Coming to my senses / Following the shore

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Abstract

Coming to my senses / Following the shore is a practice-led inquiry into the anima of place, specifically the littoral (shoreline) wetlands of Bone Island, Georgian Bay. Georgian Bay is the eastern arm of Lake Huron in Ontario, Canada. Using evocative autoethnography as a methodology, the thesis and accompanying exhibition examine my life-long associations with the Cognashene area, and chart my deepening understanding of its complicated history and its native flora and fauna.

First-hand experiences of nature, engaging with the physical energies of the forces which shape a place, are essential to my research. A braided theoretical framework of biophilia, phenomenology, biopoesie, art therapy, ecotherapy, Deep Listening, mindfulness, and Indigenous knowledge informs my work. By exploring the natural world's restorative effects, I chart how my art process has been my medicine and hope in the face of life-threatening illness, COVID, and personal loss and grief. This journey might demonstrate an alternate path for others experiencing similar challenges.

My research findings are presented in the form of a mixed media exhibition of paintings, photographs, poetry, audio, and video recordings, as well as an installation of material gathered from nature.

Acknowledgements

It is important to highlight that the site of my research, Bone Island, Georgian Bay, is situated within the traditional ancestral territory of the Anishinaabe, specifically the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi nations. Georgian Bay is part of Lake Huron in Ontario, Canada. Bone Island is covered by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and the Williams Treaty of 1923. I would also like to recognize the Ouendat Nation (Huron) who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century. Additionally, in the present-day Township of Georgian Bay, the Indigenous communities of Wahta Mohawk Territory, the Potawatomi of Moose Deer Point First Nation and the Ojibwe of Beausoleil Island First Nation are to be acknowledged.

As an immigrant, I am grateful for the opportunity to live here, and I thank all the generations who have taken care of the land for thousands of years. I deeply appreciate their historic connection to place. I value the contributions which First Nations, Métis, and other Indigenous peoples have made in shaping and strengthening our Cognashene community, and our province and country as a whole.[1]

This thesis would not be possible without many layers of love and support. A childhood of countless boat rides, picnics, and other pleasurable family activities has given me a strong sense of self and has fuelled my respect and passion for the outdoors. My maternal grandfather, Friedrich Hammer, demonstrated daily how awareness of the beyond human world could bring joy and empathy. My father, Dr. Walter Mandler, and my mother, Hildegunt Mandler, encouraged attentiveness, curiosity, research, creativity and diligence, all of which have stood

[1] The District of Muskoka, "Land Acknowledgement Guidelines and Framework", last accessed February 24, 2023, https://www.engagemuskoka.ca/11989/widgets/47335/documents/54871e

me in good stead. My older sisters, Gudrun and Siegrid, taught me how to swim, and how to navigate the give and take of close relationships.

At OCAD University, I have been fortunate to work with exceptionally knowledgeable, dedicated, and empathetic thesis advisors. Diane Pugen, as Principal Advisor, has taught me how to expand my understanding of practice-based research, and has generously shared some of her experiences of working with Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers, which have helped guide my work. Diane and Sylvia Whitton, Secondary Advisor, have helped bring narrative and form to my search for meaning. On-site get-togethers, studio visits, countless emails and many online meetings have created an ongoing dialogue of respect and appreciation. I relish the many rich conversations which Diane, Sylvia and I have had, and look forward to more discussions and outings in the future.

I must also acknowledge and thank Nicole Collins, who was Principal Advisor during my second year of the IAMD program until she had to step back. She guided me in the beginning stages of the MFA thesis development and her instruction was most valued.

As well, Nicole Collins, along with OCADU Faculty of Art professors Colette Laliberté, Laura Millard, Sarah Nind and Dan Solomon have been instrumental in developing my painting and installation practice. I am grateful to Faculty of Arts and Science professor Lillian Allen, who encouraged my love of words while giving me the tools to refine my poetry.

At the OCADU School of Graduate Studies, artists Colin Miner and Michelle Gay offered vital feedback on my ideas and photographic images. Invaluable as well have been the experiences for learning provided by Dean Ashok Mathur and IAMD directors Peter Morin and

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I am grateful for the inventive professional framing services provided by Petra Hewson, the digital sound integration co-ordinated by Linda Koenemund, and the printing magic of Keith and Matt Butler at Extreme Imaging in Barrie. I also send out a big thank you to Tyler Durbano for his interviewing and videotaping skills.

Throughout my MFA studies, my husband Michael and our son Max have been ongoing sources of inspiration, support and unconditional love. Gentlemen, I could not have completed this endeavour without your unflagging belief in my endeavours, your prodigious driving and boating skills, and your formidable ability to have fun. As well, our more-than-human family members, first Bismarck and then Louie, have never failed to amaze and motivate me with their deep affection and zest for life. I love you all!

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Introduction: Cognashene Connections

This morning, I am seated a few yards from where land meets water. The earth is moist with dew. The smokey, musty fragrance of pine needles is laced with the fresh, sweet scent of Georgian Bay.[2] A light breeze touches my cheeks, and whispers soft words wafting through autumn leaves. Before me lies a marshy swath of wildflowers, grasses and sedges, and beyond that, waterlilies and pondweed float like fallen stars on an enchanted mirror. My heart fills with gratitude for this island sanctuary, and its capacity to calm and restore.

Suddenly, a handsome blue jay alights on the branch of an adjacent maple tree. A moment later, my feathered friend flits across my field of vision and settles into a tall white pine. He watches me intently from his perch. In the distance, loud shrieks from other blue jays sound an alarm. Earlier today, my cottage neighbour shooed away a young black bear who had climbed onto his front porch. I wonder if the bear is still roaming about in the back woods, alerting the resident birds to an unexpected, uninvited presence.

My connection to the Cognashene area[3] goes back for more than six decades. My family came to Canada in 1954, on the understanding that it would be a six month stay. My father, an optical physicist and lens designer, was instrumental in setting up a new Leitz factory in Midland, Ontario, about a hundred and forty kilometers north of Toronto. But there was much work to be done, and the six month stay was extended to two years, then five. Gradually, it became clear that we would not be returning to our homeland.

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[2] Georgian Bay constitutes the northeastern arm of Lake Huron, in the Province of Ontario, Canada. Lake Huron is one of five interconnected, deep, freshwater lakes called *The Great Lakes*. These span Canada and the United States, and form planet Earth's largest body of fresh water. See Appendix A for related maps.

[3] Cognashene is a waterfront community along the Georgian Bay coastal waterways. The area runs from Tomahawk Island in the south to just north of Cognashene Point in the north. It is situated in the Township of Georgian Bay, which in turn lies within the District of Muskoka. See Appendix A for related maps.

The *Heimweh* (longing for home) we experienced was assuaged by weekend outings on the water. Our first summer in Canada, my parents purchased a weathered, eighteen foot wood motorboat, locally built, and we began exploring Georgian Bay, renowned as the world's largest freshwater archipelago. Saturdays and Sundays we would depart from the Midland town dock early in the morning and return by nightfall. A favourite destination was the National Park on Beausoleil Island, where sandy beaches and fine swimming beckoned.

My childhood memories thrum with the sound of the old inboard motor which propelled our little lapstrake boat forward, and the lively, high-pitched chatter of my two older sisters. I remember being spellbound by the wide, sparkling ribbons of frothy wake which swirled and danced behind us. I recall the sticky yet comforting feel of our Brittany spaniel's curls, the soft, warm embrace of my mother's arms, and the scratchy canvas of my cumbersome life jacket. Envigourating whiffs of Georgian Bay air, the chocolate undertones of Grossvater's pipe tobacco, the delicate scent of Mutti's 4711 cologne, the wet doggie stench of Rusty's coat, and the pungent odour of gasoline combined to create a distinctive, oddly satisfying aroma.

Each excursion was an event, an adventure, a happening to be savoured. At the helm was Papa, steadfastly checking his marine charts, the weather, and the shoals, so he could command our boat to safety. Mutti was back-up, and in charge of our picnic lunch, which she had lovingly prepared the evening before. A fat wicker hamper, filled to the brim with delicacies like potato salad, meat patties and roulades, carrot sticks and *Zwetschgenkuchen* (plum cake), was ceremoniously unpacked and served at precisely 12 noon. Soda pop and snack food like chips were strictly verboten. Indeed, we did not miss convenience foods because they were simply not purchased for our home.

In these recollections, the world was not apart from, but around and within me. Fully present, immersed in the here and now, I had no desire for things to be different (see figure 1). Curiosity, openness and non-judgement allowed me to become a part of the vital forces around me. It was a way of being-in-the-world which gradually faded as I grew older.

At age nine, I started attending our local YMCA camp, Camp Kitchikewana, in the summers, first as a camper, and then as staff. The natural environment became a backdrop for sports, activity programs and social events. Later, as an adult, the sometimes overwhelming demands of university studies, and then career and family, were mitigated by opportunities to rest and refresh on the bay. For many years, holiday canoe trips and weekend camping excursions satisfied the craving to be outdoors. Finally, in 2004, my husband and I were able to purchase a small cottage on Bone Island, not far from the Beausoleil Island of my childhood.

Although time spent on Georgian Bay remained a highlight, the intimate relationship which I had experienced with my surroundings as a young child was replaced by a need to do things quickly and efficiently, to produce, to achieve. It was not until my body said no, and serious, life-threatening illness challenged my priorities, that my heart-felt affinity to Georgian Bay was rekindled. In the process of seeking to understand the anima of place, my unwanted and unexpected personal losses have become catalysts for personal renewal, and the establishment of a reciprocal and meaningful relationship to the land.

Figure 1: *Family Boat Ride,* taken by my father, Dr. Walter Mandler, Summer 1955 (from left to right: Siegrid, Mutti, Claudia, Gudrun)

Methodologies, Theories and Methods

My recollections of family, place and personal experience form the strong roots from which my research has grown. In my thesis, I will explore the interconnected relationships between making, healing, knowing, and being, with specific attention to the wetlands of Bone Island, Georgian Bay. Four key questions lie at its heart: How is my perception of a site awakened to its resonance or anima? How can art therapy and ecotherapy deepen my art practice? How do the theoretical threads of phenomenology, Indigenous ways of knowing, biophilia, biopoesie, mindfulness, and Deep Listening intersect with the natural world? And how can I effectively communicate the value of these connections to the reader/viewer?

In the course of researching the relationship between the shoreline and me, I have pursued theoretical threads which are circular and entangled, rather than hierarchical (see figure 2).

Figure 2: *Theoretical Threads for my Thesis Research*

Below is a brief summary of each of the eight interconnected concepts. A more detailed, in-depth discussion of each thread can be found in the ensuing chapters/reflections.

Mindfulness
the Zen practice of being in the Now;
slowing down, paying attention, letting go of judgement, cultivating curiosity[4]

Biopoesie
the concept of enlivenment, an unfolding, dynamic energy;
what it feels like to be a plant, a rock, an animal[5]

Biophilia
humans' longing for nature; this urge to thrive is enhanced by the proximity to plants, forests and water[6]

[4] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*; Tolle, *A New Earth*; Hanh, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*; Cunningham, *Healing Journey.*

[5] Weber, *Enlivenment;* McNiff, *Art as Medicine.*

[6] Wilson, *Biophilia;* Arvay, *The Biophilia Effect.*

Deep Listening
intentional listening, in contrast to involuntary hearing; it involves awareness, attention and empathy[7]

Art Therapy
a form of psychotherapy rooted in the belief that the creative process is life-enhancing and healing; colours, shapes and imagery are used to express and work through feelings and emotions too difficult to put into words[8]

Ecotherapy
A form of psychotherapy which utilizes the positive effects of nature experiences to promote growth and healing[9]

Phenomenology
the study of personal experience through the lived body; the idea that the world is a living field, able to respond to our emotions, and the world in turn calls forth emotions from us[10]

Indigenous Ways of Knowing
land is more than a mark on a map; the earth is not a lifeless commodity to be used for material gain; all entities of nature have their own spirit, are to be honoured, and can be learned from; to know a physical landscape is to directly experience being there and being part of its life process[11]

In my explorations, the practical action (the making) and theoretical reflection (the thinking) go hand in hand. My inquiries, therefore, are practice-led, with an emphasis on thinking through making. Janneke Wesseling, Arts and Research professor at the University of the Arts in The Hague, asserts that "[…] one cannot exist without the other, in the same way

[7] Oliveros, *Deep Listening;* Hanh, *Your True Home*.

[8] Naumburg, *Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy*; Wadeson, *Journaling Cancer in Words and Images*; Neimeyer, *Meaning Reconstruction and the Meaning of Loss*; Stroebe and Schut, *The Dual-Process Model of Coping with Bereavement*.

[9] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life;* Roznak, Gomes and Kanner, *Ecopsychology*; Clinebell, *Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth;* Cohen, *Reconnecting with Nature*.

[10] Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*; Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception, Phenomenology of Perception.*

[11] Cajete, *Native Science;* Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; Manitowabi, *Water Teaching;* Geniusz, M., *Plants Have so Much to Give Us, All We have to Do Is Ask;* Geniusz, W., *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive.*

action and thought are inextricably linked in artistic practice. This stands in contradistinction to 'research into art', such as art history and cultural studies."[12] Robin Nelson, British performer and academic, describes practice-led methodology as "an iterative process of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing'.[13] Brad Haseman, Australian theorist, emphasizes that the practice element in 'practice as research' is not an optional extra: "it is the necessary pre-condition of engagement in performative research."[14] This is because "practitioner researchers do not merely 'think' their way through or out of a problem, but rather they 'practice' to a resolution."[15]

Nithikul Nimulkrat, textile artist and associate professor of design at OCADU in Toronto, identifies three intertwined components in practice-led research: a) surveying literature, b) making artifacts and reflecting on the experience, and c) comparing with others' artifacts and artistic experiences.[16] I concur with this articulation of a non-linear, yet entirely dedicated process. Accordingly, in addition to direct observation and the making of artwork, my research is complemented by readings which explore the histories of the land, its flora and fauna, and theoretical threads concerning the vitality of matter, relationship, reciprocity and empathy. The discomfort and excitement of not knowing exactly what will emerge, offset by an implicit trust that the practice is taking me in the direction it needs to go, is integral to my work.

Daily field notes and data gathering, along with walks along the bay, dock vigils, and shoreline explorations by boat and by swimming, contribute to my understanding of the site, and

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[12] Wesseling, *Do It Again*, *Say It Again*, 2.

[13] Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 32.

[14] Haseman quoted in Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts,* 103.

[15] Nelson, 9.

[16] Nimulkrat, "The Role of Documentation in Practice-led Research", 5.

allow me to become immersed in its ecosystem. Keen observation of what I can see, hear, smell, touch and taste is recorded in photographic documentation, visual journaling, and audio and video recordings (see figures 3 and 4). Morning meditation and visualization sessions help ground and focus me. In turn, these directly experienced methods charge my sustained paintings and drawings, which have become unhurried, layered, meditative responses to my surroundings.

Figure 3: *Morning Research at Bone Island*

I am interested in what a specific site - in this case, the marshes, bogs and swamps of Bone Island (Site 6774, Island 1810, Georgian Bay) – eels like emotionally, rather than rendering its outward appearance in topographic or botanic detail. Moreover, my intent is to communicate this felt sense of place to the viewer.

As I myself am a body in and of the research, I will use an autoethnographic, evocative approach in my written reflections on the research process. Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, American researchers who explore narrative formats, describe evocative autoethnography as a methodology "using [the narrator's] own lived experiences to write in ways that speak to others

about their human experiences", and "describing and communicating the 'lived through' experience of life."[17] Eschewing the traditional stance of objectivity, autoethnography seeks to evoke in the readers their own feelings and personal connections to the material.[18] First-person story telling lies at its heart; this emphasis on relationship, engagement, accessible language and complexity of experience reflects a de-colonizing approach. Often, remembered moments of significant impact on the trajectory of a person's life, and/or times of existential crisis, are central to the narrative, because these 'epiphanies' have forced an individual to attend to and analyze lived experience.[19] As Shawn Wilson, Opaskwayak Cree scholar, has so eloquently stated, "[…] research is ceremony. And so is life".[20]

Three examples of what I would term "evocative autobiographies" have influenced me deeply. First, *interleaves* by poet and feminist historian Lata Mani, a moving series of reflections on the author's recovery from a serious automobile crash.[21] Second, *Geography of Blood* by historian Candace Savage, a gripping account of a settler's gradual awareness of the systematic, ruthless destruction of Indigenous culture in the Canadian prairies.[22] And third, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Kimmerer, a plait of personal stories which weaves together three strands: "Indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together to heal our relationship with the world."[23]

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[17] Bochner and Ellis, *Evocative Ethnography*, 29.

[18] Bochner and Ellis, *Evocative Ethnography*, 79.

[19] Bochner and Ellis, *Evocative Ethnography*, 3.

[20] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 163.

[21] Mani, *interleaves.*

[22] Savage, *Geography of Blood*.

[23] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* ix.

My choice of evocative autoethnography as a methodology has been motivated in part by unexpected and uninvited personal losses over the past three years: a change in health following the onset of Bell's palsy, and later cancer and the death of a family member. In addition, the COVID pandemic has been an ongoing source of anxiety. I credit my daily art practice and thesis work as significant factors in being able to reflect on, untangle, and find meaning in these potentially overwhelming challenges.

Reflection 1: The Solace of Waterlilies

Ironically, my perception of the resonance of the Bone Island shoreline began with the unexpected loss of my vision. In July 2019, after a splendid boat ride to Go Home Lake and back, the left side of my face suddenly felt chilled, almost frozen. Within hours, the cold numbness intensified, to the point where I could no longer blink my left eye or move the left side of my mouth. An emergency room visit led to a diagnosis of Bell's Palsy, a compression of the seventh cranial nerve. The cause of this unilateral facial paralysis is officially unknown, but it is suspected to be the result of viral infection.

Massive doses of steroid medication, substantial rest, and the ongoing application of eye drops and gels achieved a slow yet complete recovery within ten weeks. In the interim, my blurred eyesight could not decipher printed text or digital screens. Given my age and the severity of symptoms, the attending neurologist was not optimistic about my case. And even more worrisome to me, the extreme fatigue which accompanied my illness left little physical or emotional energy to paint.

However, what I felt compelled to do, several times a day, was to walk from our cottage to the end of the dock, a distance of perhaps 40 yards. As I tapped my way along the wooden

boards, my gaze was repeatedly pulled towards the indeterminate masses of waterlily leaves and stems to either side of the dock. They scattered like cryptic writing on the surface of the water. The littoral area between land and good swimming, which had for years been dismissed by me as uninteresting and bleak, was asserting itself as a field of vital forces. I sensed, rather than saw, the plants before me.

Somehow, the process of 'reading' the incomprehensible allowed me to let go of wanting things to be different and was able to give me a sense of joy and peace. The slow looking, and the concentrated effort required to take in a mysterious organic text, allowed me to be fully present in the experience. I found myself immersed in a pool of green and rose-coloured hearts and in the fullness of the moment. That was enough. In retrospect, I can see that what I witnessed was a form of *asemic* writing, a mark-making "that does not attempt to communicate any message other than its own nature as writing […]. The result is a kind of cognitive dissonance: writing is evoked at the same time that we are estranged from it."[24]

This ongoing, meditative scrying of floating arabesques eventually led to a desire to document the waterlilies in photographs. I was intrigued to discover how the elimination of a horizon, combined with the reflective surface of the water, could create surreal, compressed compositions. The desire to make explicit the ambiguous, the hazy, the indeterminate, has continued in my photographic practice over the past three years. Over time, several 'suites' of images have emerged, each characterized by its own distinctive colour palette. The *Be-coming* series juxtaposes pale grey translucent fields against muted rose and green matter; the *Blush* photographs emanate a pale peach, pink and yellow glow; the *Whorls within Worlds* scatter

[24] Schwenger, *Asemic*, 13.

silhouettes of green and crimson onto the variegated blues of reflected sky and clouds; and the *Shapes of Water* highlight tangled, tinted stalks and leaves hovering over dark, liquid velvet backgrounds. The photographs, rather than functioning as detailed representations of specific botanical species, morph into parallel, ephemeral worlds (see figures 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Figure 5: from the *Be-coming* series, digital photographs, 2019-2022

Figure 6: from the *Blush* series, digital photograph, 2019-2022

Figure 7: from the *Whorls within Worlds* series, digital photograph, 2019-22

Figure 8: from the *Shapes of Water* series, digital photograph, 2019-2022

The blurred and the luminous have always fascinated me. As a child, I was enchanted by the reflections in mud puddles, the condensation of water on windowpanes, and the magical ambience created by early morning fog rising up from the land. In my undergraduate art history studies at Queen's University, I was taken by the late work of J.M.W. Turner, Claude Monet and James McNeill Whistler, the abstract paintings of Gerhard Richter, and the colour fields of Mark Rothko. To me, the absence of sharp edges and specific detail suggest mystery and spiritual light.

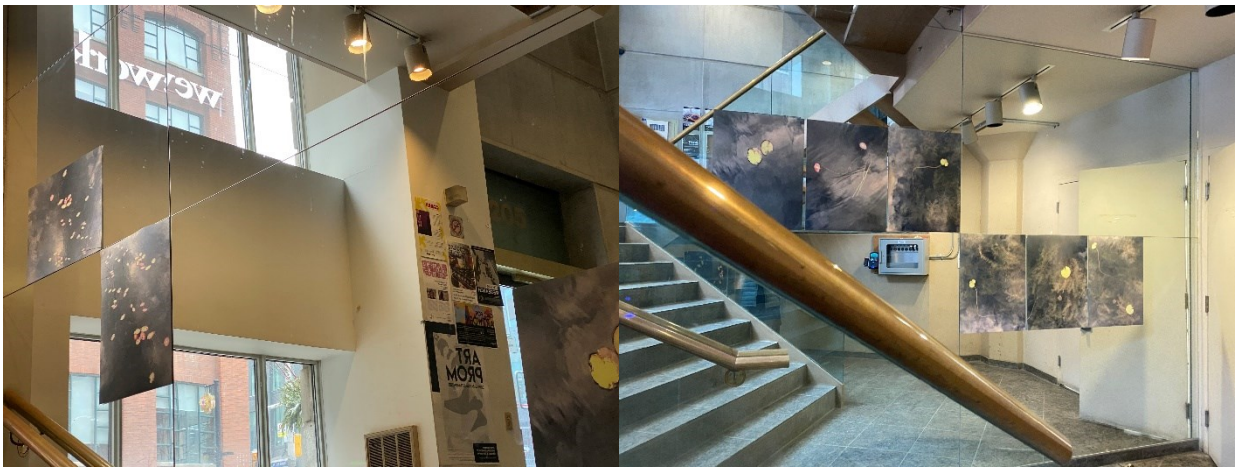
Ironically, my father's lens designs created precision optics for high resolution images, so my predilection for the indistinct may have been an attempt to differentiate myself from his

professional focus. As well, my sight is affected by amblyopia,[25] a disorder which has resulted in limited stereoscopic vision. I perceive what is before me on a flat plane. When I see a blur, I am instinctively drawn to it. I want to direct my attention to it, so that I can see what at first seemed invisible.

Eventually, I sought to share with the public the abstracted, surreal images which had played such a large part in my recovery. In February 2020, I installed a selection from the *Be-coming* series in the mirrored two-storey atrium of 205 Richmond Street West, OCADU's Graduate School building (see figure 8). The nine images, each 18 x 24 inches in size, printed on thin, self-adhesive canvas, initially appeared to merge with the flat, polished surfaces of the interior space, but the matte texture of the fabric simultaneously created the effect of hovering entities. The geometric grid of reflective wall tiles seemed to suspend the rectangular photographs in a translucent web. In so doing, the *Be-coming* installation invited contemplation, inter-being,[26] and gathering. By encouraging pause, and an opportunity to re-orient and re-group, sustained attention was elicited from visitors to the building. As a result of this visual intervention, the stark, empty space of the atrium was transformed into a resonant, breathing place.

[25] "Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)," National Eye Institute, U.S Department of Health and Human Services, last accessed February 17, 2023, https: //www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/amblyopia-lazy-eye.

[26] 'Inter-being' is a term coined by Thich Nhat Hanh to describe how all phenomena depend on and inter-exist with each other.



Figures 9 and 10: *Be-coming* installation, 205 Richmond Street West atrium, Toronto, 2020

My newly developed affinity to the powerful presence of the waterlilies at Bone Island ignited an interest in learning more about the restorative effects of nature. In so doing, I came across the term *biophilia*. Coined in 1964 by German-born American psychoanalyst and philosopher Erich Fromm,[27] the term refers to people's longing for nature, and for life. Its central concept is that life has an inner dynamism of its own, and that this urge to be alive, to thrive, to grow, is enhanced by proximity to plants, forests and water. As such, the human is a living creature among countless life-forms, interconnected in the network of life. This idea is in stark opposition to the view that humans are in charge of the world.

American biologist, naturalist and entomologist Edward O. Wilson later popularized the term in his book *Biophilia*, which explored the evolutionary and psychological basis for humans' attraction to the natural environment.[28] Since the 1960s, many scientific studies have been conducted to verify the therapeutic relationship between humans and the natural world. In his

[27] Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, 88.

[28] Wilson, *Biophilia*, 1.

book, *The Biophilia Effect*, Austrian biologist and eco-philosopher Clemens G. Arvay brings together clinical data from diverse sources to document how time spent in nature not only increases a sense of well-being, but also strengthens the immune system, focuses attention, and alleviates stress, anxiety and depression.[29] Cited research ranges from investigations of forest bathing[30] to the accelerated recovery of patients whose hospital room window framed natural elements such as trees or a landscape view.[31] Restorative experiences in nature, by triggering experiences of concentration and complete involvement in an activity, have been shown by modern science to result in 'flow' states of happiness, creativity and spiritual growth.[32]

These beneficial effects have, of course, been felt and manifested long before such data was collected and analyzed by the academy. Nature-based wisdom in *Indigenous knowledges* developed over millennia. Indigenous guiding principles have been increasingly recognized as both inspiration and direction for contemporary ecologists, scientists, psychotherapists and artists. As an artist, art therapist and educator, I have been deeply influenced by the Indigenous teachings which have been shared with me. In particular, the insights of Indigenous scholars Gregory Cajete, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Leroy Little Bear, Edna Manitowabi, and Canadian artist and OCAD University Associate Professor Emeritus Diane Pugen have been important to my understanding of place and its anima.[33]

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[29] Arvay, *The Biophilia Effect,* 19-101.

[30] Wen, Ye et al., "Medical Empirical Research on Forest Bathing", 1-21.

[31] Ulrich, "View through a Window May Accelerate Recovery from Surgery", 420-1.

[32] Arvay, *The Biophilia Effect*, 75.

[33] Cajete, *Native Science;* Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; Little Bear, "Jagged Worldviews Colliding"; Manitowabi, *Waterstories;* Pugen in Rubin-Kudra, *At Home,* 79-87.

Within an Indigenous paradigm, entities of nature, for example, plants, animals, rocks, mountains, trees, rivers and lakes, are alive, have their own spirit and are to be honoured. Knowledge can be received from living and non-living entities. Place is readily recognized as more than a mark on a map: to know a site requires the direct experience of living there, and being part of its life process. Land, too, is viewed as much more than its physical features; it is an embodiment of vital forces.

Likewise, the Earth is not a lifeless thing, a commodity to be used for material gain. Humans are part of nature, and nature is part of humans. Within Indigenous beliefs/world views, the earth is seen as our mother and the progenitor of all life. Land is to be ecologically respected by those who live there. A direct reciprocal relationship between the individual, the community and the natural world needs to be maintained. Many Indigenous languages are verb-based in their structure and reflect belief in a universe which is alive, in constant motion, and creative.[34]

As well, the reality experienced by our five senses is recognized as only one of many possibilities. Place holds memory. The land echoes the souls of those who live and have lived there. In return, the distinct climate, soil, and living things of a place carry not only its physical constitution but the psyche of its people. Specific sites, known to be sacred, possess a particular life-giving, natural quality, an anima which can be perceived and sensed.[35]

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[34] Little Bear, "Jagged World Views Colliding", 78; Gross, *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, 83-9; Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* 53.

[35] Cajete, *Native Science*, 27, 184; Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 140; Vastokas, *Sacred Art of the Algonkians*, 50-2, 141-2; Deloria, *God is Red*, 67, 284-5.

Jane Bennett, American political theorist and philosopher, has long advocated for a regard for the vitality of matter. She argues that

> […] the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies.[36]

Similarly, American physicist Karen Barad notes how entanglement and connectivity are an essential aspect of existence:

> The very nature of materiality is an entanglement. Matter itself is always already open to, or rather entangled with, the "Other." The intra-actively emergent "parts" of phenomena are co-constituted. Not only subjects but also objects are permeated through and through with their entangled kin; the other is not just in one's skin, but in one's bones, in one's belly, in one's heart, in one's nucleus, in one's past and future.[37]

Indeed, it seemed to me that the waterlilies at Bone Island had revealed themselves as compassionate entities who could silently witness the pain of my current situation, as well as my valid concern about permanent disfigurement and disability. I felt that they did so without judging my lack of fortitude or dismissing my anxieties. This supportive, empathetic, beyond human relationship was but the start of further restorative experiences to which I would awaken.

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[36] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* ix.

[37] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 392-3.

Reflection 2: Painting with Words to Learn a new Vocabulary

In the course of my 'Bell's Palsy summer', I found myself drawn not only to taking photographs, but also writing poetry. Suddenly, words were rumbling like freight trains through my head, and I began to keep pencil and paper close at hand. I was profoundly grateful that I could lie in bed, or rest in a chair, and still make note of my observations and emotions with simple marks. This satisfying process allowed me to tolerate the temporary hiatus from my painting practice. By choosing to regard the poems as an extension of my painting experience, I was able to wholeheartedly embrace an alternate vehicle of expression. A selection of my poems, *Thresholds of Vulnerability,* written over the past three years, can be found in Appendix B.

The foray into writing propelled me to seek new words to adequately describe the plants which populated our marshy stretch of shoreline. My husband Michael kindly read aloud to me excerpts from books, articles and websites pertaining to Georgian Bay wetlands. Then, as my eyesight improved, I began to keep a photo log of what was growing in my immediate surroundings. A mobile plant app, *PictureThis*, enabled me to not only identify but digitally save a compilation of images for my new interest. I was astonished, and somewhat chagrined, to learn that what I had previously perceived of as 'waterlilies' were in fact three distinct species of aquatic plants: the 'American white waterlily', the 'yellow pond lily' or 'spatter dock', and 'Schreber's watershield'. Over the past three years, I have been surprised to find, so far, over 90 species of plants (not including trees), almost all of them indigenous, within the area which I had once deemed dreary ground. Many of the plants and trees have medicinal uses; this knowledge is being increasingly documented and shared by Indigenous scholars like Edna Manitowabi, Mary Geniusz, Christi Belcourt, Wendy Makoons Geniusz, Leigh Joseph, and Robin

Kimmerer.[38] Illustrated lists of the plants and the trees I have come across in our small Bone Island bay can be found in Appendices D and E. I am continuing to pursue the study of local flora. I concur with what British biologist Rupert Sheldrake has noted:

> Through experiencing the life in your place, you will link your life to the more-than-human-world, and you will soon feel a greater sense of connection and belonging.[39]

In retrospect, I recognize that by virtue of paying attention to what had previously been 'background', the shoreline was allowed to come into its own and so create meaning for me. It was as French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty maintained, that we have to loosen the intentional threads which connect us to the world in order to make them appear.[40] To awaken, I had to become blind to my usual way of relating to the world, and instead enter into a reciprocal relationship, an exchange of energies, with my immediate surroundings.

Reflection 3: Re-visiting what I Thought I Knew by Un-forgetting the Past

The Fall 2019 semester at OCADU became an opportunity for me to further hone my writing skills and expand my sensory fields to include sound. I returned to my classes, a bit shaken and bleary, but determined to deepen my art practice. In the process of studying with poet Lillian Allen, and visual artist and writer Ashok Mathur, I learned how to listen intentionally, with my heart as well as my ears. Invited guest speakers Allan deSouza, Sonnet l'Abbe and Indu Antony,

[38] Initially, written plant documentation was the research of non-Indigenous ethnographers and botanists, sometimes in consultation with local Indigenous peoples. However, their descriptions frequently left out or misinterpreted important details.

[39] Sheldrake, *Science and Spiritual Practices,* 92.

[40] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* xv.

as well as Toronto Biennale events such as Salmon Plogging, Beach(Fire) Party Bingo, and the Arctic/Amazon Symposium, encouraged lively discussion and quiet reflection, transforming theories of decolonization into creative and meaningful experiences. At the time, I was conducting research into the history of Bone Island and 'cottage country', and I realized with a jolt that the dominant narrative, so blithely accepted by me over the years, needed major revision.

When I was in elementary school, the history of Canada from the 1500s to the 1800s was presented as a rollicking tale of brave explorers, fur traders and settlers who triumphed over the wilderness and its people. *Breastplate and Buckskin* was the title of our Grade 6 textbook, published in 1953 by Ryerson Press in Toronto.[41] The dramatic stories were calculated to appeal to boys and girls, but sadly the images and text did not reflect the Indigenous people justly, or even begin to acknowledge the systematic, ruthless attempts by the Europeans to destroy those who were here before. It was a shock to discover that I had been, and still am, living on stolen land. I came to see how Canadian historian Candace Savage, author of *Geography of Blood*, could marvel at her local landscape,

> […] to an unschooled eye, nothing looked amiss; one layer overlaid another in complete innocence. Apparently, an unconformity could exist between the present and what we knew of the past, and very few of us would ever notice it.[42]

Savage was writing about the prairies, but the first people of Georgian Bay, the Ouendat, had also been expelled as a result of European intervention. The Ouendat were succeeded by the Ojibwe, who in turn were displaced by increasing European settlement in the 1800s. 'Treaties'

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[41] Tait, *Breastplate and Buckskin.*

[42] Savage, *Geography of Blood*, 57.

on behalf of the Crown led not to the shared stewardship which the Indigenous people believed that they had negotiated, but to the outright theft of land, first, for resource extraction, and later, recreation. Three negotiations in particular affected Georgian Bay: the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, Treaty No. 76, and the Williams Treaties of 1923. Of particular relevance to Bone Island was the 1850 ceding of the Thirty Thousand Islands.[43] The Ojibwe argue that what was spoken and agreed upon at the treaty council gathering was different from the treaty text. While the written document specified the surrender of 'the Islands' opposite the shores from Penetanguishene to Sault Ste. Marie, the Ojibwe understood that they were ceding *aki,* the Anishnaabe word for land or earth, not *minis*, their word for islands.[44]

Canadian historian Claire Elizabeth Campbell (2005) has ruefully observed,

> Recreation is merely the latest industry to mine Georgian Bay, cottagers the largest and the most visible group of users […] it operates on the premise that there is money to be made in the place – by bringing in people rather than shipping resources out. During the industrial era, the place itself had little or no value. Resources that could be separated from the land, harvested, and exported, such as timber or fish – these meant revenue. Sales of Crown land to cottagers and sports clubs represented a sea change in attitudes towards the landscape. Ownership of property implies people find value, economic and emotional, in the place itself. A landscape once thought of as utterly without value is now home to some of the most expensive recreational properties in the country.[45]

The concept of property has indeed been a huge impediment to creating harmonious relationships with the land and its humans and non-humans. Ojibwe/Odawa elder and knowledge keeper Edna Manitowabi wryly notes that the European newcomers, having

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[43] *The Thirty Thousand Islands* is a local term for the chain of islands extending for approximately 175 kilometres along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay, from the Severn River to the French River. It is the world's largest freshwater archipelago.

[44] David, ed., *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky,* 22.

[45] Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind,* 92-3.

destroyed their old world, naively proceeded to perpetuate their destructive ways in the new world:

> When the strangers came… onto our shores… we were kind to them... we gave them food, shelter, we nursed them… we agreed to share. But then they saw the incredible beauty of this beautiful, beautiful New World. To them, she was brand new, and full of incredible resources and power. And she had on this beautiful green shawl, and they were leaving their place over there, because they were calling it Old World, because they were depleting her, they were using her up until she couldn't give anymore.[46]

Rather than respecting, and learning from Indigenous knowledges, the colonizers set about to separate Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands, and silence the stories, teachings, songs, language, and spiritual practices which had for millennia maintained ecological equilibrium, sustained culture, and fostered a sense of community.

Given this difficult history, it has become important for me to learn how and when Bone Island became a site for settler ownership. Upon scouring the Ontario Land Registry website, *OnLand*, I was able to find documentation of the sale of several parcels of Bone Island Crown land - one lot in 1914, and other parcels in the 1930s - to private buyers.[47] The details of this process can be found in Appendix C. How did the Crown acquire the land? Most likely as a result of one of the treaties pertaining to the southeastern islands of Georgian Bay.

My response through art was an installation, *The Veil is Thinning,* in the Graduate Gallery at OCADU. The exhibition, *Open Circle,* featured one contribution from each student in

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[46] Edna Manitowabi, "Water Stories," Wabano, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://wabano.com/education/resources-and-publications/wabano-video-library/

[47] *OnLand* is a virtual office, where land registry records in the Ontario Land Registration System can be sought out and browsed. Historical books, documents and property title records are available to access or download.

Ashok Mathur's *Decolonizing the Book* course. My work consisted of a vintage, ceiling to floor, ivory-coloured lace curtain, hung a few feet in front of a small antique side table. The translucent curtain, adorned with safety-pins securing European fabric scraps, animal bones and driftwood, was suspended from a twisted wooden cane. On the table rested a Victorian handkerchief of embroidered silk, and the 1953 public school textbook *Breastplate and Buckskin*. Set on top of the publication was a narrow stand which held the letters EXPIRED. Between the table and the corner of the room a large silver commemorative tray, the kind awarded after years of service to a worthy employee, rested upended. A triptych of three photographic images from the *Be-coming* series was affixed to the adjacent wall. Scattered on the floor was detritus from the shoreline: driftwood, rope fragments, small rocks, leaves, pine needles and twigs.

Figures 11 and 12*: The Veil is Thinning,* installation*,* 2019

In retrospect, I can see the influence of Kwakiutal artist Mary Anne Barkhouse, who frequently juxtaposes period furniture and artifacts with print and sculpture in her installations. Our local public gallery in Barrie, The MacLaren Art Centre, had featured Barkhouse's exhibition *The Interlopers* the year before, in 2018.[48] However, while Barkhouse explored the fraught relationship between fauna such as coyotes, hares, and lynx, and the humans who encroach on their space and resources, my aim was to draw attention to, and disrupt, the predominant Colonial narrative of how Canada as a nation was built.

Reflection 4: Life Interrupted

The Winter 2020 term began with the revitalization of my painting practice. For months I had craved the tactility of cold wax and oil, the sensuous spread of pigment on panel, and the sheer physicality of scraping back or piercing through layers of paint. In the basement studio of 205 Richmond St. W, I worked under the auspices of artists Laura Millard and Sarah Nind.

At first, I chose panels just a bit larger than my head, but within weeks I reached a level of comfort with 30 x 40 inches, big enough for me to hug. I continued exploring the concept of biophilia in abstract, organic images of rich and textured colour. As I painted, I thought not of Bone Island, but the Florentine gardens I had visited during my IAMD Graduate School residency in May 2019, shortly before my Bell's Palsy episode (see figure 13).

[48] The MacLaren Art Centre is a regional, not for profit, public art gallery located in Barrie, Ontario.

Figure 13: *Giardini*, oil and cold wax on panel, 30 x 40 inches, 2020

In anticipation of transitioning to larger, more gestural painting, I brought a large birch panel, 96 x 144 inches, to the studio. But just as I felt I was hitting my stride, two unexpected and unwelcome events happened. In March 2020, I was diagnosed with cancer, and a few days later, Canada declared a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A flurry of pre-operative tests and assessments, major surgery, and then chemotherapy treatments followed in quick succession. Hospital stays, follow-up medical appointments and weekly home care visits were exacerbated by the ongoing threat of viral infection. Time seemed to simultaneously expand and condense. Each hour seemed an eternity, but within a week, the days appeared to have flown by quickly.

During my convalescence, my initial way of coping with the startling changes was to inform myself about others' personal experiences of life-threatening illness. I immersed myself in autoethnographic writing by visual artists, writers, doctors and therapists. Some I had already encountered in my art therapy profession, others were recommended by friends, or came to my attention through the online cancer support groups which I began to attend on a regular basis. Over the course of many months, the poetic wisdom conveyed by Elisabeth Tova Bailey, Jean Shinoda Bolen, Mavis Himes, Audre Lorde, Lata Mani, Katherine May, Paul Kalinithi, Hollis Sigler, Suzanne Simard, Susan Sontag, and Harriet Wadeson has continued to be a source of strength and hope.

Reflecting on the somber, yet spirited, sagas of dis-ease and be-coming motivated me to explore my own inner process through a practice of daily journaling. Stream of consciousness writing, done with my non-dominant hand early in the morning,[49] allowed me to access my shock, rage and sorrow at being sick, yet also acknowledge my profound gratitude, relief and joy at not being dead. It was a confusing mélange of emotions, a mix which Dutch researchers Henk Stroebe and Margaret Schut have sought to demystify in their 'Dual Process' model of grief. Stroebe and Schut assert, "Confrontation with the reality of loss is the essence of adaptive grieving. It needs to be done, the cognitive business needs to be undertaken, but not relentlessly, and not at the expense of attending to other tasks that are concomitant with loss."[50] Accordingly, Stroebe and Schut identify two opposing approaches to coping with loss: *loss orientation*, and *restoration orientation.* Rather than viewing grief as a series of steps or phases towards

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[49] Cameron, *The Artist's Way,* 9-19; Carpaccione, *The Power of Your Other Hand,* 13-16.

[50] Stroebe and Schut, "The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and Description", 220.

acceptance, Stroebe snd Schut posit an oscillating pendulum of feelings and reactions, swinging back and forth between the two opposing stressors. I resonate with their assertion that recovery is not a linear process.[51] I have come to understand this not only intellectually, but also through my personal, lived experience. On the one hand, there has been loss orientation, involving anger, disbelief, disappointment, impatience, and rumination; and on the other, restoration orientation, where I look to the future, and consider new ways of connecting and interacting with the world. In between the two extremes is the mundane, yet essential business of going about everyday life, both a distraction and a challenge. When I was able recognize that my coping with cancer and the COVID lockdown would vary from day to day, and sometimes even from one moment to the next, I became not only more self-compassionate, but more hopeful as well.

When events do not fit in with the narrative we have created for ourselves, the incidents are usually labelled as problematic. However, in his research about transcending grief through meaning-making, American psychotherapist Robert Neimeyer has noted that, from a constructivist perspective, disruptions can become a critical opportunity for personal growth and positive change.[52] Yet simply assuming an attitude of resilience in an attempt to 'bounce back' to a previous way of being is erroneous, according to Canadian psychotherapist Claire Edmonds.[53] Instead, Edmonds opines, facing significant hardships requires a reinvention of identity, a complex process entailing reassessment of personal priorities, and the exploration of

[51] The sequential "stages of grief" (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), popularized by Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross, have been increasingly recognized as being too prescriptive, and not truly reflective of the complexity of grief experience. In fact, Kuebler-Ross' grief research was based on conversations with terminally ill patients, and not responses to loss in general, but unfortunately her findings, which identified stages of grief in response to dying, were misapplied to other populations.

[52] Neimeyer, "The Narrative Arc of Tragic Loss", 30.

[53] Edmonds, "Resilience or Reinvention in the Cancer Experience," Wellspring Cancer Support, last accessed February 20, 2023, https://wellspring.ca/online-programs/emotional-support/.

new ways to thoughtfully adapt and move forward. As psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl has wisely observed, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." [54]

Reflection 5: Mending

Post-operative pain, limited mobility, fatigue, and mandatory bed rest put my painting on hold for several weeks. In mid-June, however, my passion for image-making was re-ignited by a classmate's kind invitation to attend a 'Collage Night' social for the OCADU *Contingencies of Care 2020* virtual residency. Via Zoom platform, I was re-introduced to a technique which I recalled from undergraduate studies but had not used in years.

Serendipitously, the collage process of bringing together diverse elements to create a cohesive whole was the perfect vehicle for me to transition from the role of "patient" to active participant. I was not interested in working with magazine images, photographs, or found objects; I wanted something uncomplicated and more immediate. Accordingly, I chose simple materials which I had at hand in my studio: an unused birch panel left over from my painting practice, 'bleeding' tissue paper, patterned papers, and delicate handmade sheets incorporating leaves, bits of bark and other organic materials. Rather than cutting, I tore the papers with my hands. The physical act of tearing was incredibly satisfying. The guilty pleasure of being an agent of destruction was offset by finding joy in the evolution of new things. The surface of the birch panel felt firm, warm and supportive. The watery matte medium, which I used to adhere the papers to the wood, was soothing to the touch and ran like tears down the length of the panel.

[54] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning,*111.

The coloured tissue paper, when activated by water, blossomed into blurred edges and transparent glazes which could be further manipulated by brush.

There was no overarching goal, no assignment to be met, other than giving visual form to my experience of the moment. I worked slowly, meditatively, savouring the diverse textures and colours of the materials. By embracing 'beginner's mind,' 'not knowing' and 'child-like curiosity'[55] I was able to focus on being present and interacting with the materials. It was only when the composition felt complete, and my energy was spent, that I was able to fully take in the abstract image I had made.

It is an established art therapy practice to encourage clients to imagine a title for the work they have done, since this act of naming can help bring to light unconscious thoughts and feelings. I challenged myself to think of a title for my piece. *Activating Seeds of Hope* (see Figure 14) was what came to mind. Over the following weeks, more collages developed along similar themes: *This Call Towards Expansion; A State and Place of Lightness; Long Before We Can Remember, We Travelled the Stars; We are Made of Layers, Cells and Constellations; Fragile States; Tacit Knowing; The Push and Pull Between Things Me and Things Not Me (*see figure 15); and *Living Between Worlds*. Like the initial collage, the subsequent compositions featured areas of intense magenta, orange, and yellow offset by neutral tints, white, grey, black and brown; and again, they seemed to burst from a dynamic centre. The panels ranged in size from 24 x 30 inches to 8 x 10 inches, depending on my energy level at a given time.

[55] Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind,* xiv-vi.

Figure 14: *Activating Seeds of Hope*, collage on panel, 24 x 30 inches, 2020

Figure 15: *The Push-Pull between Things Me and Me,* collage on panel, 24 x 24 inches, 2020

The collages reminded me of the quotation, "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." These words are often attributed to American poet Anais Nin, but in fact they were written by American novelist Elizabeth Appell.[56] American author Cynthia Orcelli's prophetic words also resonated with me: "For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction."[57]

German biologist and philosopher Andreas Weber has written at length about the concept of *biopoesie,* the enlivenment or unfolding of a thing out of itself. According to Weber, this bringing forth is a fundamental dimension of existence, shared by all entities. "Feeling is never invisible; it takes shape and manifests as form everywhere in nature," writes Weber. "Nature can, therefore, be viewed as feeling unfurled, a living reality in front of us and amidst us."[58] He describes the biosphere as deeply poetic, because an organism is about "constant transformation, about developing a standpoint of concern, about desiring to be a self which yearns for connection with other selves (and this also way below the human needs, as mating, feeding, shelter concern every being), and which takes up chunks of the world as food only to incorporate them into their own physical body."[59]

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[56] Elizabeth Appell, https://readelizabeth.com/blog/

[57] Cynthia Orcelli, https://www.cynthiaoccelli.com

[58] Weber, *The Biology of Wonder*, 90.

[59] Weber, *Biopoetics*, 3.

I was able to observe this firsthand when spring came early in 2020. The Bone Island shoreline was glorious: bog myrtle, waterlilies, watershield, and flag irises were bursting with vitality. Red-winged blackbirds flitted from tall grass to grass, sounding their mellifluous 'okalee' calls. Chipmunks and red squirrels chattered incessantly, and playfully chased each other through the trees. My worries about medical interventions were mitigated by seeing, smelling, and touching seeds and growth and blossoms and other-than-human life. Although I felt and looked like a human chandelier of surgical drainage tubes, gauze and tape, I could taste the air and hear the land re-awakening. I believe it is the body memory of this dynamic essence which permeated the explosive collages I was making and eased my convalescence.

In hindsight, I consider the collages of spring 2020 to be more 'art therapy' than my other explorations, in that final aesthetic resolution or public display of the compositions was not the driving force behind them. They were spontaneous improvisations rather than sustained studies. However, they were instrumental in igniting my desire to make images again, and the strong directionality which emerged in the paper tearing and application of shapes to panel was to become a significant element in subsequent work.

Art therapy is rooted in the belief that the creative process is life-enhancing and healing. The Canadian Art Therapy Association states in its website:

> Art therapy combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, colour and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings can be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate.[60]

[60] The Canadian Art Therapy Association, https://www.canadianarttherapy.org/what-is-art-therapy

The American Art Therapy Association website augments this description:

> Through the use of art-making, discussion and reflections on the artwork, and relationship building, art therapists support individuals in problem-solving, developing self-awareness, strengthening self-esteem, managing stress, and engaging in positive social interactions.[61]

American psychologist Margaret Naumburg, one of the first art therapy theoreticians, described her dynamically oriented approach as "based on the recognition that man's fundamental thoughts and feelings are derived from the unconscious and often reach expression in images, rather than in words."[62] The spontaneously created images released by the unconscious then become an opportunity for verbal free-association by the client. Subsequent discussions by client and therapist generate insights about issues which need to be explored in order for the client to create meaningful life changes.

Because I am a registered art therapist myself, I was able to effectively alternate between the roles of art therapist and client as I worked on my collages. In addition, I participated in weekly Open Studio sessions facilitated online by the Kutenai Art Therapy Institute.[63] This allowed me to make art in the community of a Zoom room, and engage in conversation with others, in order to better understand my mixed emotions about my cancer diagnosis and treatment. By mid-August, however, something suddenly shifted within me. I no longer craved warm, saturated hues and explosive compositions. Instead, I was drawn to rose, grey and gold papers for my collages; my chosen substratum became birch panel primed with a thin coating of

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[61] The American Art Therapy Association, https://arttherapy.org/about/

[62] Naumburg, *Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy,* 2.

[63] The Kutenai Art Therapy Institute, located in Nelson, B.C, is a private post-graduate art therapy training institute, accredited by the Canadian Art Therapy Association and the British Columbia Art Therapy Association.

white clay. The cool-to-the-touch, stone-like surface, and the restrained, almost monochromatic colours of the selected tissue papers provided a respite from my escalating dis-comfort from chemotherapy and its side effects. Bi-weekly infusions of harsh medicine made me feel as if I had been set on fire, from the soles of my feet to top of my head. My hair, fingernails and toenails were literally separating from my body; I had episodes of uncontrollable coughing which left me gasping for breath. I now believe that intuitively, I was seeking to comfort this dis-ease by using pale, calming, opalescent colours, organized into undulating, horizontal rhythms. The intimate scale, ranging from 10 x 10 inches to 11 x 14 inches, together with the gentle colour harmonies and substantial areas of untouched white, created spaciousness for me, as well as some breathing room! Absorbed in art making, I was able to forget for a while the horrific side effects of cancer treatment, and could trust that all was unfolding as it should.

Again, the titles I allocated to the works reflected a new understanding of my resonance with Bone Island. We are Spirit on Water (see figure 16); Clothed with the Heavens, Crowned with the Stars; A State and Place of Lightness; I Wanted to See the Shimmering Threads that Hold it All Together were the words which emerged as each panel approached completion; they suggested an expansive, transcendent quality.

Figure 16: *We are Spirit on Water,* collage on panel, 10 x 10 inches, 2020

This reminded me how, through art making, I could sink into the present moment, befriend my very real physical dis-comfort, and thereby receive relief from suffering. By channeling the invisible power created by the intersection of wind, water, earth and sky, I felt myself no longer a victim, but on the road to recovery.

There is a saying, "We see things not as they are, but as we are."[64] In other words, our feelings and emotions affect what we pay attention to, and how we interpret what we perceive. However, how we feel can in turn be influenced by the energies around us. I posit that the change in my collages was affected not only by my bodily responses to surgery and medication, but also to the seasonal variations of place. While a Cognashene spring was bursting with new plant life and the fresh energy of birds and wildlife, summer was more settled, more low key. Hence, the vibrant colours and radial compositions reflected the warm, saturated colours of colt's foot, day lilies and swamp mallow in April, May and June. The delicate rose and gold hues, on the other hand, were reminiscent of granite rocks bleached by the summer's sun, fragile boneset blossoms, and driftwood weathered almost to white. The calming colours also reminded me of the the delicate hues I had admired in Fra Angelico's frescoes, during my Florence residency the summer before.

When summer turned into fall, I continued to connect with Bone Island through explorations in collage and photography. The pandemic meant that my 2020 Integrated Studio class was offered online only, but the "silver lining" was that I could spend more time on the bay. Through OCADU professor Peter Morin, I was introduced to the work of Thich Nhat Hanh,

[64] Rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani, as quoted in the Talmudic tractate Berakhot (55b).

renowned Buddhist monk, peace activist, teacher, and poet. This in turn sparked sustained research into *mindfulness* practices and how they could deepen my relationship with Bone Island.

Although I had been a practitioner of Transcendental Meditation[65] since the 1970s and had also received trainings in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR),[66] by Fall 2020, a morning seated meditation for 25 minutes upon waking had become the extent of my mindfulness, and I had forgotten to carry it through the day. This changed as I delved into mindfulness as a more deliberate way of being in the world.

New readings reminded me that by removing the Buddhist framework, Kabat-Zinn had placed MBSR in a scientific, rather than religious context. There are many studies which corroborate the efficacy of MBSR in improving cognitive ability; slowing brain aging; reducing stress, anxiety and depression symptoms; increasing a sense of well-being; helping with pain management; and improving quality of life for those living with chronic conditions.[67]

Vital to meditation is the commitment to sit still for a designated period of time, focus on the breath, and repeat a mantra - a chosen word, sound, or short phrase, usually in Sanskrit - in order to focus attention, calm the mind, and transcend thought. It is a practice non-doing, of simply observing thoughts as they come and go, without judgement or rumination. But although seated meditation is central to mindfulness practice, mindfulness can also be manifested in other,

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[65] This was Transcendental Meditation as taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Indian guru and popularizer of ancient Vedic traditions.

[66] Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, also known as MBSR, was developed in the 1980s by microbiologist Jon Kabat-Zinn, a student of Thich Nhat Hanh.

[67] A selection of scientific papers on Mindfulness and MBSR can be found in Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 452-4; also see Goleman and Davidson, *Altered* States, 297-321.

more informal ways. This is because mindfulness emphasizes the present moment, what German philosopher Eckart Tolle calls *The Now*, in order to realize a heightened sense of awareness.[68] By being truly awake to the here and now, rather than thinking about the past or future, mind and body can be brought into one. Thich Nhat Hanh observes,

> [the practice of mindfulness] may be very simple, but the effect can be great. Focusing on our in-breath, we release the past, we release the future, we release our projects. We ride on that breath with all our being. Our mind comes back to our body, and we are truly there, alive, in the present moment. We are home. Just one breath, in and out, and then the energy of mindfulness is there in us.[69]

In the course of becoming familiar with Hanh's work and engaging in Canadian microbiologist and psychologist Alastair Cunningham's *Healing Journey* online program through Wellspring,[70] I learned how mindfulness can be an ongoing approach to life.

A common misconception is that mindfulness is about feeling relaxed and calm. Instead, its goal is to develop the capacity to be attentive and aware of present moment experience, however that might show up. Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "[…] the awareness that emerges from paying attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgementally, to things just as they are, in service of greater self-understanding, wisdom, and well-being."[71]

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[68] Tolle, *The Power of Now,* 49.

[69] Hanh, *Your True Home: The Everyday Wisdom of Thich Nhat Hanh,* 178.

[70] Wellspring is a Canada-wide non-profit organization consisting of a network of community-based centres, offering programs and services, to anyone, with any type of cancer, at any stage in their journey.

[71] Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are,* 18-19.

By reading Hanh's *gathas* (short verses for daily living)[72] at strategic times of the day, I repeatedly returned to a state of mindful awareness. Mundane activities, such as washing hands, eating, reading, or walking, became opportunities to check in what was happening with all my senses. Moreover, an understanding of being ill, or ill-being, became possible when I stopped trying to run away from my suffering, and instead could look deeply into it. Hanh notes, "with deep looking, understanding will arise, and compassion will be born."[73]

American Indigenous scholar Michael Yellow Bird credits mindfulness practices with a decolonizing of the mind. By deleting the negative neural networks created by the trauma of colonialism, more empowering networks of well-being are created. He observes:

> Mindfulness is not a foreign way of life, philosophy or religion. Since time immemorial Indigenous Peoples have embraced mindfulness before, during, and after many of their secular and sacred ceremonies […] It will increase our compassion, patience, creativity, emotional intelligence and courage.[74]

As I began to engage more deeply with mindfulness, I became increasingly aware that it was not only the visual appearance of the Bone Island shoreline, but its sounds which contributed to its anima. Heretofore, I had involuntarily heard, but not related to the sounds around me. Now I started to intentionally practice attentive listening.

American composer Pauline Oliveros coined the term *Deep Listening* in 1989. Her practice of radical attentiveness involves listening not only with the ears, but with the whole body. And because sound is recognized as having a physical presence, it can be perceived as

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[72] Hanh, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment,* 1.

[73] Hanh, *How to See,* 55.

[74] Yellow Bird, "Neurodecolonization", 81.

seeping through the pores of the skin. In order to listen fully, temporary suspension of judgement and a willingness to learn new things are required. Deep Listening is inherently empathetic, in that it connects relationships being to being, and heart to heart. Oliveros notes:

> Sounds carry **intelligence**. Ideas, feelings and memories are triggered by sounds. If you are too narrow in your awareness of sounds, you are likely to be disconnected from your environment. More often than not, urban living causes narrow focus and disconnection. Too much information is coming into the auditory cortex, or habit has narrowed listening to only what seems of value and concern to the listener. All else is tuned out or discarded as garbage.[75]

With practice, I came to appreciate the distinctive sonar vibrations of the Bone Island shoreline. Rather than turning on the radio for undemanding companionship, or listening to music to enliven my experience, I made a point of engaging in 'sound baths' every morning, afternoon and at dusk. Each time, I would sit quietly for 20 minutes, just listening, not only with my ears but with my whole body. Sometimes I stationed myself in the small grove of trees next to the shoreline; other times I lay on the ground in the open space where dock meets land. Afterwards, I made notes of what I had heard. There was some human made noise from chain saws, motorboats, generators, or online music, but the expression of the other-than-humans was predominant. That fall, the melodic songs of the black capped chickadees and red-eyed vireos contrasted with the raucous cries of the bluejays and northern ravens. Seagulls and terns delighted in shrieking across the sky, whereas the blue herons and ospreys were eerily silent for the most part. The pileated woodpeckers liked to whoop through the trees with what I came to recognize as their 'Bone Island monkey call'.[76] Occasionally, the deep hoot of a barred owl

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[75] Oliveros, *A Composer's Sound Practice,* xxxv.

[76] This term has been coined by our long-time Bone Island neighbours and friends.

would sound from the woods. Far out in the bay the loons were gathering, ready to begin their migration south. Reverberating across the water, their mournful calls were a cogent reminder that winter was not far away. The high-pitched, rhythmic honking of Canada Geese, flying overhead in their signature v-shaped formation, added to the multiplicity of sounds. An ongoing, playful undercurrent was created by the chatter of the resident red squirrels and chipmunks, and the happy barking of island dogs.

Of great assistance in identifying the birds was the mobile app, *PictureBird*. A brief audio recording or a snapshot of the bird was sufficient to not only pinpoint the particular species of bird, but its salient characteristics. By creating an online log of activity over many months, it became apparent to me how the soundscape of Bone Island varied from season to season. In the spring, for example, the trill of the red-wing blackbirds was prevalent. In the summer, I could count on the aerodynamic whirr of hummingbirds' wings. For each species, sounds varied with intent and circumstance - interestingly, I could only see in one direction, but I could hear in all directions.

Not only were the sonic pitch, volume and duration of sound important, but the silences, as spaces in between, were significant as well. The interplay of sounds and silence, and the relationship between all of the perceptual vibrations, simultaneously focused me in the present moment and expanded my attention outwards. This allowed the more subtle whispers of wind, water, and leaves to become audible. I was reminded of Ojibwe author Richard Wagamese's reflection:

> I am my silence. I am not the busyness of my thoughts or the daily rhythm of my actions. I am not the stuff that constitutes my world. I am not my talk. I am not my actions. I am my silence. I am the consciousness that perceives all these things. When I go to my consciousness, to that great pool of silence that observes the intricacies of my life, I am

> aware that I am me. I take a little time each day to sit in silence so that I can move outward in balance into the great clamour of living.[77]

Elder Edna Manitowabi's words also resonated in my heart:

> The power of water, the power of sound, the power of the vibration and movement – that stirs up within you the changes that need to happen to come home.[78]

Eventually, I began to make sound and video recordings of the shoreline. This required a significant change in lifestyle for me, in that I had to rise at dawn to catch the first light and the dawn chorus of birds. The collected documentation allowed me to literally "tune in" when I was away from Georgian Bay over the winter months. The visuals and the sounds were significant in recharging my body with sympathetic vibrations from the site. Moreover, my new relationship to sound created a closer connection with the world around me, and helped dissolve the limiting boundaries of 'me' and 'them'. This reciprocity of energy flow helped create greater respect and empathy for what was happening around me. It was as Oliveros said:

> The devaluation of hearing through unconsciousness and ignorance has caused a serious imbalance in the quality of life. Suppression of listening is a consequence of this imbalance. Separation and alienation results. How we attend to this imbalance will have a profound influence on the future of human values. How we use the power of sound and music affects our values.[79]

In the quest to learn new ways of interacting beyond surface consciousness with Bone Island, my attention subsequently turned to *ecopsychology*, *ecotherapy*, and *eco-art therapy*. Ecopsychology, I learned, developed as a movement in the 1980s under counterculture leaders

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[77] Richard Wagamese, *Embers,* 15.

[78] Edna Maitowabi, *Water Teachings,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxmUjpkgnBw.

[79] Pauline Oliveros, "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory', 18.

such as American scholar Theodore Roszak. Roszak viewed ecopsychology as a weaving together of science and psychiatry, and poetry and politics:

> Its goal is to bridge our culture's longstanding, historical gulf between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum […] The earth's cry for rescue from the punishing weight of the industrial system we have created is our own cry for scale and a quality of life that will free each of us to become the complete person we were born to be.[80]

Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, subsequently emerged as the applied practice of ecopsychology. The term ecotherapy was coined in 1996 by American psychologist and pastor Howard Clinebell, to denote nature-based methods of being nurtured by the earth.[81] In ecotherapy, self-discovery, personal insight, conflict resolution and inner healing are prioritized.[82] Within the field of eco-art therapy, the synergy of art expression and nature is activated to capture and express thoughts and feelings sometimes too difficult to express through language alone. Throughout this process, emphasis is placed on embodiment and attunement through meditative states of deep looking, attentive listening and mindful creating.

In October 2020, I enrolled in an online graduate level course, *Eco-Arts Based Environmental Education* with the Kutenai Art Therapy Institute. The readings, conversations, art invitations and personal responses allowed me to not only increase my knowledge of ecology and eco-based art, but expand my sense of self and my understanding of my place in the world.

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[80] Theodore Roszak, The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology, 14.

[81] Howard Clinebell, *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth,* 27.

[82] Theresa Sweeney, *Eco-Art Therapy*, 13.

Indeed, the word ecology is grounded in the Greek word for home, *oikos*. It is also similar to the Ojibwe word for land or earth, *aki*.[83]

In particular, the eco-art therapy emphasis on learning through the senses significantly intensified my awareness of touch, smell, and taste. I had been so focused on what I could see and hear that I often overlooked other sensory modes. As I became more attentive to the tactile properties of my art materials, I began to employ not only paper but found materials from nature. Fluid media such as watercolour and ink were incorporated as well (see figure 17).

I was introduced to the concept that the language of nature could involve fifty-four "natural webstring senses and sensitivities."[84] According to American ecotherapist Michael J. Cohen, these can be grouped into several categories: the radiation senses, the feeling senses, the chemical senses, and the mental senses. For example, an awareness of pressure, a hunger for food, a sense of time, a sense of change of weather - these are ways of knowing beyond the traditionally acknowledged five senses. Cohen notes:

> Each sense is a vital, distinct way to know life and to be alive […] For this reason, learning how to consciously enjoy, validate, trust, appreciate, and strengthen our natural senses holds great potential for personal and global fulfillment, balance and unity. In nature-centered thinking, it is very important to honour natural sensory communication even though it is mostly non-verbal.[85]

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[83] Johnston, *Anishnaubae Thesaurus, 1.*

[84] Cohen, *Reconnecting with Nature,* 38-51.

[85] Cohen, *Reconnecting with Nature,* 38-44.

Figure 17: *Tears for Mother Earth,* mixed media collage on panel, 12 x 16 inches, 2020

Furthermore, because Industrial society often teaches conquest or improvement of nature, and emphasizes the words of the intellect rather than sensory connections, humans tend to disregard and separate themselves from the natural world. In fact, journalist Richard Louv has coined the term *nature deficit disorder* to help explain the alarming decrease in physical and emotional health in children and adults.[86] By way of contrast, Indigenous cultures' very survival has been rooted in being attuned to nature.

Through my reading and the consistent practice of mindfulness, I came to understand that in order to connect with the Bone Island shoreline at a visceral level, it was vital to develop a

[86] Louv, *Last Child in the Woods,*10.

multi-sensory, attentive, and respectful practice of connecting to this place. It was as Apache elder Dudley Patterson noted,

> Wisdom sits in places. It's like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don't you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened long ago. You must think about it and keep thinking about it. Then your mind will become smoother and smoother.[87]

Reflection 6: In the Presence of Absence

In January 2021, I began to apply my research and experiential learning of the previous months to my painting practice. Having regained physical strength, I was now able to work standing at an easel for extended periods of time. Once more, I turned to cold wax and oil on gessoed panels, but this time my desire was not to convey Italian gardens. Instead, I sought to channel the anima of Bone Island. The painter in me craved the materiality of pigment and binder, and the consummate satisfaction of spreading viscous substances over a surface. I anticipated translucent layers building up, one over the next, with vestiges of previous scrapings and scratchings still visible.

The challenge now became how to conjure up and sustain a Georgian Bay sensory experience at a time when the winter season prevented me from physically being at Bone Island. In my Barrie home studio, I continued with my morning ritual of seated meditation, followed by a half hour walk. Although the local park and the streets of our nineteenth century neighbourhood were urban spaces, the physical activity of walking created for me an envigourating shift, from regarding my body as a necessary object, to recognizing my body as a

[87] Dudley Patterson in Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places,* 127.

felt experience. My desire to learn more about the resulting change, viscerally perceived in my entire being, led me to inquire into *phenomenology*, as developed by the German philosopher Husserl, French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and American naturalist and anthropologist, David Abram.

The Greek word *phenomen* means 'that which appears', and it follows that phenomenology is the study of essences through our personal experience of the lived body. Phenomenology challenges the modern, western Judeo-Christian paradigm that the natural world is determinate and mechanical, and that the mysterious or the powerful is somehow primitive or superstitious. Instead, it views the world as a living field, which is able to respond to our emotions, and in turn calls forth feelings from us. This fluid realm of direct experience is what constitutes our reality, and its unfolding awareness has the capacity to be transformative, by not only deepening our experience of the earth, but by intensifying our sense of wonder. Merleau-Ponty declares:

> All of my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is based from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.[88]

David Abram, American ecologist and philosopher, concurs:

> The earth of our direct experience is not that blue marble, flecked with white, mapped and monitored by innumerable satellites. Rather, it is the particular place where I find myself, the tangible terrain that I engage with my muscles, whose horizons beckon my eyes and whose tangled rhythms nourish my listening ears […] Only by being deeply here, in and of this place, am I palpably connected to every other place.[89]

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[88] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* ix.

[89] Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous,* 288.

Thus, in phenomenology, subject and object come together in presence. Past and future are straddled in an absolute flow. Indeed, in order for us to sense anything, it must already have its own anima, or certain quality. Humans are not scientific instruments, reading raw data as unambiguous, discreet things. Rather, experience reveals only meaningful wholes, characterized by ambiguity. Perception is the playing field in which something happens; it is our meaningful engagement with the world. In the all-pervasive realm of being, Merleau-Ponty posits, "the body belongs to the order of things as the world is 'universal flesh'"[90] Furthermore,

> it is the expressive operation of the body, begun by the least perception, that develops into painting and art.[91]

It followed, therefore, that I would need to immerse myself in the sights, sounds, textures, scents and taste of Bone Island before engaging in the actual painting process. I did this by reviewing the photographs, video and sound recordings I had made on site. In order to further realign myself with the rhythms of Georgian Bay, I sifted through the dry but still fragrant white pine needles, hardened acorns, sandy soil and containers of water I had brought back from the shoreline the previous fall. I ran my bare feet and hands over rocks and twigs I had gathered, and reread my journal entries and poems. I concluded my preparations by cleansing myself and my environment. This brought me to a somatic threshold where I could make the marks which spoke to me of Bone Island.

Edward S. Casey, American philosopher, calls the immersion into a site, and the resulting internalization of it, *absorptive mapping*. The lived body, porous and receptive, takes in the

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[90] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 137.

[91] Merleau-Ponty, *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,* 106-7.

momentary experiences, and over time transmutes this amassing of many moments into a resource for future work. It is the opposite of taking in the world at a glance. So the act of painting has become, for me, an active meditation in which I venture to give form to that which I do not know. What I seek to express are powerful luminous presences, "garnered in long periods of becoming."[92]

Similarly, the art process itself, from a phenomenological point of view, is not the result of me as the artist imposing my thoughts on a given material. Rather, as British anthropologist Tim Ingold has pointed out, it is the unfolding of the materiality itself, which creates the final outcome.[93]

During the winter, spring and summer of 2021, I sought to bring 'flesh' to my experience of Bone Island by exploring spontaneous, meditative mark-making in a series of cold wax and oil paintings. I was heartened by American artist Joan Mitchell's declaration, "I carry my landscapes within me."[94] Whether away from or actually at Bone Island, the morning rituals which I had carefully developed, allowed me to invest and charge my movements with my felt sense of the shoreline. A new component developed after the sudden and unexpected death of our beyond human family member, a feisty terrier called Bismarck, in mid-January. He was my buddy, my best friend for over ten years, and I could not imagine a life without him. After he

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[92] Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*, 162.

[93] Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture,* 20.

[94] Mitchell, in *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter*, 252.

died, my mornings began with a new ritual; this somehow helped mitigate the almost unbearable pain of loss, and allowed me to process what could not be fixed.[95]

The shock, anger, and deep sadness of my grief came in waves. The physical act of painting let me discharge emotions and simultaneously draw strength from the process of making. The restricted, low contrast palette brought my dull and drained feelings of bereavement into a more calm and restful state. However, the rare tints and shades of chartreuse cadmium, quinacridone violet, and occasionally a hint of cadmium red which I now employed in my painting were not devoid of vitality either; they suggested to me the promise of new growth and a new relationship to the deceased.

Using not only my hand, but the motion of my whole arm and upper body, I applied varying viscosities of pigment, wax, and oil medium to my birch panels. Using paint brushes, scrapers, flat rocks and pieces of wood, I transferred my felt memories of the vibrations of Bone Island to the panels, so that my physical being became but another instrument to convey the island's energies and life-force. The accrued layering of glazes and impasto was important. Also, the removal of accumulated strata by sanding, rubbing, gouging and scraping was essential to translate the powerful, yet delicate and nuanced energy I experienced, into art. The inner dynamic of the haptic mark-making, and the unfolding materiality of the pigment itself combined to create mists and transparencies, worlds-within-worlds. To convey the immaterial through floating essences and elusive luminescence became my purpose and my joy.

[95] The death of a pet is often a source of disenfranchised grief. Friends, family, and the broader community may not recognize the loss of a pet as a real loss; the bereaved pet owners are frequently expected to 'get over' their grief quickly, and to 'replace' the deceased with another animal.

As each painting moved towards conclusion, its title revealed itself. I intuitively knew when to stop: that was when additional marks no longer contributed to what the piece wanted to say. Many of the panels were 30 x 40 inches or 30 x 30 inches in dimension, a size chosen because they could fit comfortably within my arms' reach. I recalled how painters Claude Monet and Joan Mitchell had juxtaposed multiple panels to create fields of presence, and saw how some of my paintings could be grouped into diptychs and triptychs to create the experience of a larger whole. For example, *Morphic Resonance* began as one painting, but subsequently two others sought its proximity for completion (see figures 18, 19, 20, and 21).

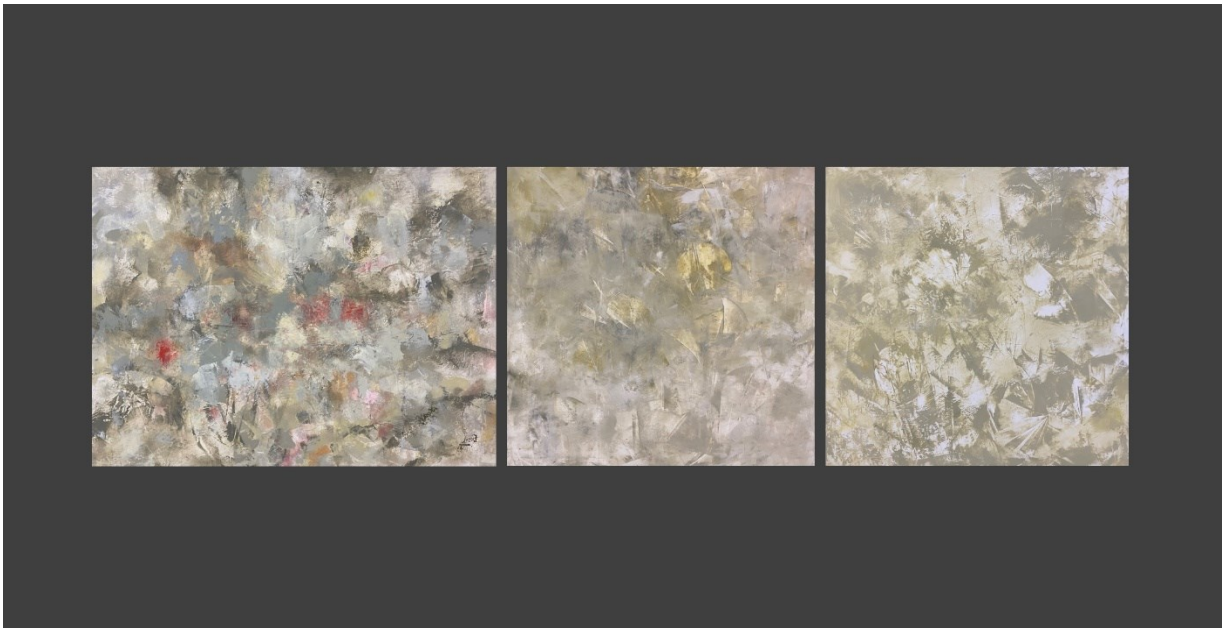

Figure 18: *Morphic Resonance*, triptych, cold wax and oil on panels, 30 x 100 inches, 2021

Figure 19: *Morphic Resonance I,* oil and cold wax on wood panel, 30 x 40 inches, 2021

Figure 20: *Morphic Resonance II,* cold wax and oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches, 2021

Figure 21: *Morphic Resonance III,* cold wax and oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches, 2021

The concept *Morphic Resonance* was developed by British biologist and parapsychologist Rupert Sheldrake. It hypothesizes "a kind of memory in nature giving direct connections across time from past to present organisms, providing each species with a kind of collective memory of form and behaviour."[96] Together, the three panels seemed to express what I could intuitively feel, yet only partially grasp intellectually. Similarly, paintings such as The Place Where the World is Breathing (see figure 22) and Unfurled (see figure 23) tapped into an underlying vitality for which I had no words.

Figure 22: *The Place Where the World is Breathing*, cold wax and oil on panel, 30 x 40 inches, 2021

[96] Sheldrake, *Science and Spiritual Practices*. 6.

Figure 23: *Unfurled*, oil and cold wax on panel, 30 x 40 inches

Although most of the oil and cold wax works were on a large scale, some were more intimate, and ranged in size from 8 x 10 inches to 11 x 14 inches. In retrospect, I can see that these are more gestural and immediate, probably because then, I was less concerned with achieving a resolved composition, and more invested in manifesting the feeling of being alive (see figure 24).

Figure 24: *Hiding in Full View*, oil and cold wax on panel, 12 x 12 inches

Developmental psychologist Daniel Stern argues that five dynamic events linked together give rise to the experience of vitality: movement, time, force, space, and intention/directionality.[97] I concur that, in the physical act of painting, these elements are paramount. And by working abstractly, rather than being distracted by rendering physical likeness, I was able to fully give myself over to receiving, interpreting and giving form to the resonance circulating within and around me. This was the start of my engagement with process painting, a form of painting which champions the experience of the creative impulse, the essential life force, rather than a final product which would be explained, analyzed, evaluated.

[97] Stern, *Forms of Vitality,* 4.

Reflection 7: A Mind Spread Out on the Ground [98]

During late Summer and early Fall 2021, I reluctantly came to acknowledge that I was absolutely fatigued, yet incredibly restless at the same time. I felt encased in a thick blanket of cold grey fog, lined with hot, tiny, sharp needles of copper. My fingers and toes often tingled, but at times they seemed disturbingly numb. I was easily distracted. It was difficult to remember things from one day to the next. I misplaced the items I sought to organize. I had to read and reread material in order to retain information. My reliable memory, and the ability to inhale and analyze complex texts, had abandoned me. As a result, I felt very fragile: something was not right.

It is a well-known, but often under-diagnosed and disregarded fact that Cancer Related Fatigue (CRF), Peripheral Neuropathy and Brain Fog are side-effects from chemotherapy and adjuvant medications.[99] Cancer Related Fatigue is described as "a persistent sense of physical, emotional, and cognitive tiredness that is not related to activity, and doesn't necessarily go away after rest."[100] Peripheral Neuropathy is the result of damage to the sensory nerves, and may manifest in a feeling of 'pins and needles' or 'electric shocks',[101] numbness, and/or a loss of balance.[102] Brain Fog, also called 'chemo-brain', is the term for treatment related changes in

[98] This is the title of an autoethnographic reflection by Haudenosaunee author Alicia Elliott, published in 2019. It refers to the Mohawk word for depression, *Wake'nikonhra'kwenhtara:'on,* a mind "literally stretched or sprawled out on the ground." Although I was not exactly depressed, I did feel 'undone' and indeed the term does describe, for me, the traumatic after-effects of cancer diagnosis and treatment.

[99] https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/after-chemotherapy-breast

[100] https://wellspring.ca/online-programs/programs/all-programs/cancer-related-fatigue/

[101] https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/about-peripheral-neuropathy

[102] https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323481#symptoms

cognition, the symptoms of which include decreased memory, shortened attention span, difficulty sorting problems and reduced ability to multi-task.[103]

When I communicated my symptoms to my oncologist, her professional advice was to "power through" the fatigue, sensory distortion, and cognitive disorientation. She was clearly uncomfortable with discussing anything other than blood counts or medications. I recalled Lata Mani's outrage following a consultation with her neurologist:

> Faced with his distress at my situation and his capacity to help me, the doctor had resorted to a quintessentially American discourse of determination, motivation and personal effort. He had transmogrified into an aggressive sports coach, urging me to adopt a "can do" attitude. His fear of my condition had quickly turned into criticism that I was not trying hard enough to recover. Although he may not have intended this, he was in effect trying to shame me into getting better. The neurologists's response to me was, alas, not unique. I had heard versions of it many times before.[104]

Mani's insights strengthened my resolve to resist my doctor's "mechanistic, Newtonian model of effort"[105]. Instead of denying my bodily perceptions, I actively sought out reliable sources of information and support, such as webinars, online art therapy programs, and associated readings on the topic of cancer treatment side effects. The term 'side effects', I came to realize, was an understatement, because these so-called side effects were not peripheral, but in fact central to my understanding and participation in the world.

I also appealed to the Bone Island shoreline for help in dealing with the distressing changes I was experiencing; I did this by means of meditation, prayer, offerings of tobacco, and engaging in the art process. Rather than powering through my symptoms, I greeted and

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[103] https://wellspring.ca/online-programs/programs/all-programs/brain-fog/

[104] Mani, *interleaves,* 35.

[105] Mani, *interleaves, 36.*

connected with them as they manifested. I set up a 'studio' on the living room sofa, so that I could sit and paint, and thereby lessen the ongoing, whirling sensation of vertigo. In addition to my other preparations prior to painting, I introduced a slow, mindfulness-based body scan, silently reading and acknowledging, from head to toe, 'what is'. This objective inventory of my body's felt sense was a calming practice, in that there was nothing else to do or fix - the sensations simply were. I then imagined roots descending from the soles of my feet to somewhere deep in the soil, and from there extending into the networks and tangles and fibers of the plants and trees I had come to know so well. Once I was fully grounded, I visualized the land's life force moving into my body, activating healthy cells, and restoring positive energy. This brought me to a vibrational threshold where I was ready to give form to my experience.

I decided that, for me, the best way to channel the resulting electric flow was to close my eyes and, with a pencil in each hand, make marks. I chose to draw on birch panels which were small enough to rest on my lap. The warm, smooth, firm feel of the wood was reassuring; the delicate scent reaffirmed my connection with nature. Moreover, the subtle wood grain had its own textured pattern, which interacted with and shifted my mark-making. When I felt my two-handed scribble was complete, I opened my eyes and studied the lines and shapes which had been created. With traditional art materials such as ink, chalk, watercolour and crayon, as well as household items like coffee, tea, and wine, I then added further contour lines, and multiple layers of colour and texture. As with the cold wax and oil panels, subsequent removal of portions of pigment introduced unpredictable and chaotic elements. In these water-based works, I experimented with sprayed water and splashes of bleach to disrupt the elements, and lifted areas of colour by blotting with rags or paper towel. Scratching and scraping further affected the

initial pigment applications. The challenge of bringing erratic components into haptic resolution activated both my internal and external art process.

The use of irregular, accidental marks and shapes to ignite further image-making has been apparent since Paleolithic times, when cave surfaces suggested where pictographs might best be placed.[106] Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci advised that studying the stains on walls, fire ashes, cloud formations and patterns in mud could stimulate creative thought.[107] Later, the Surrealist art movement embraced techniques which allowed the unconscious mind to express itself, such as the 'automatic drawing', 'grattage', and 'frottage' processes which I used in this body of work, which I called *Groundwork*.[108]

Early American art therapy practitioners like Florence Cane and Margaret Naumburg advocated for spontaneous markmaking as a means of integrating movement, emotion, and thought, as well as releasing repressed material.[109] Later, English pediatrician and psychoanalyst David Winnicott developed and popularized what he called the 'squiggle game', where an initial free form scribble was used to spark further manipulation into recognizable objects or design. Recognizing the vital role of play for children and adults, Winnicott writes:

> … it is in playing and only playing that the individual or adult is able to be creative and use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.[110]

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[106] Moulin, *Prehistoric Painting,* 38.

[107] da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting,* 124.

[108] Dempsey, *Surrealism,* 78-92.

[109] Cane, *The Artist in Each of Us,* 56-7; Naumburg, *Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy*, 15-16.

[110] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 73.

Contemporary American art therapist Lisa D. Hinz, drawing on the phenomenology of expression, identifies kinesthetic activities as those which explore and emphasize rhythm, action, movement and energy release.[111] Creating form from a scribble is shown to discharge energy, release tension, provide muscle relaxation, find or create an inner rhythm. In turn, these effects encourage self-regulation, counteract physical or psychological numbing, reconnect with the wisdom of the body, and stimulate form perception and emotional experience.[112]

Certainly, the dynamism of bi-lateral, spontaneous drawing enabled me to work through, and find peace with, my altered sense of myself and the world. The act of giving attention to my bodily sensations in the present moment, rather than being drawn into the trauma of the past or fearful anticipations of the future, was vital to my recovery and to my art. As Bessel van der Kolk, American researcher and psychiatrist explains,

> One of the clearest lessons from contemporary neuroscience is that our sense of selves is anchored in a vital connection to our bodies. We do not truly know ourselves unless we can feel and interpret our physical sensations; we need to register and act on those sensations to navigate safely through life. While numbing (or compensatory sensation seeking) make life tolerable, the price you pay is that you lose awareness of what is going on inside your body, and, with that, the sense of being fully, sensually alive.[113]

It was through anchoring myself in the body, and following its spontaneous impulses, that the imagery for my drawings emerged. At first, leaves and flowers and stems; later feathers, birds, nests, fish and small creatures appeared. Their riotous intertwine and interweave called to mind the Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts I had studied in my undergraduate years of art history,

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[111] Hinz, *Expressive Therapies Continuum,* 44.

[112] Hinz, *Expressive Therapies Continuum,* 49.

[113] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, 272.

while the floral and animal motifs recalled European folk art and liturgical textiles, Asian carpets, William Morris wallpaper, and Indigenous beading, appliqué and quill work.

For the most part, the flowers which I drew were not conceived of as particular species. However, in retrospect, I can see fragments and lobed images of waterlilies, swamp rose, plantain pussytoes, coltsfoot, flag iris, boneset, rattlesnake root and day lilies. Curiously, one distinctive shape occurred repeatedly in every panel: a white or pale coloured oval. I wonder now if these ellipses were meant to evoke organic elements such as seed pods, petals and leaves, or if perhaps they subconsciously echoed the luminous opalescence of surgical drainage tube bulbs, and the translucent plastic bubble wrap of prescribed medications. They might also be viewed as halos, numina, spectral moons, or portals into another world. What I do know is that the process of bringing a semblance of order and substance to the initially chaotic scribbles was immensely satisfying.

Whereas I had needed pale tints in my process paintings to communicate the anima of the land, I now sought out deep alizarin crimson and bright cadmium red, complemented by pale rose, ochre, lavender and grey. In the Vedic tradition, red is the colour of the root chakra, which provides stability and security. It is associated with the earth element. In many Ojibwe medicine wheels, red is placed in the South, representing summer, youth and the continued nurturance of all creation.[114] Ojibwe elder Lillian Pitawanakwat writes:

> The southern direction reminds us to look after our spirits. When you are in balance within yourself, spirit will warn you of danger, will tell you, "No, don't go there. Go this

[114] Bopp, J., Bopp, M., Brown and Lane, *The Sacred Tree,* 48-54, 72. This publication presents a generalized overview. It is also important to note that different nations will have different medicine wheel teachings, according to their stories, values and beliefs. Sometimes within the same nation there will be variations.

> way instead." So no matter what happens, when you listen to that spirit, to that intuition, it never deceives you. It's always right, because that's your guide.[115]

The act of choosing and applying the red pigment was grounding in itself, and was able to settle, yet simultaneously envigourate my restless mind. The images became visual documents for gathering strength, exploring tension, and manifesting my sense of connection with the infinite force of the universe. As each painting moved towards completion, I was able to determine a title for it. The titles were an interface of my bodily awareness, and what I felt Bone Island wanted to tell me. Titles included *Remember to Breathe* (see figure 25), *Petrichor* (see figure 26), *Seeds of Hope, Strength and Knowing, Celebration, Signs of Direction, Snow's Crucible, Balancing and Relinquishing, Transmuting Darkness into Light, Nourish,* and *Coming Home to Myself.* In all, more than twenty panels were created, and I am currently continuing with this process of markmaking.

Figure 25: *Remember to Breathe,* mixed media on panel, 11 x 14 inches, 2021

[115] Pitawanakwat, "Four Directions Teachings". *Four Directions Teachings*, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/ojibwe.pdf.

Strangely, although the panels were created as horizontals, for the most part they are best viewed as vertical compositions, as if reaching upwards from deep in the ground. And like the cold wax and oil paintings, they can effectively be grouped.

Figure 26: *Petrichor,* mixed media on panel, 12 x 16 inches, 2022

Reflection 8: Imprints

Spring, Summer and Fall 2022, I was able to live on Bone Island every weekend, and often for several weekdays as well. I continued to study and to develop my kinship with its flora and fauna, and was awed by the complexity and beauty of what I was privileged to experience.

Having explored my own markmaking process for so many months, I now began to wonder what might evolve if I invited the land to offer her own marks. Accordingly, I spread out and partially buried several swaths of raw canvas along the shoreline, and waited for water, soil,

vegetation to create imprints on the cotton (see figures 27, 28 and 29). After several days, I rinsed the canvases in the lake, spread them out to dry on the grassy area adjacent to the shoreline, and studied the delicate contours which were etched into the fabric. I then experimented with ways of responding to the tidemarks, stains, and smudges which nature made.

Figure 27 and Figure 28: *Partially buried canvas with fragments of rusted met*

Figure 29: *Partially buried canvas with fragments of rusted metal*

My first foray consisted of rewetting the canvas with splashes of lake water, and then, using found sticks, rocks and feathers, adding pools of black ink to the fabric laid out on the shoreline. Unlike the canvases for *My Mind Spread Out on the Ground* paintings, wherein the lines and shapes were generated by my arms and hands, this new canvas, just a bit taller and wider than I, received and recorded marks generated by my whole body. The result was a dark, dynamic composition in which the original imprints were almost obscured. Subsequently, I applied chalk, conte and watercolour to add swaths of colour, but the result was still a forbidding storm (see figure 30).

Figure 30: *When Things Fall Apart (*detail), mixed media on canvas, 31 x 71 inches, 2021-2

For my second approach, I used softer, earthier media on dry canvas. By applying charcoal, conte, chalks and watercolour in gentle, parallel strokes, I sought to convey the peaceful, lyrical energy I now felt emanating from the site. I was astonished to see that the resulting composition resembled the linear pattern graphs of the sound recordings I had been making in order to identify birdsong (see figure 31).

Figure 31: *Hope with Feathers,* mixed media on canvas, 27 x 65 inches, 2021-2

My third attempt at working with environmentally stained canvas began with judicious scrapings of ink on wet fabric, followed by multiple layers of charcoal, chalk, conte and watercolour. The learning I experienced from completing the two previous canvases resulted in my creating a tangled web of organic lines and shapes, a mass of interwoven filaments spinning, looping and stretching outwards, upwards, and down. This image most closely conveyed my reciprocity with the land. I call it *Giving and Receiving* (see figure 32).

Figure 32: *Giving and Receiving,* mixed media on canvas, 54.5 x 54.5 inches, 2022

This painting was my visual response to listening, not only with my ears but my entire being, to Bone Island's shoreline and its unique energy vibration. It was as Oliveros noted:

> Listening involves a reciprocity of energy flow; exchange of energy; sympathetic vibration: tuning into the web of mutually supportive interconnected thoughts, feelings, dreams, vital forces comprising our lives; empathy; the basis for compassion and love. Yes, Deep Listening is the foundation for a radically transformed social matrix in which compassion and love are the core motivating principles guiding creative decision making and our actions in the world.[116]

Reflection 9: Renewal

The final work for my thesis project was a gift from the land and its creatures. Spring and summer 2022, I took note that tree branches, chewed by beavers, frequently washed up on the Bone Island shoreline. In previous years, I had disregarded this phenomenon, but now I became intrigued and enchanted by the smoothness of stripped twigs and branches, the rough rhytidome of others, the delicate sculpted patterns left by gnawing, and the myriad variations of tints and shades in the found wood. I began to gather the sticks, and eventually laid them out on the area between cottage and water to dry. Over time, neighbourhood friends and their dogs began to bring me additional beaver sticks which they had sighted.

The birch, maple, pine, oak and ash sticks ranged in length from several inches to more than 6 feet, and in diameter from ½ inch to 4 inches. I began to reflect on the importance of the beaver: how it provided meat and fur to the Indigenous people, how it had played a central role

[116] Oliveros, *"*Quantum Listening", 18.

in the fur trade with the Europeans, only to become almost extinct in the mid-1800s due to overhunting and extermination.

The beaver, I came to learn upon research, had been the chosen symbol for the Hudson's Bay Company, for Canada's first postage stamp, and later for the Canadian Nickel. In 1975, it was declared Canada's national animal.[117] It is also the representative animal for an Anishnaabe doodem, or clan. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Anishnaabe scholar, tells how Beaver offers lessons in how to live connected to the world around us, through knowledge, wisdom and industriousness.[118] Scientists concur that without beavers, ecosystems would collapse, because beavers are a keystone species. Simpson notes,

> *Amikwag* build dams, dams that create pools and channels that don't freeze, creating winter worlds for fish relatives, deep pools and channels that drought proof the landscape, dams that make wetlands full of moose, deer and elk, food cooling stations, places to hide, and muck to keep the flies away. Dams that open spaces in the canopy so sunlight increases, making warm and shallow aquatic habitat around the edges of ponds for amphibians and insects. Dams that create plunge pools on the downstream side for juvenile fish, gravel for spawning, and homes and food for birds.
>
> And who is first back after a fire to start the regeneration makework? *Amik* is a world builder. *Amik* is the one that brings the water. *Amik* is the one that works continuously with water and plant and animal nations and consent and diplomacy to create worlds. To create shared worlds.[119]

As my collection of beaver sticks grew, I contemplated how to best work with them to honour their unique qualities. First, I wove a nest with the sticks; then, I experimented with laying the sticks end to end, in a long line. Neither felt right. I studied the nature-based work of

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[117] Government of Canada, "Official Symbols of Canada", last accessed February 24, 2023, https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-symbols-canada.html.

[118] Simpson, CBC Radio, *Ideas*, Posted: April 16, 2020, 6:11pm ET.

[119] Simpson, CBC Radio, *Ideas*, Posted: April 16, 2020, 6:11pm ET.

artists like Michael Belmore, Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, Yoko Ono, and Cornelia Parker. I reviewed the bronze beaver sculptures created by Joyce Wieland[120] and those by Mary Anne Barkhouse.[121] Most importantly, I sat and contemplated and silently communed with the sticks over a period of several weeks. I came to realize that they were not objects to be manipulated, but presences.

Some, I observed, were elegant and slender; others were more robust and weathered. Each had its own distinctive appearance, character, and energy. This apprehended essence determined how the sticks best interacted. They naturally assumed a radiant pattern, and collectively formed a circular shape, much like the ridged veins of a waterlily leaf fanning out from a midpoint. The title *Inner Compass* (see figure 33) came to mind, denoting our responsibility to sustain just practices, and honour relationships with the earth and its humans and more-than-humans. The beavers had spoken.

Figure 33: *Inner Compass* (installation detail), beaver sticks, circa 12 feet diameter, 2022

[120] Joyce Wieland, *The Spirit of Canada Suckles the French and English Beavers*, 1970–71, bronze, 6 x 19.3 x 12.5 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/joyce-wieland/significance-and-critical-issues.

[121] Mary Anne Barkhouse, *Grace*, 2007, bronze and Canadian Shield granite, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://maryannebarkhouse.ca/portfolio_page/2007-grace-robert-mclaughlin-gallery-oshawa-ontario/.

Final Reflections

At the end of the day, I ask myself, why and how does my project matter? I posit that, through art and text, *Coming to my Senses / Following the Shore* suggests a valid alternative to strategies of control, mastery and domination. By acknowledging Indigenous history, and recognizing the Indigenous people as the original stewards of the land, this thesis contributes to dismantling the dominant Colonial narrative of how Canada developed as a nation. I have brought attention to the Georgian Bay wetlands, those 'ribbons of life' which are essential, yet endangered. Both thesis and exhibition foreground the art process as my medicine and hope in the face of life-threatening illness, COVID, and my personal loss and grief, and could serve as such for others having similar life experiences.

Moreover*, Coming to my senses / Following the shore* tells the story about my awakening over the past three years. Awakening to what? Awakening to the perception that I am more than my thoughts. Awakening to a fresh relationship with earth, water, air and sky. Awakening to an awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings. And awakening to Canada's fraught history of the past five hundred years, a history which has allowed me, an immigrant of German descent, to make my home in a place called Bone Island.

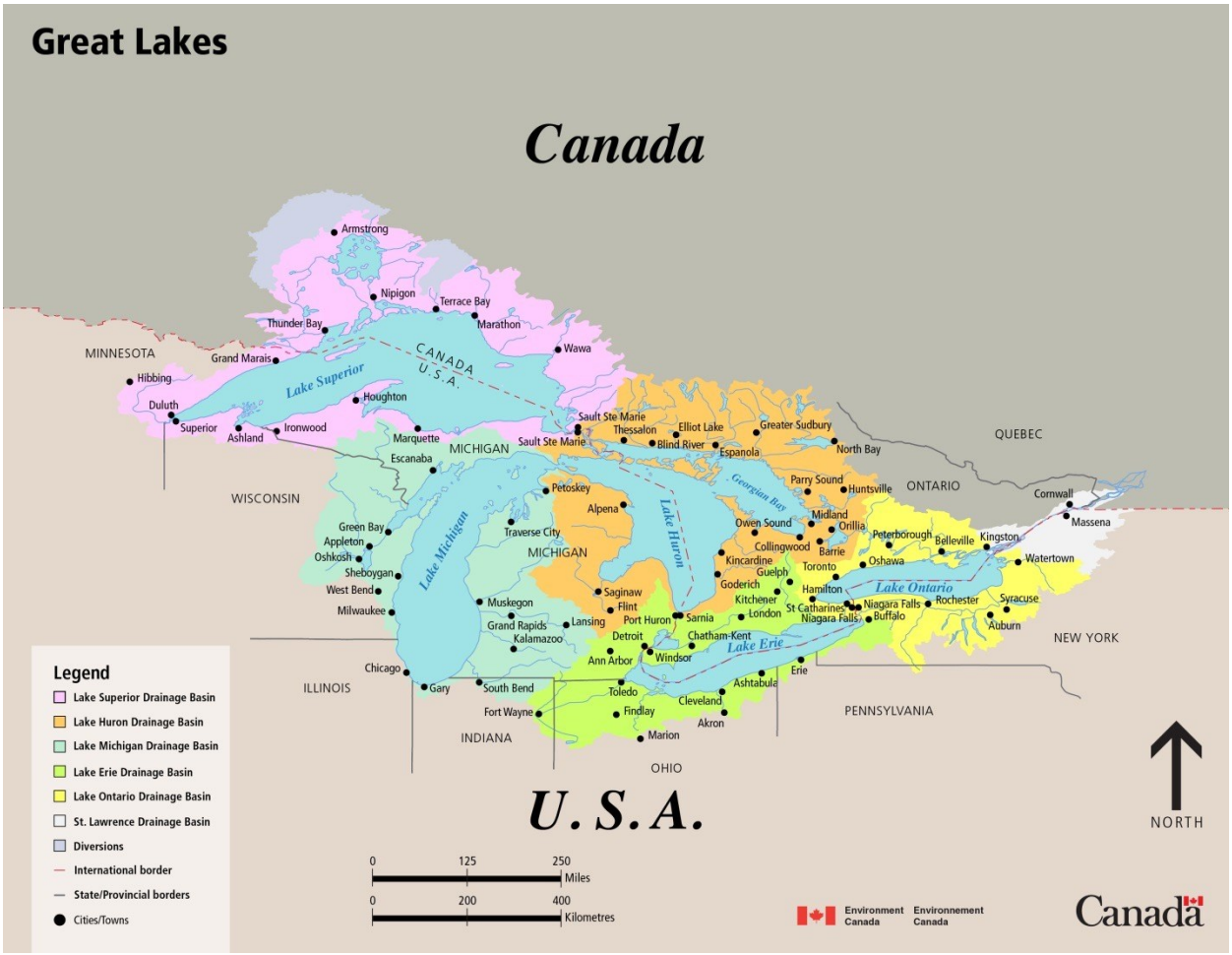
In the process, I have come to realize that to know a place is much more complex than I had ever imagined. It is composed of many animate entities. It is a series of intricate relationships. Place is not separate from us. It is a luminous energy field of which we humans are just one small part. Through our senses, we can strengthen our connection to the earth and all of its beyond human inhabitants. It is not enough to look; we must learn to see. Not only

with our eyes, but through touch, taste, smell, sound, and the other senses beyond that, including the heart.

To know a place is to develop a relationship with it. And to be in good relationship takes time, attention, respect, and reciprocity. To experience the land and the spirit of place is to feel them as an extension of the body. This attunement transcends the properties of physical space.

My research has changed me - I no longer desire what I used to desire. I am no longer seeking distraction from, but engagement with, the world around me. I have developed a new acuity of thought, vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

I can taste the fresh fragrance of the water;
I can hear the soughing of the trees;
I can see the wind.



Appendix A: Maps

Figure A1: *Great Lakes Drainage Basin Map*

Environment Canada, *Great Lakes Drainage Basin Map*, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/great-lakes-protection/maps/drainage-basin.html.

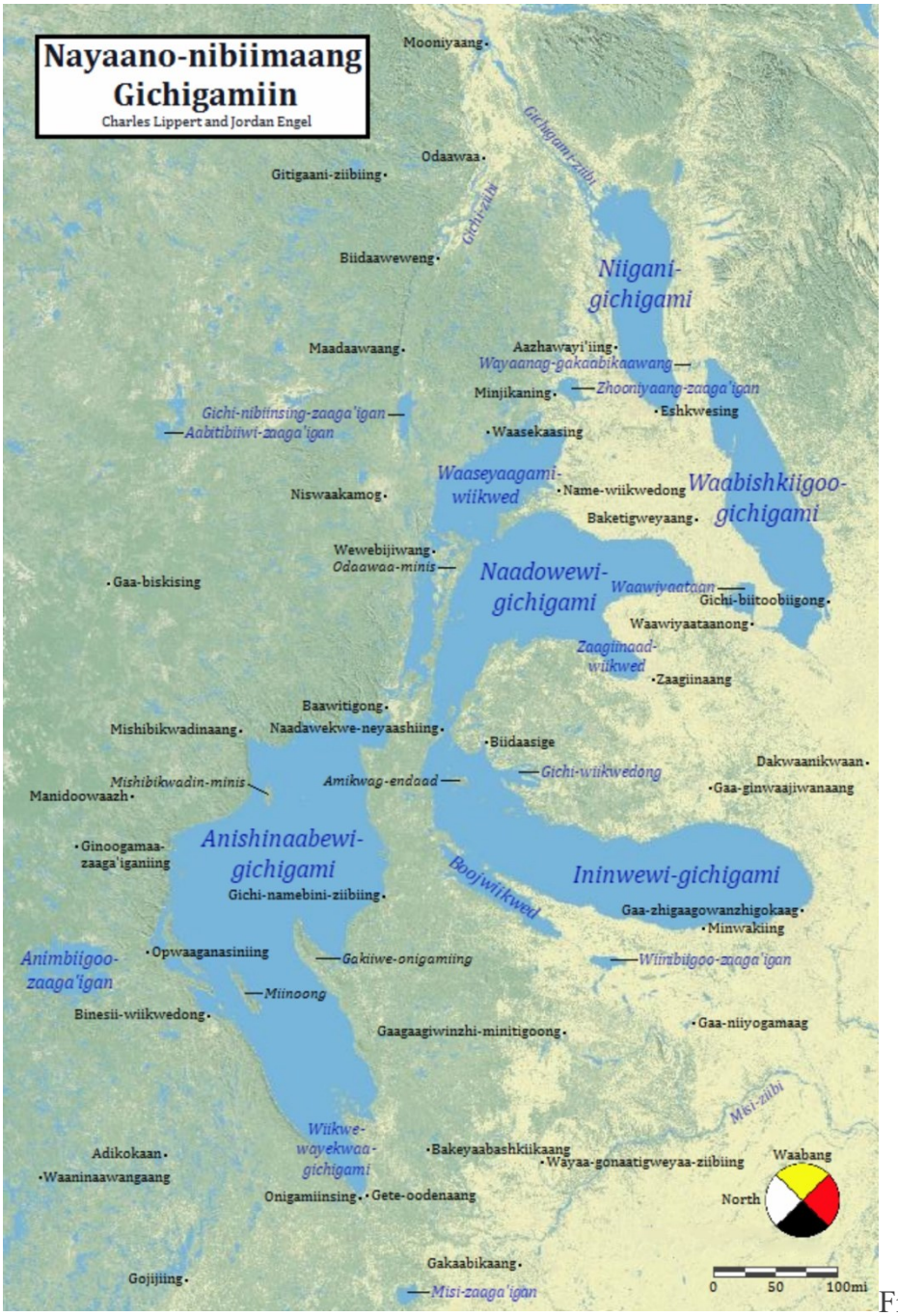


Figure A2: *Map of the Great Lakes with their Ojibwe names*

The Decolonial Atlas, *Nayanno-nibiimaang Gichigamiin (The Great Lakes) in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe),* by Charles Lippert and Jordan Engel, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2015/04/14/the-great-lakes-in-ojibwe-v2/.

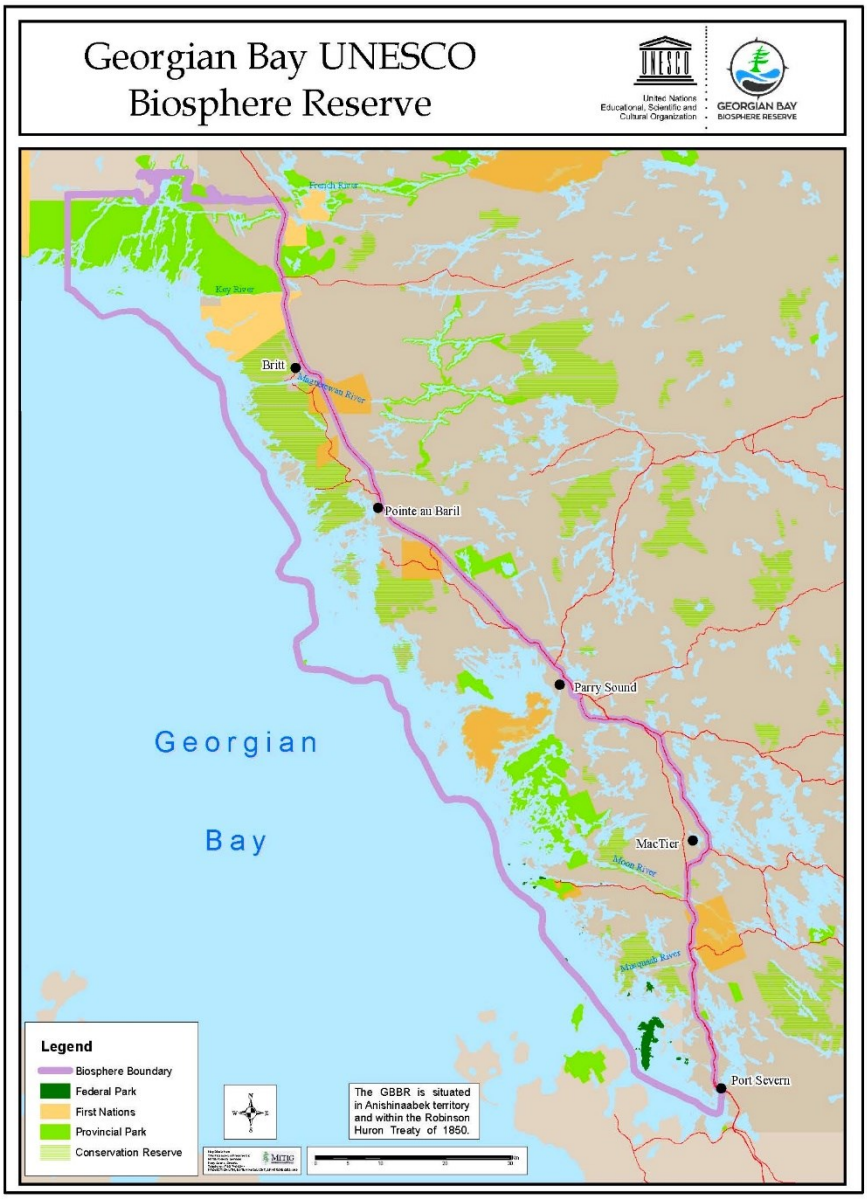


Figure A3: *Map of Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve* by Rebecca Pollock, Executive Director, GBBR, 2019, last accessed February 24, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Thousand_Islands#/media/File:BIOSPHERE_KEY_MAP_8x11_Feb28-2019.jp

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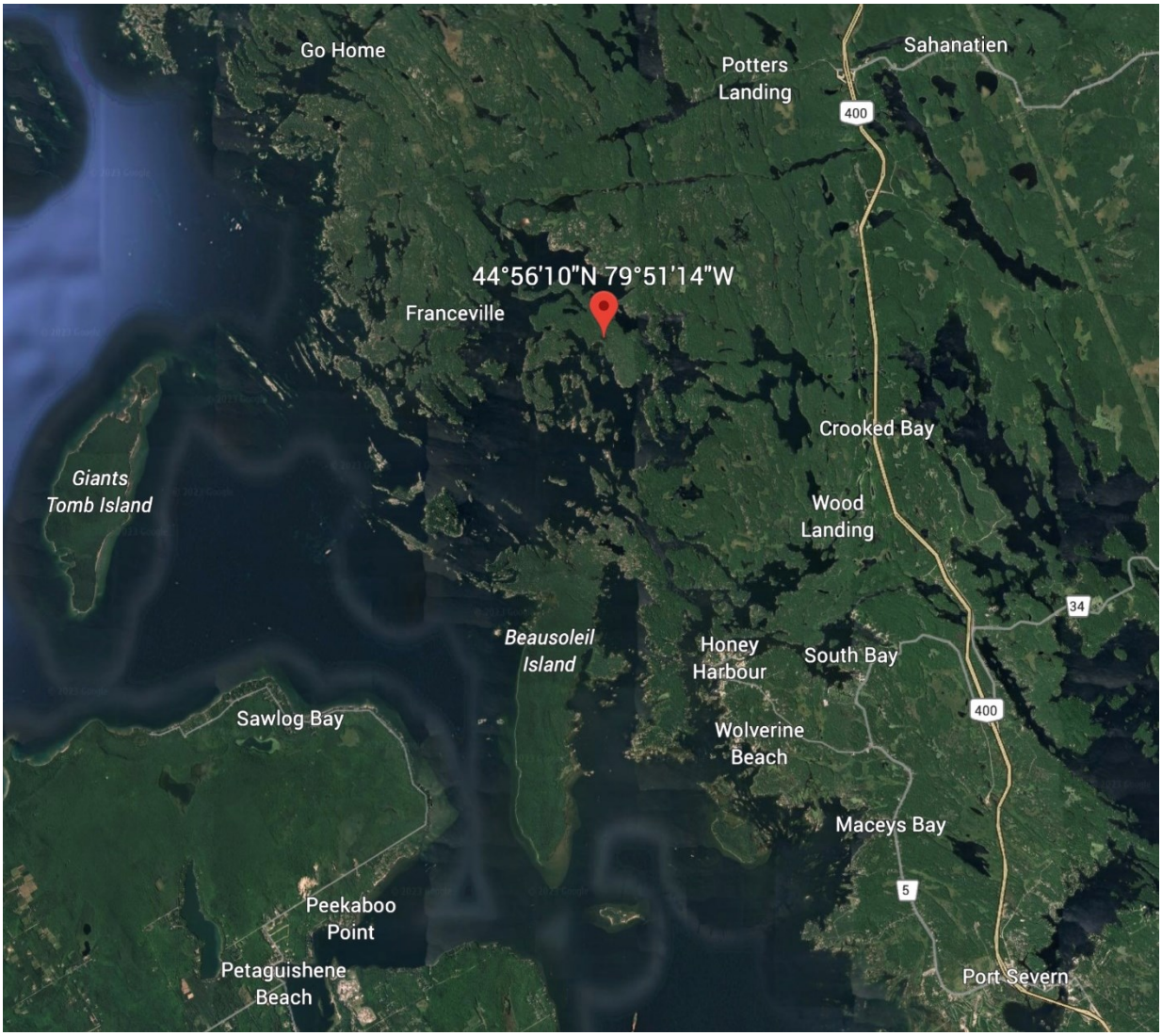

Figure A4: *Google Earth Map marking Site 6774 on Bone Island with a red pin*

"Bone Island, Georgian Bay". Last accessed February 20, 2023. Google Earth Link. https://earth.app.goo.gl/B3rAxX #googleearth

Appendix B: Some Cognashene history

Southeast Georgian Bay's first people were the Ouendat, an Indigenous term meaning 'Islanders' or 'Dwellers in a Peninsula'. They lived in wooden longhouses within pallisaded villages. Primarily agrarian, the Ouendat cultivated corn, squash and beans; they also fished, hunted, and gathered wild fruit.[122]

The arrival of French explorers in the early 1600s brought about disastrous changes for the Ouendat. Increasing competition for furs to trade resulted in conflict with the neighbouring Haudenosaunee nation. Catholic missionaries, first from the Recollet order and later the Jesuit order, brought devastating smallpox, measles and flu epidemics to the villages they visited. Then, in the 1640s, a series of Haudenosaunee attacks drove the weakened Ouendat from their homeland. Some survivors joined the Haudenosaunee; a small faction fled with Jesuit missionaries first to Christian Island and then to Quebec; others went south to Michilimackinac, in the state of Michigan.[123]

By the 1700s, the Ojibwe were the dominant Indigenous nation southeast Georgian Bay. Unlike the Ouendat, the Ojibwe were nomadic, and lived in small dome-shaped birchbark dwellings. They fished and hunted in small bands and gathered wild rice and berries. It was the Ojibwe who gave Cognashene its name, "land of the porcupines and blueberries".[124]

As European settlement in the area in the area increased, and colonial demand for property, timber, and minerals grew, 'treaties' were introduced by the British Crown for the

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[122] David (editor), *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky,*13-14.

[123] Heidenreich, "*Wendat/Huron".*

[124] David (editor), *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky, 22.*

Ojibwe 'surrender' of their ancestral lands. Three negotiations in particular affected Georgian Bay: the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 (Treaty 61), Treaty No. 76, and the Williams Treaties of 1923.

Of particular relevance to Bone Island is the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty, which ceded the Thirty Thousand Islands to the Crown. The Ojibwe argue that what was spoken and agreed upon at the treaty council gathering was different from the treaty text. While the written document specified the surrender of "the Islands" opposite the shores from Penetanguishene to Sault Ste. Marie[125], the Ojibwe understood that they were ceding *aki*, the Anishnaabe word for land or soil, not minis, their word for Islands.[126] Furthermore, the annuities promised to the Anishnaabe have not increased in dollar value since 1875. The Supreme Court of Canada is currently in the process of determining the value of the compensation owed and the respective liabilities of Canada and Ontario.[127]

Under Treaty No. 76, the four islands in Lake Simcoe, one in Lake Couchiching and "all those Islands lying and being in the Georgian Bay" were given to the crown in exchange for "that group of islands known as the Christian Islands", now known as Beckwith, Hope and

[125] Union of Ontario Indians, *Nation to Nation,* 40.

[126] David, editor, *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky,* 22.

[127] Government of Ontario, "Treaties in Ontario," https://www.ontario.ca/page/map-ontario-treaties-and-reserves#t35; The Manitoulin Expositor, "Third Stage of Robinson-Huron Treaty Annuities Case to Continue Early in New Year," last accessed February 26, 2023, https://www.manitoulin.com/third-stage-of-robinson-huron-treaty-annuities-case-to-continue-in-early-new-year/.

Christian Island.[128] Canadian historian Peter H. Russell observes, "By the end of the 1860's, Cognashene was left wide open to timber companies and future bands of settlers."[129]

The Williams Treaties of 1923 were the last historic land cession in Canada. The Ojibwe of Lake Simcoe and the Mississauga of the north shore of Lake Ontario transferred over twenty square kilometers of land to the Crown, in exchange for a one-time payment of $25 to each band member, and one-time payments of $233,375 to the Ojibwe and $233,425 to the Mississauga. This money was just a small fraction of what the land was worth. Moreover, the signatories did not realize that they were also giving up their fishing and hunting rights. This brought great hardship to the Indigenous people, who could no longer feed their families by traditional means. In 1992, the Williams Treaties First Nations filed a lawsuit against the federal government, seeking compensation. An agreement was reached in 2018; this included over a billion dollars in financial compensation, the restitution of harvesting rights and the return of 4,452 hectares of land to each of the seven bands involved.[130] In addition, the governments of Canada and Ontario made a formal apology to the Williams Treaty First Nations.[131]

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[128] Russell in *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky,* ed. David, 22.

[129] Russell in *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky,* ed. David, 22.

[130] Government of Canada, "Williams Treaties First Nations Settlement Agreement," last accessed February 26, 2023, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1542370282768/1542370308434.

[131] Government of Canada, "2018 Apology for the Impacts of the 1923 Williams Treaties," last accessed February 26, 2023. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1542393580430/1542393607484.

Appendix C: Name and Documentation of the Sale of Bone Island, Portion D

The origin of the name "Bone Island" is unclear. Some speculate that it may be an anglicization of the French word "bonne", meaning good or beautiful. Others surmise that the shape of the island, like a pelvic bone, gave rise to its name. In addition, Shawn Corbiere,[132] Indigenous Outreach Officer for Georgian Bay Islands National Park, notes that the name is linked to the early to mid nineteenth century discovery of many human skeletons on the island. Indigenous oral stories tell of a battle waged between the Ojibwe and the warriors of the Six Nations Confederacy in the eighteenth century.[133] Bernard Nicholson, Honey Harbour Historical Society chair, concurs. Nicholson adds that it is said that the Ojibwe surprised their adversaries and were victorious; they sent the survivors south with the warning to only return in peace or face death.[134] Both Corbiere and Nicholson observe that Bone Island was located on one of the main travel routes into the Muskoka Lakes, and was therefore strategic to control. Corbiere posits that, as a result, there could also have been conflict on Bone Island between the Europeans and the Indigenous peoples.

In order to ascertain how Bone Island became available to cottagers, I searched the OnLand website, a Government of Ontario 'online office' for historical documents and books pertaining to land registry. Here I was able to view the *Abstract/Parcel Register Book*, complete with a plan of Bone Island, drawn up in 1907, and a record of property sales.[135] Our little inlet

[132] Shawn Corbiere is Ojibwe, originally from M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island.

[133] Shawn Corbiere, email correspondence with author, March 11, 2022.

[134] Bernard Nicholson, email correspondence with author, March 28, 2022.

[135] Ontario Land Registry Access, *OnLand,* https://www.onland.ca/ui/35/books/50491/viewer/538511514?page=1, 131-175.

was shown to be situated in Lot D (one of 14 island lots in total); Lot D frames the western shore of the island. The first Lot D owner is listed as a William Robert Benson, who secured a patent, probably for logging or mining, from the Crown in 1930; he flipped it within days to James Playfair, a wealthy shipping and industrial leader from Midland, a small town 60 kilometers away. Due to non-payment of taxes, the property was forfeited back to the Crown in 1943-4. Then, in the 1950s, Lot D was divided into smaller properties. The Coe family bought the central area around our popcorn shaped bay, and eventually further subdivided its land. My family, the McKnights, now reside in this area.

Appendix D: Bone Island Plants (a compilation of my sightings, not including trees)

Figures D1 and D2: American white waterlily; *Nymphaea odorata*

Figure D3: American eelgrass; *Vallisneria americana*

Figures D4 and D5: Annual fleabane, Daisy fleabane; *Ergeron annuus*

Figure D6: Arrowvine; *Persicaria sagittate*

Figures D7 and D8 Bog myrtle, Sweetgale; Myrica gale

Figures D9 and D10: Boneset; *Eupatorium perfoliatum*

Figure D11: Broadleaf arrowhead; *Sagittaria latifolia*

Figure D12: Broadleaf cattail; *Typha latifolia*

Figure D13: Bulb-bearing water hemlock; *Cicuta bulbifera*

Figures D14 and D15: Common hawkweed; *Hieracium umbellatum*

Figure D16: Canada mayflower, false lily-of-the-valley; *Maianthemum canadensis*

Figures D17 and D18: Canadian bluejoint:*Canadien canadensis*

Figures D19 and D20 Cardinal flower*:* *Lobelia cardinalis*

Figure D21: Chantarelle (a family of fungi); *Cantharellacaceae*

Figure D22: Clasped Pondweed, *Potamogeton perfoliatus*

Figure D23: Clustered Field Sedge; very slender sedge; *Carex praegracilis*

Figures D24 and D25: Coltsfoot; *Tussilago farfara*

Figure D26: Common bird's-foot trefoil, Ground honeysuckle, Butter-and-eggs;
Lotus corniculatus

Figure D27: Common blackberry; *Rubus allenghiensis*

Figure D28: Common blue violet; *Viola sororia*

Figures D29 and D30: Common dandelion; wild endive: *Taraxacum officinale*

Figures D31: Common daisy; *Bellis perennis*

Figures D32 and D33: Common evening primrose; *Oenothera biennis*

Figure D34: Common hairmoss, great goldilocks; *Polytrichum commune*

Figure D35: Common Lady fern: *Athyrium felix-femina*

Figure D36: Common mugwort; *Artemisia vulgaris*

Figure D37: Common plantain; *Plantago major*

Figure D38: Common selfheal; *Prunella vulgaris*

Figure D39: Common speedwell; *Veronica officinalis*

Figure D40: Common spikerush; *Eleocharis palustris*

Figure D41: Common winterberry, black alder; *Ilex verticillata*

Figure D42: Coprinaceae (a family of fungi); *Psathyrellaceae*

Figure D43: Creeping yellowcress; *Rorippa sylvestris*

Figure D44: Dwarf St. John's wort; *Hypericum mutilum*

Figure D45: Elecampagne, Wild sunflower; *Inula Helenium*

Figure D46: Eastern annual saltmarsh aster; *Symphyotrichum subulatum*

Figure D47: False foxglove; *Agalinis paupercula*

Figure D48: False Solomon's Seal; *maianthemum racemosum*

Figure D49: Fox-and cubs, Orange hawkweed; *Pilosella aurantiaca*

Figure D50: Goldmoss Stonecrop; *Sedum acre*

Figure D51: Grassleaved goldenrod; *Euthemia gramifolia*

Figure E52: Japanese sweet flag, Dwarf sedge; *Acorus gramineusth*

Figure D53: Juniper Haircap; *Polytrichum juniperinum*

Figure D54: Lance-leaved coreopsis; *Coreopsis lanceolata*

Figure D55: Large-leaved aster; *Eurybia macrofilia*

Figures D56 and D57: Marsh pea; *Lathyrus palustris*

Figures D58 and D59: Meadow hawkweed; *Pilosella caespitos*

Figures D60 and D61: Nodding beggarticks, Bur marigold; *Bidens cern*

Figure D62: Nodding lady's tresses, wild hyacinth; *Spiranthes cernua*

Figure D63: Northern blue flag iris; *Iris versicolor*

Figure D64: Northern dewberry, blackberry; *Rubus flagellaris*

Figure D65: Orange daylily, Common daylily, Tiger daylily; *Memerocallis fulva*

Figure D66: Oriental Bittersweet, Climbing spindleberry; *Celastrus orbiculatus*

Figure D67: Panicled bulrush; *Scripus microcarpus*

Figure D68: Pickerelweed; *Pontederia cordata*

Figure D69: Pincushion moss; *Leucobryum glaucum*

Figure D70: Pink lady's slipper; *Cypripedium acaule*

Figure D71: Plantain pussy toes; *Antennaria plantaginifolia*

Figure D72: Poison ivy; *Toxicodendron radicans*

Figure D73: Purplestem aster; swamp aster; *Symphyotrichum puniceum*

Figure D74: Red columbine, wild columbine: *Aquilegia canadensis*

Figure D75: Red raspberry; *Rubus idaeus*

Figure D76: Reed canary grass; *phalaris arundinacea*

Figure D77: Russulaceae (a family of fungi); *Russulaceae*

Figure D78: Schreber's watershield; *Brasenia schreberi*

Figure D79: Shallow sedge; Bottlebrush sedge; *Carex lurida*

Figure 80: Small geranium; *Geranium pusillum*

Figure D81: Spiked water milfoil; *Myriophyllum spicatum*

Figures D82 and D83: Spotted Joe-pye weed; *Eutrochium maculatum*

Figure D84: Spotted touch-me-not, jewel weed; *Impatiens capensis*

Figure D85: Spreading dogbane, bitterroot; *Apocynum androsaemifolium*

Figure D86: Starflower; *Lysimachia borealis*

Figures D87 and D88: Swamp rose; *Hibiscus moscheutos*

Figure D89: Upright sedge; *Carex stricta*

Figure D90: Vallisneria, eel grass; *Vallisneria spiralis*

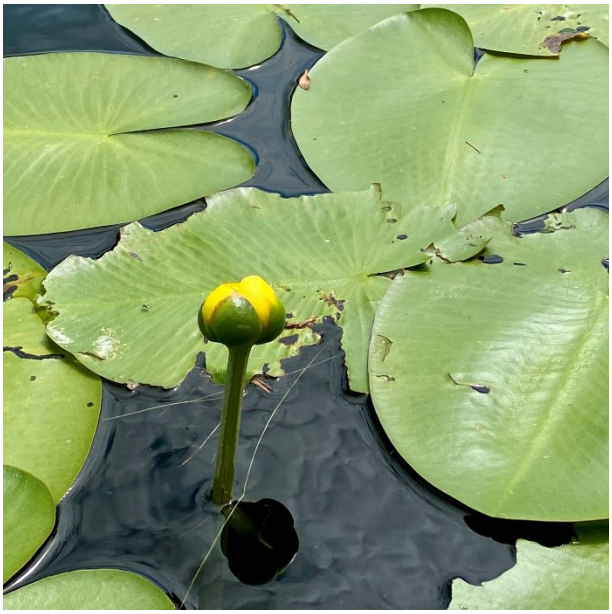


Figure D91: Variegated yellow pond-lily, spatterdock, yellow pond-lily; *Nuphar lutea*

Figure D92: Virginia creeper, American ivy; *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Figures D93 and D94: White clover; *Trifolium repens*

Figure D95: White panicled aster; *Symphyotrichum lanceolatum*

Figures D96 and D97: White rattlesnakeroot; *Nabalus albus*

Figure D98: White meadowsweet, pipestem; *Spiraea alba*

Figure D99: Wild sarsaparilla: *Aralia nudicauli*

Figure D100: Wild strawberry; *Fragaria Virginiara*

Figure D101: Wintergreen; *Gaultheria procumbens*

Figure D102: Woolgrass, Woolgrass bulrush; *Scirpus cyperinus*

Figure D103: Wrinkleleaf goldenrod; *Solidago rugosa*

Appendix E: Bone Island Trees (a compilation of my sightings)

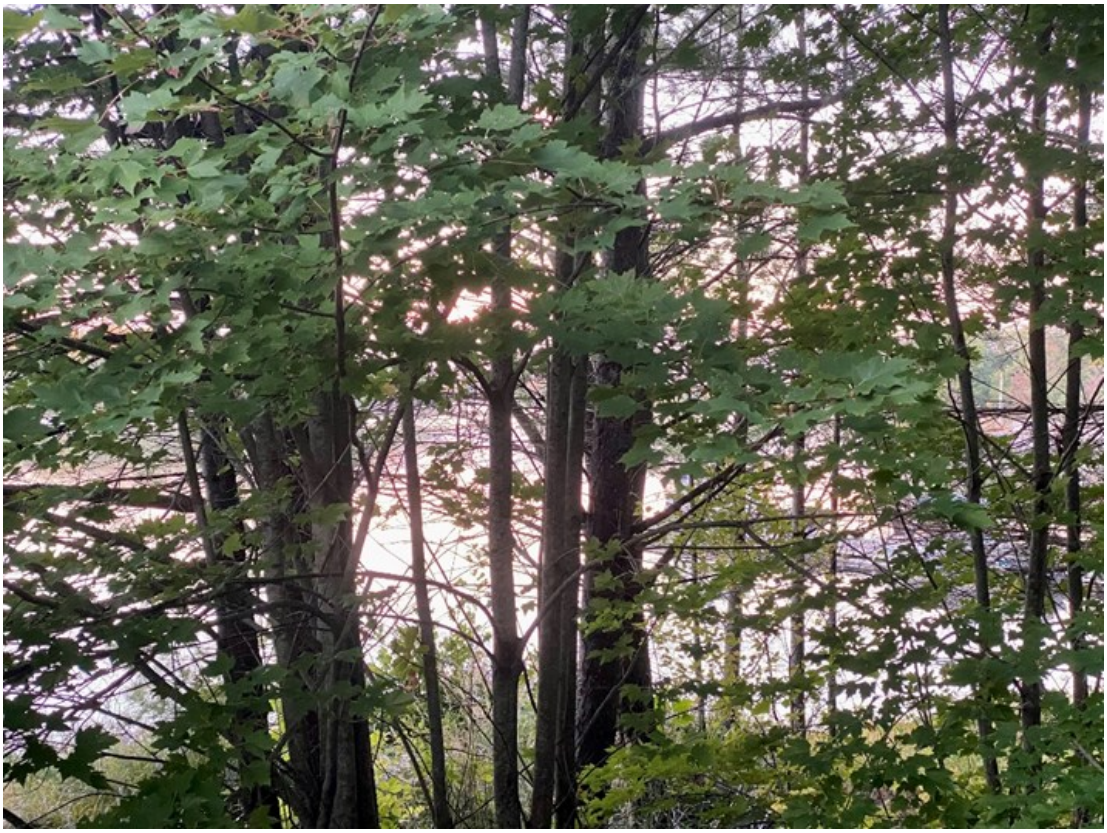
Figures E1 and E2: Common juniper; *Juniperus communis*

Figure E3: Eastern red cedar (a misnomer, since this is a type of juniper); *Juniperus virginiana*

Figures E4, E5 and E6: Eastern white pine; *Pinus strobus*

Figures E7, E8 and E9: Northern red oak; *Quercus rubra*

Figures E10, E11 and E12: Paper birch; *Betula papyrifera*



Figures E13, E14 and E15: Red maple; *Acer rubrum*

Figure E16, E17 and E18: Staghorn sumac; *Rhus typhina*

Figures E19, E20, E21 and E22: White ash, American Ash; *Fraxinus americana*

Figures E23, E24 and E25: White poplar, quaking aspen; *Populus tremuloides*

Appendix F: Poetry

Nymphaea: To float on the pulse of the earth

a site of possibilities
an inventory of shimmers
a bloom-space
present
to the struggles of our time

not about what something is
but how it is

an interface of worlds
whorls-within-worlds
worlds-upon-worlds
of potential belonging

folding
angles
of arrival
into
resonant
mattering
maps

Shorelines

shorelines
not lines
along shore
but
kissing spaces

    where water meets land

liminal interstices
generative swamps
indigenous gardens
untethered by

    human intervention

sumptuous wetlands
life ribbons
intertwine
interlace
interweave

A Conversation

in the garden
flesh hangs off bone

the throat softens
the eyes drift

outbreath lifts
inbreath flows back

each flower finds bloom-space
adapting
unencumbered
in its luminous field

Night Vision

seven deer danced
into star-crossed constellations
to help make

famine, poison, bombings
wild excesses of agony,
terror written on the body

an unmarked geometry
hiding thirstily
in secret semblance of order

Cognashene

in the land

of porcupines and blueberries

stone shields
and
freshwater bays
make islands
by the thousand

earth
water
and sky
shape our vision
and heal the heart

What the Bear Saw

in the quiet
shoreline garden
shadows stretch long
memories

slip

in search of patterns
still spaces
ancient places
whisper soft darkness
into light

blurred thresholds

shift

no parsing of inchoate worlds
just time and space
curved

fragile filaments

spiral
twist
swirl

in
restless
matter

Collage

the adjacent possible holds space

torn edges
call and respond
to each other

untethered yet suspended
things hide in plain view

the here and now
cracks open from within

not much has changed
yet everything is different

the world is being remade

and

for the moment
everything is alive

Pondweed

elusive figures rise
from murky depths

ambiguous
vortiginous

rhizomatic
basal angliosperms
diverge

luminous nymphaeaecea
whorl
and dapple
in
delicate morphology

floating carpets
petals and carpels
nest
in delicate thresholds
of hope

The Not Yet

viridian arrows
fat eel grass
champagne petals
sway
enchant
kiss
wetland waters
of indigo silk

filigree threads
shimmer
twist
weave
vermilion tapestries
of looped necklaces
and sovereign gold

anodyne garlands
twirl

platelet leaves
knot
heirloom lace circles

minute minnows
exhale
algae breath

floating gardens
spin
sacred thresholds
and ribbons of life

in
an imminent Not Yet

Morning Reflections

wet leaves
crowd like memories
on pewter mirrors'
dull shine

silk faces
squeeze
every bit of light
from early dawn

minute islands
blossom
in the shallows
between shore and
good swimming
as
fulsome breaths
tenderly embrace

Dear Bone Island

on this late October morning
i see you
flecked with crimson maples
crowned with cobalt skies and radiant sun

i hear
fresh water lapping on muddy shores
i taste
bouquets of sweet smoke
i smell
strong petrichor of desiccated pine

i sense
the pulsing energy of place
as Ouendat spirits flicker

gone are the tiny sprites who hummed
the twittering vireos
the red-winged blackbirds
who sang all spring and summer long

now it's pileated woodpeckers
northern flickers
and handsome blue jays
who cry out in discontent
until longing
becomes be-longing

do they know
that the presence
of absence
can hurt?

i'm told, dear island,
that you're just one of thirty thousand
but what i know for sure is
that you're the one for me

Shoreline Soliloquy

shrieking and jabbering
our Bone Island monkey
flits through the pines
then pauses and wails

his red crest shimmers
the proud neck cranes
tuxedo striped feathers
toss fulsome complaints

why such compulsion
to hoot and to holler?
why this fierce cursing
in flutters and fits?

and yet i must note
the wisdom in screaming
it stills my centre
it lets me rest

i wonder…
if i were pileated and obnoxious too
what sounds would i make?
and
what are the sounds which could help you?

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