

Connected by Water: The Confluence of Self and Place

A Thesis

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by

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Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of Kaleb G. Bass, submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a Major in Art and titled "Connected by Water: The Confluence of Self and Place," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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Abstract

The installation, *Connected by Water*, is a culmination of experiences and places that shape my sense of self and place. My family has lived along the Salmon River for five generations, and I have guided rafts down its waters since high school. The Salmon River is not just my home; it is a shaping force for who and how I am. While depicting the specific landscape of the Salmon, Snake, and Clearwater Rivers and the positioning of the exhibit in Moscow Idaho, *Connected by Water* invites viewers to consider their own experiences in this landscape or other places with which they have relationships. As the outdoors play such a crucial role in my art and formative life experiences, it seems only fitting that my thesis took shape on the sides of mountains and banks of rivers that inspired *Connected by Water*.

This written thesis, *The Confluence of Self and Place*, explains how my experience of growing up where and how I did informs my work and is entangled with my understanding of self and place. In addition to the direct inclusion of journal entries from the past year, a majority of the ideas and phrasing existed first in handwritten journals that traveled across the places featured in this thesis. The introduction acknowledges the land and the role it has played in shaping my work and my sense of self. In Chapter 1, watersheds literally and metaphorically define the boundaries within the Snake River drainage and connect all elements within. Chapter 2 explores how pacing and movement inform one's experience, attentiveness, and awareness of details within a landscape. Lastly, Chapter 3 decenters dualistic notions of right/wrong to pose questions of how and why we can authentically engage and interact with place.

Together, *Connected by Water: The Confluence of Self and Place* expresses my upbringing along the Salmon River and the new experiences and continuous relationships I have with the watersheds of the Northwest. By asking viewers to consider their own relationships with place, I hope to engage with the question of how we (humans) settle our weight into dynamic landscapes as part of an intricate community.

Acknowledgements

Eagle Creek Trail, Wallowa Mountains

July 20, 2019: As we walked back to the trailhead today I moved through the line of newly experienced backpackers like a bead alternating between every position on a string. I shared some conversations with the fellow artists I had come to know over a week in the backcountry of the Wallawas. While moving between gaps in the string of bikers, I also took the opportunity to reflect on the moments that led me to this place.

While there is an element of isolation and solitude present in much of my work, I also recognize the importance of community. The human and more-than-human collaborators whom I have encountered along the path of art have contributed to the routes I have taken and my experiences along the way. I would like to thank my advisor, committee, faculty, Art + Design Department and Outdoor Program colleagues, and other individuals I have crossed paths with on this journey at the University of Idaho. I appreciate the contributions of the Mary Kirkwood Art Scholarship, G. Douglas Byers Memorial Fellowship, H. James Marshall Scholarship, Central Idaho Art Association Scholarship, and CaWein Endowed Art Scholarship. Thank you Signal Fire Arts for introducing me to a cohort of artists who are interested in similar themes. Thank you to Gloria Dawson Teats and the other artists of the Salmon River Art Guild for mentoring my early years of painting. My partner Emma deserves special thanks for helping me to articulate many of my thoughts that resisted being shaped into words.

Creating art is a route with many forks and opportunities for off-trail travel. I look forward to seeing where I venture in the future and what influences and experiences I convene with along the way.

Dedication

For the family, friends, and land that intertwine with the past, present, and future to establish my sense of place.

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Introduction

Cached Lake, Wallowa Mountains

July 18, 2019: As I lay parallel to the Earth and sky, time seemed to speed by—the nearly-full moon ascended above the two jutting peaks to the south, like a fish leaping from the froth of a falls. Clouds sped by from the northwest to southeast, a migration of salmon single-mindedly set on their destination. As my sleepy eyes focused on a spot in the sky, my viewpoint seemed to ascend above the trees. The stars appeared to move together, like a cluster of satellites drawn to an electromagnetic field, while the clouds in my field of view remained stationary. The streak of shooting star dropped me back down to the large granite rock where I lay wrapped in a sleeping bag, the Wallowa Mountains, and the night sky.

The ideas presented in this thesis are wrapped with place, such that site and thought are as inseparable as the stars and the night sky. The passages I have written only exist with the shaping forces of the places in which I wrote them. I introduce these locations through writing not as a complete reproduction of the place-based experience but as an ephemeral glimpse of the traces these places inevitably leave behind. These journal entries are arranged not chronologically but according to a poetic logic of their own.¹ The entries have been shuffled around until the fragments flow through the document, just as the fluid waters that inspire them pour through solid rock. Together, the established canyon of academic writing and the poetic water of journaling form the narrative river that explains my work and my sense of self. Journal entries in italics complicate the notion of past and present by introducing thoughts recorded in specific moments of place and time.² Section titles indicate the places that ground the narratives and subsequent reflections. As a personal expression, this body of work has a source at my upbringing along the Salmon River and tributaries in each of the new experiences and continuous relationships I have with the watersheds of the northwest. As the outdoors act as the headwaters of my art and formative life experiences, it seems only fitting that my thesis took shape on the sides of mountains and banks of rivers.

¹ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (Seattle: Wave Books, 2009).

² Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt, ed, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) 1-12.

South Fork Palouse River, Palouse Range

June 28, 2019: I feel most connected to a place, as I am now, the warm summer sun on my bare legs and face and the soft new growth of a Western Larch on my back. I write to the soundtrack of sharp bird chatter over the smooth breath of wind through the trees

Solitude isn't quite the word to describe these settings. After all, I aim to illustrate the agency of the environment, living and nonliving, and our respective place as humans in the natural world. I choose to recognize myself as surrounded with a more-than-human community. My ideas exist in a dynamic of outdoor conception and studio revision, my art in on-site creation and gallery presentation. This thesis threads together a conceptual narrative about my work, observations embedded in the places I wrote them, and ideas prompted by artists, writers, and researchers. The journal entries are the vertical warp threads of this thesis, and my supplementary writing weaves through them as the horizontal weft fibers. The resulting fabric of narrative is strong enough to support the visual work, just as a well-made canvas supports paint. In the way that the academic passages cite scholars, the journal entries owe credit to the places they were written. Interactions with the more-than-human world can teach in ways that are different but not lesser than articles and lectures.

Eagle Creek, Wallowa Mountains

July 20, 2019: As I walked and contemplated, I plucked three long strands of bunchgrass from along the trail and began to effortlessly braid. My hands recognized the familiar movements just as my feet seemed to independently navigate the trail, leaving my mind free to drift. The weaving strands—each wrapping forward before fading to the back—reminded me of the interconnectedness of present events with both my sense of place and history. After covering some distance on the trail, the braid swayed in front of my oscillating knees. Looking down the long woven strand, I realized how extensively my past and sense of place have intertwined with who I am.

While my work engages my personal deep-rooted sense of place, the centering of self in the physical world (both ethnocentrically and egocentrically) is a universal human characteristic.³ My work compels viewers to examine their own connection to place beyond the self-as-individual (egocentrism) toward self-as-relational (ethnocentrism). Three chapters braid together to form this solid fiber of place: In Chapter 1, watersheds literally and metaphorically define the boundaries within the Snake River drainage and connect all elements within. Chapter 2 explores

³ Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 30.

how pacing and movement shape one's experience, attentiveness, and awareness of details within a landscape. Chapter 3 decenters dualistic notions of right/wrong to pose questions of how and why we can authentically engage and interact with place. Together these chapters consider relationships of place through the lens of art and observation.

July 20, 2019: I tied the now unified strand in a loop and placed it over my felt hat. There is a chance this hat has been in these mountains many years ago. The hat was my grandfather's, given to me years before he passed. Only recently have I started wearing it as I explore the places my family has called home for many generations. I will keep this band of grass on the hat as I walk along the Selway River next week, a trail this hat has also possibly known. Then perhaps when I walk out, I will add a Selway braid alongside the Wallowa braid, weaving together the places I go with memories of the past and present.

The physical setting where this work evolved, the locations depicted in the gallery, and places described in writing are more than visual inspiration. These places connect my personal sense of self with those that lived here before. These relationships extend beyond family and human to include the more-than-human animals, plants, water, and land. The more-than-human world presents plentiful sources of knowledge and provides the cognitive and physical space for reflection on our (human) place in that environment.⁴ While often overlooked inside the sterile walls of educational institutions in a society driven by capitalistic and anthropocentric discourses, the local landscape is ever-present. The environment offers a common ground that transcends the physical boundaries of geographic location as well as language, education, and human perspective. Tapping into this knowledge, by acknowledgement of the agency of place and the intent to listen to the world around us, delivers insight into the past as well as the present and future.

Windy Point, Salmon River

The geologic history of the Salmon River began over a billion years ago, before the river even began to flow across the land. At this time and place, advancing and receding seas deposited sediment. Volcanic activity deep underground also formed granite and metamorphosed some of the sedimentary deposits to form some of massive rock cliffs now present along the river. Rifts and fissures from volcanic activity pushed up jagged mountain peaks and columns of basalt. The Salmon River then began cutting into these fault lines to start

⁴ Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, 75.

a several million-year process of shaping the river canyon. Like the ebbing and rising seas, retreating glaciers picked up and deposited granite boulders and other sediment as they widened mountain valleys and left behind alpine lakes. Every year, tributary blowouts and rockslides alter the river's rapids and change how it flows through the canyon. The Salmon River's formation is not a distant history, but an ongoing and active collaboration between water and rock.

August 16, 2019: The distant rumble of the river in the narrow canyon below reminds me that water is the ultimate force at work. It may have taken since the beginning of time, but rushing water shaped this canyon—a monument larger than humans have ever created. Viewed from this ridge, the tiny winding roads, trails, and home sites through the Salmon River Canyon dwindle in comparison to Nature's traces.

This ridge overlooking the Salmon River is the traditional homeland of the Nimiipu, or Nez Perce, tribe. Downriver from this area, archaeologists have unearthed charcoal and bone fragments dated to around 16,000 years ago, making them the oldest radiocarbon-dated record of human presence in North America.⁵ This ancient site, now called Cooper's Ferry, recognizes that the Nimiipu people have lived here for longer than recorded history. The Nimiipu do not have an oral history story of migrating to this area. Instead, creation stories shape humans from the land much as local landmarks, like the Seven Devils to the East, were pulled up from the land.⁶ Nez Perce tribal members live in areas that their ancestors have called home longer than written and even oral history can measure. From a human perspective, these river canyons have a history deeper than anywhere on the continent.⁷

Place directly influences my experience of art and history in the context of places in which I grew up. Before I ever stepped into the Metropolitan Museum of Art, visited the Smithsonian, or even looked at images in a book, I encountered pictographs and petroglyphs at Pittsburg Landing on the Snake River and near Cooper's Ferry on the Salmon River. Viewing sculptures and displaced artifacts in a distant museum can only teach a person so much: in contrast, massive basalt boulders sit as physical records of the deeply established culture of more than 16,000 years of Indigenous people calling this river home. My deep roots here also solidify my sense of place. I grew up on land that was a Nez Perce winter village called Ayaspa before it

⁵ Loren Davis, et al, "Late Upper Paleolithic Occupation at Cooper's Ferry, Idaho, USA, ~16,000 Years Ago," *Science* 365, no. 6456 (August 2019): 891.

⁶ Elizabeth Wilson and Samuel Watters, *Nu Mee Poom Tit Wab Tit*, Edited by Deward E. Walker Jr. Translated by Allen P. Slickpoo Sr (Nez Perce Language Program, 2014), 201–2.

⁷ Allen P. Slickpoo Sr and Deward E. Walker Jr, *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Perces) Culture and History of the Nez Perces Volume One* (Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, 1973), 5.

was named Slate Creek.⁸ Five generations of my family have called Slate Creek home.⁹ While multiple generations of my family have interacted with the ground under our feet, our impression has never been comparable to the land's shaping of us. My grandmother concluded an article about our family history, "...as the years pass and families grow up and times change, the hills of home are always here. The promise of the future springs eternal in the bosoms of those fortunate enough to watch the seasons pass and the water of Slate Creek always flows fast in the springtime and cools us in the summer and fascinates us in the winter, now as in the past."¹⁰ Now, as in the past, home is central to understanding myself as an artist and person. My formative experiences all took place in this river canyon and surrounding mountains. This place influences me far more than I can imagine effecting change on the location—or perhaps place and self are entangled in a mutual sort of becoming.

We humans are a part of this landscape no matter how much modern culture distances us from the natural environment. This distancing is not only physical but also psychological. Even on a busy city street, trees break up the profile of angular buildings, bird sounds layer with the noise of traffic, weather and seasons alter the bustle, and air sweeps through our bodies with every step. Nature is all around us; we are nature.

Far from any city streets, special places like Windy Point offer a perspective of my home greater than a visual interpretation alone. This area is what I know first and best; it is the standard to which I compare other places. The familiarity that makes me feel so grounded and comfortable here is replaced by overwhelming unease in urban settings. Perhaps, if I were raised in the city, I would feel comfort surrounded by its endless bustle and commotion. However my sense of place and self are here—deeply embedded in Salmon River rock.

August 16, 2019: I have quietly observed this particular place far more hours than I have sat in a classroom. I have studied and read the changes in the land more than any subject. Today I have been wandering and sitting; observing and thinking since the sun was yet to appear over the opposite horizon that it is now falling slowly toward.

More than any one artist, writer, or philosopher, the land has influenced who I am as an artist and individual. Using the term *landscape*, I suggest the land's agency in shaping itself. When

⁸ Betty DeVeny, "Slate Creek History" (US Forest Service, Slate Creek, 1974), 1.

⁹ Kevin Wilkins and Family, *The Good Old Days: The Family Histories of Georgene Maynard & Glen Wilkins* (2011), 70.

¹⁰ Georgene (Maynard) Wilkins, "John Maynard and Slate Creek History," *Salmon River Sun*, June 1999, first edition.

referring to *land* and *place*, I mean more than a snapshot of the physical setting. *Land* and *landscape* include the fluid movements of streams and rivers that carve out these canyons, the solid columns of basalt that cut tilted ribbons through grass-covered mountainsides, the elk and other animals that travel through the ecosystem. Even intangible aspects of history and attitude like stories and spiritual connections contribute to the interconnected components of place. As I write about and occupy these multifaceted places, I recognize their history and active presence whether visible or imperceptible.

Chapter 1

The River Showed Me

Salmon River

July 13, 2019: The seemingly eternal sound of water spilling over, around, and through smoothed rock has been so ingrained as a backdrop to my every formative action and thought that without it, a piece of me feels missing.

I often say that I was raised by the Salmon River. This statement is meant to be as fluid as water approaching a rock in mid-stream. On one side, it means that I grew up on the Salmon's eastern bank. To the other side, this statement indicates that the river nurtured me into the person I am today. I played on its sandy beaches and cool water and fell asleep to its ever-present sound. I ate fish from the river, vegetables irrigated by its water, and wild game living off its nourishment. I learned about the life cycles of salmon and how to read currents. No person taught me these lessons, rather the river showed me.¹¹ I later paid for college with money earned guiding rafting trips down the river. Like water split by a rock, the two meanings of “raised by the river” coalesce. One is not possible without the other. The Salmon River is both a significant place and active contributor to my formative experiences—feeding my body, mind, and soul.

April 18: 2019 Hidden beneath the high-flowing spring waters of the Salmon River, a migration is beginning to take place. Or did this migration commence a few years ago in the fine gravel of an upriver stream or millions of years ago with the freezing and thawing of this region? In the coming months, thousands of Chinook salmon will make the return journey to their birthplace to spawn a new generation.

Like the mystery of how Chinook salmon—the namesake of the Salmon River—find their way from the ocean to their birth streams, my deeply rooted sense of place is multifaceted: it lacks a concrete or one-track explanation. Perhaps it is a magnetic pull or distinctiveness of the water that draws us to this location. Whatever the explanation, my attachment to this place is a matter of trust, as assured as it is intangible.

¹¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 22.

Salmon migrations remain an enigma to modern Western science. How they navigate thousands of miles of ocean and changing river systems to the place they were born baffles our human senses and terrestrial understanding of the world. Humans often understand birthplace as a line on a certificate, a simple answer of date, time, city and state. The significant aspects to me are that I was born in the spring near the Palouse River—a tributary of the Snake River. I grew up along the Salmon River, another tributary of the Snake, learning the power and necessity of water in shaping the people, other animals, and entangled environment of an area.

After about a year in freshwater streams, the surviving young salmon smolts journey to the ocean, aided by the rushing current of spring snow melt. Like the smolts, I reached an age when it was time to leave home. I too traveled down the Salmon to the Snake and down the Snake to the Columbia River. I settled into an area of the Willamette Valley that (as I later found out) was a temporary home for some of my ancestors before they came to the Salmon River. Perhaps this coincidence mirrors the migration patterns of monarch butterflies, which unfold over the course of multiple generations (as opposed to the single-lifespan behavior of salmon).¹² Even if I had stayed west of the Cascades for the rest of my life, my ties there would be comparatively shallow compared to my Salmon River roots. However, I met new people in the Willamette Valley and explored new surroundings, developing relationships with a new place.

Salmon spend around four years in the ocean, growing to maturity. Upon reaching adulthood, the salmon return to the place they were born to spawn a new generation. After four years studying art, science, movement, writing, and ethics, I too returned along rivers of the Columbia watershed. High flows of spring runoff poured over the dams as I drove along I-84, aiding the numbers of salmon also making their return journey. I settled into a new dwelling a short walk from the hospital in which I entered the world.

After returning to their place of birth, salmon spawn a new generation that will navigate the same river path to and from the ocean. Then their depleted bodies return to the stream banks to provide nutrients for other life. Salmon are an integral part of a cycle of reciprocity that benefits future generations of salmon and the entire region. Fortunately, this is where my story deviates slightly from my traveling companions, the salmon. I hope to extend my journey before returning to the soil and continuing the flow of energy through an ecosystem. In those years, I hope to give back to this landscape in other ways. Through my art, guiding, and activism, I can bring attention to the physical, emotional, and spiritual importance of place.

¹² Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (New York: Harper, 2012).

Selway River

July 22, 2019: I have stood on this sand where I now sit writing, but the water flowing near my outstretched legs is different than when I was here last October, different than it was when I sat down a few moments ago, and different than it will be when I return this fall.

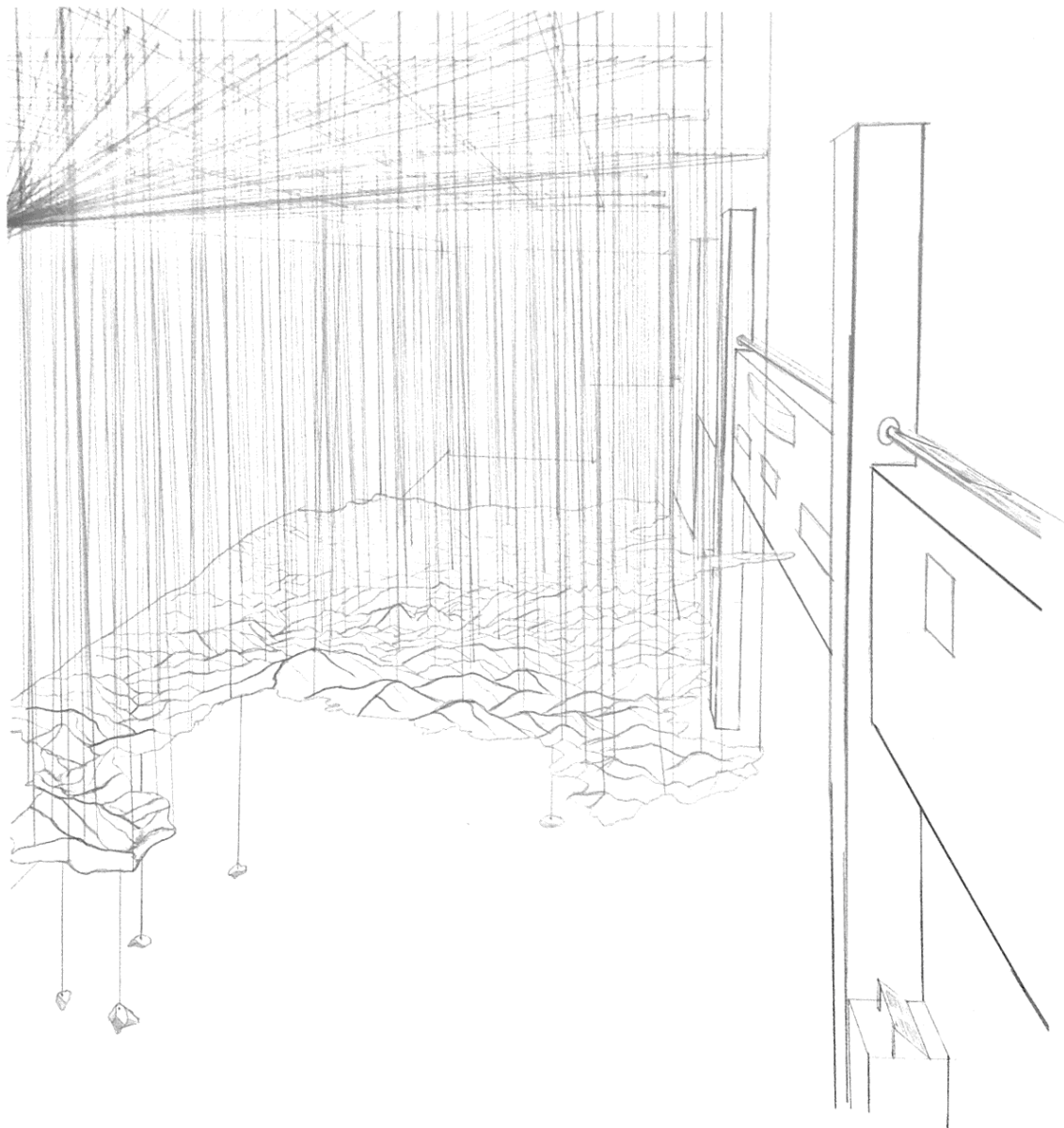


Image 1.1. *Connected by Water*. Installation in Prichard Gallery (preliminary drawing)

July 22, 2019: This river is a special place. While my deep ties to the Salmon River pull me southwest toward deep murky pools, the Selway's seemingly transparent waters invite me to stay. The water at my feet does not journey by my home on the Salmon, nor does the Salmon send currents to shape the expansive beaches of the Selway. The waters of these rivers do, however, mix eventually. The Salmon wraps its way around the Joseph Plains before joining the Snake River. The Selway joins with the Lochsa to form the Clearwater, and connects with the Snake near the town of Lewiston. Together these rivers—draining an enormous expanse of Idaho's wilderness—unite to face the obstacle of four concrete behemoths together, powering toward the Columbia River and then the Pacific Ocean.

The landscape represented in the installation, *Connected by Water*, is made up of the Snake River and all its tributaries (Images 1.1 and 1.2). The area drained by the Snake embodies my personal and familial view of home. The watershed contributed by the Salmon and Clearwater Rivers represents a vast expanse of undeveloped river systems unimpeded by dams. The convergence of strings supporting the landscape represents the delicacy of the entire drainage at a point where water flowing from every point on the land eventually reaches the same place. At this point of attachment a small disturbance could cause a complete collapse of the landscape.

July 22, 2019: Tonight, the Selway feels like home. Perhaps it is the familiar colors of mountains and trees in the fading light of evening, the saccharine vanilla smell of Ponderosa Pine, the feel of hot sand and a cool downriver breeze, and the sound of water picking a path over rocks on a mission to meet with fellow streams.

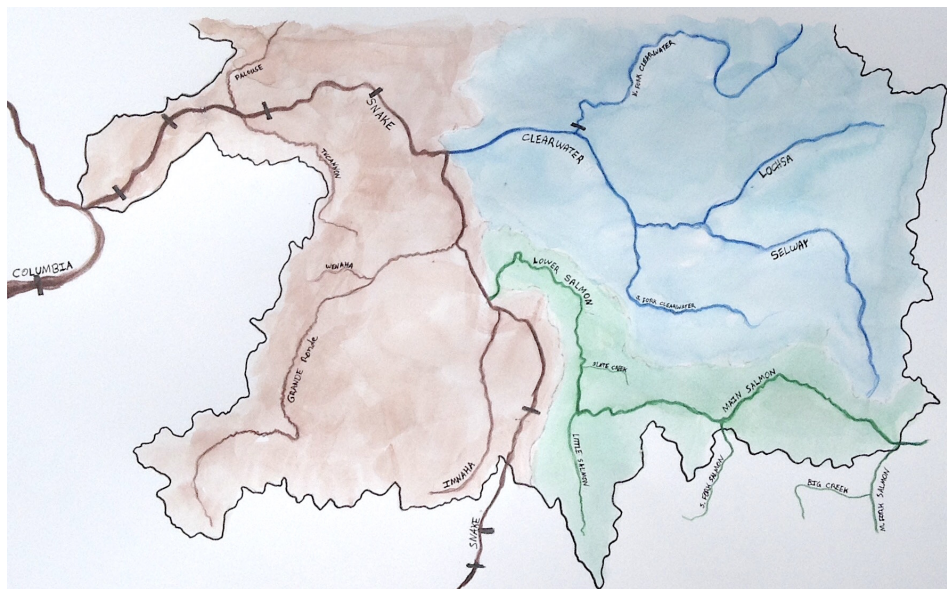


Image 1.2. The region's rivers and watersheds from journal page sketch (9/1/19). Portions of the Snake River (brown), Salmon River (green), and Clearwater River (blue) drainages represent an expanse of free-flowing rivers and streams

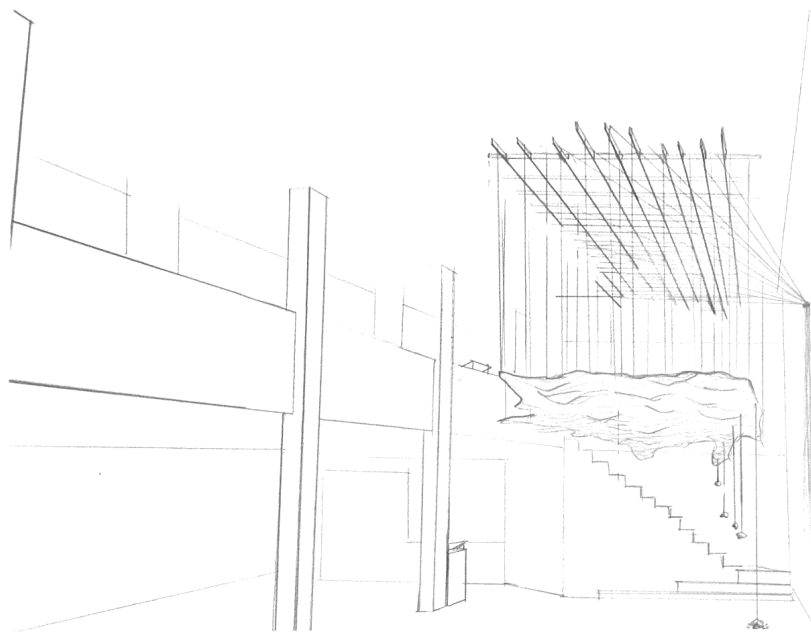


Image 1.3. *Connected by Water*. Installation from first floor of gallery (preliminary drawing)

Upon entering the gallery space, the view of *Connected by Water* is that of the underside of a landscape—a perspective we are not used to as human observers (Image 1.3). Visitors can walk under the expanse of fabric suspended about eight feet from the gallery floor. This evokes quite a different experience than traversing the surface of a landscape, although in the steep canyons of the Salmon River it sometimes does feel as though you are beneath the mountains. Hanging from the canvas landscape, materials represent the weight of their presence on the landscape. Pieces of concrete indicate the positions of the four lower Snake River dams. The lone sediment making contact with the gallery floor forms a direct connection between the site of the installation in the gallery and the location signified on the canvas landscape—Moscow. Rather than the convention of isolating artwork in space and forgetting about the wall upon which it hangs, visitors are meant to notice the ambience of the entire space inside the gallery and recognize the gallery’s geographic positioning.¹³ This perspective of the installation places the visitor amongst the objects representative of specific locations. The suspended objects and visitors themselves characterize a few of the many influences pulling and shaping the dynamic landscape. This piece asks visitors to engage with the question of how we (humans) settle our

¹³ Robert Smithson, and Jack D. Flam, *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 262.

weight, without snapping strings or tearing holes, into the complex configuration of a more-than-human assemblage.¹⁴ From here, the visitor can see and interact only with the limited matter in front of them, while being aware that there is more. The projected images on the top surface of the canvas landscape glow through the fabric folds and spill over the edges in places. There are indications of a bigger picture and different perspectives from which to view it.

Bitterroot River

August 2, 2019: After feeling so at home on the Selway last week, I feel strangely out of place here in the Bitterroots. The weather still comes over the mountains from the west, but the clouds have a different energy. The dark, heavy thunderheads unleash hail the size of thimbleberries. Rivers and streams seem to flow in the wrong direction. It amazes me that these waters still find a way to navigate the jutting peaks to the west and join the familiar waters from the Salmon in the Columbia before flowing into the ocean.

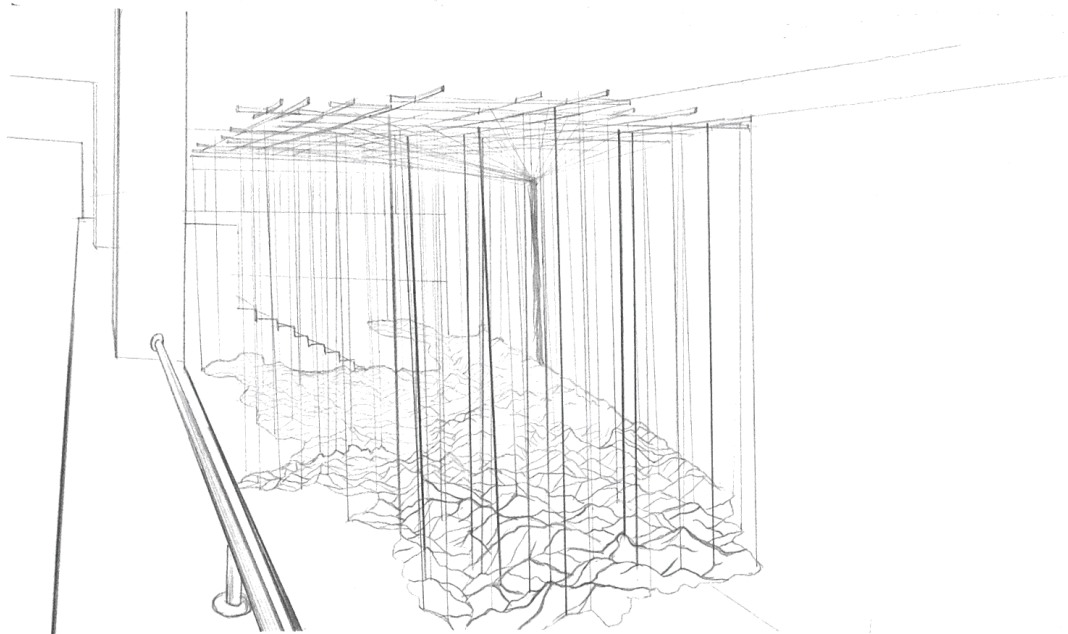


Image 1.4. *Connected by Water*. Installation from second floor balcony (preliminary drawing)

The view of the installation from the gallery balcony provides a different physical and conceptual viewpoint (Image 1.4). Viewing the installation from above has similarities to the

¹⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1987).

disconnect of looking at a map created by a conjunction of data points originating from decontextualized locations. The visitor is now detached from the landscape in that they cannot reach or touch any of it. The objects below, which they could walk amidst, are now veiled by the expansive canvas landscape. Vertical strings suspending the peaks and ridges allude to the forces that seem to pull this landscape into steeply folded canyons. The strings also represent the locations from which they originate. The convergence of all the strings supporting the suspended landscape indicates a point of vulnerability. At this point of attachment a small disturbance could cause a complete collapse of the landscape.



Image 1.5. Photographs of the fabric piece in locations represented by the installation: the Selway River (left), the confluence of the Salmon and Snake Rivers (middle), and the Lower Snake River reservoirs (right)

Video projections of the waters that shape the landscape ripple across the fabric. The fabric not only absorbs the projections but also has been soaked with water from these very rivers (Image 1.5). The movement of projected video introduces an element of time, indicating the ever-changing environment. One channel of video depicts smooth but still-flowing water and reflected colors of the riverbanks. The other channel shows turbulent rapids and water crashing over rocks. The two projections overlap on the fabric ridges to show the mixing and interaction of the different currents. The projections also define the contours of the fabric landscape. The whitewater casts light on the east-facing slopes while the smooth water gives color to the west-facing ridges.

August 2, 2019: As I walked further west into the Bitterroots, back toward familiar mountains, I began to realize what constitutes the boundaries of place to me. I feel most at home in mountains where water drains to the Salmon; I feel close to home in places where waters make their way to the Snake. This place represents the far reaches of home. The water at my feet flows east and north, through several unfamiliar rivers, across the depths of a lake that could submerge seven of the tallest trees in the area end-to-end, through human-made dams, and across an international boundary, before joining the Columbia River—closer to its headwaters than to the ocean.

August 2, 2019: Drainages connect valleys and canyons. They shape the landscape, carry nutrients, and hydrate all life. And for me, this network of rivers and streams establishes an underlying and very physical sense of place in a world broken by intangible borders.

The unraveled edges of fabric reveal an indefinite border of the installation. The edges define an area emanating from my home on the Salmon River, including the installation location to the north—Moscow, Idaho—and most of the Salmon, Clearwater, and Lower Snake River drainage (Image 1.6). The lattices of wooden supports represent the grid of ownership imposed on the land. This grid forms a transition between the rectilinear environment of city streets and buildings and the topographic environment represented by the fabric. Though the installation is contained in the rectangular dimensions of an indoor space in a town divided into quadrangular sections, the shape of the canvas follows rivers and watershed divides rather than political boundaries of state or county. Even the straight edged side suggests, through ragged-unraveled edges, that there is more beyond.

Just as I experienced images on stone next to rivers before artifacts on pedestals in museums, I encountered topography in the landscape before geography on a map. This introduction to the natural divisions of the landscape—jagged ridgelines dividing the flow of water, large rivers carving deep canyons through the mountains—was a product of where I was raised. Home to me is the meandering creek where I floated on warm days, jagged basalt cliffs that stood out in the snow, grassy hillsides that I climbed in the spring, and elk trails that I followed in autumn—not the lines on a map which are labeled *Slate Creek* (Image 1.6). On a map, Idaho's otherwise straight western border follows the Snake River as it flows north and curves around the Wallowa Mountains, forming a point directed at Slate Creek, one drainage to the east on the Salmon River. The Seven Devils mountain range and Joseph Plains rise between these two river gorges—the first and third deepest on the continent. To the east is wilderness all the way to the continental divide and Montana on the other side. Slate Creek is tucked into an area that uses natural divisions in the landscape over arbitrary political boundaries inked on a map. Whether influenced by the physical impossibility of surveying such steep river canyons or the relative convenience of following more navigable routes, this area at least has lines on a map that seemed to match my formative grasp of the landscape as a child. It was when I ventured out of this area that an understandable confusion set in.

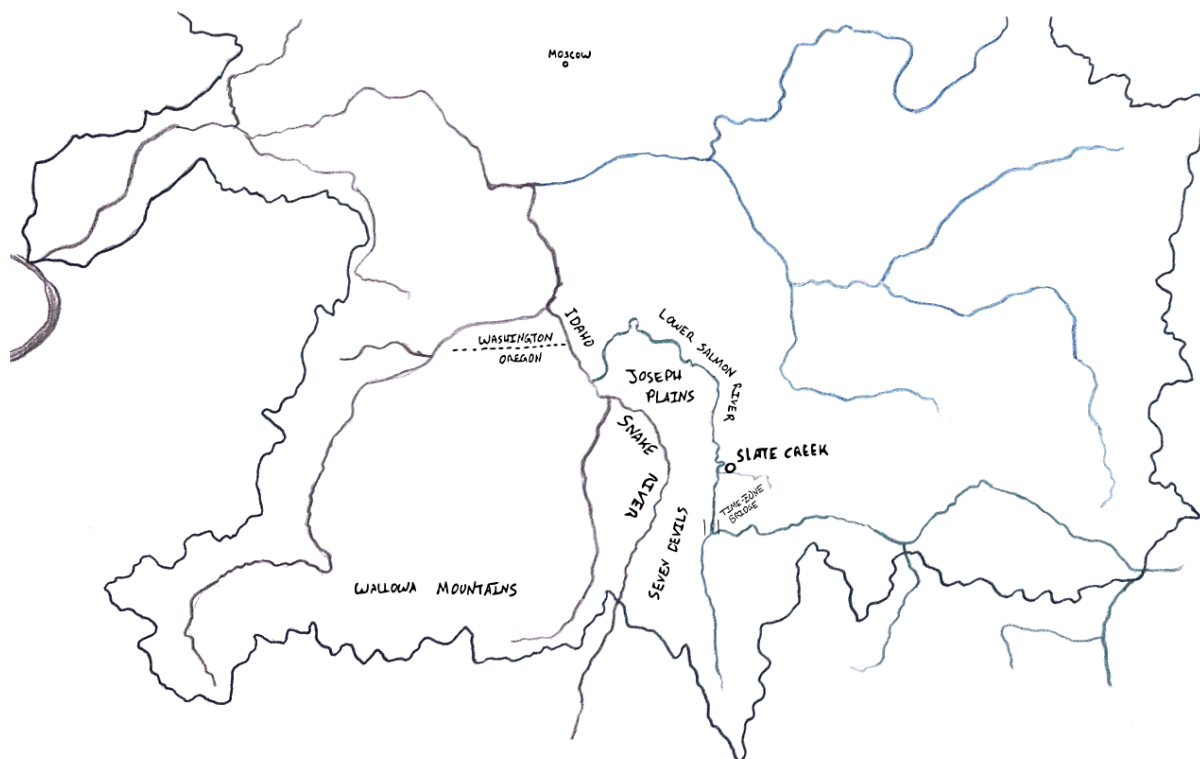


Image 1.6. Sketch of area depicted in the installation with places of significance labeled from journal (9/1/2019)

As an eight- or nine-year-old child full of curiosity about the world around me, I remember rafting the lower Salmon River and coming to the confluence of the Salmon and the Snake. The sun-faded river map now showed Oregon on river left and Idaho on river right (Image 1.6). Setting up camp on an Oregon beach felt and looked no different from an Idaho beach. Yet it made sense that this powerful river—as it carved the deepest gorge in the continent—would make as good a border between states as any. This intuitive logic disappeared the next day when a straight dashed line on the map, not corresponding to any drainage or other physical feature, indicated that the canyon wall on the left was now claimed by Washington State. Staring at an unfolded map, my eyes traced the lines that supposedly segmented space and time into recognizable regions.

To my young self, time zones made more sense in theory. As the sun traveled across the sky and disappeared over the mountains to the west, it was understandable that the places in that direction would experience daytime later into the evening. If I scrambled to the top of that mountain, I could even catch a few more rays of sun long after sunset in the river canyon below. Following Highway 95 a few miles up the river, crossing over a bridge due south and “losing” an

hour confounded my initial understanding of boundaries established by the sun. The nature of the sun drawing lines across the landscape with shadows is a concept I explored in the 2019 piece, *Apricity (n): 'The warmth of the sun in winter.'* (Image 1.7) as well as *Connected by Water* (Image 1.4). In *Connected by Water*, the projections reference the light and direction of the sun to create shadows on the fabric landscape.



Image 1.7. *Apricity (n): 'The warmth of the sun in winter.'* 2019. Acrylic on Panoramic Canvas, Framed Color Prints, Sound Installation. 20in x 52in x 52in

July 24, 2019: If I close my eyes and let my imagination take over, I can still distinguish the sound of this river from Slate Creek and the Salmon River, the ever-present white noise of my childhood. Yet the sound has the same invigorating effect on my mindset—

*I can think clearly,
create more,
be at peace.*

Chapter 2

Trails That Led to Here

North Fork Trail, Slate Creek

October 11, 2019: Walking allows me to think. The internal movement rouses my body and mind. The physical change in surroundings spurs new thoughts. The time occupied holds space for contemplation. In a world driven by productivity and multitasking, walking is an allowable chance to let the mind wander its own path or pace around a specific idea.

The process of both moving through the landscape and remaining still in a location heightens awareness and deepens my connection to place. Beat novelist and poet Jack Kerouac calls this process “the meditation of the trail.”¹⁵ Each of my steps along the ridges of the Slate Creek drainage has accumulated into a defined sense of belonging. The paths underfoot, usually traveled only by elk and deer, guided me through the trees. Simultaneously, contemplations along these trails led me to where I am today. I learned the canyons of the Salmon River by rowing each rapid until I knew every rock and wave. Following the flow of water directly on the river or indirectly in the water-formed landscape continues to channel how I comprehend the environment in which I live.

“Hiking” is one of many words that I have begrudgingly adopted to convey meaning to others, but as a word it does not mean what I want it to. I rarely say, “I am going for a hike.” Instead, I say, “I’m going up Slate Creek” or “I’ll be out Bear Gulch.” To me, the term “hiking” does not summon the intention of my interactions with moving through a place. Growing up, my sister coined the term “lebbing,” short for *Kalebing*, to describe the somewhat unpredictable activity of a leg-straining off-trail run/walk to the top of a hill only to sit for a moment or scramble down the other side. “Lebbing,” as those who join me come to experience, is impulsive and deliberate, sometimes favoring swift exploration and other times leisurely contemplation. Whether traveling directly to a perceived location or wandering intuitively through areas, movement establishes my sense of place.

¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Viking Press, 1958).

Many factors influence an individual's sense of place.¹⁶ The same location offers something unique from day to day and season to season. Manner and pace of travel also determine how we experience a place. "Slate Creek" refers to different experiences depending on one's position—seated in the middle of its current on a hot summer day, perched on a log by the creek bed, bouncing over the rocks in an inner tube, or following its path along the dirt road from the back of an old pickup. When I walk leisurely along the creek, I experience a different flow of water than when I sprint parallel to its waters during an interval workout. My awareness of the water shifts from summer evenings, when the gravel is still warm from the sun and the buzz of cicadas rides the cool breeze down the creek, to winter mornings when the creek's flow is muted by a layer of ice. Over the years, I have traveled the route along this creek more than anywhere else in the world. It continues to offer new experiences every time I return. We can consider "site" to be a meeting of self and location, to the degree that a person's mindset, memories, and bodily experience define a place. In this way, place becomes significant through a compilation of reciprocal relationships between individual and environment.



Image 2.1. *16.5 Miles on Moscow Mountain*. 2018. Intaglio prints, copper plates (left) and copper plates attached to boots worn during the process (right)

My 2018 piece, *16.5 Miles on Moscow Mountain*, questions our relationship with moving across the landscape and the expectation of leaving footprints behind (Image 2.1). The plates of metal attached to the boot represent the point of contact where individual meets land. Instead of footsteps making an active mark on a passive environment, the copper plates show the physical

¹⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

marks the ground makes on the walker. Printed at various stages, the ink shows the build-up of interaction between the movement and the terrain. Looking at these prints, the viewer is invited to consider ways the land leaves impressions on them in addition to marks they leave behind.

While movement is not my only relationship with place, the desire to cover significant distances on foot has been central to me since the time I could walk. I followed my father on long treks up steep Salmon River canyons and biked for hours with my mother. In middle school I really discovered running, and one spring I decided to run from home (Slate Creek) to school. I rose at three in the morning to begin the thirty-mile trek down the river and over a mountain pass to the Camas Prairie. For years, I explained this endeavor as a physical challenge and the desire to push my body. However, moving through place has never been about the end result of “conquering” a distance. Across my years of collegiate cross-country, track, and cycling, my most memorable and meaningful experiences are the long efforts done solo or with a few close friends. Through these efforts, I built maps of place that are more valuable to me than laps in front of a crowd, school records, or podium finishes will ever be. All of the significant endurance efforts I have made over the years *have* been about the thrill of physical exertion, but not with the goal of covering a certain distance at a particular speed. For me, athletics provide the opportunity to connect one place with another using nothing but the power of my own body.

Humans often reduce automobile travel into linear trips between Point A and Point B, as if passengers cruise through the space between them without much consideration. I find that venturing on foot provides a slower, more intimate experience of tracing the connections across place. Roads, paths, and trails all signify a route that has been traveled repeatedly over time. Since colonial incursion, existing trails have continually been widened and “developed” to accommodate horses, wagons, and then automobiles.¹⁷ Many of these trail networks are now buried beneath modern roads. The one highway through the area in which I grew up, Highway 95, mostly follows the Salmon River along the route of the Old 95 (the successor of a narrow dirt stage road). The stage route was dictated by early mining trails, which likewise followed Nez Perce paths between winter villages. These early Nez Perce trails most likely followed the paths of non-human animals, reminding us that trails do not begin with human beings. Across the land of my home, deer and elk chose trails based on the path of the river, the slope of the landscape,

¹⁷ Robert Moor, *On Trails*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 9.

and the presence of vegetation. From this perspective, it is impossible to ignore the interconnectedness of movement within the entire ecosystem of an area.

January 4, 2019: My partner Emma remarked, "I wonder who else went this way," as she stepped off the trail on top of some roughly heart-shaped indentations in the shin-deep snow. We hadn't seen a human footprint in miles, yet it didn't seem too out of place to refer to any living creature who shared the trail with us this morning as "someone" or "who." After all, in a place like this it seems more natural to see a line of tracks in the snow belonging to a deer, elk, wolf, pika, grouse, or chickadee than it does to see a boot print or tire tread.

As conservationist Aldo Leopold once noted, "January observation can be almost as simple and peaceful as snow, and almost as continuous as cold. There is time not only to see who has done what, but to speculate why."¹⁸ It is this kind of curiosity that brings us closer to the environment in which we live and questions human-centered perspectives. When we take a step back to view our own path in the snow, woven under and across the trails of other beings, we receive a chance to see our place as just one of many.

Private Lands Trail, Moscow Mountain

June 28, 2019: Committing these thoughts to paper poses a challenge if inspirations move at full stride, but pauses to sit and write create a meditative rhythm. If I run out of things to write, I simply pack up and venture on until I have thought of something more to say. The danger arises when it is time to return down the trail. New thoughts just keep flowing like a spring snow melt and I stop frequently to jot them down (as I am doing now). My handbound journal is repeatedly unclipped from the built in spine loop that attached it to the outside of my pack. Canvas ties keep the pages intact, as the journal swings in sync with my steps.

While Slate Creek remains my deepest connection of home, I continue to build connections with other places through movement. As with Slate Creek, my understanding of the Palouse (my current residence) unfolds in overlapping degrees of familiarity. I understand the south side of Moscow from the perspective of walking. I know the regions north and south to the foothills of Moscow Mountain and Paradise Ridge by running. My perception of the area south to the Clearwater and Snake River and north to the Palouse Divide is defined by cycling. These different methods of travel thread together areas into a continuous experience like a

¹⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 4.

needle sews fabric.¹⁹ The rises and descents of the Palouse are measured by the effort of my legs striding up hills and pushing against pedals.

But walking provides more than a physical understanding of geography and topography. Movement also offers a time in-between beginning and end points. If appreciated, this time can offer the space to focus on awareness and thoughts. While I was raised in an atmosphere of working hard but also valuing the importance of rest and reflection, it is possible to dismiss occasions dedicated to thinking as “doing nothing.” For many, doing nothing is only acceptable by “disguising it as doing something, and the something closest to doing nothing is walking.”²⁰ Most of my ideas are worked out in-between places through physical movement. Exploring an area also explores the mind, and walking accomplishes both. When the in-between places are honored as places of their own right they become as or more important than the destinations.

One experience that particularly shaped my relationship with the town I’ve lived in for the past three years was a spontaneous morning walk to the top of Moscow Mountain in September 2019. Essayist Gary Snyder wrote about the long-held importance of mountaintops to people and civilizations who believed that the highpoint overlooking a village was sacred and belonged to the people of the town.²¹ Moscow Mountain is almost entirely private land, yet timber companies and some landowners have allowed the construction of an extensive network of trails. My recollection from studying a property ownership map last winter told me that the very top of the mountain was on private land. The distinctly rectangular section of older growth on the summit confirmed my mental map of the timberland. As I neared the summit of the mountain, I reasoned why I should be able to ascend that last stone’s throw to the top. The deer and other animal trails in the snow clearly indicated an indifference to property boundaries. Private property, like so many other human constructs, reinforces a duality between human and non-human. In my art, I push against this sort of reasoning for why humans should be distinguished and separate from other animals—and the notion that other animals should be treated just as material objects of property ownership.

¹⁹ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2005), xv.

²⁰ Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 5.

²¹ Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 99.



Image 2.2. *First Snow*. 2019. Video Installation

That day on Moscow Mountain, I was also working out some of the experimental video ideas that I shelved along with my winter gloves with the melt of the previous spring (Image 2.2). After walking for about two hours, I noticed that the red lights on the back of my cameras had stopped flashing the record signal. *Just as well*, I thought. *Now I will not even be capturing unidentifiable video on private property.*

Though I take issue with elements of land ownership that position humans as rulers of land, I also respect that the owner has a special connection to the place—or is it the underlying regard I have for the place itself that I felt? While my art is focused heavily on the material and embodied aspects of self-in-place, I also recognize the shaping forces of the language we use. Words can help us to acknowledge, challenge, and reinforce particular ways of relating to the world. The term “belong,” has a multitude of connotations. When speaking of private property and legal land ownership, “belonging” refers to control, superiority, and individualism (e.g., individual humans as masters of land and resources).²² When speaking of connections and a sense of self in place, the notion of “belonging” is an experience of relationality, respect, and reciprocity. When thinking of “property,” I try to focus on the possibilities of this latter version of “belong,” where another human’s connection with the land could be “belonging with” rather than “belonging to”.

As I continued to walk, I tucked the cameras into my pockets to keep them from falling off in the snow. The ankle-deep snow lofted by thick brush appeared thigh-deep in spots.

²² Susan Griffin, *The Eros of Everyday Life: Essays on Ecology, Gender and Society* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 29.

Hidden downed trees increased my exertion in the last push up the steep clearing, and I deferred to deer tracks as I navigated the best route through the maze of hidden obstacles. I paused for a few moments of reflection at the top, taking in this perspective of the Palouse and Moscow framed by snowy evergreens, before picking a more gradual ridge down the mountain. At this point, the snow was deep enough to shelter any non-durable soils or vegetation from disturbance. I thought to myself, not a trace of my path will remain when this early accumulation melts off in a day or two.

Back at the edge of the clearing, I noticed a couple signs facing down the hill. Beneath the snow plastered fronts, faded text read

**PRIVATE PROPERTY, FOOT TRAFFIC ONLY,
PLEASE RESPECT THE MOUNTAIN.**

It turns out my justification of trespassing was unnecessary. I took a moment to appreciate this posted sign, which contrasts starkly with the other “no trespassing” signs I have encountered on Moscow Mountain. This sign calls for human-powered travel (though the steep hill and tightly-grouped trees also discourage any kind of mechanized travel). “Foot traffic” encourages visitors to engage with the experience of traveling through the place rather than rushing to arrive at the destination via modes of travel that might be labeled more “time efficient” or “progressive” in a post-industrial society. The sign also acknowledges that the land—the mountain—merits human respect.

September 29, 2019: The fresh snow reveals the traces of other beings out exploring the new day. Light imprints of various small birds and rodents abound between dense firs with bare ground beneath. Hares leave their distinct impressions across one isolated section of trail. Deer tracks follow and cross the trail most frequently. The largest and most distinct are the tracks of a couple moose—or perhaps one moose meandering like the winding bike trails. But what evidence suggests that I am not the aimless wanderer, compared to the moose’s conceivably deliberate and purposeful route?

Once down from the steep section, I opted for a logging road over the bike trail’s gradual incline on which fun banked corners take precedence over any kind of practical navigation on foot. However, I trust any human-made path much less than I trust the fresh deer tracks I followed up the last part of the mountain. The road responds to timber company boundaries and log truck limitations. Though it is wide enough for six people to walk side-by-side, the slippery mud and unstable dirt made it much more precarious than the stable footing I had experienced on the uphill. Given the tracks in the road from earlier in the morning, a moose

seemed to have had an even more difficult time holding a straight path than I did. Arriving at a bend in the road, I contemplated descending to the creek below and crossing the steep, brushy drainage to regain my known route from earlier. Later into the day, the wet and heavy snow on waist-high brush was just discouraging enough to continue on down the road. Not six strides later, the moose apparently had enough of the unstable footing and picked a route through the brush on long legs.

Though I longed for an off-trail or single-track route, I decided to intentionally stick out the road. I thought, perhaps traveling this route would lead me to a greater understanding of the animals that made it—the human individuals that I understand far less than hooved mammals I prefer to follow through the landscape. I am not saying that the movements of deer, elk, and moose are simple and easy to comprehend or that I fully understand them. If I cannot determine why an elk trail takes a certain path, I can at least trust that there is a reason. My thinking here is not a romanticized idea of elk, but rather an experienced relationship (expanded in the following chapter) that leads me to trust their decisions over human decisions when it comes to trail building.

September 29, 2019: Though I am now committing my earlier thoughts to paper in the comfort of a warm chair with my hands warming on a cup of hot chocolate between sentences, these thoughts were “written” while walking this morning. As I just transcribed the musings of my morning stroll, I felt no need to add any ideas. I discovered it relatively easy to recall the thoughts without having notes of any sort.

I simply replayed the route in my mind and the contemplations I wanted to remember flowed easily. If my pen came to a standstill, I closed my eyes and imagined the place I had been: thoughts that occurred in the place seemed almost physically present in my memory of them, as if I could lift an idea out of the snow-laden branch of a tamarack, see the exact phrasing alongside fresh tracks on the ground, or hear my faintest musings in the silence of the cold breeze.

Wapshilla Ridge Trail

September 1, 2019: The familiar jagged points on the southern horizon seem to rise even further toward the sky as they catch the last warm light of the day. After a long day of hiking, my mouth is as dry as the brittle grass and parched dirt between my outstretched dusty legs. This ridge splits two river canyons. To my right is the deepest gorge on the continent, the Snake River. To my left is the third deepest, the Salmon River, and home.

The confluence of these two rivers at the base of Wapshilla Ridge mixes waters that have undergone very different journeys. The most-traveled water from the Salmon emerged from a

spring over a week's distance from this point, having made its way through a mostly roadless and sparsely developed area of wilderness. The vast majority of this water flowed by my home at Slate Creek during this trek, reaching the base of the Wapshilla Ridge without encountering a single dam or slowing in a reservoir. Viewed from the ridge, the water from the Snake looks warmer and browner than that of the Salmon. The Snake's water has come through farm and ranch land, highly populated cities, and human-constructed reservoirs.

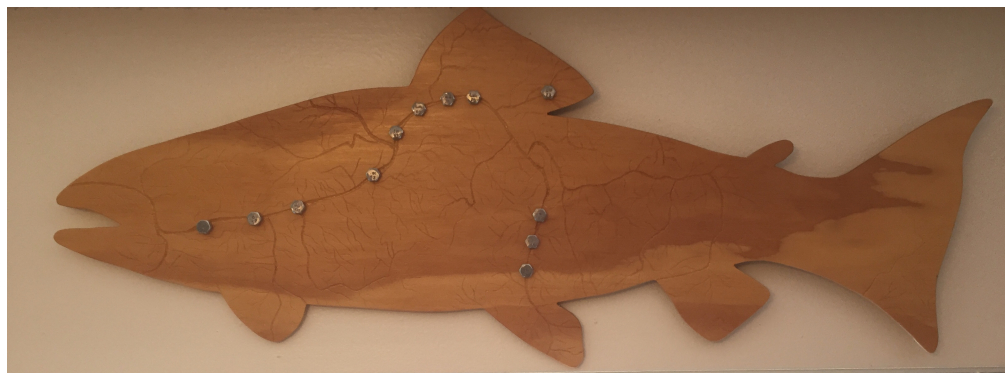


Image 2.3. *Running the Gauntlet (Chinook Salmon)*. 2017. Plywood, Bolts. 14 in. x 35.5 in.

September 7, 2019: The waters I looked down at longingly last week now form my mode of travel for the weekend. The speed gathered as the river narrows and drops, the force of waves crashing over the bow, and the resistance that meets each push of an oar provides a glimpse into how much power is behind this water.

Together, the waters of the Salmon and Snake flow north to join with the Clearwater River. From the confluence of these major watersheds to the ocean, the spillways of enormous dams form the only change in pace for the otherwise stagnant water. The four dams on the Lower Snake and four more on the Columbia disrupt the continuity of free-flowing water and the anadromous fish that still persevere along this impeded path. In my 2017 piece, *Running the Gauntlet (Chinook Salmon)*, bolts stamped with initials and date of completion represent these dams (Image 2.3). The massive burden of these dams continues to strain an ecosystem put under the weight of further development. My 2018 piece, *The Weight of Development*, uses actual concrete pieces of a demolished dam to represent these eight hydroelectric barriers (Image 2.4). How much tension can the watershed take before strings start to snap? This piece has visual and conceptual similarities to *Connected by Water* on a smaller scale. Before I uninstalled this piece, I explored projecting images onto the blank canvas (Image 2.4, bottom). *Connected by Water* also includes projection in the form of video.

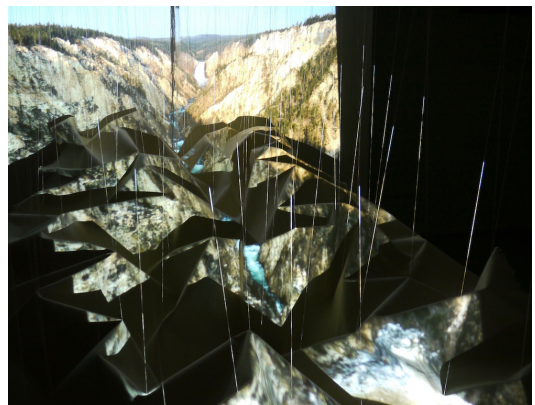
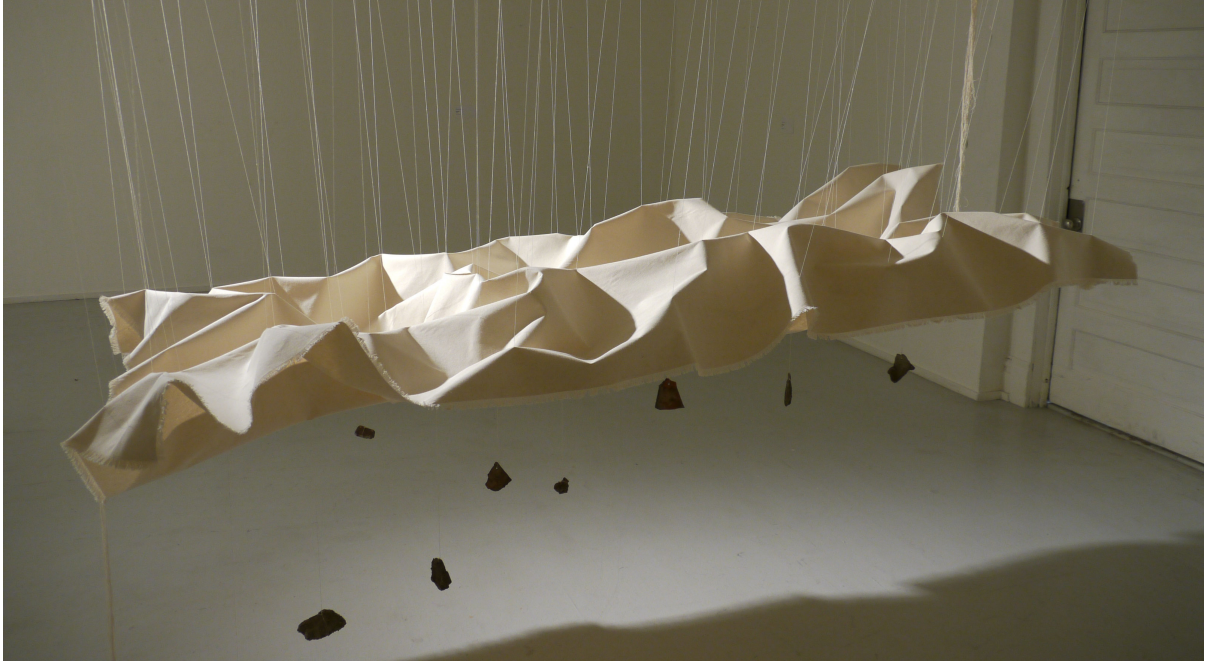


Image 2.4. *The Weight of Development*. 2018. Canvas, Demolished Dam Pieces, Video Projection. 48in x 96in x 82in

Selway River Trail

July 26, 2019: The bike back down the Selway today means the trip is nearing its halfway point. As I walked along above the smooth waters—which mirrored the trees across the river—I reflected on the first two weeks of this trip. A week in an area of the Wallows where I had never been, and a week on the Selway River where I have been before, offered plenty of opportunities to share what I know, love, and respect about these special places.

During the summer of 2019, I spent a month backpacking around the Rocky Mountain sub-ranges on a juried art trip with the Portland-based organization Signal Fire. Our team of artists included two leaders and eight other participants. The theme of the trip was “Waiting for

Salmon,” a topic resonating with my deeply rooted connection to the Salmon River, the significance of native salmon in shaping and supporting the place I consider home, and the threat to the continued existence of this ancient and important population. We visited locations on all sides of the area I consider home and that makes up the foundation of my work. We trekked into the Eagle Cap Wilderness in the Wallowas for the first week, hiked along the Selway River the second week, ventured into the Bitterroot Mountains the third week, and passed the last week in the North Cascades. Each of these locations lies within the Columbia River watershed, near the southern, eastern, and northern edges of the expansive drainage. As a collective group of artists interested in how humans fit into the more-than-human world, we shared invigorating discussions, read inspirational written works, and created meaningful art specific to the interior Northwest.



Image 2.5. *Water* (left) and *Wind* (Right). 2019. Installations in the North Cascades as part of a Signal Fire juried trip

During this trip I created some temporary installations with canvas that I packed in and packed out (Images 2.5 and 2.6). For these canvas sculptures, I invited the wind and sun to collaborate as active contributors in shaping and lighting each piece. However that week both were a little too enthusiastic to help out. I abandoned my first piece on the hot rocks and began another piece deep in the cedars. The eager wind whistled through the treetops exposed to the sun above, but on the needle-blanketed ground a light breeze wove through the giant trunks and skipped between cool shadows. The largest sheet of canvas slowly took on the shape of the river valley and mountains outside the cedar grove where I threaded and tied strings over low-hanging branches (Image 2.6). The piece questioned how the landscape of this area is continuously formed and reshaped. A towering cedar supported vertical strings, suspending the canvas

landscape from above. Twisted into these strings—small objects such as pine cones, leaves, feathers, and a beehive represented some of the plants and animals that play a role in altering the landscape. The wind through the trees from upriver lightly rippled the ridges in the fabric and floated needles into the folds. Under the canvas, strings weighted by decaying needles, a beaver chewed stick, a deer vertebra, bear and deer droppings, and hardware from a washed out bridge represented some of the factors that shape the landscape from below. In a dynamic system that is being pulled and shaped from various directions and by many influences, how do we settle our weight into the complex configuration without snapping strings or tearing holes?



Image 2.6. *Earth*. 2019. Installation in the North Cascades

I have articulated the ways in which the land and the agency of places my work is about have influenced me. These influences exist primarily outside of the art world, however, I also pull from modern and contemporary painters as well as environmental and eco artists. My depiction of wilderness landscapes is influenced by the activism for national parks and preservation efforts by painters Thomas Moran and George Catlin. I am influenced by elements

of Sanford Gifford, Frederic Church, Julie Beers, Thomas Cole and other landscape painters of the Hudson River School, though my inspiration is largely a reaction against the themes of these artists. For example, I pull from these artists by implementing their use of the sublime and complicating themes of silence and solitude, but I critique the ways in which they employ anthropocentric themes by acknowledging the agency of the land itself in my work.²³ I also look to the letters of Ansel Adams because of his advocacy for and articulations of wilderness and conservation ideas. My installations are heavily influenced by Robert Smithson's ideas of site and non-site.²⁴ However my installations differ significantly from the work of Smithson and other 1970's and 80's artists from the Land Art movement in their ephemerality and lasting alteration of places. In this regard, they are influenced by some of the more temporary works of Andy Goldsworthy.

Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison's eco-arts projects from the 1970's act as inspiration for building a practice at the intersection of ecology, community, and art. New Orleans-based artist Quintron's Weather Warlock and Weather for The Blind projects inspire recognition of the agency of environmental changes. Contemporary painters, Rackstraw Downes and Richard Schmidt influence my practice of expressing places through my own lens. The interdisciplinary art collective Postcommodity (Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist) share my interest in the connectivity of places across human constructed borders. Organizations like Land Arts of the American West, Cape Farewell, and Signal Fire influence my values of arts education outside the traditional classroom. These are a few of the notable arts-based inspirations that influence my work after the active agency of the land and traditional ecological knowledge that has evolved over hundreds of years of direct contact with the environment. While I use art themes and theory to hone concepts and resolve installation decisions, in *Connected by Water*, my first hand experiences *with* the landscape make up the initial choices of the installation.

July 26, 2019: As we follow the flow of the river out to the trailhead, an attempt to keep pace with a formation of bubbles on the fluid surface below is like trying to hold on to experiences as they happen. Before the bubbles make it around the next bend in the river, catch in a cycling eddy, accelerate into a churning rapid, or vanish on the glassy surface—my focus drifts back to the origin of the bubbles upstream. Rather than grasping at

²³ Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 149.

²⁴ Robert Smithson, and Jack D. Flam, *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

fluid traces, I appreciate the presently passing currents as my strides along the trail quicken and slow independent of the river's pace.

While creating art about moments in specific times and places, it is easy to become absorbed in the present. When I install or paint on site, I become completely immersed in the sounds of water and warmth of the changing light. However, it is also easy to get stuck in the past by dwelling on a completed piece after the moment has passed. Once I have left the river and return to the studio there is only so much memory can offer to a creative process about site and place. Most of my installations are meant to exist between an ephemeral moment and enduring documentation. I intend for photographs of the work to offer the essence of the ideas behind the work, while being recognized as separate from the original piece installed on site or in a gallery. For this reason, the installations could not exist in an online gallery form in the way that they take up physical space around a visitor in the gallery.

Working on installations has taught me to create in a more fluid process and allow various bodies of work to inform others. By opening my art to more possibilities, I have nurtured a space to explore with more conceptual ideas. Rather just making an installation, I can research the relationship among thoughts, actions, and the environment.²⁵ The installation in this gallery has been evolving from the moment it was a vague idea—and perhaps before. Once an installation concept reaches its final form, I embrace the subtle changes that inevitably occur as it takes shape over the course of an installation week. I feel fortunate that my art is on a path that can continue to unfold before, during, and after an exhibition without being overrun by options. “The freedom of the trail is riverine, not oceanic.”²⁶ Like trails and rivers, I am not locked into a set pace or destination, and the paths I do decide to take are not the only paths. Whether I am in the backcountry or the gallery, I appreciate the freedom to adapt to changing conditions (whatever they may be).

Hurley Creek Trail

February 2, 2018: Interaction with our environment is essential to the human experience.

But can we pinpoint where exactly that interaction occurs?

Is it merely a function of observing with our eyes?

²⁵ Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 268.

²⁶ Moor, *On Trails*, 20.

If so, then why does looking at an image of the view from Black Butte over the Salmon River not evoke the same contentment as sitting on that ridge as June storm clouds roll down the canyon?

Or is it a physical experience we seek?

Then why have millions of strides on a track over the years not fulfilled as much as stepping onto a sand bar after a day on the Selway River?

Is it rather a tactile experience?

If so, why doesn't picking up the moose antler from my bookshelf compare to picking up a small whitetail shed below a budding larch?

Maybe it is a combination of the senses.

Listening to a mountain chickadee sing to the accompaniment of the cool stream splashing at weary feet, looking up at the snow-covered peak that supplies that refreshingly frigid water, tasting the handful of huckleberries within reach, smelling a fragrant spruce tree and spotting the white cheeks singing from its branches.

Is it an imaginative connection?

If so, why are my winter daydreams of sitting in a summer meadow only satisfied after spending a July morning trekking up some remarkably tangible elevation?

Or maybe it is more of a spiritual connection—

Being immersed in a place so expansive and powerful cannot be explained in any other way.

Chapter 3

Elk Taught Me the Language

Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness

March 19, 2019: When the deep snow of January and February piles up, elk saunter off the mountains in search of food. They frequent hay feed lots and venture into the river corridors where roads and houses dot the otherwise undeveloped area. Heavy snow packs give way to green hillsides in March and April and the herds follow the receding snow line back into the remote mountains and drainages. May and June find the elk well fed and replenishing the lives lost during the harsh winter with fresh young life. In July and August, the massive herds that lined the river corridor in the depths of winter are now spread far and wide across the high Rockies in search of respite from the scorching air of lower elevations. As temperatures drop, fall bugles echoing out of forested basins announce their return in number to the area. The large male (bull) elk attempt to gather a large number of female (cow) elk and small yearling spike elk while warding off competing bulls. When the hierarchies created by breeding season start to break down, northern winds seem to blow the elk from the trees onto the frosty grass covered hillsides of the lower elevations along the river.

Elk are one of the many more-than-human beings whose fine-tuned system of interacting with the land has influenced my own interactions. These concentrated herds remind us of what the millions of elk that once inhabited the west must have looked like. While they do not depend on a human calendar or set itinerary, you could, upon a period of close observation, set your clock by their patterns and habits. I acknowledge elk as some of my many mentors in gaining a fluency in the language of the Salmon River ecosystem. Indigenous peoples and many naturalist writers/artists have long embraced the language and agency of the land. With attentive observation, humans can learn to listen to the living and nonliving components of the land. However, many scholars, citing concerns about anthropomorphism and romanticism, have been much slower to accept the idea of land's capacity to speak.²⁷ As an artist, I am just one human relating to the world around me through my human lens, but with an awareness that there are other perspectives to consider. A foundational premise of my installation, *Connected by Water*, is

²⁷ Debbie Lee, and Kathryn Newfont, *The Land Speaks: New Voices at the Intersection of Oral and Environmental History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

that, “nature is an active participant in—rather than an object for—production of knowledge.”²⁸ Influenced by the field of environmental history, I seek to disrupt human-centered narratives by presenting my work as the result of listening to the land. This “elk-centered” chapter illustrates the agency of the environment that I share with other beings, in affecting my sense of self and approach to art.

March 19, 2019: Like the elk, my intentions change throughout the year. In the span of just one day marked on the fall calendar, I trade my sketchbook and paints for a black powder rifle my grandfather made. The birch wood stock seems somehow natural in this place, gliding through a grove of trees in the same creek bed it may have originated from half a century ago. At the other end of the rifle, the cold black barrel seems to be from another world. Forged on the other side of the country, this heavy piece of steel speaks to industry, development, and imported goods that seem quite foreign to the peaceful and self-sustaining meadow in which it now appears.

From the time I could walk, the eleven months of the year during which I do not carry a rifle prove useful in knowing where to find the elk—reading the terrain from their viewpoint and understanding how to close to within a dozen strides while avoiding detection. In this language of the land, I consider myself more fluent than many humans, but the elk constantly remind me that they are even more fluent than I am. Nearly every fall, an elk that stood under a pine tree a week prior smokes over the wood of an apple tree. Once the freezer is full, the muzzleloader goes back onto its hook on the wall of the log house my grandfather also built from hand peeled trees that originated in the nearby mountains. The elk on the hillside once again become purely a source of inspiration and affection. One of the draws to spending countless hours filling my mind with experiences and memories of scrambling up basalt bluffs and traversing dense groves alder brush is to seek the presence of the creatures from whom I can learn so much.

An onlooker, glimpsing this antique rifle and log home or the elk covered hillside above the ax-split shake roof, may understandably assume that the scene described is the nineteenth-century American West, a period and region of abundant elk herds and other wildlife, wide open spaces, and the idealized native-occupied West. But in fact, this is the isolated area of central Idaho that formed the setting of my upbringing in the 1990s. I have found that in trying to understand the distant past, it is easiest to start from something I know and have experienced

²⁸ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001).

first hand. Interacting with the same places as distant relatives provides me with points of connection from which I can more deeply explore this past. I am able to grasp what the region was like though the anomaly in time that such a remote and rugged landscape preserved (to a degree) from the development and urbanization of the surrounding region. However, humans are now in an era where even the most untouched landscapes are being affected by distant choices changing the climate and disrupting the connectivity of migrating wildlife such as Chinook Salmon and the elk herds of the Rocky Mountains. Even if this remote landscape avoids the development of roads and influx of human population, the area stands to change more in the next several decades than it has in the last several centuries.

In describing the present that I have come to know on the Salmon River, I am in many ways depicting the past as it existed over a century ago. This place has most certainly changed, but my descriptions at least aim to portray a tangible underpainting, a point of departure upon which historical events can layer to create a comprehensive product. I think of this as a painting of the cumulative complexities now present in the landscape of the installation. The fabric landscape of the installation provides viewers with a blank canvas to visually paint with their own experiences and memories of landscapes they know. However, where painting is rooted in a visible scene, the installation aims to show the connections uncovered in seeking to understand the complexities of the landscape.

While the elk and other wildlife, as well as the landscape itself, have transformed very slowly over time, the abrupt changes have been in those who like to distinguish themselves from the other animals: humans. The indigenous Nimiipu (Nez Perce) regard the land and wildlife as ancestors: the environment provided for them, and so they should respect and provide for the land however possible. They believe in interconnectedness rather than ownership. The land belongs—or doesn't belong—to the antler crowned elk or *wise'w* (Nimiipu)²⁹ as much as to any other human or more-than-human creature. This sense of interconnectedness can only be achieved with a deep understanding and appreciation. Knowledge is gained by observing the habits of a predawn herd while seated under a fragrant spruce tree, rather than at a laminated desk. Appreciation is achieved with the realization that fully understanding something so complex is not possible within a human lifetime. When appreciation and understanding of elk or

²⁹ Allen P. Slickpoo Sr, and Deward E. Walker Jr, Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Perces) Culture and History of the Nez Perces Volume One (Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, 1973).

any other entity occurs, it seems that mourning is eventually to follow. As Aldo Leopold concisely stated, “we grieve only for what we know.”³⁰ Though as with any meaningful relationship, the prospect of loss should not preclude meaningful bonds. How can we grieve for the profligate destruction of free-flowing rivers, salmon, elk and the rest of the natural environment in which we exist if we do not make the effort to know them?

March 3, 2019: In my years of watching, learning from, and building understanding of elk, one characteristic that stands out is their tendency to stand sentry on the highest ridges and points. Upon spotting a herd at a distance, there is almost without exception a lone cow elk, highlighted against the horizon, her gaze sweeping across the landscape, surveying the expansive kingdom of and for all.

To the elk, this domain is—and always has been—a near borderless expanse with few fences, scarce roads, and limited humans. The inaccessibly rugged mountains and intimidating river canyons these elk inhabit resisted substantial colonization efforts throughout time. The area is additionally shielded from visitors by the fact that it does not contain any national parks, nor does it claim to be the largest of all wilderness areas. Rather, the land appears on a map as several wilderness areas: the Frank Church, Gospel Hump, Selway-Bitterroot, Sawtooth, and Hell’s Canyon.³¹ These designated wilderness areas are in turn surrounded by more than fifteen national forests across the borders of Idaho, Montana, and Oregon drawn on paper. In effect, Idaho’s urban areas are split into north and south and only connected by a small strip of highway and private land through the lower Salmon River corridor. This expanse of millions of acres has changed boundaries, names, and governing bodies throughout the past hundred and fifty years. But the elk continue their patterns and habits un-phased by the human constructions of wilderness and land ownership.

History only exists with a comparison of the present to the rest of time. While this history of elk relies on my experiences of the present, it also provides room for reflection of how this history matters today. My experiences provide a dual entry into the past and the present of elk and other wildlife in a unique landscape. While this unusual pocket of Salmon River country remained essentially pre-1850’s, the surrounding area and rest of the west underwent major changes in the second half of the nineteenth century. This topic is a counter narrative to

³⁰ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 48.

³¹ “Intermountain Region,” U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Map, January 2000, accessed April 2012, http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/gis/images/idaho_rdlsg.jpg.

much of American history of western expansion. This is a story of an area that, relative to the rest of the region, resisted human inhabitation and provided elk and other wildlife with a terrain-imposed sanctuary. Elk in this area were able to proceed without changes to the land in the way that Oregon's fields were cleared for farming, Montana's grasslands were appropriated for grazing, or even Yellowstone Park was developed and commercialized for tourism. The Salmon River area affords elk the space to roam throughout the year, only coming into contact with humans, roads, and homes in the cold months of winter.

I was and am very fortunate to share experiences on the land with these magnificent herds. From childhood, elk have filled my memories and imagination—as well as my family's freezer and stomachs. My hope is that, like the elk, humans will experience the wonder of finding prominent mountains to lift them above unrelenting rivers. As we survey the expansive landscapes around us, we must not position ourselves as rulers but as pieces of something much greater than the sum of its parts.

Frank Church Wilderness

November 2, 2019: From a ridgeline point, I can see down into the Salmon River canyon. A jetboat, one of the only motorized vehicles permitted in this place, splits the icy green water with a V-shaped wake and navigates around the churning waves of a distinctively rapid. I have heard many rafting stories of this rapid from my father, who guided this stretch of river in the late 1980s and early 90s. Upriver from the corner the jetboat disappears around lies hundreds of miles of roadless wilderness. Behind me is a densely forested bowl. Forty years ago, my grandfather may have looked down from the other side as he led a string of pack mules out of the mountains. The highest peak to my left is topped by the pointed roof of a lookout tower. My great-grandfather watched for fires from the log structure in the 1930s. Nearly a hundred years ago, my great-great grandmother exchanged eight hundred dollars for a piece of land just downriver. Along with connecting to a place, the abundant wilderness in this area allows me to connect with the past in a unique way. There is nothing to suggest that the year is or isn't 1930, 1980, or 2019.

My family, on both my mother's and father's sides, shares a long and close relationship with the landscape of the Salmon River. I grew up knowing where nearly all of my food came from. Eggs were gathered from the chicken coop every morning before I left for school. Vegetables came from the large garden that I tilled every spring. Fish were reeled from the Salmon River—the powerful force that shaped the mountains and canyons of north-central

Idaho—and meat came from those mountains. Taking a life is difficult. But if I choose to eat meat, this is the way I am going to do it. The several hundred pounds of lean meat a single elk provides will feed me for almost a year. Unlike something picked out of the refrigerated section at the store, I know where and how this food source came to be. It is healthier than antibiotic and corn-fed beef, more sustainable than processing and shipping packaged meat across the globe, and more ethical than corporate farms. I know that every part will be used because I appreciate how much went into every step of receiving this meat. I understand because I actively determined how to take the life and process the meat. Instead of ending up in a sterilized landfill, the nutrients in the bones and entrails will go back to the land, providing nourishment for grass, trees, and eventually another elk.

November 2, 2019: I made my way through the dense brush to the downed elk. I didn't say anything or perform any ritual of giving thanks. Instead, appreciation is embedded in every action from before this moment to after the meat nourishes my body. I went to work in this state of silent reflection, for though the sun was high in the sky, it would not be by the time I started the 2000ft ascent out of this hole and 4000ft descent back down to the river. One ninety-pound hindquarter on my back made for an exhaustingly steep climb out of the snow and brush covered canyon, racing daylight to the ridgeline trail above. The other three quarters are left high in a tree, where the cool night air will chill them just short of freezing until I return for them tomorrow.

Though this way of living makes the absolute most sense to me, I recognize that it is not universal. Not everyone lives in a remote area with more elk than people. The level of thought and care I put into not just where, but how, my nourishment arrives from relationships with other living organisms is present in other facets of my life. This ethic of understanding the origin of foods translates, for me, to other products including art materials. Participating in where things come from, even once, at the very least fosters awareness. Whether it is raising chickens and tending a garden, or milling boards and gathering pigments, first hand experience makes us more responsible in how we live and relate to the environment we live in.

A society built on the ideals of always moving forward quickly encourages us to ask the question, “can we?” However, this type of culture rarely encourages us to pose the question, “should we?”³² In regards to human interactions with the land, answering the “should we” question requires personal engagement with all the specific factors within our own specific

³² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minn: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

communities. In the mid-twentieth century United States, a mechanical concept of “nature” replaced the idea of biotic ecosystems because viewing ourselves and nature as a community was too anthropomorphic for the science of ecology.³³ In other words, many ecologists recognized the problems of anthropocentrism and addressed this by attempting to pull “human” out of “nature,” not necessarily realizing that this movement tended to pull humans *up* to a realm of grandiose master. Before this adoption of a mathematical modeling of nature, naturalists and writers spoke of a more direct moral engagement between self and land. According to Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”³⁴ We are a part, not a manager, of this biotic community, and we must position ourselves as relational presences instead of saviors jumping in to rescue a struggling ecosystem. The threats of climate change and global capitalism are not to the Earth as inert land and rock but to the Earth as a collective of beings, including land and rock. We are straining the capacity of the land to support human lives as we are currently living them.³⁵ The landscape will likely recover, but will we?

My motivation in how I interact with the land is built on long-held relationships and ways of living rather than looking first at reducing my carbon footprint or the global outcomes of my decisions. I choose to make decisions like eating meat that I harvest because it is what my family has always done and continues to feel right, not because local is trendy or because global leaders tell me that it is better for the environment. In focusing on immediate and tangible relationships with the places we live, more indefinite elements of our impression on greater ecosystems change for the positive. In touching on ethics, I am not attempting to outline a set of rules or recommendations but rather to encourage individuals to engage with what is right and wrong within each of their own communities. What is right for someone else may be different for me. My own values have shifted across time and place, though close engagement with the land remains a constant. Determining healthy relationships with environments should be a continual process of reflection and reconsideration.

I am very thankful to have grown up in a place where self-sufficiency and a close interaction with the land were a part of life by necessity. A preference for growing, harvesting,

³³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 103.

³⁴ Leopold, *Sketches Here and There*, 224-5.

³⁵ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2016).

and making results in a deeper respect for foods and materials than buying does. My family's deep ties to our home along the Salmon River (for five generations) have helped us to settle into long-standing (if imperfect) mutual relationships with the land. A common element of post-industrial and capitalistic societies is the separation between humans' consumption and waste. We buy food from the grocery store, throw it into the dumpster in white plastic bags, and never see it again. Our waste is flushed into a water system that (for many) is out of sight and out of mind. The humans who *do* end up living in closer proximity to toxic and non-toxic waste are disproportionately low-income, Indigenous, and people of color.³⁶ Ironically, these are often the people that are more aware of their relationality with the land and cannot afford to buy ignorance of where their goods come from.³⁷ When we take the time to learn more about the links among the production, consumption, and decomposition of our life-sustaining resources, humans may fall more naturally into an ethics that values and protects the cycles and systems that nourish us (and that we, in turn, can nourish).

For me, awareness is cultivated through spring afternoons fixing irrigation pipes and summer mornings spent digging up carrots and potatoes. Appreciation is gained through fall mornings following elk herds and winter evenings making furniture. Awareness of our immediacy to the land does not have to require as physical of proximity as this. Awareness can also be learning about where our resources come from, supporting local vendors, and learning more about the systems that support them, whether we live in a high-rise city apartment or a cabin by a creek. In relating my experiences as an example of relationship with place, I acknowledge that there are still problems and that I am always trying to improve this relationship. We all live in a world where it is challenging to live in a way that minimizes contributions to climate change and the environmental and human suffering that results. In response to the expanding United States, American essayist Henry David Thoreau wrote, "it is my own way of living that I complain of as well as yours—and therefore I trust that my remarks will come home to you."³⁸ As a member of a country that has struggled with the weight of

³⁶ Robert Bullard, "Dumping in Dixie," In *American Earth: Environmental Writing since Thoreau*, edited by Bill McKibben, (New York, NY: Library of America, 2008), 730.

³⁷ Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London ; New York: Verso, 2019).

³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, "Huckleberries," in *American Earth: Environmental Writing since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben. (New York, NY: Library of America, 2008), 30.

“progress” since the time it was founded, this remark holds true with me today. Perhaps the best I can do is to carefully consider my way of living and encourage others to do the same.

I could easily say that I approach my art practice with a similar set of ideals to how I engage with my food sources, day-to-day activities, and sense of physical home. However, these sets of ideals (for art, work, home, and life) are not parallel but intertwined with how I understand myself as a person. My art does not reflect my beliefs about life; rather it bends, shapes, and folds into my entire ethics of being. In the installation, my use of cedar supports alludes to where and how the materials originated. Cutting and milling the cedar myself feels to me like an innate act, not an intentional statement on process or a principled decision about materials. I grew up in a log house made of trees from a nearby mountainside and filled with walnut furniture built by my grandfather. Even though I now spend most of my time in a Moscow apartment, I still sleep in a bed constructed from an elm tree that stood outside my childhood window and work at a desk made from some of the last walnut boards my grandfather milled. When I look at boards, I see the years of growth and the place they came from instead of a building resource stacked in bundles at the hardware store. At Slate Creek, the stumps and memories of a standing tree sustain a sense of relationality every time I walk by them or water the new seedlings growing in the open space. My tired muscles and calluses after flipping over a stack of drying boards reminds me of the tree’s influence on me. When I mill boards years before they are to be used and take care to dry them evenly, I hear the echo of the foresight of each relative who planted the trees. When I consider my relationship with place, I think first of these physical moments that position my embodied self as a literal and figurative part of places *in* nature.

November 7, 2016: I was about five years old and had been tagging along literally in my father’s footsteps every evening for weeks. We had already walked many miles in the steep Salmon River canyon that afternoon and the sky was beginning to lose some of its vibrancy. Just when we were about to head home, my dad spotted a deer on the ridge above us. I crouched behind him as we moved slowly up the steep hillside until he was close enough to make a clean shot. By the time we got up to where the deer had fallen, my little legs were done for. I helped as best I could as my dad skillfully split the animal’s skin from neck to pelvis, the daylight quickly slipping away. He worked efficiently and solemnly, carefully setting the heart and liver off to the side. Not a piece of this animal would be wasted. By the time he was done, a chilly darkness had surrounded us. The treacherously steep path down the mountain was made even more precarious in the dark, particularly with the added obstacle of

scattered prickly pear cacti. It was nearing my bedtime after such a long and exciting evening, and my tiny legs were still spent. My dad lifted me up and placed me inside the carcass of the deer. He slung his rifle over his shoulder and pulled the deer like a sled. With liver in one hand and heart in the other, I slid down the mountain in the warm rib cage of a deer.

In the twenty or so years since that experience, I continue to move across those landscapes with a similar intensity, a feeling of life with fluid boundaries. Often I lose track of where body ends and the body of the land begins, whether I am perched quietly at the top of a hill for hours or slowly soaked with river water over the course of a day's float downstream. I believe that embeddedness shapes our ethics, and that considering how we engage with the more-than-human beings and landscapes we call home is not just an ethical decision to benefit the health and stability of ecosystems. Such considerations are themselves a way of living that acknowledges our role as one of many active participants in an interconnected community. By directly engaging with each of our environments, we can recognize our own influence on the land and the agency of the land acting on us. Engagement produces a feeling of belonging that benefits our mind and spirit in addition to our health.

The experiences I have described are not best understood through abstract philosophy alone but through a partnership between abstract and concrete experiences. The lines between mind/body, intellectual/physiological, and representation/reality will always be blurry at best. In my art and my writing, I am deeply committed to exposing how *every* kind of experience is tethered to a sense of self-in-place. When we can learn to see theory-memory-body-self-place as parts of a dynamic assemblage³⁹ perhaps we can more ethically engage with the living systems that are currently threatened by anthropocentric ways of life. *Connected by Water* is supported not by a single pedestal or foundation but by an assemblage of threads that extend from the piece itself, each one small on its own but coming together to balance something much greater than the sum of its parts. One goal of my artwork is to foster recognition of humans as threads—not top-down creators or irrelevant onlookers—in the fabric of our place-based communities. By aesthetically engaging with the never-ending processes of convergence, consumption, composition, destruction, and recuperation that shape living systems, perhaps we can step closer

³⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1987).

to a world where humans better perceive and cultivate balanced relationships with their more-than-human communities.

Connected by Water: The Confluence of Self and Place functions as a personal expression and an invitation to contemplate. The projections of moving water that ripple across the fabric form a language to be read—like these written passages—by the observant, patient, and open-minded. The projected light flickers across thin fabric, floor, and body alike—reminding the gallery visitor that they are a part of the connected spaces in which they dwell. While moving around and through the installation and gazing over the balcony at the fabric expanse, a visitor has the opportunity to reflect on their movement through place. When they step into the sunlight outside the gallery, the visitor continues an exploration of the landscapes they inhabit, with a continued contemplation of their own individual sense of self and place. Once we all step into a world where we perceive and cultivate our interconnected relationality, we can deepen our care for community by entwining self *into* the fabric of place.

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