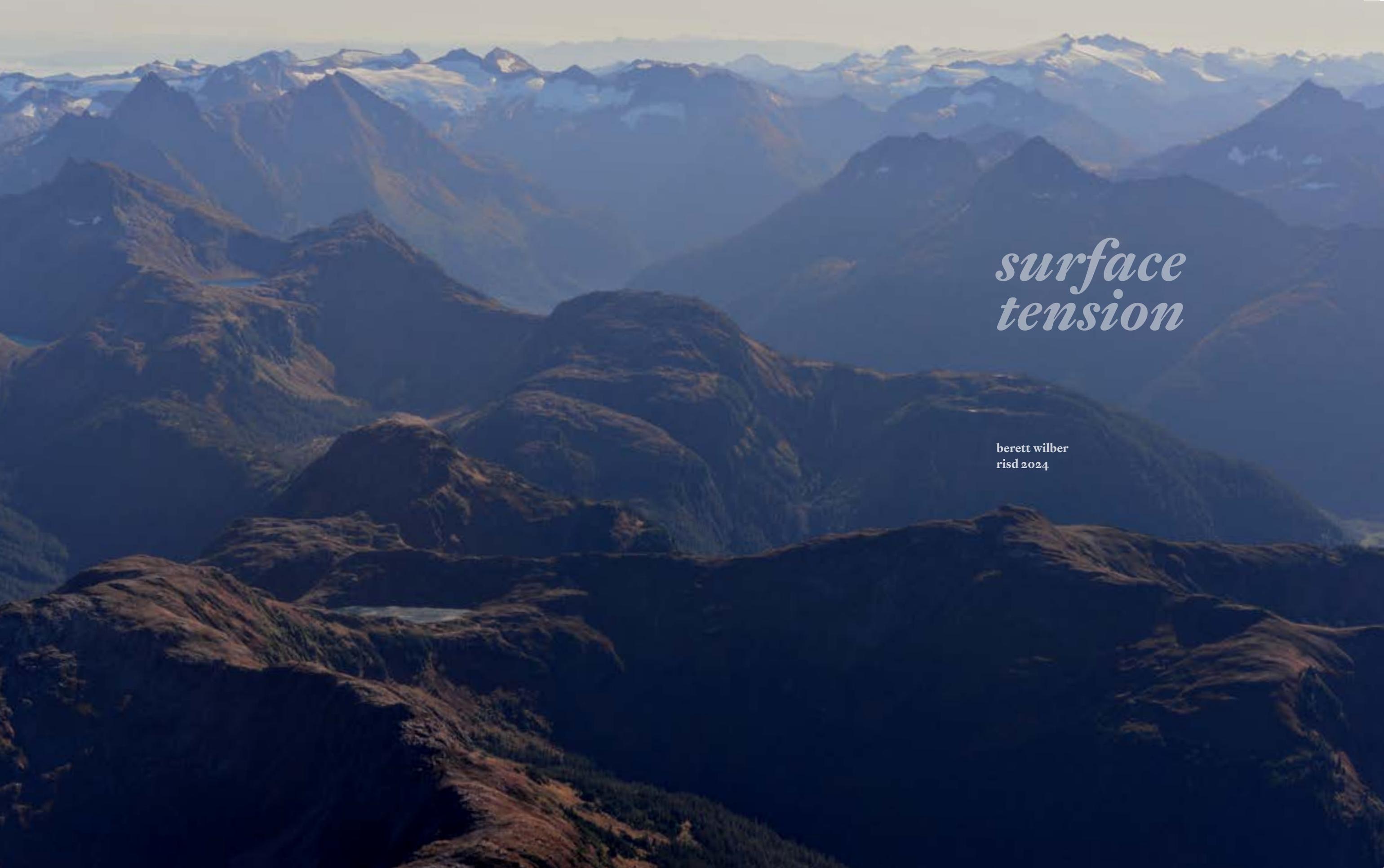


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tension*



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berett wilber
risd 2024



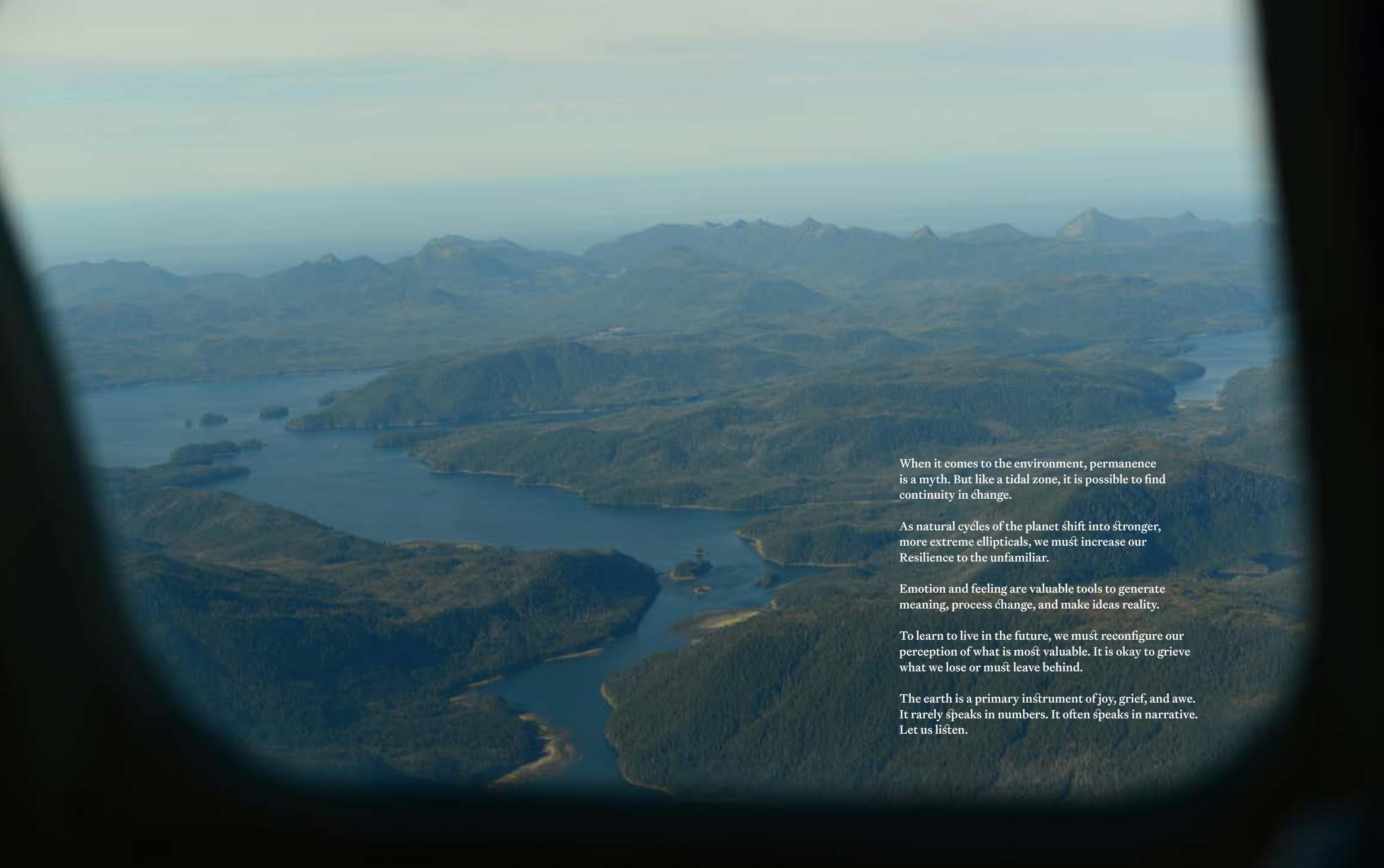
PROJECT

*flying
home*

Flying home
to Sitka, Alaska,
which can only
be reached
by air or sea.

Set of 4 photographs
2024



An aerial photograph of a vast, winding lake system, likely a fjord or a large reservoir, surrounded by dense, dark green forests. The water is a deep blue, and the surrounding land is covered in thick coniferous trees. In the far distance, a range of rugged mountains with some snow-capped peaks stretches across the horizon under a clear, light blue sky. The overall scene is serene and majestic, capturing the beauty of a natural landscape.

When it comes to the environment, permanence is a myth. But like a tidal zone, it is possible to find continuity in change.

As natural cycles of the planet shift into stronger, more extreme ellipticals, we must increase our Resilience to the unfamiliar.

Emotion and feeling are valuable tools to generate meaning, process change, and make ideas reality.

To learn to live in the future, we must reconfigure our perception of what is most valuable. It is okay to grieve what we lose or must leave behind.

The earth is a primary instrument of joy, grief, and awe. It rarely speaks in numbers. It often speaks in narrative. Let us listen.

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sea

land

fish

abstract

Land is the premise upon which all questions of identity, belonging, and consciousness are set.

Our relationship to land is simple and complex. On one hand, in our daily experience there is no daylight between body and land. On the other hand, our relationship to land is intensely mediated through design in the form of tools, ritual, technology, tradition, and law. Language and design are primary mediums through which land is transformed into a material resource and commodity.

Understanding how designed systems craft our understanding of land can help us recognize their limits—and open our eyes to the other worlds all around us.



*It's been too hard living
But I'm afraid to die
'Cause I don't know what's up there
Beyond the sky*

*It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will*

*There been times that I thought
I couldn't last for long
But now, I think I'm able
To carry on*

*It's been a long
A long time coming, but I know
A change gon' come
Oh yes, it will*

—Sam Cooke
A Change is Gonna Come
1964



Walking Astrid the dog this morning, I feel my brain slipping into spring with the rest of the landscape. The grass looks greener, the sky feels bluer. I caught sight of a skunk yesterday on the walk, waddling down toward the river along the old railroad tracks. We walk under a tree and I hear the starlings, mockingbirds, and red wing blackbirds chirping and singing like start-up dial tone.

The Ramones come on the radio in the coffee shop— *I Wanna Be Sedated*. It makes me laugh, catching me as it is in my thoughts about the internet. Growing up on an island with 14 miles of road, there are many common experiences of modern life I still find novel. Riding the train from Boston to New York makes me feel like an actress on stage, moving through the world at a dense core of attention. In contrast, on the internet, binge-watching a new show starring my celebrity crush, I feel my sense of self evaporate entirely.

Or rather, I feel it return when I have to shut my laptop screen and lay in bed in the dark, for a few minutes before I sink into the blissful unconscious.

Markers of spring at home include skunk cabbage: giant leaves and hooded blossoms spiraling out of the ground with that tell-tale scent. The snowdrops are blooming here in Providence, and it's possible a few have poked their heads up out of the leaf litter at home in Alaska. The progression of the season tracks differently depending on your geography—the way the light and the rain wash over the landscape, whether the early morning fills with fog. The seasons are a kind of clock, but the time runs different depending on where you are.

Salmon, too, are a kind of clock. They return each summer, filling Kaasda Heen and the other forest streams with the sweet, gagging smell of death. Along with laying the eggs of a new generation deep in the river gravel, their bodies decay into the banks and roots, fertilizing the entire ecosystem.

At home, it verges on cliché to explain how the landscape, the trees, the bears, and we, too, are fundamentally made of salmon. The world is not seamless. It is so richly and tightly woven that we don't see the stitches, missing the trees for the forest, as it were. In a similar way, my family is made of salmon.

During a graduate seminar at RISD, the phrase “fish wife” came up in conversation—not a real word? some posited. A cute marketing scheme by a tinned fish company to humanize their packaging?

For me, a moment of vertigo: my graduate class discussing—doubting?—the concept of the fishwife? When Dad was out at sea, Mom took care of my sister and I (and Margot and Chandler and other kids from the neighborhood). When he came home, Mom was the one that would process, vacuum pack, and seal the he brought home, ensuring that even in the depths of February, we would



open the freezer and find salmon. Every year, she manages a greenhouse, gardens of flowers, and raised beds of potatoes, carrots, garlic, lettuces, herbs and more. Every summer she makes a giant batch of homemade jam to last the year, with enough to give jars away to our friends and neighbors at Christmas.

We would talk to Dad at night by calling out over the ocean on the VHF radio—the only choice in the era before cell phones, and still a mainstay for marine communication. Mom would coach us: Never ask how many fish Dad caught, don't ask exactly where he is. With the entire fleet listening in to your 6-year-old's questions, you didn't want to broadcast the proprietary details of the family business to the 400 people out there working the same waters. Friends established coding groups, shuffling numbers and locations, keeping a decoder system on a notecard that sat by the radio. You could report a “35 at Cape Omney” over Channel 16, but only your code group friends would understand you had caught 50 king salmon at Snipe Bay.

I went fishing “professionally” for the first time at 11. As the bulk of the ocean prevented us from looking down into the water to easily identify the location of our quarry, we had to do our best to understand and entice them across trans-species communication barriers. Our family's style of fishing—trolling—which is considered one of the most sustainable in the world by international seafood watch-dogs—is a small boat, hook-and-line fishery. We focused on catching king salmon (the biggest, oldest, fattest, and most valuable fish) and coho salmon (our bread-and-butter catch)—one at time.

One hook, one line, one fish. It's a style of fishing that floats to the level of a philosophy, so opposite in its approach compared to industrial commercial fishing, such as the Bering Sea trawl fleet, which drags giant nets indiscriminately through the water. There are fishermen who would take issue with me saying it's a difference of quality vs. quantity, but I stand by it as an inherited bias—our fishery is purposefully inefficient. We interact with each fish at least four times: catch, clean, ice, and unload, each step requiring attention, care, and respect for the body of each individual fish. We might as well name them, Dad often says.

After almost 50 years of fishing, there are jokes and sayings repeated each season, each fishing trip. Meaning clusters and deepens around certain ideas that resonate more and more over time.

“The ocean always wins,” my dad says to me often, particularly after I lose a big fish off the hook as I try to draw it up to the side of the boat get my gaff in it, and then curse myself and the world for my stupidity and clumsiness and the indignity of luck.



Never ask how many fish Dad caught.

Like fishing, swearing is an ancient maritime tradition. Going out to sea, whether you are captain or deckhand, paddler or navigator, teaches a kind of humility I imagine feudal peasants may have felt stepping into cathedrals: seeing God in the stained glass windows. The thing about relationality, as opposed to scalability, is exactly that: the unquantifiable, emotional, and tender; the meaningful and soft. The things we imbue with meaning that grow in value to us slowly over time—summer by summer, fish by fish.

It is a kind of necessary contradiction that spending your time killing and eating a thing gives you a deep respect for its presence, connections, and importance in the world. After all, it has sustained you. A contributor to your survival. Whether it wanted to or not, for your life, it gave its own.

The ocean cannot be controlled or corralled. It cannot be argued or convinced. It cannot be begged, bribed, threatened, or influenced.

It can be navigated. You can struggle through a storm (a memorable one for me was driving a 50 foot longliner through 25 foot swells across the Gulf of Alaska, from Cordova to Sitka, to make some cash, trying to outrace a storm chasing us. Later, the other crew member told me he was most impressed by my eating a pastrami sandwich around midnight in two-story swells), but even so, the ocean is not fighting you. It is impersonal. The ocean does what it does. To survive, you accept that and you make choices to help ride it out.

We had “safety day” each year at the beginning of the season. We would run over the location of all the fire extinguishers on board, and out of nowhere, while still tied up to the dock, Dad would yell, “Mayday, mayday the ship is sinking!” We would race up to the flying bridge to stuff ourselves into giant neoprene survival suits in under two minutes.

My sister alerted the family text thread a few weeks ago—all the training paid off. Not because she was in an emergency—but because she out-raced her fellow crew members getting her suit on during their drill.

The ocean is not for us, but it is inextricably connected to us, from the shores we walk to the surface we navigate with our boats to the food we eat and the money we make and the air we breathe. The tropical rainforest is often described as the planet’s lungs, but ocean algae produces most of Earth’s atmospheric oxygen. This falls mostly falls beneath our daily recognition even as we unconsciously and effortlessly breathe 12-20 times per minute.

The ocean is not for us, but we depend on it. Wake up and have salmon and waffles for breakfast on Sunday. The link couldn’t be clearer.

Histories of the state and nation I was born in often feels incomplete to me because they so rarely include the story of the land that made me. History covers the legal decisions and purchase agreements; it does not talk about slow, incremental growth of the trees in the forest—cathedrals, chandeliers, towers of branches made of hundreds of years of light. The pin-sized orchids blossoming underfoot. How the deer and the bears come out in the early morning to browse at the shoreline, nibbling salty kelp or a few mouthfuls of salmon.

The history of the land, the temperate rainforest, is drenched in a millennia of rain. It is crowned and carpeted and consumed by moss. It is a tangle of creatures and plants so dense and large that it has the highest concentration of biomass—the maximum density of sheer living material—of any environment in the world. Like my dad’s repeated phrases—“Eat an orange, get a good night’s sleep, and if it doesn’t feel better in the morning, we’ll go out to the shop and cut it off”—it’s a place where, for me, a deep deep well of meaning has pooled over time.

When, for an in-class assignment, I had to describe my “perfect day” to a RISD classmate, I talked about going out in the skiff with my family, to an island just across the Sound, where a volcano—known as L’ux to the Tlingit people, dubbed Mt. Edgecumbe by Captain Cook coasting by on his pan-Pacific naming spree—looms over the sea. Spending the day on the beach, letting the dogs race around on the sand. Going for a long walk to see what’s washed up on the shore. Walking the margins of the coastal forest, on the lookout for chanterelles or hedgehog mushrooms, for shells discarded by otters or birds, singing loudly to let the bears know we’re around. Building a fire, roasting a bratwurst over a driftwood fire for lunch. Watching whales on the way home—not trying to get close, not trying to do anything, just killing the engine and waiting to hear their breaths plume up again. The ocean can be so quiet when all motors are off.



**Eat an orange,
get a good
night’s sleep,
and if it
doesn’t feel
better in the
morning, we’ll
go out to the
shop and cut
it off.**



The cultural framework in which I've been raised tells me that the land does not feel. It is a non-sensory object. It does not pursue goals; it does not articulate its thoughts in any way legible to us; ergo, it has no thoughts.



Then why, I wonder, are we using AI to unravel the speech of whales? Several large, national magazine features have been written recently on the phenomenon. It's not that different from the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) program, which has been running since 1980. Imagine if the very first species we encountered on another planet was a whale. It's not that strange; it could just as easily happen in reverse, here on Earth. What if alien life has actually been talking to the whales all along? (In the course of editing this essay, I learned this is actually a major plot point in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, a 1986 movie directed by Leonard Nimoy and featuring the crew of the *USS Enterprise*, which in case you are concerned about plagiarism issues, I have absolutely never seen).

But as we try to crack the whales' language—with which they organize intricate social groups, follow long and ancient migratory patterns, and exchange complex communication—with our most cutting edge technological AI tools, perhaps it's time to dispense with the idea that the world is inanimate.

Are whales really a new communication horizon? After all, we've been talking to dogs for thousands of years. Maybe I'm falling into the charismatic megafauna illusion: That that which we find more compelling is more important, a logical fallacy which structures our lives. How our interest in something determines its value. We wear diamonds; we keep goldfish in bowls. Both shiny, yet have different exchange rates.

But not everything is scalable. Should we be training an ambassador to meet the whales? A translator, perhaps? Is there a delegation preparing for that conversation?

This is exactly the kind of thing for which the person you choose to fill the role matters quite a lot. If this person is the president of ConocoPhillips, for example, or a representative from Greenpeace, or a descendant of Herman Melville, the whales might come away from the conversation with radically different ideas about what the human species is. Or what we might want. Or perhaps just . . . sink all the yachts.

Indeed, before oil, gas, coal, and plutonium, there was ambergris, spermaceti, and whale oil. The bodies of whales were drawn into a pattern of extraction and resource consumption we now take for granted.

It's a reflexive attitude of infinite growth with which we approach the physical world that now reflects how we see and operate in the digital world—unlimited access. We expect constant connection, continuous content, infinity.

But no system lasts: Entropy always has the last laugh. Is it laughing yet? We are surrounded by tiny, ever-changing miracles. It is spring and the daffodils are coming up again. At home, the herring are spawning.

—

The transformation from land to natural resource to extraction is a process of design. If we change how we think about land, its future changes, too. The 1867 Alaska Purchase Treaty, between the United States and Russia, was only 1500 words. Yet it sparked a new paradigm of ownership and control of reality, through the medium of paper and type. What power, in proportion to so few pieces of paper!

If it hadn't happened? After all, if we go by today's geo-politically boundaries, Alaska is less than 50 miles away from Russia, compared to to more than 500 miles away from the mainland U.S. If you factor in the Diomedede islands, one which is 'Russian,' one which is 'American,' there's a separation of less than 3 miles—the same distance Astrid and I walk each morning in the park.

But after all the federal investment and infrastructure of World War Two that sent Alaska's settler population sky-rocketing? The Japanese invasion of the Aleutians, the subsequent internment of both Indigenous and Japanese Alaskans? The rise of market capitalism? Miners and canneries and fishtraps? The violence and the alcohol? The land grabs and the pioneers and the epidemics? The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the rise of oil and gas drilling? Even if Alaska had stayed 'Russia,' it feels like the attitude about it, as a frontier and a source of material, would likely have remained the same. I think about how Siberia is considered. The conception of Alaska as pure 'frontier'—unlimited raw material stretching far beyond what the eye could see—would probably have persisted just as ubiquitously.

The names we use matter. The language we use to make them matters. As humans, Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, language is the special gift we've received from the earth. With that gift comes a relationship: A reciprocity, a responsibility; a reliability, a respect.



We use language as a tool to shape reality. But as all people grow out of specific geographies, so do all languages. Like people, they travel and migrate, sometimes used in concert with violence as a tool of domination to establish themselves as the dominant vehicle of the future.



Fish, for example, do not, strictly speaking, exist in the way we think. The surface of the ocean obscures many glittering, slippery creatures whom we call fish. But the category is taxonomically irrelevant: fish represent a spread of evolution that far exceeds most everyday understandings.

From an evolutionary biology perspective, in order to fully encapsulate the category of fish, we would have to go back to a common ancestor all fish share. But if we did, it would also be . . . our common ancestor, along with birds, reptiles, and every other mammal. In fact, some fish are taxonomically closer to us than they are to each other. For example, we are more closely related to the salmon than the

salmon is to the shark. But because they live beneath the surface of the water, we lump most of them together in a single category. We call them fish—but what we refer to is a group of radically variable creatures with different lifestyles, shapes, natural histories, environments, and adaptations.

The male lingcod is a ferocious father, guaranteeing his offspring's survival by carefully guarding his nest. The brighter a salmon's spawning colors, the more appealing they are as a partner: the intensity of their coloration is a consequence of consuming more nutrients, increasing their fitness. Octopus are gaining so much cultural capital as thinkers and tool users — as individuals, essentially—that a movement is growing not to eat them. Halibut are born swimming vertically like most fish, but within their first year, one of their eyes migrates to the far side of their head so the fish can move through the water flying-carpet style, their white bellies concealed flat against the sea floor. Spot shrimp can live up to 11 years, the average lifespan of a golden retriever. The hagfish can, in a finger snap, produce more than five gallons of slime so impenetrable that they cannot be grasped by potential predators.

King salmon swim thousands of miles upstream to return to the places they were born, navigating with scent and the planet's magnetic field to escape a gauntlet of predators in order to bury coral-colored eggs in the gravel. They dig nests with their tails, carving into stream beds to make a well-shaped redd, then cover their fertilized eggs with a layer of gravel heavy enough to protect it from the current as well as seagulls, minks, arctic char, or whatever else

might find them tasty. A good nest protects the eggs; a bad one forecloses a fish's one chance at reproduction. In their work to give their offspring the best possible shot, salmon use their bodies to carve the banks and the channels of the river, shifting, reinforcing, and adjusting the flow of the river itself. To me, this is clearly a matter of design—by fish.

And that's just one fish, in one ecosystem. While I personally find the king salmon an endless well of meaning, it is not unique in its role as a designer. Every environment, from the sea ice to the tundra, the smallest town to the biggest city, is in an ongoing exchange between all the creatures who live there, human and non-human, constantly imagining, making, and remaking. The connections salmon have to the land are no less meaningful than the connections and activities of the staghorn beetle, the sphagnum mosses, the echidna or the dugong. We often just care about different things.

As a consequence, we constantly underestimate the intelligence and power of the non-human world. We take for granted that the world was made for us, though we belong to it—and every day, we are made every day in concert.

King salmon have stopped returning to the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers in reliable numbers. In the meantime, grassroots organizations are setting up "fish drives" in Southeast Alaska and Bristol Bay to send salmon to the Yukon River villages for winter food, since they haven't been able to fish in over four years. The fish flew in on planes powered by combustion engines—which, it turns out, are so effective that 150 years after their invention, we are dealing with a serious problem of mission creep: we too, are being slowly combusted. The system is working as it was designed—by intention and neglect.

I am preparing for a future in which design is a critical tool for adaptive survival, as it has been since time immemorial. Design allows us to make ideas a reality. It allows us to project our intentions into tools, expanding our power and its consequences. The stone axe and the nuclear bomb, the halibut hook and the VR headset—these are all tools of design intended to help us shape, navigate, and change the world around us. The history of design is wedded to the history of power. From the impene-trability of legal language to the mapping of homesteads across the American West, from Ernst Neufert's mythic norm of the Bauhaus man to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's model for land as pedagogy, design is the medium through which we create and sharing and worldviews.



Our underpinning values are shaped by the circumstances into which we are born. The place, the land itself, is not a backdrop to that process, but the entire stage—and the bedrock on which it sits. But what we make of it, the meaning we derive from the place where we live, is often based on the ideas we've inherited about what land *is*. Was it made for "improvement"? Was it a frontier that beckoned the rugged individual to conquer it? A source of material goods, from beaver fur to spermaceti to graphite for electric car batteries? Is it Mother Nature? A lover? A provider?



These ideas get passed down through laws, cultural, and family norms embedded in designed artifacts whose range and diversity continues to grow: treaties and checks, compasses and sextants, maps and charts, borders and walls, statute books, time zones, parking meters, data servers, and more. Often, the assumptions about ownership contained in these artifacts are enforced and protected through violence, or its threat.

The way that we see the land reflects how we construct our own sense of identity, and where we hope it will lead us. What do we need to live a good life? What do we need to feel safe, secure, satisfied? Where will we live? What must we see? What borders must we cross? The salmon carve out their nests in the river. What are we carving out and why? What makes it feel okay to be alive in the world we have? Is it important that I work hard every day at my desk, moving shapes around the screen? Is it important that I ride the boat out to the island, cut the engine to listen to the humpbacks across the Sound?

Our ideas about land mutate and transfer to things we think of as discrete environments. The internet, for example, is a place defined and navigated not by geography but through the exchange of identity profiles, where large corporations buy and sell access to our attention, habits, and emotions. It has undergone immense change in the last 25 years, a shifting landscape of power, money, language, and form. Even the internet relies on land, from the electric currents at our touch to the minerals they flow through. My life's archive of photographs lives in the (a?) cloud. When the birds sing in Providence, I hear dial-up tones.

We are all inextricably rooted in the materiality of the world around us, no different from the Sitka spruce or the yellow cedar. We project different values on the surface of it, depending on the context: at home, you are a doctor. Here, you are a refugee.

What is a fish? It feeds me, my family, the roots which hold the trails on which I run. As one of the respondents to a fish questionnaire put it, a fish is a creature with plans of its own.

The sooner we recognize the value and intelligence of the world around us, instead of being blinded by the designs we've inherited, the smarter and safer we will be. This is a question not of ego, but survival. As the seasons change, I feel a great sense of need to prepare for what is next, even though I have no idea what it will be.

We are changing rapidly and so is the earth. How can you ask people to recognize the humanity in the non-human world when calling it "humanity" by nature limits the meaning you're trying to identify?

It is okay to find the world joyous and powerful and full of pain. It is okay to find the world cold and hard and sad. Perhaps our ability to feel joy is commensurate with our ability to feel pain. There is power in being a witness to both.

I realized recently that I think of the ocean as a living thing. Not intellectually—I've been taught that being "alive" means neurons firing in brain matter, a metabolism. But as I think about survival, how to stay in the world of perceiving instead of the unfeelingness of death, I think perhaps I must reimagine what it means to be alive.

After all, the ocean is mercurial, unpredictable, full of mystery, and overwhelmingly beautiful. It is alluring, dangerous, and deadly. No algorithm can predict it or protect from it. Its capacity for change exceeds our imagination.

It makes more sense, to treat it as a living thing—to check back in on it. To make sure the weather hasn't picked up. To make real-time observations. To wade out into the water and float, and let it hold every inch of your body with the same cool, quiet pressure. It absorbs you, it holds you, it supports you and then effortlessly releases you, stumbling back to shore gasping, howling with cold, feet raw, drops sparkling like diamond as the dog shakes and sends the sea flying up into the air.



PHOTO
ESSAY

background

*I was born and raised in a commercial
salmon fishing family in Southeast Alaska.*





ALEXA K

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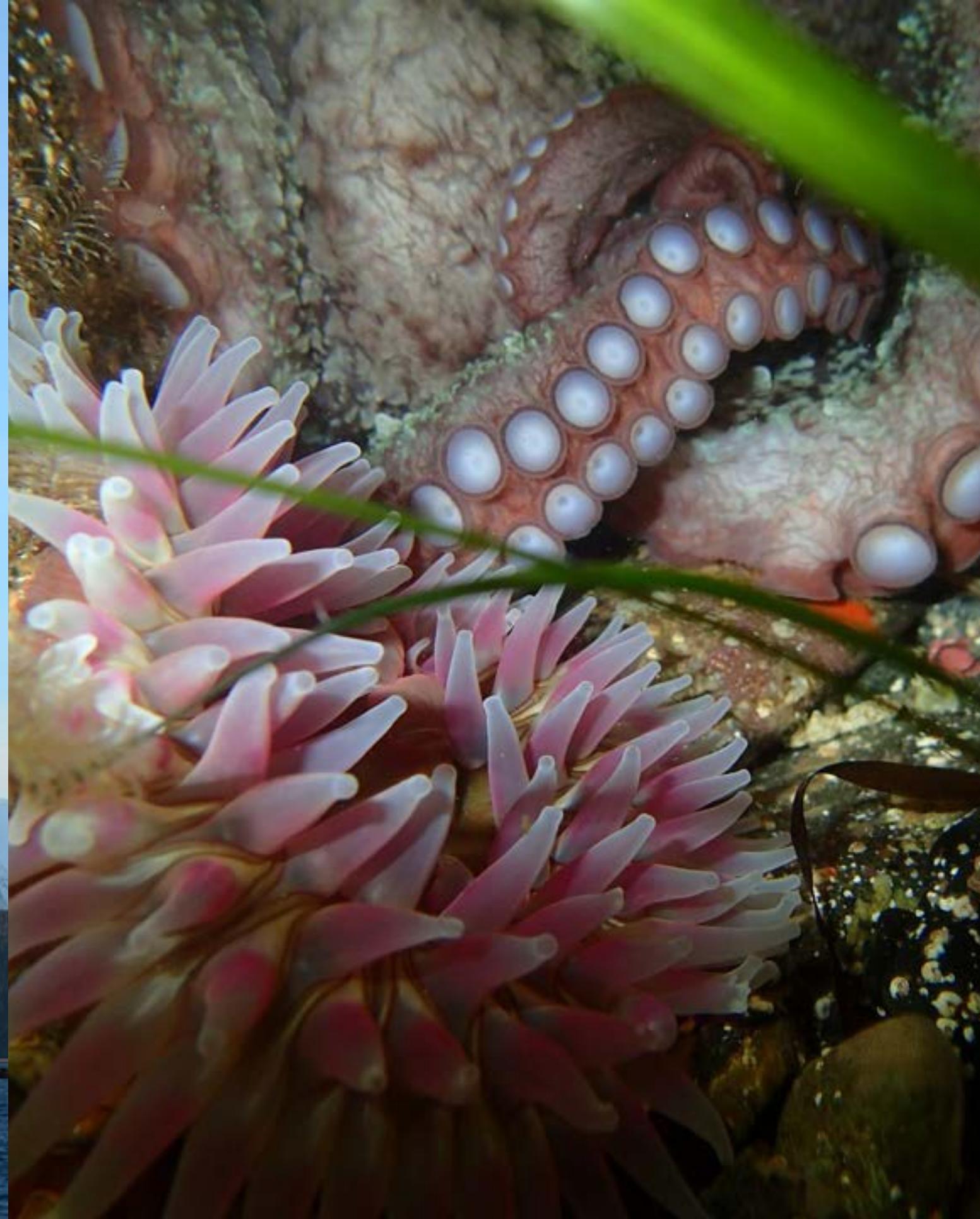






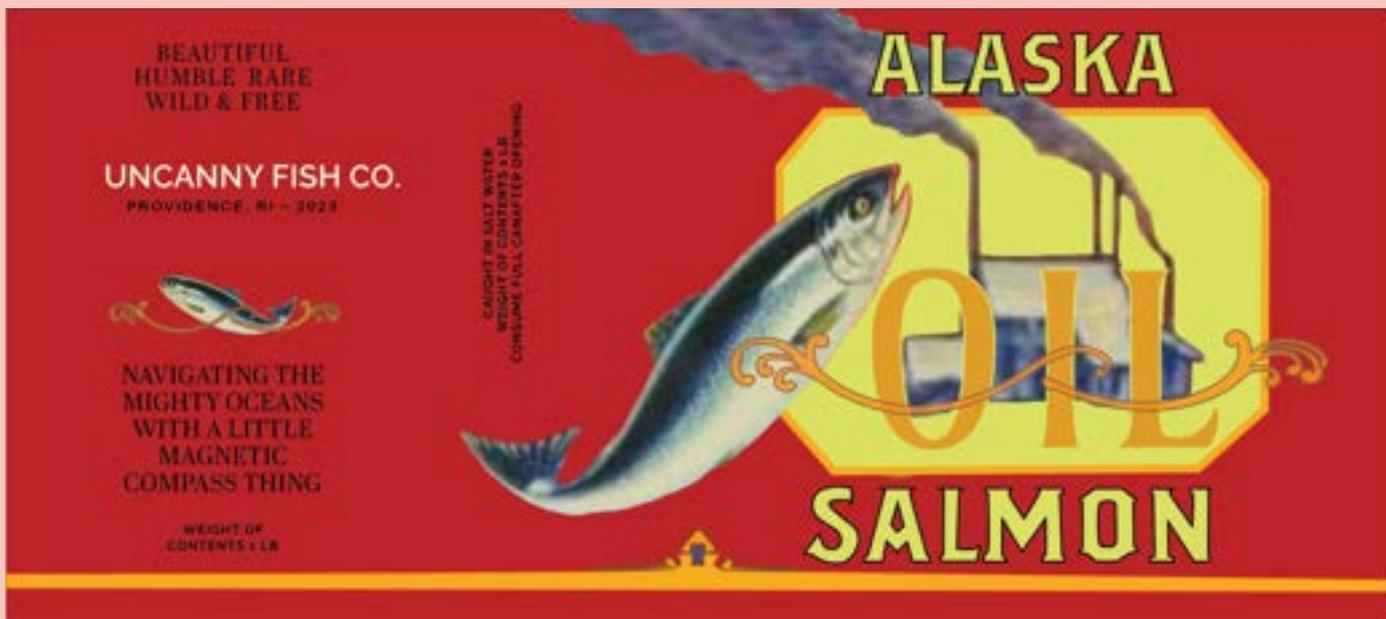






sea





PROJECT

uncanny fish co.
symbol + material = commodity



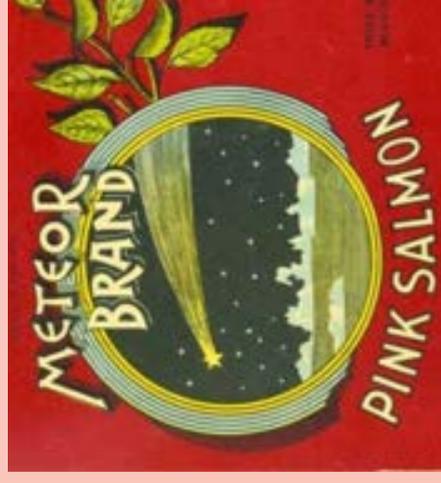
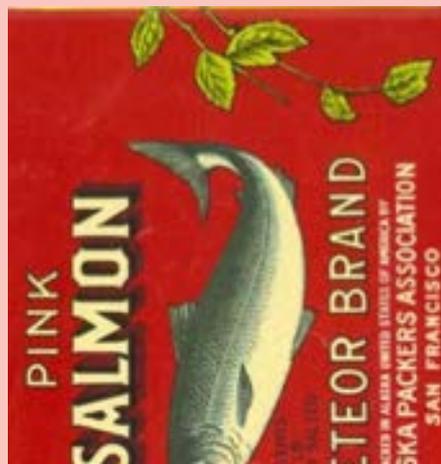
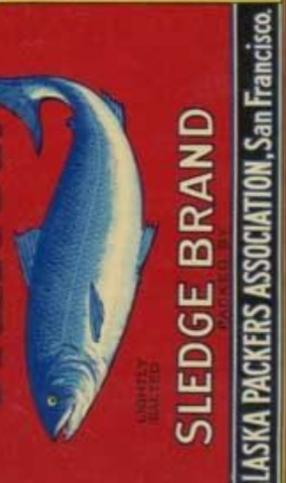
about

uncanny fish co. updates canned salmon labels for contemporary life. The project uses legacy cannery labels as a form to explore how Alaska's canning industry made salmon a global commodity and a political rallying point for statehood.

Canneries marketed their cans of salmon with representations of Alaska to spur sales and the imaginations of a new global market. It's remarkable how the narratives they created to sell their products still represent how the outside world sees Alaska.

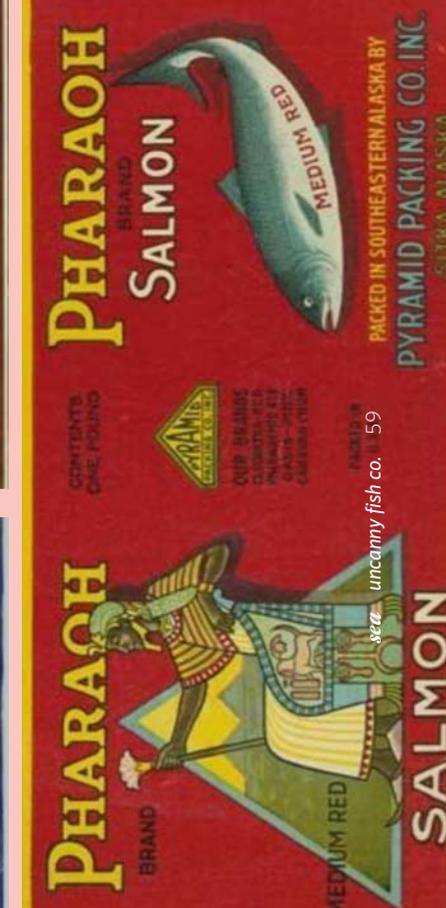
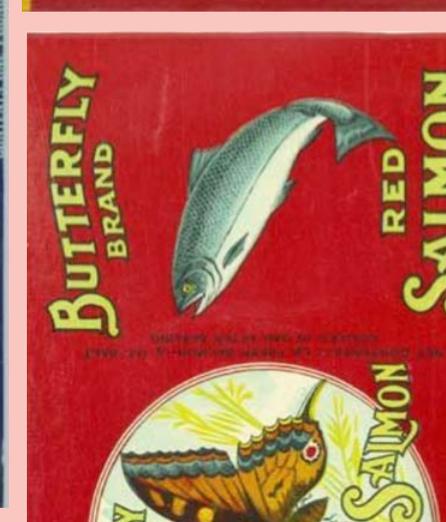
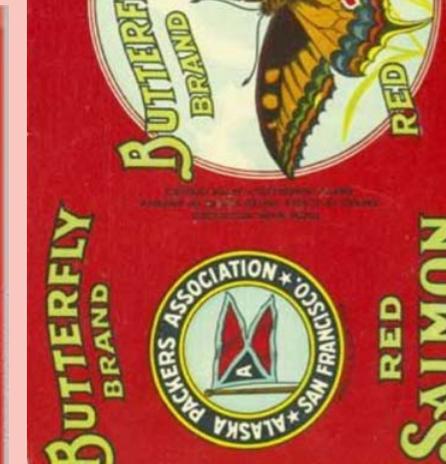
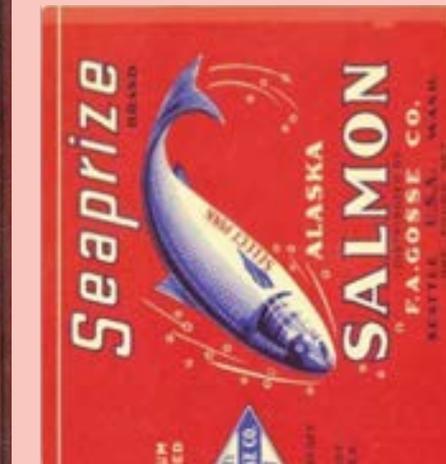
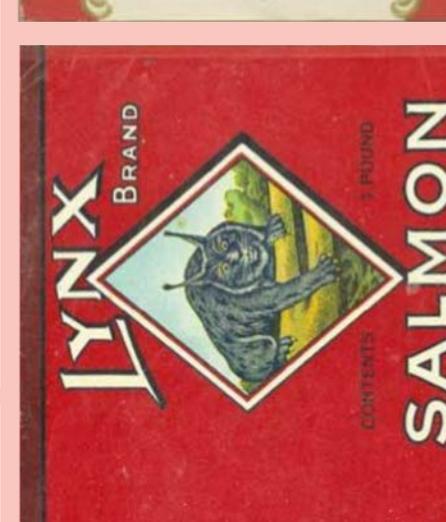
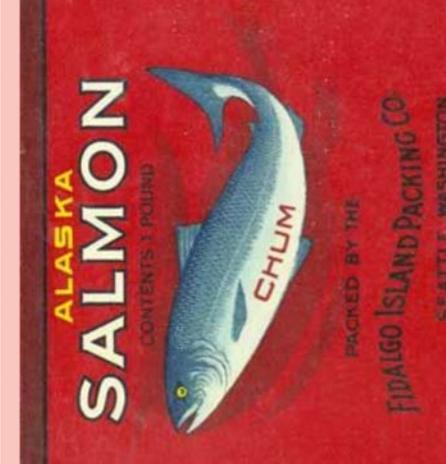
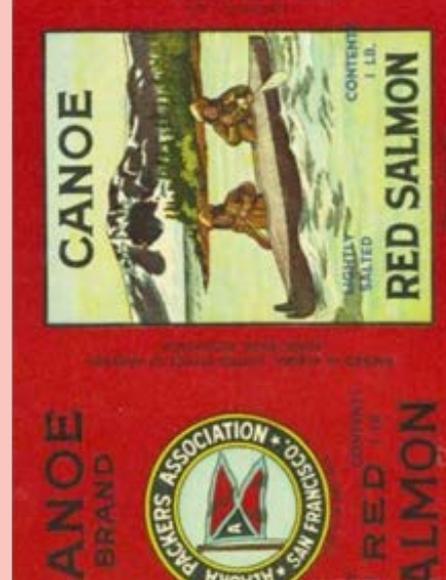
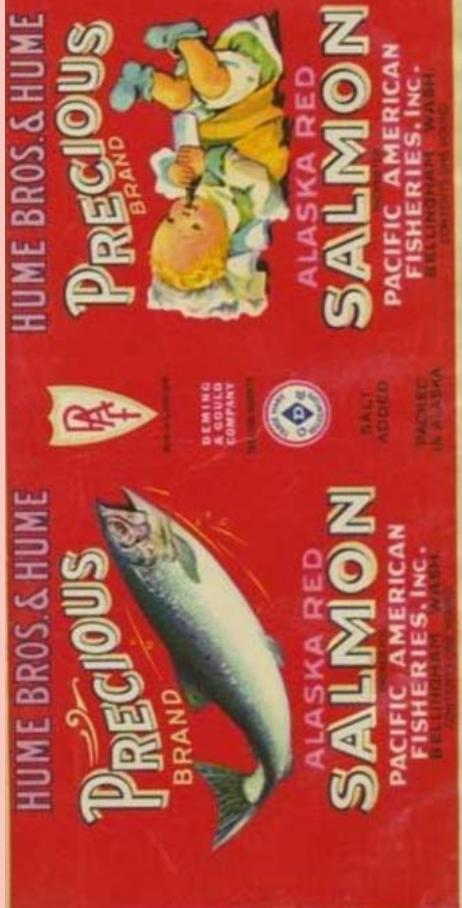
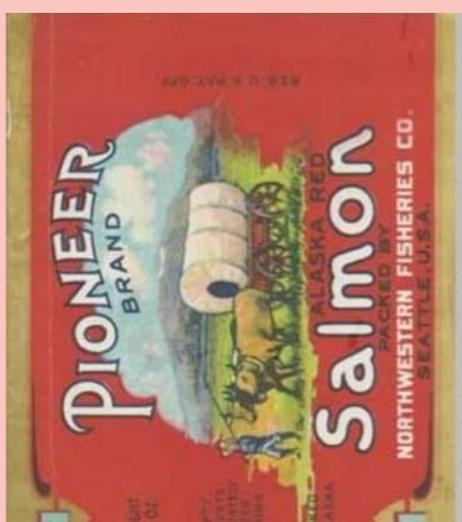
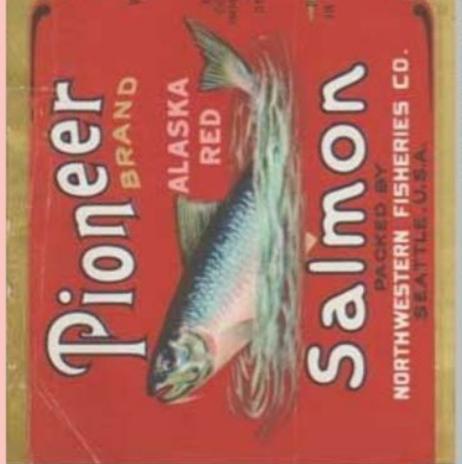
Like the originals, the new can labels are based on modern-day assumptions and impressions outsiders have about Alaska. Drawing on the forms and colors of salmon can labels from Alaska's 1880-1930 canning boom, this set of contemporary labels pairs modern assumptions about Alaska with the history of how salmon pushed it to statehood.

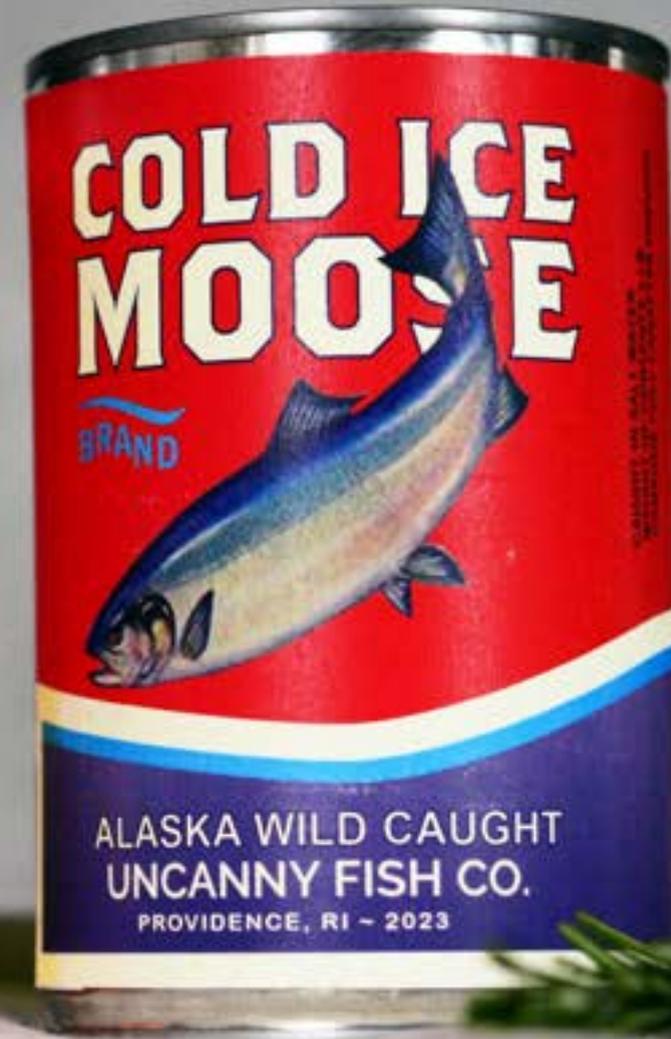
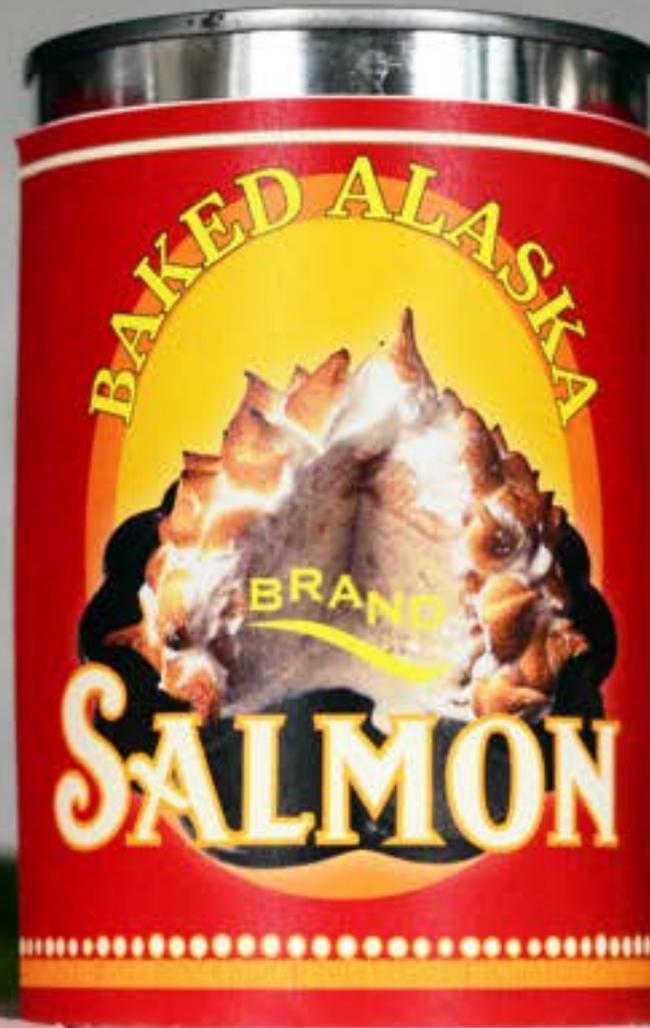
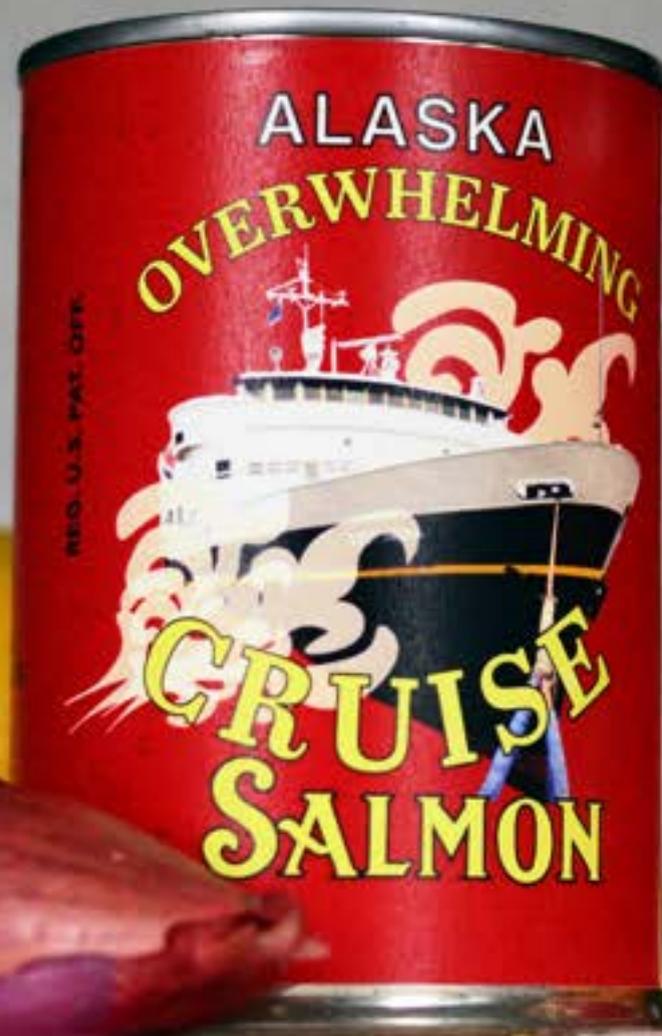
Labels printed on Mohawk Warm White Bristol Cover paper, set of 16.
 9.625 x 4 inches
 2023



source

These original labels, from the Alaska State Library Historical Collection, were used to sell canned salmon from Alaska to a new global market in the 1880–1940s. Most marketed a specific kind of narrative about Alaska to the world—a distant, rugged ‘frontier,’ pristine and wild, ripe for military might and colonial settlement.





process

1. Like legacy salmon labels, themes for these contemporary cans are based on outside impressions of Alaska, updated for 2024. Members of the RISD graphic design community were emailed a one question impressions assessment: Please list 3-5 things (e.g, bears, darkness, Sarah Palin) based on your first impressions to a single statement:

When I think Alaska, I think...

2. Anonymous responses were mixed, matched, and translated into themes for new labels, while maintaining the color, forms, and typefaces reminiscent of the originals.

3. Historical details about the relationship between canned salmon and statehood are woven throughout the set in places where production or advertising text might otherwise be.





history

Most original can labels include references to two geographic locations: Alaska, where the fish was caught, but also often San Francisco or Seattle, since the vast majority Alaska's canning industry was controlled by Lower 48 corporations. And canned salmon was king—it was the largest industry in Alaska, producing over 80% of the territory's tax revenue at the time.

Absentee control of such a major industry was a critical domino in driving Alaska's push for statehood. Because of the abundant supply, companies packaged without regard to demand. Salmon runs began to wane under the industrial of exploitation of the resource. But Alaskans who relied on salmon had little recourse against a global market.

Since Alaska was still a territory, it had no state government: the only way to exert any kind of local control over outside corporations was through federal action. But between 1906 and 1923, though 42 pieces of federal legislation to address Alaska's fisheries were introduced in Congress, and despite plenty of in depth hearing and clear historical evidence from the collapses of salmon runs in Europe and the Atlantic Seaboard, not a single piece of legislation passed—largely because of the opposition by the canned salmon industry.

The solution? Vic Fischer, the last surviving delegate to the 1955–56 Alaska Constitutional Convention, who died in 2023 put it, canneries and fish traps were “the principal public policy issue that was driving the fight for statehood.”

It has been more than 60 years since statehood, and conflicts between people over resources, and power remain. As salmon runs boom and bust across Alaska in the climate change era, the cannery era still has important lessons about who gets the power to decide what's most valuable about a specific environment, fish, or resource.

SUICIDE RATE
BRAND



NET CONTENTS
1 LB. SALMON
1/4 OZ. SALT

COOKED IN CAN
AFTER SEALING

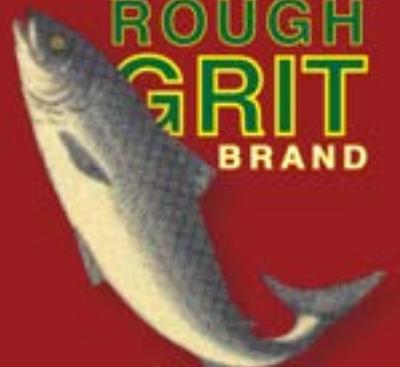


THE SEAL OF QUALITY

IF DESIRED HOT
PLACE CAN IN
BOILING WATER
FOR 20 MINUTES
BEFORE OPENING

SUICIDE RATE
SALMON
ALASKA

ROUGH GRIT
BRAND



ALASKA
SALMON

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

"FISH TRAPS WERE THE PRINCIPAL, TRULY THE PRINCIPAL PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE, THAT WAS DRIVING THE FIGHT FOR STATEHOOD."
— VIC FISCHER, LAST LIVING DELEGATE OF ALASKA'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, 1955-6

PACKAGED BY
UNCANNY FISH CO.,
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

CANNED WITH TIN COOKED WITH SALT

PUFFY JACKET
COOKED IN SALT WATER
Salmon



ALASKA BRAND
UNCANNY SALMON CO.
PROVIDENCE, RI - 2023

NET CONTENTS
1 LB. SALMON
1/4 OZ. SALT

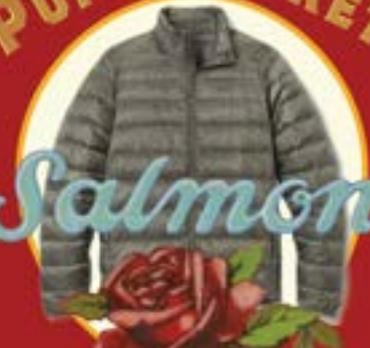
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

TRAPS WERE OWNED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY BY COMPANIES HEADQUARTERED OUTSIDE OF ALASKA. THE TRAPS WERE ...

"LOOKED UPON BY MOST ALASKANS AS THE DIPPER WITH WHICH THE LARGE ABSENTEE OWNER APPEARED TO SKIM WITH RELATIVE EASE THE CREAM OF ONE OF THE REGION'S MOST VALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCES, AND THEN CARRIED AWAY TO THE OUTSIDE THE FULLEST PART OF THE WEALTH SO GARNERED."
— ROGERS 1998

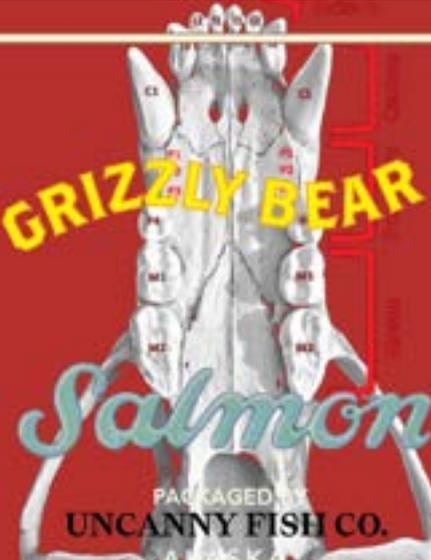
IF DESIRED HOT
PLACE CAN IN
BOILING WATER

PUFFY JACKET
Salmon



UNCANNY SALMON CO.
PROVIDENCE, RI - 2023

GRIZZLY BEAR
Salmon



ALASKA

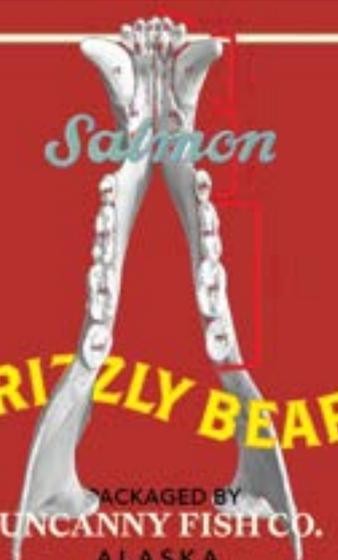
PACKAGED BY
UNCANNY FISH CO.
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

"FIERCE COMPETITION, UNRESTRAINED BY ADEQUATE LAWS, HAS BEEN AND IS NOW OPERATING TO FORCE PACKERS, WHO CAN NOT HELP BUT REALIZE THE SUICIDAL POLICY OF SUCH A COURSE, INTO PRACTICES WHICH THEY MUST KNOW WILL SURELY BE FATAL TO THE PERMANENCE OF THEIR INTERESTS."
KUTCHIN, 1898



PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

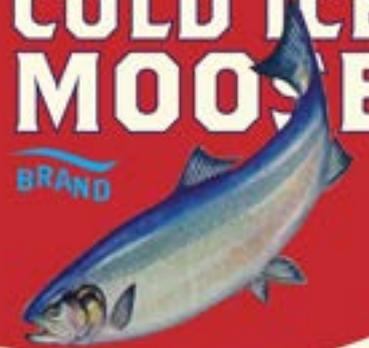
GRIZZLY BEAR
Salmon



ALASKA

PACKAGED BY
UNCANNY FISH CO.
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

COLD ICE MOOSE
BRAND

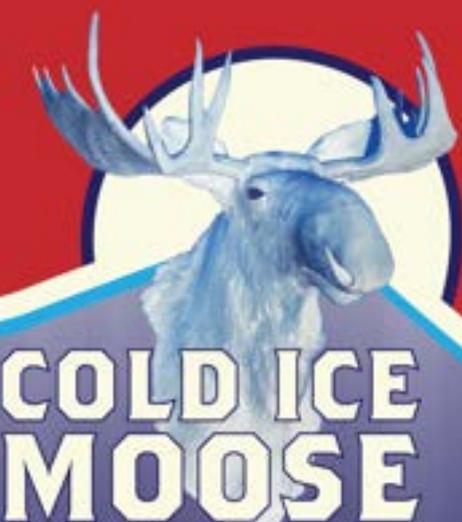


ALASKA WILD CAUGHT
UNCANNY FISH CO.
PROVIDENCE, RI - 2023

CAUGHT IN SALT WATER
NET WEIGHT OF CONTENTS 1 LB.
CONSUME FULL CANNETTER OPENING

UFCO

CAUGHT
CLEANED
CANNED
COOKED



COLD ICE MOOSE

RUSSIAN SALMON
BRAND
SUBMARINE



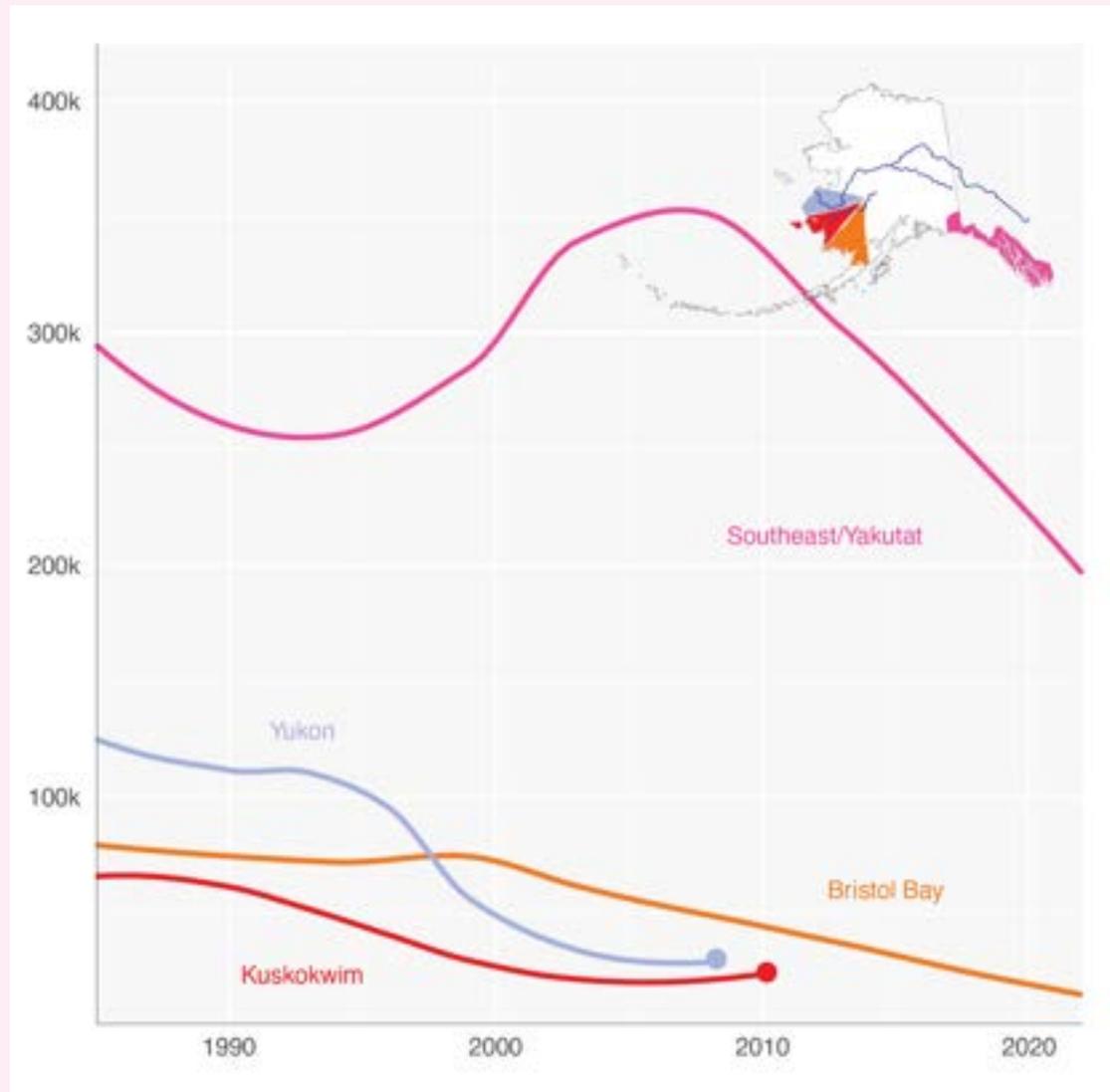
ALASKA
SUBMARINE SALMON

CAUGHT IN SALT WATER

BEGINNING WITH THE CHINESE, THEN THE JAPANESE, AND FINALLY THE FILIPINOS, THE LION'S SHARE OF CLEANING, BUTCHERING, FILLING, AND COOKING IN WESTERN U.S. SALMON CANNERIES WAS DONE BY ASIAN IMMIGRANTS, SEASONALLY EMPLOYED BY CANNERY OPERATORS SEASONALLY AS A CHEAP LABOR FORCE.

COOKED IN SALT WATER
UNCANNY FISH CO.
PROVIDENCE, RI 2023

WEIGHT OF CONTENTS 1 LB.
CONSUME FULL CAN AFTER OPENING



fewer fish

This chart shows significant declines in catches of king salmon in four key fishing regions of Alaska since 1985. It was made using public landing data submitted by fishermen to the Alaska Department Fish and Game between 1985 and 2022.

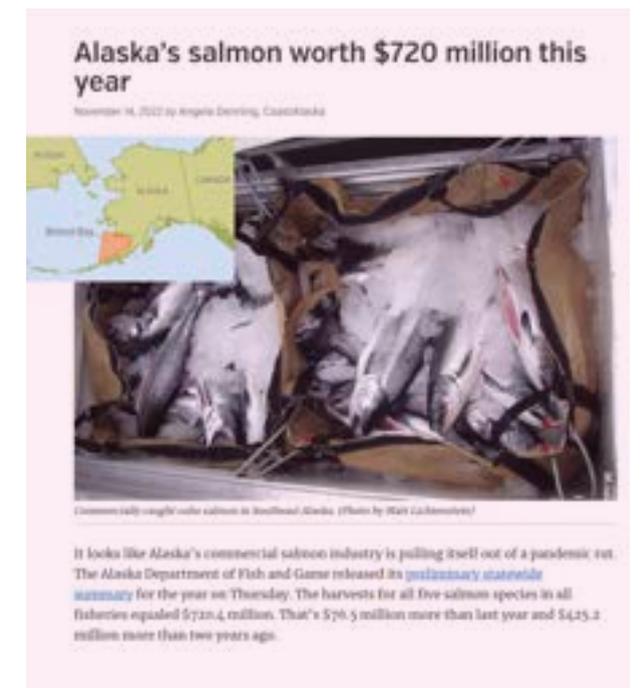
PROJECT *big fish trouble*

king salmon & climate change in 2023

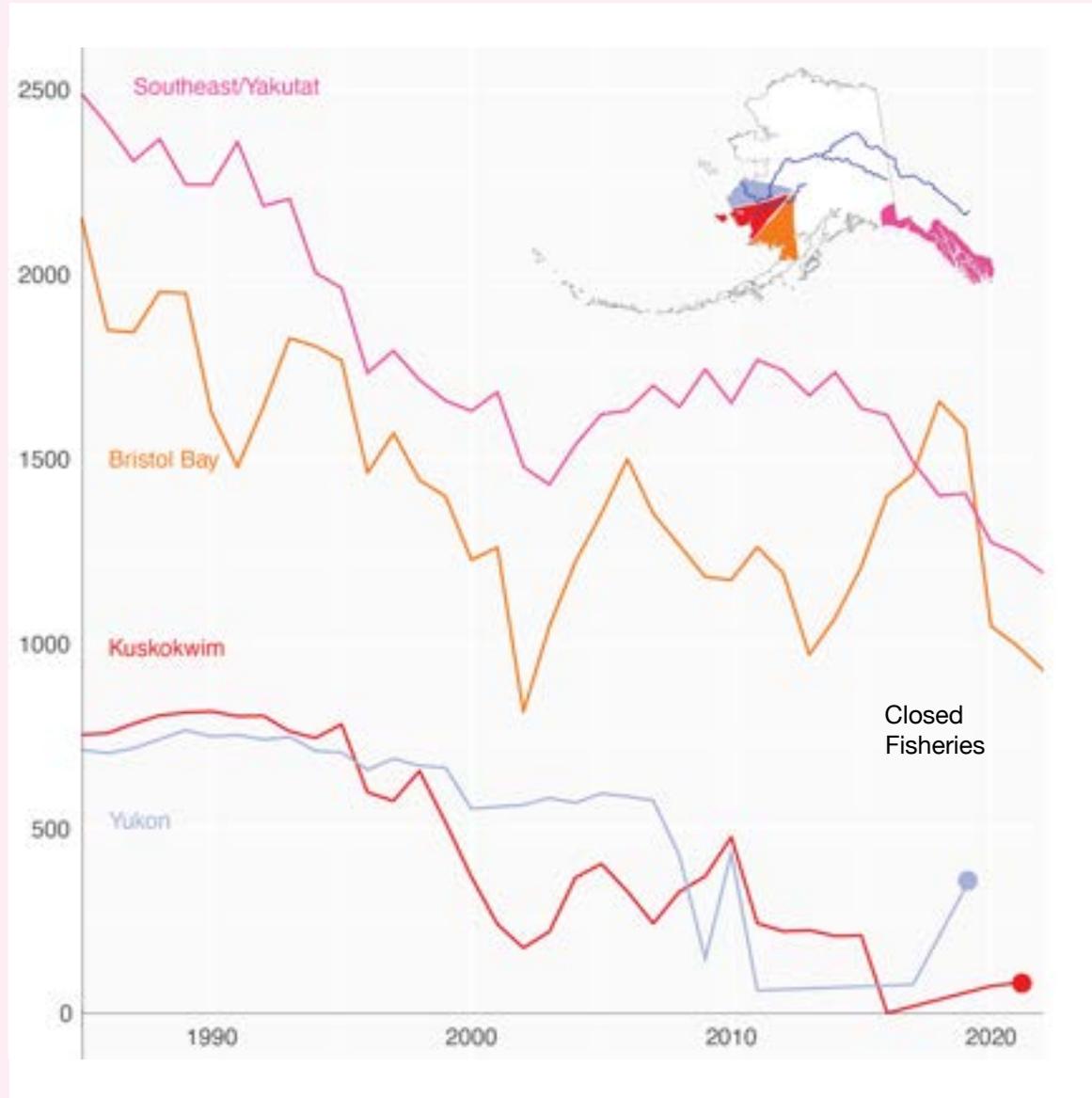
Alarm bells should be ringing in Alaska's famous king salmon fishery. King (or chinook) salmon may be one of North America's most iconic fish, growing over 5 feet long and more than 100 pounds, but the likelihood that one will appear on your plate in the future is shrinking—along with the livelihoods of the people who catch them.

Rates of commercial king salmon harvest in Alaska have plummeted in the four regions which historically have been the most productive for king salmon: Southeast/Yakutat, Bristol Bay, Yukon, and Kuskokwim.

Southeast/Yakutat's hook and line troll fishery is the largest targeted fishery for king salmon in the state, but the number of king salmon caught annually has fallen by more than 100,000 fish in the last ten years. Bristol Bay has seen a steady decline of king salmon since 2000, despite harvesting record quantities of sockeye salmon within that same time. For the Yukon and Kuskokwim, which traditionally have welcomed king salmon migrating thousands of miles upriver each year, commercial harvest has been off the table. Commercial salmon fishing on the Yukon was closed in 2010 by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to protect the stock. On the Kuskokwim, the last remaining local processor closed in 2016, leaving options for fishing extremely limited—so limited that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game won't disclose harvest data to maintain confidentiality.



News coverage on Alaska's 2022 salmon season shows a commercial salmon boom in Bristol Bay,



fewer fishermen

This chart shows the number of commercial salmon fishing permit holders declining in four key fishing regions in Alaska. The dots represent shut downs of the commercial fishery by the state. This chart was made using public landing data submitted by fishermen to the Alaska Department Fish and Game between 1985 and 2022.

So why are king salmon stocks failing? According to Peter Westley, University of Alaska Fairbanks Professor of Fisheries and Ocean Science, there are a series of challenges—many exacerbated by a changing climate. Rising rates of cardiac parasites, heat stress from warming waters, and increased predation of baby salmon fry by predators (such as the northern pike) make life hard for juvenile king salmon in freshwater. But because they are anadromous, kings also face challenges at sea, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says it is mostly “climate-related changes in the marine environment” driving the rise of ocean mortality for king salmon.

So though *Food & Wine* may say king salmon is “the best salmon money can buy,” the supply has become significantly more limited since 2010. And that means fishermen are feeling the pinch. Permit data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game shows that the number of king salmon fishing permits in each of these four regions has also fallen significantly.

And permit holders matters. Economists at Alaska’s Institute of Social and Economic Research proved in a 2021 paper that whether a permit holder is local or not is actually the most significant factor in determining a fisheries’ economic spillover benefits.

Because permit ownership is directly linked to the health of the economies of coastal communities, dwindling numbers also reduce the amount of value fish provide to local economies. And given the remote nature of the places where wild salmon fisheries are based, other career options can be limited.

For king salmon, their fishermen, and their families and communities, the future offers more questions than fish.



News coverage on Alaska's 2022 salmon season show a subsistence fishing crisis on the Yukon river.



INTERVIEW

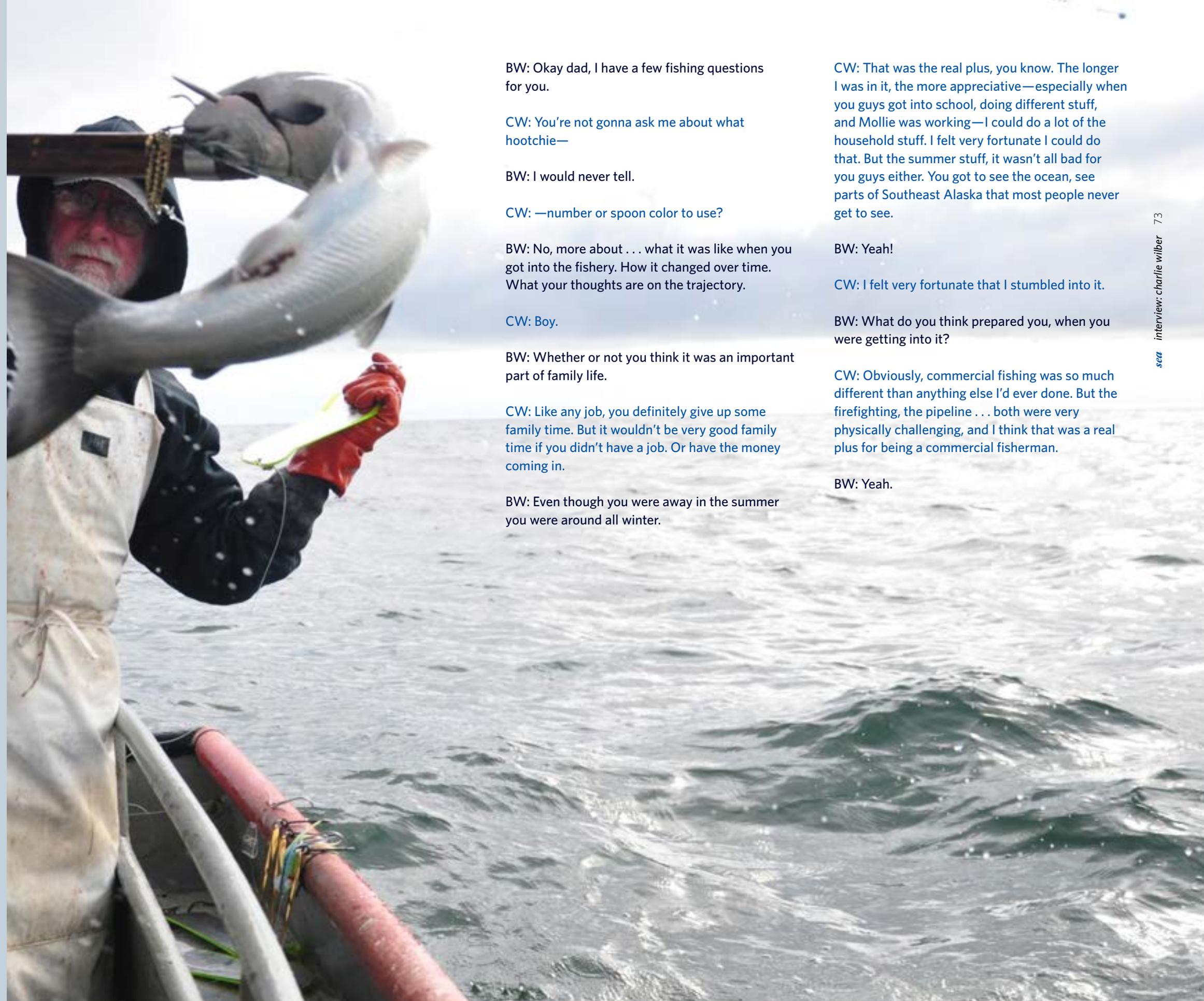
Charlie Wilber

Charlie Wilber fished commercially for salmon, halibut, and black cod in the waters around Southeast Alaska for around 50 years.

Raised in Nebraska he received a BA in Liberal Arts from the University of Montana-Missoula in 1970, minoring in "draft avoidance, skiing, and fly fishing" and proving "C's get degrees."

His previous work experience includes parachuting out of planes to put out wildfires, hauling roofing tar up ladders in the winter, laying railroad tracks in the mountains by hand, building the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and being a tugboat and Alta ski lodge cook.

He retired from fishing in 2022.
He is my dad.



BW: Okay dad, I have a few fishing questions for you.

CW: You're not gonna ask me about what hootchie—

BW: I would never tell.

CW: —number or spoon color to use?

BW: No, more about . . . what it was like when you got into the fishery. How it changed over time. What your thoughts are on the trajectory.

CW: Boy.

BW: Whether or not you think it was an important part of family life.

CW: Like any job, you definitely give up some family time. But it wouldn't be very good family time if you didn't have a job. Or have the money coming in.

BW: Even though you were away in the summer you were around all winter.

CW: That was the real plus, you know. The longer I was in it, the more appreciative—especially when you guys got into school, doing different stuff, and Mollie was working—I could do a lot of the household stuff. I felt very fortunate I could do that. But the summer stuff, it wasn't all bad for you guys either. You got to see the ocean, see parts of Southeast Alaska that most people never get to see.

BW: Yeah!

CW: I felt very fortunate that I stumbled into it.

BW: What do you think prepared you, when you were getting into it?

CW: Obviously, commercial fishing was so much different than anything else I'd ever done. But the firefighting, the pipeline . . . both were very physically challenging, and I think that was a real plus for being a commercial fisherman.

BW: Yeah.

CW: Well, you know. The hours were long and it could either be really boring or it could be pretty exciting. Sometimes too exciting.

BW: Yeah, I remember having my . . . remember when I had my elbows in the pans of ice water on that trip when we really got in the cohos?

CW: Yeah, yeah, that was a good one. Yeah, you're continually challenged. So, you know, being able to handle some of those challenges . . . not handle, but being able to accept some of those challenges was a part of it. It's a good question. There's a lot to the equation. The whole foundation of it was fishing, where we lived and what part of the world we were in. Having an income to support the family. Mollie, as time has gone on, Mollie has definitely surpassed what I was doing but, in the beginning, having an income while she was dealing with kids. . . Yeah, I remember coming home one time from a fishing trip, and she had you and Adrie, Chandler and Margot, and Emily and Ian. And that convinced me I needed to build an addition onto the house. I had had numerous Lego foot injuries, walking on sharp pieces of plastic that were always strewn all over the place. I don't know, Berett, that's a good question.

BW: No, that's a good answer!

CW: But . . . being able to accept the challenges.

BW: Why did you pick trolling instead of say, gillnetting or seining, or whatever?

CW: Well, by a weird quirk of fate mostly. My last season smokejumping I was definitely ready to do something else. I was about 30, I was ready to do whatever, but I didn't really have a good option. I wasn't nearly as good a student as you are, and the academic capabilities were not gonna make me a living.

BW: Well, remains to be seen for me either, Dad.

CW: I had a friend of a friend that I knew a little bit. He and his wife were living in Haines and he had bought a little sailboat and went trolling. And he said, Well, why don't you stop by on your way down from Fairbanks? And so I did, I stopped down there for, I don't know, a week or two, a couple weeks. We went hand-trolling at Homeshore, and I thought, you know this—I loved it. You know, being . . . just the scenery and everything. Actually, he wasn't much of a fisherman at all, but I didn't realize that. I just thought, this is great! So I made up my mind—at the same time, my aspirations to be a cherry orchardist fell through, big time. So I thought, this might . . . I kind of made up my mind that I really wanted to stay in Alaska, I had to figure out how to do it. And becoming a troller . . . it was the only thing I knew because I had gone trolling. I could understand it. Doesn't mean I had mastered it by any means, but I understood what was going on. Whereas seining, or longlining, or gillnetting, I didn't have a clue about that. I knew they did a lot of trolling out of Sitka, and so you know, it seemed doable for me.

BW: And it was.

CW: Mm-hmm.

BW: You did it!

CW: Mm-hmm! Although the first few years, I found out how little I really knew. It was hubris to even get into it, thinking, "Oh man, two weeks hand trolling, I can do this," you know? Holy smokes . . . I mean, it was . . . I barely made enough money to stay afloat the first year. My girlfriend at the time, she went with me the first year. And actually she went with me the second year, but she was sick of it by then—that was the end of the relationship, and I don't blame her. So, at the end of the second year trolling, we were pretty much officially broken up, she was down in Port Angeles, Washington, and there was no reason for me to go back there. In fact, I can remember quite vividly I took Ghislaine, who had been a crew member, and Pat Kehoe, who had also been a crewmember for



Charlie Willber filets a king salmon in the backyard.

part of that season, I took them both out to dinner at the Channel Club, you know, kind of end of season thank you celebration. And I was expressing my bewilderment about what was the next thing. And Pat said, Well, what's wrong with here? You know, I just hadn't . . . She said, Sitka's a pretty nice place. And I got thinking about it and I decided, Yeah, I think you're right. So I stayed in Sitka. And then . . . I can't say my trolling skills had improved much, but they had improved some. And [cute dog walks by] hey, who's that little guy?

BW: That looks like a friend!

CW: Yeah! So I got a job in the winter working for Samson Tug and Barge. I was a cook and a couple trips I was a deckhand. But that just gave me enough, gave me an edge to get through. And I did that for, I think, three winters. And that really

helped get me stabilized financially. And by the end of the fourth season I was pretty sick of tugboating, too, and I decided well . . . longlining, people were really making money doing that. And I decided, hey, I got a boat, and I'm gonna do that! So I went longlining with Walt Pasternak and Steve Lawrie—a trip from hell I might add—then I could understand it. I thought hey, I'm gonna do that, and I did. I geared up for longlining, and I never looked back. And you know to be honest with you, over the years, I probably made about half my income through longlining.

BW: Yeah.

CW: So it was very fortunate that that opportunity arose. But it was also fortunate I took advantage of it.



Charlie Wilber and his daughter Adrienne Wilber smoke salmon in the backyard.

BW: You got in right after they limited entry, right? You had to buy a permit?

CW: I did get in, in fact, when Limited Entry was and . . . oh, god . . . I think it was . . .

BW: It was like, early seventies? . . . '72 or '73 but I can't remember . . .

CW: You're right. You know, that seemed to stabilize the fishery, it made me decide—well, this seems like an opportunity. Plus, I could see the East Coast fisheries, they were just suffering from being overcrowded and everything.

BW: Yeah.

CW: So that was one of the factors. I made a business decision . . . I had made some money working on the pipeline with the intention to put a downpayment on a cherry orchard. And came pretty close. But not close enough. So, I was kind of adrift, really. That plan was over, and then I went back to jumping for another year, thank goodness. And came up with the fishing plan, and being able to stay and live in Alaska, that was important to me. Nowadays, if somebody wanted to get into trolling, I would strongly advise them . . . don't ever commit to money in this until you go out with someone who knows what the hell they're doing. I mean, most of the deckhands I've had, including you and your sister, have known way more about fishing by the end of your first year than I knew probably by the end of my second year. My story was fairly typical of being in Alaska in the 70s.

I started trolling in '79, and I know when I was jumping in the '70s, the average age of people in Alaska was early to mid-20s. A lot of young people, and a lot of that was I think because of the opportunities for younger people to make a living.

BW: Yeah. Do you feel like those opportunities exist still in the fishing fleet, now?

CW: Not as much. You know, the people I see getting into it now are second or third generation, and they know what the hell they're doing before they ever make a commitment. And more power to them. You know, Ryan Nichols would be a perfect example. I mean, he went to sea at . . . I don't know, 16 months? I think he's made every season since. Had a good background.

BW: You mentioned when you first got in, you saw what happened with the east coast fisheries and you felt that limited entry was stabilizing the fishing industry in Alaska . . . but seeing the way that salmon and the returns are going now, do you wonder if the same thing will happen in Alaska that happened on the East Coast?

CW: It's a real mixed bag, because the problems in Alaska fisheries right now aren't all due to overcrowding of the fisheries. I think climate change is a huge factor, and I would attribute the problems with the king salmon directly to climate change. And also the lack of decent regulation of the trawl fleet in the Bering Sea—they're catching a lot of small kings out there. But you know, you can say, Oh yeah, a lot of fishermen, they're being depleted—but Bristol Bay just had some of the biggest seasons ever. You know, the sockeye are doing great. So, you know, it's a factor . . . I read some paper on the reason for that is the lakes, the sockeye go into deep water lakes to spawn. Like in the case of Bristol Bay, it'd be Lake Iliamna, very deep, very huge lake. And with global warming, the temperatures of the lakes are a little warmer. And the feed in the lake for the sockeye fry is more abundant, and therefore there's more feed for the sockeye.

That is the theory I read, and it made a lot of sense to me. So, you know, it's kind of . . . it's a mixed thing. You can make the case for whatever—global warming, overfishing . . . and some fisheries are, the trawl thing is just, I think, almost criminal—it's a matter of big fleet, big money, controlling the politics. But you know, king salmon on the Yukon, I think that'd still be a problem regardless of the trawling.

BW: Yeah.

CW: We've seen our quotas in Southeast . . . for years we had a quota of around 300,000 kings. And the quota for kings is heavily regulated, it's an international treaty. But I think even without the trawlers, we'd probably see the same problems with the kings we see right now. I think it's a matter of warming of the ocean, warming of the river. I don't know, I'm not a scientist. But in the political arena, when you come to trying to correct what the problem is, deciding what the problem is, is the problem. Because whatever changes you make somebody is going to be affected, and somebody is going to fight it tooth and nail.

BW: Yeah. I think people here [on the East Coast] don't realize how personally people take it. How those little regulatory changes and the quota changes and stuff like that really . . .

CW: They should . . . you know, the East Coast at one time was just super abundant. But the quotas they've had, and the species they can fish have just diminished and diminished and diminished.

BW: Yeah there's like, only one stream in Maine where Atlantic salmon . . .

CW: I think the trawling is just absolutely devastating. But, it's an entrenched industry, supported not only by fishermen, but by processors, legislators, you know. The fish themselves can't talk and don't vote.

BW: If only.

CW: So, I—you know, I know this sounds all gloom and doom. I still think there's a chance for younger people to make a living in the fisheries. But they're gonna have to be smarter, work harder, and be better financed than when I got into it. When I got into it, we had —

[church bells start aggressively ringing]

[church bells continue ringing]

[church bells still ringing]

[ongoing ringing]

[ringing remains]

BW: JEEZ THAT'S LOUD.

CW: THESE FRIGGIN' EPISCOPALIANS AND THEIR LOUD BELLS —

[bells continue undaunted]

[bells unintimidated]

[bells pursue agenda]

[bells still ring]

[bells stop]

CW: PRAISE THE LORD. Oh my gosh.

BW: That is the longest—

CW: I think I've lost my hearing.

BW: I know, I can't believe how long that went on, god.

CW: Ahhh, we made it. Well, Berett you've asked me a bunch of thoughtful questions I'm not sure I answered well.

BW: I think you did.

CW: Let me ask you a few.

BW: Okay.

CW: How do you feel the direction of your interest in graphic design?

BW: I mean . . . I had to give this presentation this week where I talked about why I came here. So I was looking back over my essay I wrote when I applied here, and the work samples I sent in. A lot I said when applying is still true—I went to this program because I ended up in these positions in politics and journalism where there was so much information the public needed that politicians or newsrooms had—but didn't have the time or energy or skills to share it in a way that was going to help people.

CW: Huh. To understand.

BW: Yeah. think on a personal level, I knew I was a strong writer and a strong photographer, and being a strong designer would kind of just be a thing that really allowed me to put those two skills together. I had had a bunch of different jobs, and I moved around a lot, and I just felt like I needed to have a skill that I could fall back on that . . .

CW: Could stabilize your nomadic existence.

BW: And I think it's a thing that can really help me work with other people. One of the things I like about design is that you can use it to bring other people's ideas out. You know, whether it's creating a report for someone, or a marketing strategy, or telling a visual story in a journalism setting. I just think, especially with the internet, things have become more visual and the way people absorb information is continuing to become more about what we see, and visual communication.

CW: Well, today's politics, too. With the Trump influence, lying and misinformation has almost become the norm.

BW: Totally.

CW: Which is really a bad thing for our country.

BW: When you think about the Russian interference campaign that went on during 2016, it was Facebook posts, you know? It was Facebook posts



Charlie Wilber chainsaws up some logs in the side yard.

and ads, all of which are basically . . . graphic design. They're just little squares that have icons and text. That ended up having a huge influence on the election, which has had a huge influence—

CW: We were all sucked in. I can remember myself reading, thinking, I only need to get news from Facebook! I can get all these items! You know, not realizing it was all just total shlock that . . . aughhh.

BW: Yeah, and I think that's going to continue. Now that AI is really growing, I think there's a chance that what makes the internet so powerful and helpful—which is that you can access the correct information very quickly from wherever you are—our ability to do that may be reduced, as the internet fills with information that is less reliably factual and also just . . .

CW: Bias.

BW: Bots can create information and articles so much faster than journalists can write a news story! And that just means the quality and the quantity of the information that will be available to everyone I think will be reduced.

CW: No end of the need.

BW: Yeah. So I don't know. I feel like that's a very large abstract response to, what am I really going to do with this graphic design thing.

[bells begin ringing again]

BW: OH MY GOD.

Charlie Wilber reads the newspaper with Fern the dog.



CW: Oh, come on. TEN O'CLOCK.

BW: Maybe church is over.

[bell tower peals ten o'clock]

CW: Well, Berett. The two real similarities I can see between the two of us, and I think it's real typical of people that get into their thirties, they've tried a lot of different things, done quite a bit. But they're ready to stabilize.

BW: Yeah.

CW: And for me, that was fishing. And for you, maybe I think graphic design, or some part, branch of it, would give you that stability. And income.

BW: One hopes.

CW: Oh, it'll come.

BW: Yeah. I care about, I really care about Alaska and what happens. I think it relates back to the fishing stuff. Because fishing is a thing that is so connected to the environment, when you do it, you are forced to care—

CW: Absolutely.

BW: About the land, the sea. And what governs those things are, you know—people's relationships and politics and the law. And so you really can't—

CW: The outside isn't just somewhere you go for a picnic every month, you know. You're dependent on it. In this state especially. A lot of places, not so.

BW: I think that's part of why it's so hard to correct against climate change, is because people don't have that relationship anymore. It doesn't feel real to them, that if emissions go down, their lives will be better. They walk around the asphalt kingdom,

and nothing really changes. Except maybe the weather, which kind of gets everybody, no matter where they are.

CW: Which is getting—

BW: Yeah, I think people are now really starting to get on board! Because—

CW: Yeah, in my lifetime, it's severe!

BW: Yeah. The weather seems to be coming for us wherever we are.

CW: Yes. No matter where you are, take your pick, you know—fires, rain, oh gosh, what are the others. There's increased—you know, trolling on the ocean, the weather is changing for the worse. It's getting tougher. More heavy winds. Something I personally noticed because I don't like all that heavy weather!

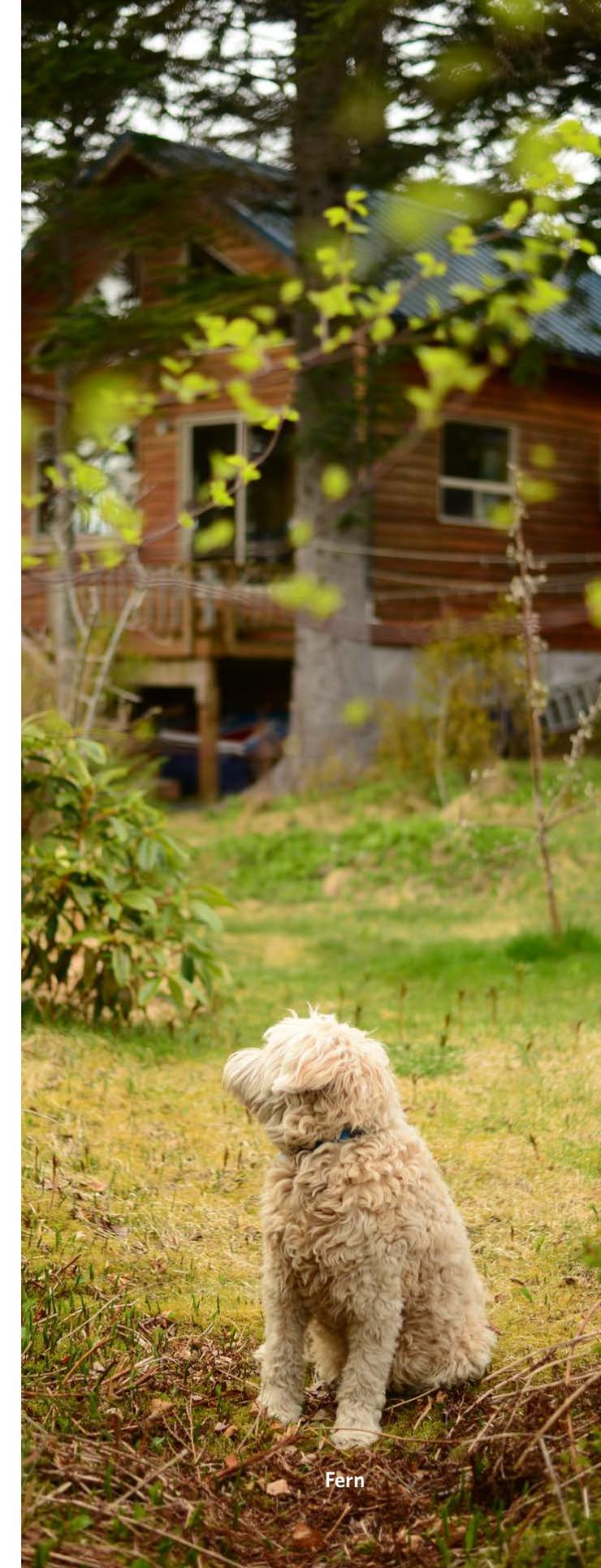
BW: Yeah. Me neither!

CW: Anyway. It's a good path.

BW: I'm hopeful.

CW: Yeah. And you made it happen!

BW: Well, I couldn't have done it without you, Dad.



Fern

PROJECT

speculative fish ticket

These new fish tickets asked a widespread community to think about an amorphous and oft taken-for-granted category of creature who about 375 million years ago, was the first vertebrate who decided to explore life on land. Under the guise of a speculative bureaucracy, it requested respondents complete paperwork in which they are confronted by philosophical questions such as the nature of pain, the interior lives of non-human creatures, the skills and qualities necessary to survive in non-human environments, as well as their own memories, emotions, and assumptions.

fishtory

From an evolutionary biology perspective, scientists who use genetics, traits, and common ancestors to clarify evolution have agreed since the 1980s there is no such thing as a fish.

Fish refers to a category of ancient, strange, and varied creatures. We mammals didn't develop adjacent to fish: we came from fish.

You have to go back ten evolutionary branches until you hit some primordial ancestor that could be considered a pre-fish. It's a square/rectangle problem: Not all fish are us—but all of us are fish.

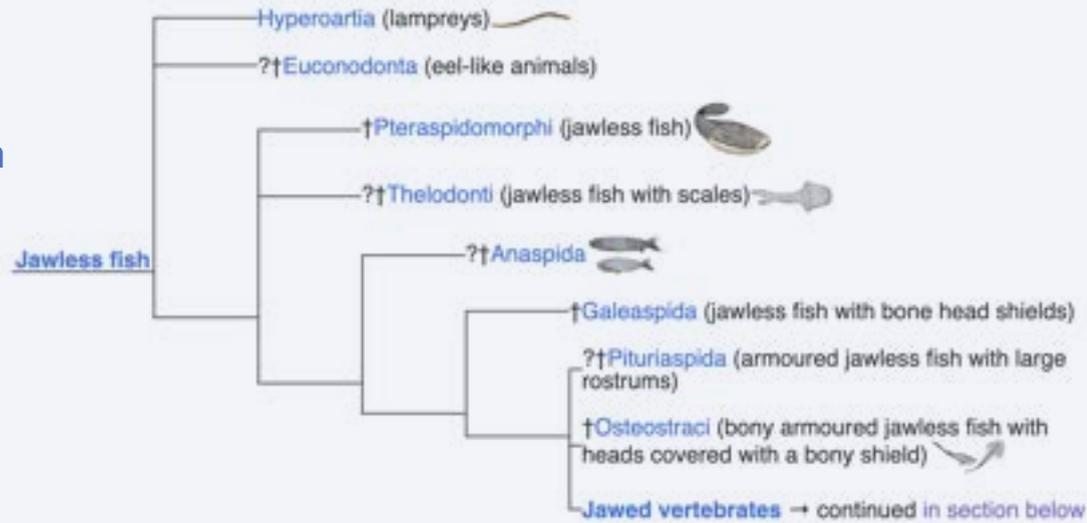
"Fish" is a label that doesn't contain the fundamental underlying meaning most of us assume it contains. But the fact we all still know and use the label communicates something about our shared sense of reality.

It tells us about knowing, and the way knowledge is constructed and inherited. Fish are a mind-bendingly wide range of creatures, but they live beneath the surface of the water. We fall prey to the availability heuristic—we tend to believe what we can see is more real than what we can't see. Unable to see fish in their diversity, we lump them into one—that vast array of creatures, out of sight, beneath the waves.

By recognizing "fish" as a belief, we see how easy it is for our beliefs to shape our reality, significantly but outside our range of notice.

Sometimes our beliefs limit our ability to imagine new worlds and possible futures for ourselves. Sometimes they limit our ability to see what's closest and most familiar to us. We all carry beliefs that stand in as reality.

Over 500 million years ago

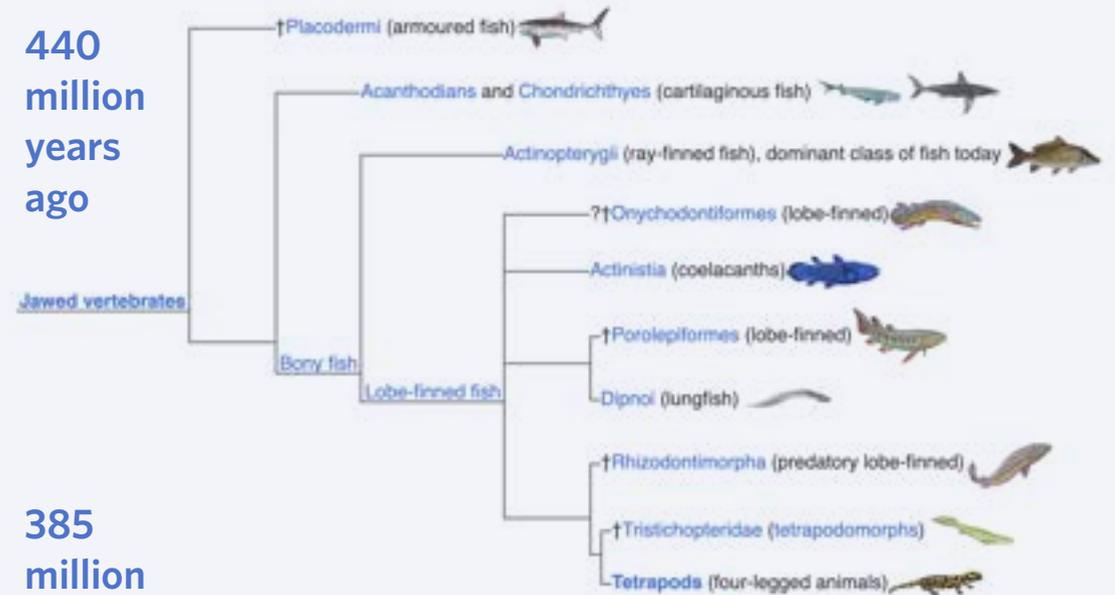


Land: Come over
Tetrapods: I can't, I'm busy defending my niche and fighting for food

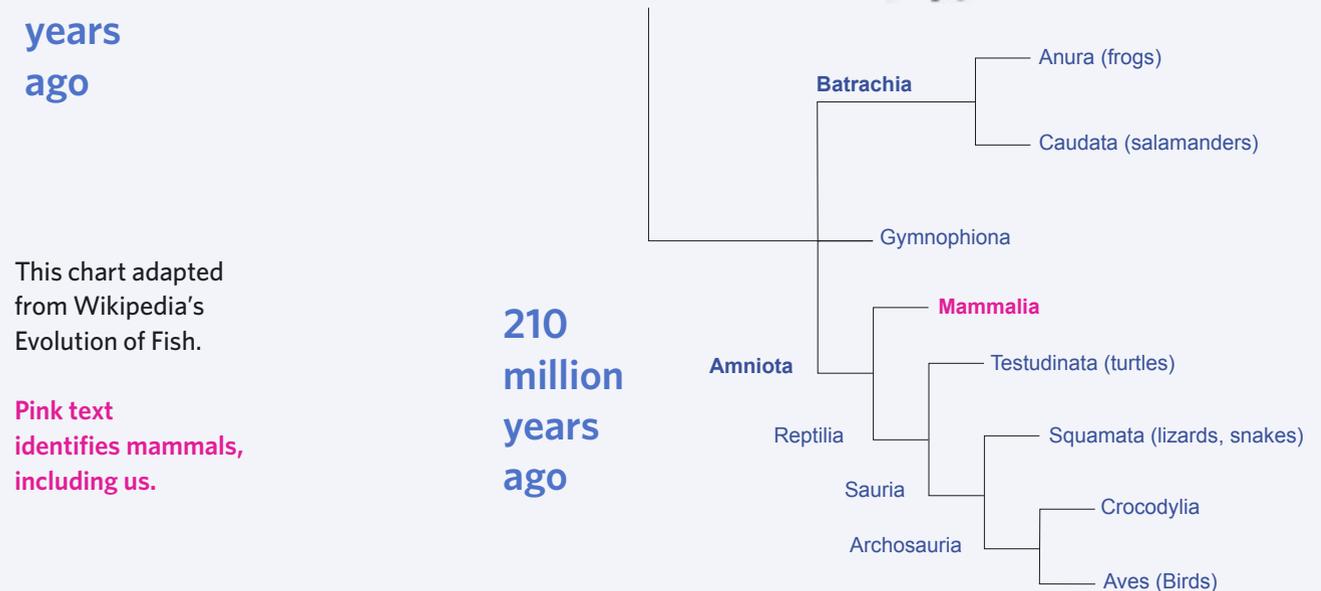
Land: terrestrial vertebrates haven't evolved to exploit my resources



440 million years ago



385 million years ago



This chart adapted from Wikipedia's Evolution of Fish.

Pink text identifies mammals, including us.

210 million years ago

“If fish don’t exist, what else don’t we know about our world? What other truths are waiting behind the lines we draw over nature? What other categories are about to cave in? Could clouds be animate? Who knows. On Neptune, it rains diamonds; it really does. Scientists figured that out just a few years ago. The longer we examine our world, the stranger it proves to be.”

—Lulu Miller
Why Fish Don’t Exist
 2017

RECORD

fish ticket

This is an Alaska Department of Fish and Game commercial salmon fishing ticket. After catching a boatload of fish, you deliver your catch to the processor and fill out a ticket reporting the number and type of salmon you’ve caught. Each ticket is a carbon-copy triplicate site of information exchange between fishermen, processor, and the state.

K&R SERVICES, LLC • (807) 360-2649 9413202

PLACE WRAPAROUND COVER UNDER PINK COPY
 WHITE – PURCHASER YELLOW – FISH & GAME PINK – SELLER

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME TROLL SALMON TICKET

Vessel Name _____

Fishery _____

Name _____

Permit Number _____

Proc. Code _____

Company _____

ADF&G NO.

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

J23 000501

STATISTICAL AREA

Stat. Area	%

PARTIAL DELIVERY

Ticket No. _____

Processor _____

Target Species:

Kings Coho

Chums Pinks

Start Date Caught _____

End Date Caught _____

Area Caught _____

(Nearest bay or headland)

Frozen at Sea? Yes No

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Port of landing or off-shore operation type _____

Date Landed _____

SALMON							SALMON						
SPECIES	CODE	DELIV. CODE	NUMBER OF FISH	POUNDS	PRICE	AMOUNT	SPECIES	CODE	DELIV. CODE	NUMBER OF FISH	POUNDS	PRICE	AMOUNT
Lg. Red Kings	410						Bright Chums	450					
Med. Red Kings	410						Dark Chums	450					
							TOTAL CHUMS	450					
Sml. Red Kings	410						Salmon Roe (specify)						
							King Roe	410	14				
Lg. White Kings	410						Chum Roe	450	14				
Sml. White Kings	410						Subtotal						
							Less Salmon Enhancement Tax @						
TOTAL KINGS	410						TOTAL SALMON						
SOCKEYES	420						OTHER SPECIES						
							Groundfish bycatch: Please report the six-digit stat area number for groundfish bycatch in the Stat. Area cell(s) below.						
							SPECIES	STAT AREA	DELIV. CODE	NUMBER OF FISH	POUNDS	PRICE	AMOUNT
Lg. Cohos	430						Halibut 200						
Med. Cohos	430												
							TOTAL HALIBUT 200						
Sml. Cohos	430						Groundfish (Specify)						
TOTAL COHOS	430						Steelhead 540						
PINKS	440						GRAND TOTAL						
							NOT SOLD/PERSONAL USE - 95						
							Salmon Species	Number	Groundfish Species	Deliv. Code	Weight		

Permit Holder's Signature _____ Fish Received by _____ Date _____

I HEREBY ATTEST THAT THESE FISH WERE CAUGHT IN COMPLIANCE WITH ADF&G REGULATIONS.

PURCHASER

TICKET
HOLDER:



Division of Creative Fisheries
Information Service Section

HOW TO COMPLETE A FISH TICKET

Dear Seafood Survey Participant:

This fish ticket is a form provided in both paper and electronic versions which details important information regarding intellectual harvest of fishery resources. It is critical for managing biologists, enforcement agencies, population managers, meaning adjudicators, and other state and federal entities that the fish ticket be filled out completely and correctly. Please assist the department in providing the most accurate information possible concerning this public resource.

It is critical that you rely on the level of information intrinsically available to you when you receive the form. **DO NOT** seek out additional information throughout the form completion process. Consulting outside resources such as electronic devices, animate objects, inanimate objects, or critical minerals to change or affect your answers is a violation of **5 AAC 39.129** and will result in a corruption of the data gathering process through catastrophic error.

Reporting requirements specified in **5 AAC 39.130** "Reports required of fishermen, processors, buyers, exporters, designers, operators, and consumers of certain fishing species and fish products; tabulation requirements" details proper procedure when completing fish tickets. A fish ticket is required to be completed at the time of reception. The form is required to be returned in the attached self-addressed envelope within 7 days of recovery, or as otherwise specified by the department. In the top left corner of the ticket, red text indicates the name of the ticket holder.

Additional tickets from ADF&G are required to sell information to the public. Please contact the Seafood Industry Coordinator to obtain permitting information. If you have any questions related to the proper completion of paper fish tickets, please contact your local area office.

Sincerely,
Information Service Section
Division of Creative Fisheries

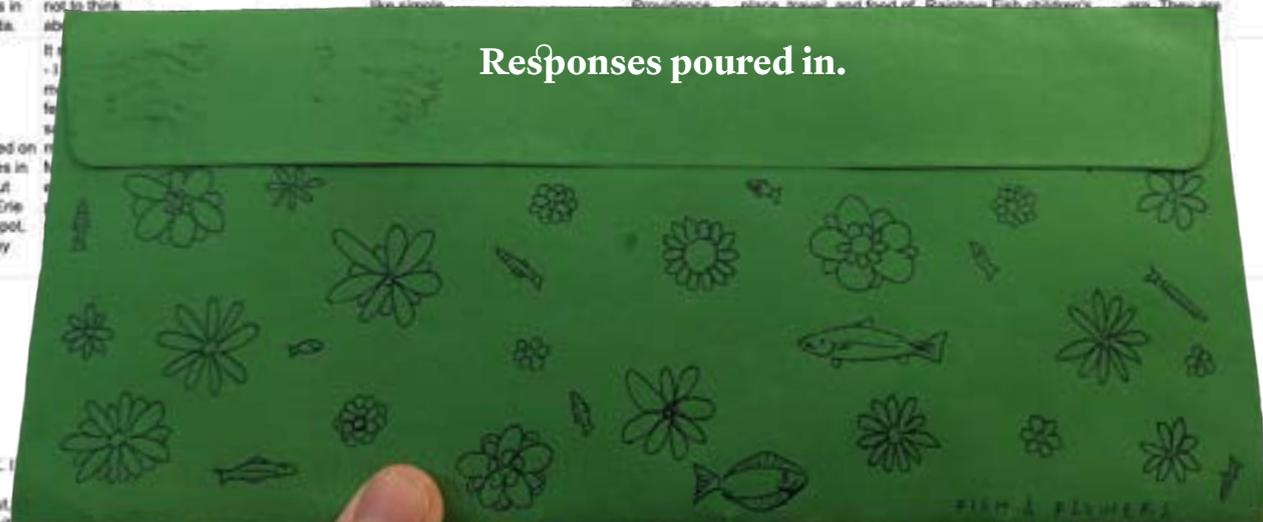
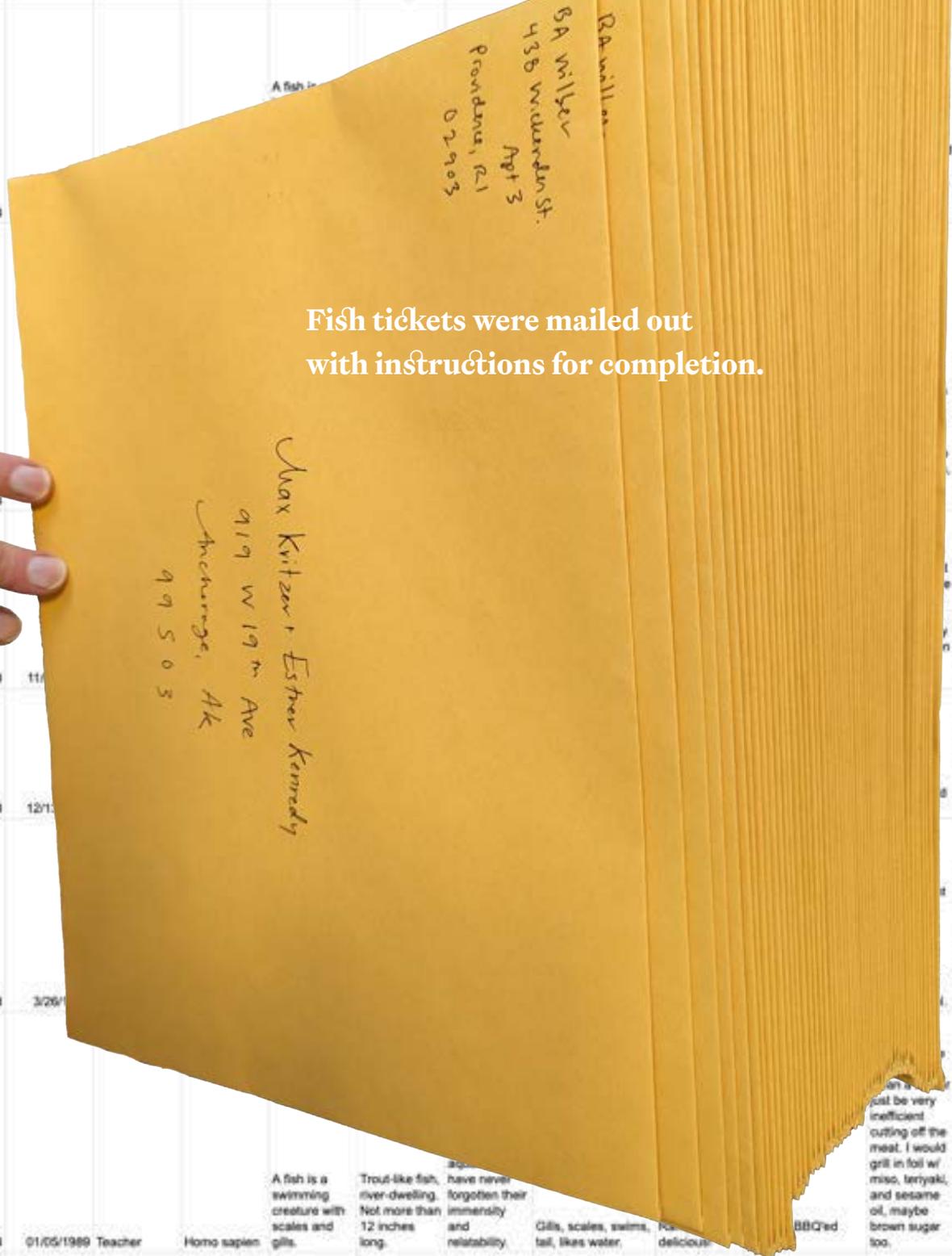
NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____

DATE: _____ VOCATION: _____

BIRTHDATE: _____ SPECIES: _____

1. A fish is . . .
2. When you consider the category of fish, what type or style fish is the first that comes to mind?
3. What species of fish is your favorite? Why?
4. List five qualities that make up a fish.
5. Do you enjoy eating fish? Why or why not?
6. What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
7. If presented with a whole raw fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, filet, prepare, cook & serve it for dinner guests within two or so hours?
8. Think about a memory in your life that involves fish. Describe in 2–3 sentences.
9. Circle the significance of fish in your personal life on a scale of one to ten.
10. Have you ever caught a fish? Where and what was it?
11. Do fish feel pain? Please support your answer with reasoning.
12. Describe the smell of a fish.
13. If you touched a fish, what would it feel like?
14. Mark the complexity of a fish's interior life on a scale of 1–100 and explain your answer.
15. How do fish know where they are?
16. When was the last time you saw a live fish?
17. Do you associate fish with any specific symbolism? Please explain.
18. Can you think of a famous work of art that involves fish?
19. If you had to live as a fish for the rest of your life, what fish would you choose?
20. Draw a fish.

Fish tickets were mailed out with instructions for completion.



Responses poured in.

A fish is . . . a joy to catch and eat.

When you consider the category "fish," what type or style comes to mind?
 Troll-caught Alaskan king salmon.

What is your favorite species of fish? Why?
 King salmon. They are beautiful and the tastiest.

List five qualities of a fish.
 1. Overall appearance
 2. The environment that it lives in
 3. The way it was handled and processed after landing
 4. The taste
 5. Who cooked it.

Do you enjoy eating fish?
 Yes! It's very tasty and healthful! Brain food!

What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
 Charcoal grilled king salmon fillet, and eating with friends and family around the campfire.

If presented with a whole raw fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, fillet, prepare, cook, and serve it for dinner guests within two or so hours?
 I prefer a grilled, marinated king salmon fillet.

Describe a memory in your life that involves fish.
 A fond memory was watching my daughter catch and land a 33-pound king.

Circle the significance of fish in your life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Have you ever caught a fish? Where and what was it?
 I've caught many species of fish in SE Alaska including 3 types of salmon, halibut, black cod, rockfish, lingcod all while commercial fishing near Sitka!!!

Do fish feel pain?
 Yes. They are very unhappy to be landed.

Describe the smell and feel of a fish.
 Smell: Hard to describe. Once you've smelled one you never forget it!
 Feel: A very smooth touch, as your finger rhythmically moves over the scales.

Please mark the complexity of a fish's interior life & explain your answer.
 0 50 100
 Interior life? The natal life in freshwater? Life on the open ocean? What is the fish thinking and feeling on its relentless quest for food?

The Pacific Ocean alone is 65.8 million² miles. How do fish know where they are?
 Good question! You got a tip from a buddy on the radio. You return to a "hot spot" where you did well 5 years ago! The hardest part – where are the fish?



Retired Commercial Fisherman

Do you associate fish with any specific symbolism?

What kind of dipst question is this? I'm going to write to your funding agency to cancel your grant.**

I suggest you spend 3 months at the "slime line" at your local fish plant to grasp [he true meaning]!

When was the last time you saw a live fish?

While walking the dog along Indian River. We saw thousands of chum salmon spawning.

Can you think of a famous work of art that involves fish?

The "Spawn Til you Die" t-shirt by renowned artist Ray Troll is a classic interpretation of neoclassical fish art!

If you had to live as a fish for the rest of your life, what fish would you choose?

Lingcod. For its size, it's the fiercest predator in the sea.

Left: A "slime line" worker processing pollock fillets at the Trident plant in Dutch Harbor, Alaska. Right: A king salmon trailer in Southeast Alaska.

Sitka, Alaska

Along with research and images, each individual's response became a spread in an ongoing book project. Responses are anonymous. Each person's vocation and location are shown vertically at right; their definition of a fish runs at left. No two answers were the same.

A fish is . . . scaly, sparkly, and well-adapted to its environment. Rarely observed brushing its teeth . . .



When you consider the category "fish," what type of fish comes to mind?
What is your favorite species of fish? Why?
Can you describe a fish?
Do you enjoy eating fish?
What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
If presented with a whole live fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, fillet, prepare, cook, and serve it for dinner guests when you are at home?
Describe a memory in your life that involves fish.

Does the fish from the children's book with shiny rainbow scales.
Why? List fish that are hard to see from above or below by predators - very smart! List habitat.
**1. Goby
2. Seahorse
3. Cuttlefish/jelly movement
4. Like the sea
5. Any of weightlessness swimming in ocean**
Sometimes, if it is well prepared and doesn't smell like fishy.
King salmon plate from the Fish Fair food truck! Smoked salmon, grilled bread and potatoes!
Low confidence! For each I would need it up to the level as not understanding fish. Probably based on years with salmon, fish.
Did you see the fish when you were sleeping and it was scary? He taught us to cut the dorsal fin off salmon to catch fish.

Does the significance of fish in your life?
Have you ever caught a fish? Where and what was it?
Do you enjoy eating fish?
Describe the smell and feel of a fish.
Please mark the complexity of a fish's interior life & explain your answer.
The Pacific Ocean alone is 65.5 million miles. How do fish know where they are?
Do you associate fish with any specific emotions?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mostly habitat on the lake, and enjoying with my wife. I've fished in salmon state in Alaska, and caught many spawning.
Yes! They have brains and systems that investigate 360 quadrant swimming.
Yes! Not great. Kind of funny the idea if it's spawning season. Otherwise, just kinda hovering. Fish. Hard mostly seen that is a little nervous/ being from scales, very toxic, but gets better as it dies.
Yes! I've seen feeding frenzies! Fish are basically people that live underwater - makes some evolutionary fun.
Direct hearing/hearing the direction of the swimming currents, and sensing the temperature and light.
Yes! Fish are a symbol of peace.



Teacher

Fish represent the fight for justice and understanding between humans and non-humans; Western and non-Western management styles. Explaining would take a lot more words.

Sitka, Alaska

A fish is . . . a water-breathing, finned, slippery, slimy swimmer.

When you consider the category "fish," what type of fish comes to mind?
What is your favorite species of fish? Why?
Can you describe a fish?
Do you enjoy eating fish?
What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
If presented with a whole live fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, fillet, prepare, cook, and serve it for dinner guests when you are at home?
Describe a memory in your life that involves fish.

A big of tuna fish.
Where sharks go, to big great mouths.
I make eating fish, it feels healthier than eating other meats, and more athletic.
I make these salmon bowls where I season the salmon in the rice cooker. However,
Not confident at all. Not a huge fan of already prepared items in fish, so this is another sad.
When I first went to Hawaii. My 11-year-old daughter, a cousin, and I.
It seems scary - I feel like most animals feel just as a safety measure. Maybe also emotional pain if you separate them from their family.
Yes! I've fished on a beach of water in Western NY, but fishing on the Erie Canal off our boat. The point is it's healthy.
It seems scary - I feel like most animals feel just as a safety measure. Maybe also emotional pain if you separate them from their family.
Yes! Like the ocean. Yes! I think people would be surprised at how tough and wily they can be.
I believe this means either their inability or exceptional? I think it's somewhat complex, but we see most of it so it can't be that easy right?



Can you think of a famous work of art that features fish?
If you had to live as a fish for the rest of your life, what fish would you choose?

Rainbow Trout (the children's book) is a true classic.
Definitely a fish that lives on the bottom of the ocean floor.
I wanna see what it's like down there.

Software Engineer
 Goleta, CALIFORNIA

A fish is . . . shimmering and wet.

When you consider the category "fish," what type of fish comes to mind?
What is your favorite species of fish? Why?
Can you describe a fish?
Do you enjoy eating fish?
What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
If presented with a whole live fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, fillet, prepare, cook, and serve it for dinner guests when you are at home?
Describe a memory in your life that involves fish.
Does the significance of fish in your life?
Have you ever caught a fish? Where and what was it?
Do you associate fish with any specific emotions?

Foreign fish followed closely by salmon.
Sardines! They feed everyone and are behaviorally interesting.
Yes! Fish are kind of mysterious. I spend a lot of time reflecting what they are doing based on the scientific studies. They symbolize a healthy ocean. The foundation of healthy waters, predatory fish, and marine microbial populations. In short, healthy happy natural water life.
At the library the other week, there was some non-obvious small fish living in a kind of impressive green tank. But made me love it!
To be sure where a fish is hiding a biologist? I think fish are either totally absent or in the background of famous art. Unless locally famous counts, then it makes sense are fossils.
Pacific sleeper shark. Pretty sure "fish" includes shark & vice. Can't really think of a beloved/favorite fish that would be fun. Clownfish or other salmon, definitely a Clownfish if I could ever time adjust to that aspect.
Yes. Some of my favorite fish to catch are the rainbow trout off of Sitka. I'm a pretty lucky fisherman.
Probably I'm pretty sure this went away from painful details.
Yes! Capelin smelt like cucumbers. Yes! The firm strength of the ocean.
Yes! I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank.
Yes! I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank.

The Pacific Ocean alone is 65.5 million miles. How do fish know where they are?
Do you associate fish with any specific emotions?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Yes! Fish are kind of mysterious. I spend a lot of time reflecting what they are doing based on the scientific studies. They symbolize a healthy ocean. The foundation of healthy waters, predatory fish, and marine microbial populations. In short, healthy happy natural water life.
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Biologist

Fairbanks, ALASKA

A fish is . . . multitudes.

When you consider the category "fish," what type of fish comes to mind?
What is your favorite species of fish? Why?
Can you describe a fish?
Do you enjoy eating fish?
What is your favorite method to eat or prepare fish?
If presented with a whole live fish, how confident are you in your ability to clean, fillet, prepare, cook, and serve it for dinner guests when you are at home?
Describe a memory in your life that involves fish.

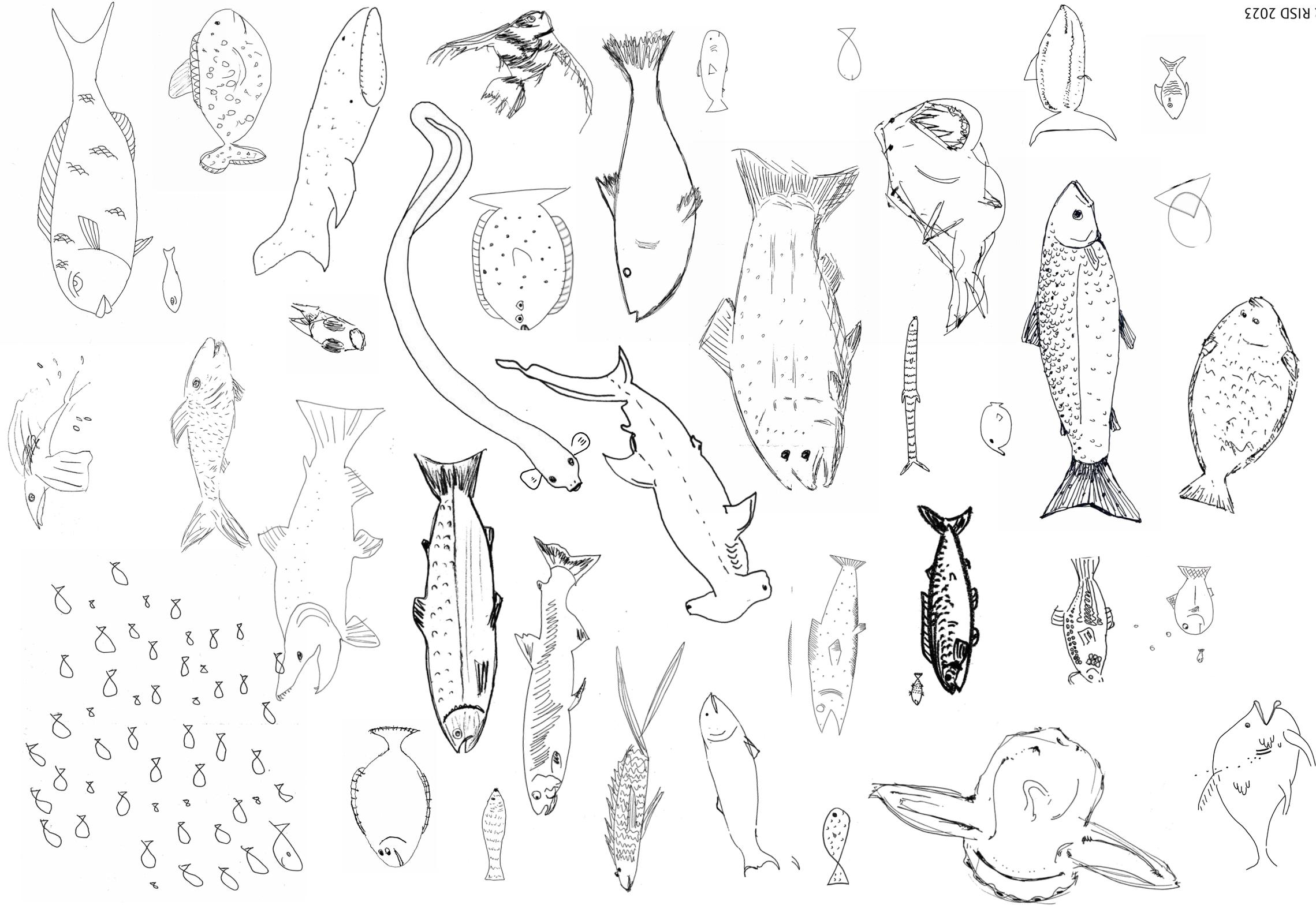
Salmon, obviously.
The really clean salmon, as it's delicious and completely unappreciated, as evidenced by its other name: the dog. I think it's more of the underlying salmon.
**1. Fins
2. Slime
3. A vaguely prehistoric bearing
4. The ability to embody the hopes, dreams and aspirations of human communities
5. Fat**
Yes, it is delicious and the better fish! Use the most deliciously flourishing food in existence.
Whole salmon, just lengthwise into steaks, marinated in herb and balsamic vinegar sauce. Alternatively, salmon for Charlie Weber's steak and tips and a good fish sandwich.
Very confident - see most method below or with the olive oil, garlic, and lemon and baked or grilled.
Yes! I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank.
Yes! I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank. I've seen it in a tank.



Can you think of a famous work of art that features fish?
If you had to live as a fish for the rest of your life, what fish would you choose?

Yes! Many in Alaska also in their growing up.
Of course they do. If they didn't, fish parts they would not be involved in such much natural habitats as seas and human populations.
Yes! Fishy steaks and a little sharp cut/leaves it's appetizing as a dead fish is a refrigerator or freezer.
Yes! Sharp points, matches, scales if you eat the head, muscle & bones.
They are capable of basic, important feelings like fear in pain but their brains are too small & simple to question or understand the basis or cause.
Stuff with magnets, fish.
Fish are made to fit into this life! Salmon are the species of Alaska's indigenous people and society. They're members of ecological health and status on which capitalism feeds its design.
If a lobster counts as a fish, a few weeks ago at the Portland Maine fish market. If not, a salmon in the same time in August.
There's that top-top using about salmon, the "Salmon Heads" that we in the West! The Super Salmon (salmon) from the Super Salmon, just before it's coming into the country and immediately after that.
Probably a technique but also intrigued by hearing & ability.

Journalist
 Anchorage, ALASKA



BERETT WILBER RISD 2023



2023 FISHES OF NORTH AMERICA

The last question on the speculative fish ticket was to draw a fish.



PROJECT

paper tide

Trees live by balancing fluidity and rigidity, taking in water and light, growing wood, needles, leaves and roots.

As the end product of an industrial process using trees as raw material, paper maintains some of these qualities.

Fluid paper organisms draw attention to the original material relationship of water and wood.

with Tom Wedell

2021

sail

1/4



invert I

2/4



sail II
4/4



invert II
3/4





PROJECT

troll valentines

One fish, one hook, one line.

We know it's not about how fast
or how many. It's about quality.

It's about taking the time to do
things right. Tonight.



Two-color screenprints

left: 8.5 × 11 inches
edition of 33

above: 4 × 6 inches
edition of 33

with Tycho Horan

2023



“How strange to feel herself so completely under the control of another person! But also how ordinary. No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought? Go running in the other direction. Depend on other people for everything. Allow them to depend on you. Why not?”

— Sally Rooney
Normal People
2018

ellie schmidt

Ellie Schmidt (愛麗李) is a writer, film maker, ceramicist, painter, and scholar currently pursuing her PhD at the USC School of Cinema in Los Angeles.

Her multidisciplinary work centers around the ocean and the body, uncovering the affinities and contradictions of an interconnected world. Drawing on ecology and feminism, her work kaleidoscopes across scales of relationality, from the familial to the planetary.

Ellie is Fulbright Scholar and National Geographic Explorer. Originally from Colorado, her explorations have taken her to live, work, and study from Michigan and Minnesota, to Fiji and Hawaii, to Alaska and Svalbard.

BW: Let's get down to brass tacks.

TES: Brass tacks.

BW: You talk about how writing is an important methodology in your work. I'm curious about how you use storytelling and narrative as a tool.

TES: As a visual artist, I love working with lots of different mediums and have a hard time choosing one in particular to work with. It does help me to think of different mediums as just different ways of telling stories. A lot of my projects I think of as love stories. I like the format of writing a narrative that's a little bit romantically heightened, focused on one sort of subject I'm relating to, or two subjects relating to each other. I just find it to be really interesting and beautiful, and kind of this long tradition I can draw from. I love writing love stories that are, you know, not about romantic love necessarily, but like, with me and my mom, or like a person in the landscape, or in more experimental ways, like a knife and a fish. Taking that format and applying it to situations that I'm interested in.

BW: That's such a poetic way to think about relationality. I've been thinking a lot about our relationships to land, and the way design mediates it, whether it's through GIS mapping or English language place names vs. like Tlingit place names. So, I think the idea of using a specific type of story, like a love story, as a tool to re-examine relationships is a powerful idea. And I think it's also a very feminist idea, because so many people look down on the love story . . . as like, frivolous.

TES: Totally, the emotional realm. It is interesting how we as humans, our relationship with nature is very mediated in so many different ways— like design, for sure. And other types of technology, and bringing it back to, a love story.

A lot of my projects, I think of them as love stories.

BW: I think about tools and technology as objects that have been very intentionally designed by people, and so I think the love story itself is a kind of tool we've designed. It has a beginning, people meet, conflict, you know, resolution. I think it's powerful—we're in this world where we are supposed to look down on the emotional realm,

even though I think most people would agree many of the most meaningful parts of their lives are deeply emotional, you know?

TES: It's something I've been trying to wrap my head around. I think the emotional realm is allowed in certain situations; like it's allowed in poetry, film, it's allowed in dance, but if you

think about other places . . . I just came back from my dive weekend, and in a science situation, there's not a lot of space for diving deep into emotions. Speaking of mediation . . . we have so much technology to go diving. That's what the whole class is about, right? It's just the different tools and how to use them to survive underwater. We listened to this lecture last night that was about decompression sickness and barotrauma—ways you can get sick and die from breathing air and going up too fast. This guy who gave us a lecture, he was so detailed, he was telling us how the bubbles form in your capillaries and how they move through your heart, and he was showing us these really graphic images of barotrauma and the details. And I was just so interested in it. I think I was kind of loopy because I was up all day, diving, but I was like—this is such a crazy dance between the human body, which is mostly water, and sea water! We've evolved to live on land, but then we're obsessed with going back into the ocean. But we need to bring air under the water to survive. But if we do it wrong, our bodies are actually more like ocean than air. So if air gets into the wrong pocket or like, you know, the osmosis goes the wrong direction or something, we could just, like, explode.

So I was just like, Wow, what a crazy dance, what a tale of obsession! And desire! Obviously, humans aren't meant to like to spend 72 hours underwater, but people like to make it work. So that's an example of . . . I want to bring the romantic story into these places where it doesn't belong and . . . see what happens? I think it can be really interesting.

BW: I think it's powerful because it forces us to re-examine our assumptions about life, especially because the Western worldview is so framed by science as reality. Like scuba diving, for example: like okay, if we understand the science of it, then we understand it, period. Descend, nothing more to say. But then thinking about it more as a narrative, a love or obsession between the human that is so desperately trying to be underwater despite the fact that there's a couple of million years of evolution separating us from our marine predecessors . . . What is the personal natural history that got us to where we are now, where we can kind of reliably breathe underwater, you know?

TES: Yes, that's so crazy to wrap your head around. Yeah, I completely agree. I love what you said, like a personal natural history.

BW: You engage with that idea a lot in your work, like especially with your work about feminine bodies, the ocean, intimacy. "The relationship of our body being more ocean than air," something you just said. I wonder if you have ideas about the body as landscape.

TES: Yeah, I love this type of thought process. In my ten years as a grad student, I've been led to and also asked to find theories that match my work. I started in college dipping my toes into ecofeminism. More recently I've been interested in this offshoot called hydrofeminism, which is basically—Astrida Neimanis coined it—thinking of the human body as made up of water, which is not, you know, a big philosophical revelation, it's just kind of this truth we all know about. But using that as a jumping off point to think about relation to

other bodies of water, and this sort of instability or constant change of the human body, taking in water and other molecules and nutrients out. I like it because it's not very hard to understand, but that mindset helps me to think about my relationship with the world in a different way. The boundaries are less defined. They're more fuzzy.

BW: That like the body is not an object or a landscape, but a constant flow connected to other flows?

TES: Yeah, exactly. And, depending on your definition of a landscape, just part of the larger landscape. Coming off of this barotrauma lecture, I really want to get more into anatomy—the more I study theory in school, art theory and philosophy, the more I would rather study chemistry and physics and evolution, because I think there's so much that's so interesting as it relates to where art and beauty and stuff comes from. I keep thinking I need to learn more about what's happening on a smaller level. Because I really want to philosophically understand that we are connected on such a follicular scale.

BW: I feel this is something I also have been struggling with this year—trying to deeply engage with our relationship to the things around us, but then feeling like, Okay, I need a science degree to understand this. And at the same time, living with the contradiction of—well, art, and art history, and philosophy contradict the idea that science is the only world view worth believing in, just because we've been schooled in it as like, the ultimate reality? I think for us, science confers a sense of legitimacy to ideas that feels really solid. Can you think of other methodologies or approaches that you use to get that same satisfaction of understanding?

TES: In school, everything was very theoretical. I really craved doing something physically in order to understand it. I got a lot of this satisfaction, learning, living in Sitka, and being able to do things I was learning about.

How to fish, swimming in the ocean itself, or like, seeing a fish plant, and having more understanding of how that market works. So being in school, I'm always kind of struggling against this theoretical knowledge of things, and really craving practical experience of things. It's really easy to get lumped into big schools of thought, and pulled in these really big directions that don't always reflect how the world is. Like from the Anna Tsing book we both read—she says, you can't scale relationality. I think that's one of the big problems I have with the world and academic thought, that people are thinking with these huge overarching ideas, but a lot of times it doesn't really matter, it's not the best way, or the only way, to understand a relationship between two individuals, whatever that might be. Another methodology or experience that gives me the satisfaction of knowing is . . . I rely a lot on my emotions to guide me. And I know emotions are

tricky chemical signals or whatever, but to guide me on like storytelling. When you're creating a fictional story, or even retelling an actual story, there's so many different options for how the story can go, so I think using the emotions as a guide helps me keep that story feeling true. I rely on that a lot.

BW: Like the experience of having emotions as a type of knowing.

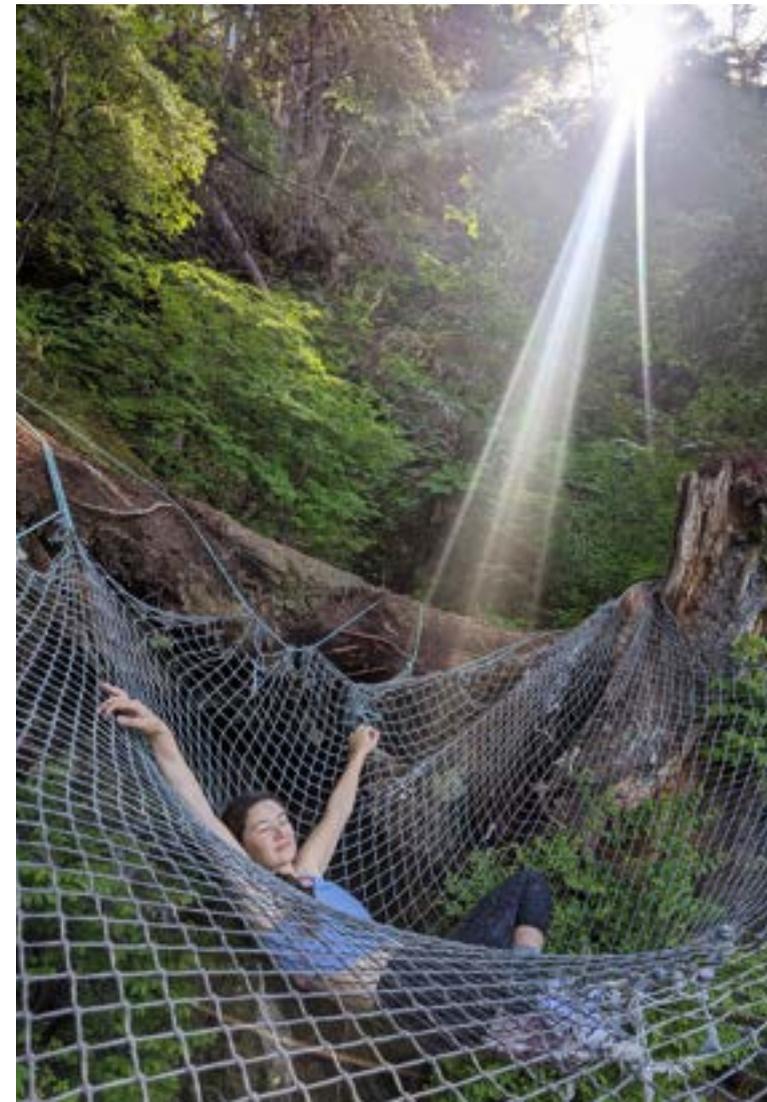
TES: Yeah, definitely.

BW: I can't remember how long the *Selkie* zine has been going. Can you? What role do you feel like it plays in your life as a creator and as a community member?

TES: *Selkie* zine is the art project most close to my heart that I have worked on. It started as a project with my dear friend Annika Ord, we were both in our early twenties living in Sitka, and we found ourselves snorkeling a lot and really connecting over kind of living independently for the first time. We were very adamant feminists, and we wanted to make a feminist scene, because that's kind of what we connected about, intellectually. So we made the zine that was meant to be very community-oriented, based on our friends, pretty casual, very inclusive in the sense that we just took all the submissions that came. But it was pretty word of mouth, so the spread was pretty small. And now it's grown to be sort of like this little online community. We have, you know, a bunch of readers—not like a bunch but we have some consistent readers—who fund the zine base by subscribing to it. And I would say what it means to me is . . . it's just like, organized art with my friends, that has been really meaningful because we approach issues . . .

*Ellie Schmidt
suspended by
seine netting
above the forest
floor in Sitka,
Alaska. 2023*

We approach some issues that are very, sort of funny or comical, like body hair, but then other images we approach are really difficult, that we've all faced,



like sexual violence and heavy stuff like that. But it creates a space where we can just commiserate with each other and have a bit of camaraderie. So it's been really, really meaningful. It's my favorite type of art project because it's very easy in terms of just accessibility, just some online button pushing, but it has a really big impact for me because I feel connected to people.

BW: Why selkie?

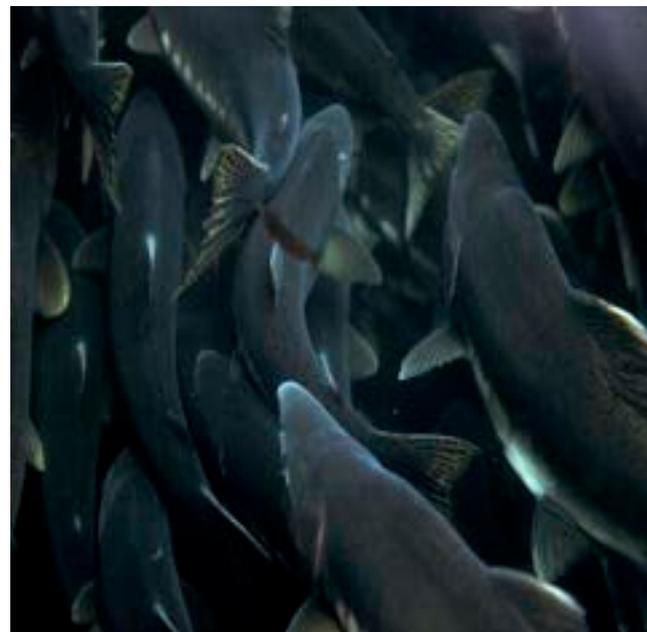
TES: When I was first in Sitka we ended up watching this animated film, *Song of the Sea*, about this Scottish myth about women who turn into seals when they go into the ocean. And then they zip off their seal skin when they emerge back onto land. And because that was an era when we were all learning about snorkeling, we started calling each other selkies, because we identified with this feeling of zipping in and out of your suit to go into the ocean. So that word kind of symbolized this sense of adventurousness, and embracing the cold, and it was this comrade friendship word we used.

BW: You talked about how the *Selkie* zine can be a place for exploring topics you might not be able to talk or think about in everyday life. Often in your work confront grief and heaviness—what is the relationship between heavy subjects and creative work for you?

TES: It's almost hard to identify because it's so interwoven for me. I've always used my art practice as a way to make sense of really difficult things in my life. A way to honor them, even if I can't fully make sense of them. And that helps me process, and move past, and feel better. One thing I love

*Selections from
Ellie Schmidt's
ongoing series late
summer, of things
above and below
the water near
Sitka, Alaska.*

about art, and especially love stories, is that it doesn't always have to resolve or be happy in the end for the processing and healing to happen. And in fact, I really gravitate towards stories



that aren't happy or don't have a happy ending. So, I would say there's a very strong therapeutic use to my work. I admire artists who deal with hard things that create a sense of mutual understanding between the viewer and the artist and this broader community of camaraderie around certain issues a lot of us have gone through. That's always been like a really important element of like taking in art for me, as well.

BW: It sounds like what you're talking about is finding ways to make grief or make trauma interpretable, whether it's interpretable to yourself, or interpretable to an audience. Why do you feel like that is important?

TES: That's a good question. As I get a little bit older, my instinct is not to describe these really hard things and make them public immediately, which is what I used to do. And I did some really important work that way. But recently, I've been a little more. . . cards-to-my-chest. In general, I think reading something painful someone else has gone through, even if it's fictional but especially if it's personal, just makes me feel much less alone. It makes me feel like the world is manageable and beautiful, despite heartbreak. And so I think when people share trauma publicly—you know, I think it's important for all of us to be protective of ourselves, and what's going to help us to feel okay—but I think that can be a really generous act to help other people feel seen and understood. Especially when certain writers or artists say things in a way I couldn't say, but I relate to it so much it helps me understand myself more.

BW: Can you think of an example of a work that has helped you understand yourself that way?

TES: I love Sally Rooney's *Normal People*—it's such a specific story. But I feel like so many other people have had similar experiences to that—when I read it, it just makes me feel like these are the deep regrets that I have in my romantic life. Like, I feel so much better about them because Sally Rooney also went through this rite of how impossible it is.

BW: Your thesis project, the tide pool room, was installed at an exhibit called *How to Survive* at the Anchorage Museum. What made you focus on the tide pool as a center for your creative work? How do you see them as related to ideas of survival?

TES: A lot of the projects that I embark and spend time on start as a little nugget that shows up in my brain and I'm like, *Oh, I have to explore that!* And oftentimes, it's through doing that I really started learning why it's important. The longer I stick with it without tossing it to the side, the more important it shows itself to be. Tide pools . . . I just had this idea that originated from enjoying long durational films—observational films, like *Leviathan* is one. Norwegian slow TV really captivated me for a while. Using film to just look at something for a long time, especially in today's age where our attention is so scattered and shattered and pulled in many directions. That interest, paired with being in Sitka, and being blown away by the biodiversity and the beauty of the kelp forests. Kelp forests are a little bit inaccessible, but a tide pool—you can just walk up to it. It's like a kid activity, because it's so accessible. Tide pools are magical things that exist all around Sitka, but sometimes we don't take the time to look at them. So it was almost for myself, *I just want to force myself to look at a tide pool for a really long time because I think a lot could be gleaned from that.* And Fran [*Francesca Dubrock, Anchorage Museum chief curator*], bless her, she helped me connect this project to survival in such a beautiful way: Attention is a precursor to care. This piece is directing attention to the coastal world, small invertebrates, and by extension, the natural marine world around us. One thing I learned in Sitka is people in a lot of smaller communities live more engaged and aware of the world. In LA, sometimes I don't even know what the weather's like. Because I'm inside all the time. So I really wanted to cultivate this sense of attention with myself. And care. And relation to the tide pools.

I've always used my art practice as a way to make sense of really difficult things in my life. A way to honor them, even if I can't fully make sense of them.



BW: I think that is a very beautiful framing of it. Each tide pool is a finite thing, but also a kind of portal into another world . . . that is still our world. Separate but same.

TES: I love that way of putting it; I love the portal, because that's so true. I love that film too, can be a portal. What you're saying speaks to what I was researching: A tide pool is the edge of two ecosystems, the zone of exchange. And I love that idea—between two entities, like a city and a forest, that boundary is a really, interesting and diverse place ecologically, but then you could also make that into a love story, and be like, Well yeah! That point of meeting and exchange is extra vibrant!

BW: That reminds me exactly of the Anna Tsing book you referenced earlier, you know all about—I think the subtitle is about the capitalist ruins?

TES: Capitalist ruins, yeah.

BW: But these boundary-crossing places! Because of ideas we've inherited, we know what a forest is, and we know what a city is. But we don't know what the inbetween of those things is, despite the fact that for every forest and every city, there's an

in-between thing. But that space doesn't really live in our conception . . . it's not like it doesn't exist, it's just that we don't have a word to categorize it.

TES: Yes, I couldn't agree more. What I learned from my thesis and the tide pool room, is that every relationship, whether it's between two people, or like, a rock and an ocean, it's different. You can't really make big generalizations. It's like a relationship between two people. And I think we know that about love—love has these universal qualities, but we would never say, I have the exact same relationship with this person that these other people have.

BW: Yeah, that really speaks to me. I've been thinking lately about the power of difference, and how we think of variation as being a very important genetic principle; a "strong" gene pool is a diverse gene pool, is a very Western science way of looking at it. But in non-genetic terms, it's almost like a principle of form; a world with a plurality of centers is much stronger and more resilient than a world with a single center.

TES: Wow. Yeah, that's really smart. I love the gene pool of our lives, it's so true—having lots of different relationships.

BW: I'd never thought about it the way you just describe—if you think about it as a love story, it becomes so obvious; we know it is possible to love many people. And you would never expect me to say, my love for my mother is worse or better or the same as my love for my father. There's no quantification or limitation or comparison that is really . . . relevant or necessary. We accept that love can live in the same space and time. It can also coexist, like the quantum physics principle of being a particle and also a wave; things can at a very fundamental levels, be together and apart.

TES: I couldn't agree more. Like I would never say my love for my mom is the same—or, I would not compare it to your relationship with your mom. But at the same time, I can relate, you know, I think I can relate—to anyone who has a mom. And I can relate to anyone who likes a favorite fish, without having to know them. I don't have any idea what their experiences are, but I can know what that might be to them. That's something that I'm trying to advocate for in my work: I don't think relationships are scalable. But I think there are unlimited relationships, spread across the world, unlimited love stories.

BW: This idea that being able to recognize love stories, in our own lives, whatever they may look like . . . may allow us to see clearly the humanity of other people? Even if we have no access to their voices, or we can't touch them, or reach them.

TES: Totally. And this might be a little tangential, but this is reminding me about a recent meme—"Oh, someone found out that bears appreciate beauty!" or something. And I was like . . . Were we ever thinking bears couldn't appreciate beauty? You know? It just was mind blowing to me. You know, a bear is a living thing! So it probably has some similarities to us! And obviously, we don't know what it's like to be a bear, but bears probably get hungry, and horny, and that stuff happens to us, too.

BW: We do, I think, as a species, kind of have a big ego problem. I said—recognize humanity in other people. And you immediately bring up—the humanity of other species. And well, it's not really humanity at all! It is like something larger and greater than that, that I don't know I even have a word for at all! But I think it is the thing that makes me interested in landscapes and the interconnectedness of the natural world, trying to unpeel all these layers of ideas or ideologies I've inherited to get down to the bottom and be like, Well, what is it that we all are, that we all share? What is it the bears see when they sit, you know, on the side of the river and look at the salmon?

TES: Totally. Yeah, it's interesting. There's not a word for like, humanity beyond humans. Interesting. But as you know, humans are struggling to have humanity these days. Not to get into that, but . . .

BW: No, it ties back to a lot of the things we've talked about. I had this thought today that the ecological crises we are seeing—the sense that resources are more precarious, and our relationships around resources are more precarious . . . it is not a coincidence that there's more unrest, and the world feels politically and geopolitically more dangerous, or more like fascist than it used to.

TES: You're totally right. Yeah, I didn't think of it that way. But it makes a lot of sense. And literally seeing like, resources being used as like, acts of war makes a lot of sense. So yeah.

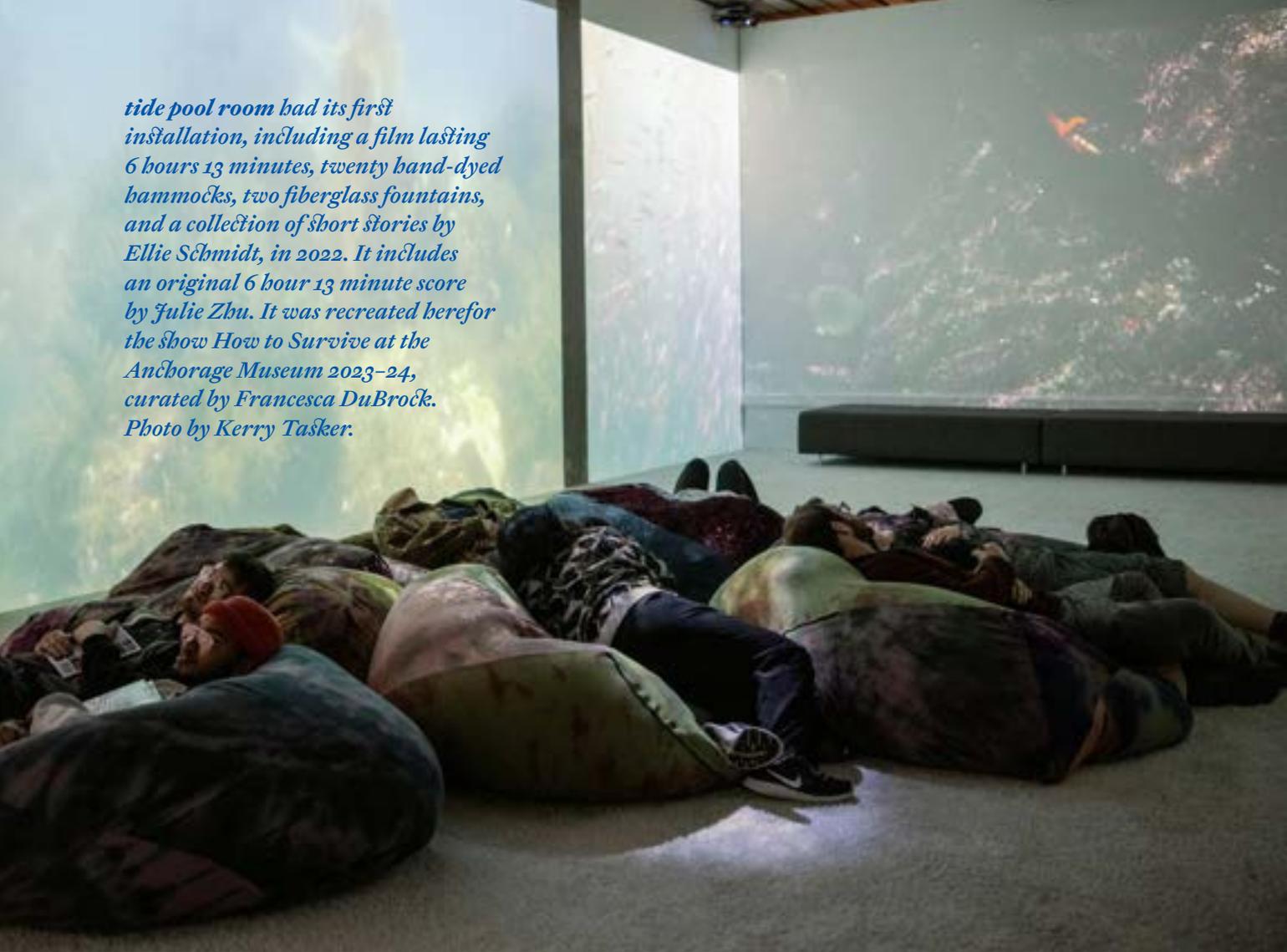
BAW: Weaponizing bread just feels like so . . .

TES: Dystopian.

BW: Yeah.

TES: Yeah. I think it goes back to what we're saying. Everyone has a relationship with their family, and a place, and we're never going to know all of those. But I believe the more specific a story is, the more relatable it is. So, I really like these highly specific personal stories that have big ripples.

tide pool room had its first installation, including a film lasting 6 hours 13 minutes, twenty hand-dyed hammocks, two fiberglass fountains, and a collection of short stories by Ellie Schmidt, in 2022. It includes an original 6 hour 13 minute score by Julie Zbu. It was recreated here for the show How to Survive at the Anchorage Museum 2023-24, curated by Francesca DuBrock. Photo by Kerry Tasker.



BW: Yeah. For a long time, I struggled to understand, if I take pictures of my family, how do you deal with that little voice in your head that just says, like, who's gonna care about this? Why would people care about my little pictures of my little life? But it's genuine. Often the more specific something is, the more relatable it is. We don't need everything to be completely universal. We just need to be able to recognize the genuineness in each other's experiences.

TES: I really love that a lot. I agree, when I see photographers who photograph their families in their backyard, it makes me love my own backyard more. A backyard or like, someone like, you know,

eating out of a fridge late at night. I don't know how to elevate those mundane moments. We haven't even talked about mundanity! But that's something I'm thinking a lot about right now.

BW: One-hundred percent.

TES: I'm just reiterating what you said—and I was inspired to start a photo essay on my family, you know, and they're mundane, too. But I really love your work on your family that you know, spans years and big family shifts and . . . it's amazing. I agree about genuineness.

focus on evolution by descent and natural selection, the origin of life is not a simple trickle to be tracked back to a clearly identifiable source.

The tree of life becomes even more obscured when we hack evolution in a lateral orientation. Cross mixings, lateral transfers, and symbiogenesis are a more direct concern for Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, whose discussions of the orchid and wasp, and other lateral becomings, are widely known. These becomings are also at the core of Stefan Helmreich's (2009: 81) investigation into the dissolution of the tree of life, in the hot water of deep sea thermal vents. Contemporary microbiological studies of hyperthermophiles do not draw a clear line of descent at all, but instead reveal 'genetic trajectories pointing every which way'. In following these extremophiles, Helmreich discovers how 'lateral gene transfer in microbes places in jeopardy the vertical inheritance needed to root the tree of life' (87). Helmreich's focus is on how new paradigms of science – biogenetics, in this case – are finding new ways to break down life and build it up again, and what this might mean for how we understand kinship and ourselves (these ocean microbes, he concludes, are both 'a primordial version of ourselves' and also an 'alien' – an 'unfamiliar interloper'). But his other point is specifically about how lateral crossings disturb both linear genealogies and evolutionary timekeeping (105) – and, we should note, how these strange kinships are blooming in the sea. Below the surface, the origins of life are murkier than ever.

But even if life began in the sea, what happens to water as a gestational milieu, once we cross Zimmer's 'fatal boundary' that separates watery and terrestrial proclivities, divest ourselves of scales and fins, and learn to stand on our own two feet? Given this tendency to forget our watery beginnings, perhaps we need to pack a bag – a souvenir of sorts – and take it along for the ride.

Carrier bags and Hypersea

In 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', feminist writer Ursula LeGuin refers to Elizabeth Fisher's 1975 discussion of human evolution where she claims 'the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of sling or net carrier' (Fisher, quoted in LeGuin

1989: 166) – and not a sharp, pointy weapon, as the more popular story goes, at all. Carrying, in other words, is the first trick that we learned to do. For LeGuin, a key point here is that she can recognize herself in this story; in place of sagas of Man the Hunter, she finds a more capacious tale in which to root herself. It ‘grounds me, personally’, she writes, ‘in human culture in a way I never felt grounded before. So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share of it’ (167).

Again, it matters what stories we tell. Fisher and LeGuin’s story makes sense (‘If you haven’t got something to put it in, food will escape you’ [166]). It is also a more feminist origin story with no need for the biological essentialism of feminine docility (as LeGuin notes, she is often angry, and she’d happily club a hoodlum over the head with her handbag). For LeGuin, the point is that the carrier bag theory is more inclusive and does away with tired hero narratives. This in itself is a good reason to retell it (and, as we’ll see below, offering origin stories that start from the place of sexual difference can result in all kinds of productive work). But as LeGuin also notes, a carrier bag holds things, and more than that it ‘holds things in a particular, powerful relation to each other and us’ (169). This leads me to wonder: what if we push LeGuin’s tale even further? I suggest that we *ourselves*, as bodies of water, are also evolutionary carrier bags – facilitating the proliferation of the new by holding water and becoming literal gestational milieu for the other. What we hold is this potential for diffractive relationality.

The water that gave us life is also the water that we humans in turn carry with us, in us. We have literally incorporated this water, as Deleuze and Guattari remark in their epigraph above; the evolutionary emergence of terrestrial life depended upon this. Our own human bodies are approximately three-quarters water, but even life forms evolved to survive in the driest of conditions, such as desert plants, are still at least half soggy. Moving to a new terrestrial address meant that evolving life had to invent creative means for dealing with the threat of desiccation. One of these inventions was the amniotic egg, which kept amniote embryos perpetually in water thanks to their hard, calcium-rich shells. (This liquid insurance replaced the jelly encasing that surrounded fish and amphibian eggs, necessarily laid and gestated in a watery habitat in order

to survive.)¹³ Other innovations included the various salt and water uptake mechanisms that guaranteed sufficient quantities of both substances, for while aquatic animals were constantly immersed in water and appropriate amounts of saline, terrestrial animals had to actively seek these out. Such mechanisms range from the infiltration of the porous oral and anal surfaces of terrestrial woodlice (Little 1990: 204) to the dew-collecting innovations of a certain Namibian desert beetle who, when fogs are dense, scuttles to the top of a sand dune, stands with its head down and belly up, and drinks the water that condenses on and then flows down its body toward its mouth (205). Other specific innovations include the production of tough skin (to prevent excessive water loss), absorptive intestines (to allow water in), big lungs (to replace oxygen intake through water), and tears (to keep exposed eyes moist and allow vision to become acute) (Zimmer 1998: 109). All of these adaptations, of course, involve a negotiation of our bodies specifically in relation to their watery topography.

But a final innovation reveals the role of water in these adaptations as not only a tool for self-survival, but as a mechanism for the gestation and further proliferation of other life, too. This is what evolutionary scientists Mark and Dianna McMenamin call Hypersea, that is, the interconnected system of terrestrial life that has extended the sea and taken it along for the ride. The McMenamins (1994: 25) elaborate the fascinating process to which Deleuze and Guattari allude: ‘The land biota represents not simply life from the sea, but a variation of the sea itself. Acting over evolutionary time as a rising tide, the land biota literally carries the sea and its distinctive solutes over the surface of the land, into some of the driest environments on Earth.’ They elaborate: on land, the life sustenance that was passively accessible in a marine environment has to be actively facilitated through increasingly complex networks of microscopic organisms, fungi, and plants, as well as the animals – both human and otherwise – dependent on symbiosis, physical connection, and proximity. In Hypersea, life nests within other life on land like sets of Russian dolls. Or, one species visits another, bequeathing to it new species who seek out new routes of fluid fecundity in a novel other-species internal habitat. Without the sea to serve as a prime communicator and facilitator, life on land needed to chart its own watercourses – most available in the watery tissues and body fluids of other life forms.¹⁴ This is how we became carrier bags.



PROCESS

marbling

Marbling is a style of printing from a liquid surface, so named for its ability to emulate the texture of fine marble stone. Each print is a monotype.

Set of 9
3 × 6 inches
2022

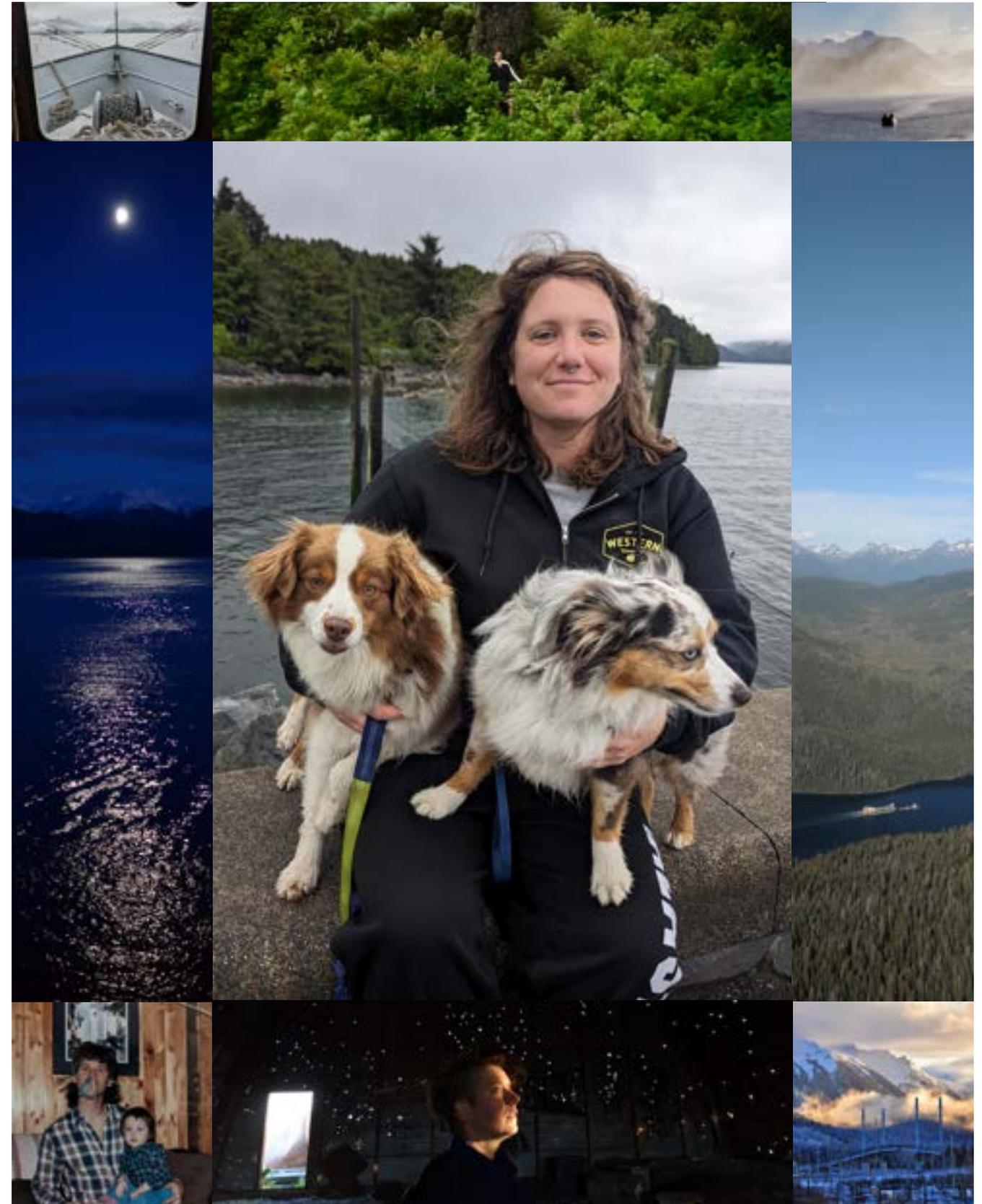




Adrienne Wilber is a professional mariner and artist. Born and raised in Sitka, Alaska, she began her career at the relatively advanced age of 11 on fishing vessel Alexa K. First duties included “counting the fish and making the sandwiches.”

In the 23 years since she has long-lined for black cod and halibut, sailed blue water passages in the Pacific and Atlantic, taken coastal voyages with students in Southern California and the Salish Sea, cruised Southeast Alaska as a mate on passenger vessels, and now works full time at *Western Towboat*. She is a second mate operating tugs between Seattle and Alaska.

Her art practice spans mediums, but lately she has been working in linocut, on a series about the vessels she’s sailed and worked on around the world, as well as the people and culture of a life at sea.



PROJECT

vessels catalogue

Speculative museum catalogue for a show of Adrienne Wilber’s linocut prints at the fictional Whittier Gallery. Wilber and her crew often turn their tugboat around in Whittier, the last stop before the boat heads back across the Gulf of Alaska and through British Columbia, toward Seattle. Since all the residents of Whittier live in a single apartment building, it is a natural location for a local artists’ gallery.

with Doug Scott
72 by 36 in, folds to 24 × 18 inches
2023–24

Adrienne Kathleen Wilber

LINOCUTS of the NORTH PACIFIC at the WHITTIER GALLERY

Can you introduce yourself and describe your practice?

I was born and raised in Sitka, Alaska. I left home to go to college in the Midwest and I really missed the ocean. So, I got a job working on — or, I volunteered. I got a job working on a sailboat. I was just so fascinated by how the plankton looked and how people almost never knew what they looked like.

One of the really nice things about my job is that when I'm on land, I don't have any job responsibilities. None whatsoever. So during my off time, I have a ton of freedom in my ability to make art. And because I don't have a set schedule on the boat, I don't have the opportunity to work over time. And makes a lot of art related to those themes.

I first just started doing mostly plankton. When I was working on the sailboat, we did all these deep sea plankton tows. I was just so enchanted by how the plankton looked and how people almost never knew what they looked like.

[When] the pandemic happened, I did this series of oil self-portraits. It was one of the first times that I was making art without thinking about the value it held to other people. I was just thinking about the value that it held to me.

And that was like a big growing moment in my art practice. I came back to the boat, but I was doing them in a way that felt a lot more creative to me — I was doing interesting, weird things that I wouldn't have thought about doing before. Like, one of my favorite pieces that I've made in the last probably two or three years is a key monster that's made out of a Hidden Valley Ranch bottle ticking a slice of pizza.

It's just like a weird creator ... that's kinda gross! But I really like it. So that really informed me making more personal choices about what I think is in art, and following that, which in turn makes the art more interesting to me and makes me want to make more.

I'm working on this boat series right now. I was inspired to do the first one because, well, in general, I just am a fan of boats. I think they are cool. It is probably the biggest reason. I think they're pretty. I think they're cute. I thought I think about them was they go on great.



TOP: CHILHOOD SNAPSHOT FROM HARBOR MOUNTAIN SITKA, ALASKA c. 1997

BOTTOM: CAPTAIN OF THE FAMILY SKIFF 2017



NO FRESH FISH AT THE FISH MARKET 2023

FAIL-SAFE NOSE PROTECTOR 2022



I had coffee with Dad when I was at home around Thanksgiving and he just told me the great story about... well, "a great" story of nonviolent maritime disaster... when he worked on the Georgeann, about how they had to emergency bail the barge loose, and it got hung up on a rock, and they had to crane all the logs off, and everyone was fine. The barge was a little torn up, but basically it was fine. And I really loved the story of it.

And I think it was also because I was like having such a good Dad time? I was like, we're bonding about boats! But like we haven't bonded this much about boats in a while. So I was just like having all these good feelings about it.

And I was like, wow, I really want to — I'll get this feeling when I'm just doing stuff in my day-to-day when I'm like, oh, I want to make art of that. And all kind of just goes bang and then I think it away. Sometimes I remember to write it down, and sometimes I don't. But then when I'm feeling like, oh, I want to make art, or what were those moments, or what were those photos that were like — oh, I want to make art of this.

So one of the reasons I have been doing boats, but specifically the large framed pieces that I'm doing right now, is because I'm really enjoying being able to add elements of storytelling into the art.

On the Georgeann, on the outside edge are the towing cables. People don't get to see towing cable up close very often. On the corners are the different sized cables that we use on deck for making and breaking tow. That part is kind of related to my boat crash stuff, where I'm like, this stuff is so cool! People don't know! They should know!

But then on the bottom is a picture of a sailor standing by, and a little white stuff — they're setting a seine net and then there's logs in the middle, which is because part of the story that Dad told me was they unloaded all the logs off the barge back to the sea, but they wanted to get them back because they were worth a lot of money. So there were some local whalers in the area that they asked to make sets for the logs to catch them. So I said a sailor for reference called the Challenge that a few different friends have worked on in the past. It was just like a really pretty boat that I think is cool. A theme!

On the bottom is a little panorama of the Alaska Range including Mount Fairweather, which is, you know, one of the most striking, beautiful mountains ever, especially from the sea. It's super tall, snow-capped, beautiful. For as growing up, we heard about the Fairweather grounds all the time. And now I go right by them. And every once in a while we would see Mount Fairweather fishing with dad when it was super clear, and we happened to be far enough, "Oh! Dad!" like... [deep voice] "There it is!" "So, good! Yeah! Mountain, and it's cool to see it so much closer to it, and go by.

Get ahold of the owner of the company George Buggs, and he flew down to a Boat place and started to rigging what to do. We had to go to three other tugboats to come and all get onto the barge so I can get out and off. I was like, "I'm not going to do all these tugboat pulling, I want more!"

The main reason was to unload the logs. There were some whalers coming through. So we called the whalers. "You got want to make some whaling sets?" "Yes!" These were big bundles of logs. These guys — I was kind of mad at the moment, it was like, "They were more than happy to collect bundles of logs for fuel! Remember how much, but they were going to make money."

I think about three, that day to unload the barge. The crane operator would start the logs to the water and they would float down toward where the whalers were. And then there would be a boat that would be pulling it in. So we had to get the logs right enough so it could be pulled off the rock. It had a pretty good gain in it. So we had to load the barge, enough of the way to Seattle where it could be repacked for sale.

I know George Buggs is like, he's the boss, right across the dock from ours — the Confirmation. I had George would, and then I was a head master, I was like, "The whole thing has a half a lot of money. And the skipper had his life on the line. You know it could have been... I mean in the case of the skipper, I very possibly could have been killed over in the Confirmation. I'm not kidding about that. We were just another day on the barge."

This comes to another short story to make the piece — going through George Harmon, I don't know if I passed it out to you as a piece, there's a crew? Well, that crew was for the three three guys that were on a tugboat. And they probably would have been the skipper was a little like. The current was starting to pull. They were going with it — the barge started to operate the boat because the water was going so fast. So before they knew what the hell was going on, the barge was out of control, going to the north side of the boat over. Roll the boat. Three guys died and... you know it. The boat was out of control. The barge, and they were in the water. The boat was out of control. The barge, and they were in the water. The boat was out of control. The barge, and they were in the water.

Most of the time it's pretty, pretty dull stuff, just going along. But every once in a while, you know, crazy weather, or getting the barge grounded. The old saying was, "The barge was never more than a few miles from shore. And I would have to agree with that."

I've been forever grateful — in fact, I told George one time, you know, probably wouldn't have made it fishing had I not had a couple of years to get me through that. I don't know if I ever said that. I was forever grateful that I got me a chance to make some more art about the barge.



PHONE CALL 2022



MOUNTAIN BEAVER ELECTRICIAN 2022



SHACK



TELL YOUR WIFE I'M NOT IN LOVE WITH YOU 2023

And then in the next print that I sent you, — one of them shows Cap St. Elise which, I'migrating Arctic snow goose. Because — I think it was my second trip on the boat? We accidentally drove through a flock of snow geese resting on the sea. It was at night, we didn't see that until the last minute, and they flew up to get away from the boat. Some were... unaccounted for... and landed upon the vessel. No injury to snow geese! They were all the wadding around confusally on the deck, but in my mind I was like, oh my god — these snow geese are migrating. They are with their flock. We can't carry through three of the snow geese away from their migratory group!

So I was like okay guys, I'm gonna have to go. I'm gonna go toss the snow geese off the boat.

And on my co-deckhand, Devin (a lot of being deckhands on tugboats is being like... teamwork! If you're going after the snow geese, I'm going after the snow geese), we went down onto the foredeck, where there's three snow geese sort of wandering being like... what the Fck is this! And Devin was a little nervous about the snow geese. I was like, hands out, going for the snow geese, and Devin was like, "Are...they...mean?" And I was like, "No, they're great!"

And so I scooped up this first snow goose — so white. So warm. So soft. And white. I scooped up the goose and just put it on the edge of the boat. And I looked around for a second then was like oh god! and flew away. My next two snow geese captures were not quite as graceful — I didn't manage to get both wings at the same time. So it was a little bit more of a like... they were all made it back into the sea, and in my mind, they are migrating with their group still as we speak.

But I still look at his prints to look at how he carries the sea. Water and the ocean, is like... it's... it's my white whale of printmaking. [Laughing] For another maritime reference. Because it's so complicated: it can have so much texture or so little texture. So one thing that I'm also really enjoying about this series is that I'm also really enjoying about this series I've been working on it's one of the first ones where I have just really embraced trying to work on the sea, and water, and ways that I'm just like, blown away. He works on wood and I do not, but his work inspires me that one day I would. For a long time, I wished I could make art exactly like his art. That it was just the most perfect block cuts of anyone, ever. And as I have done more of my own and developed more of my own style, I don't feel like that as much — I like the art that I'm making.

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in the corners on the top are two pair tights — one of them shows Cap St. Elise which, same idea — was cool, had never been able to see it in person, and was so excited to be able to. And a little splashing wave. And at the bottom is Winder and a rag and some cooling quarters, because that is super what I was doing on that trip...

Clearly place has a large influence on your work.

The place that you exist in the boat, but also the place that the boat goes. I could go on for so long. Like socially, politically, community-wise... mentally... it's one of the things that I love about [Devin], also in a joking way, I say I got into boats for the commute, because it's a five minute walk from my bank to the bridge.

So you end up feeling really rooted in this place, because you can't go anywhere, and to the people that you're with, because you can't get away from them. But also, I always say that my favorite part of my job is looking out the window, because it's always changing. And you have a very snug, safe place, but you are never in the same place.

Who are your influences?

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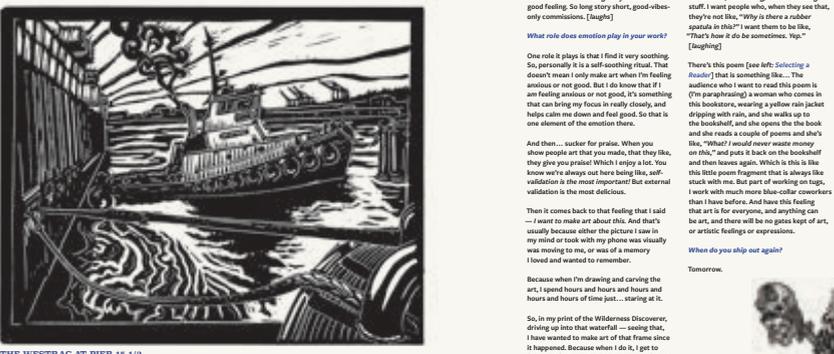


ALASKA TITAN AT LA PEROUSE GLACIER 18 x 24 inches 2024

SELECTING A READER

First, I would have her be beautiful, and walking carefully up on my poetry at the loneliest moment of an afternoon, her hair still damp at the neck from washing it. She should be wearing a raincoat, an old one, dirty from not having money enough for the cleaners. She will take out her glasses, and there in the bookstore, she will thumb over my poems, then put the book back up on its shelf. She will say to herself, "For that kind of money, I can get my raincoat fixed." And she will.

TED KOOSER 1985



THE WESTRAC AT PIER 15 1/2 2023

LASER PIZZA

Who is your dream commission?

I don't know if I have a dream commission, actually. I have people ask me not infrequently if I'm taking commissions, or if I will do commissions. And you know how I was talking about how I get this feeling in my day to day where I'm like, oh, I want to make art of that? When you're doing commission work, that does not come into the equation. You are doing art for someone else. And I find a lot less meaning in that. Not always... sometimes. Long story short, commissions with a lot of freedom of design.

Who is my audience? When I imagine my audience, it is other people who like boats. [Laughs]

Who is your audience? When I imagine my audience, it is other people who like boats. [Laughs]

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“The old saying on the tugboat was 99.9% boredom and .1% sheer terror. And I would have to agree with that.” —Charlie Wilber

“My favorite part of my job is looking out the window, because it's always changing.” —Adrienne Wilber

PROJECT

pacific/ atlantic

Letter to my sister,
printed by risograph
on water soluble paper.
Sent by dissolving in the
Atlantic to be carried
by ocean currents and
delivered to the Pacific.

Photographed and
formatted into
perfect-bound book.

8.5 × 11 inches
2022



You
How long does it take water from the Atlantic in Rhode Island to reach the Pacific in

ChatGPT
The journey of water from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean in Rhode Island, or any location along the East Coast of the United States, involves a complex system of ocean currents and circulation patterns. However, it's important to note that water from the Atlantic Ocean doesn't directly flow into the Pacific Ocean without undergoing significant transformations and mixing with water from other sources.

One of the primary mechanisms by which water from the Atlantic Ocean can eventually reach the Pacific Ocean is through the Gulf Stream, a powerful ocean current that flows northward along the East Coast of the United States. The Gulf Stream transports warm water from the tropics toward higher latitudes, and some of this water eventually enters the North Atlantic Current.

The North Atlantic Current, in turn, flows northeastward across the North Atlantic Ocean and eventually merges with other currents, such as the Labrador Current and the Norwegian Current. These currents contribute to the circulation of water within the North Atlantic Ocean basin.

Ultimately, water from the North Atlantic Ocean can enter the Arctic Ocean through various passages, including the Fram Strait between Greenland and Svalbard. From the Arctic Ocean, some of this water may eventually reach the Pacific Ocean through the Bering Strait, which connects the Arctic Ocean to the Bering Sea and the broader North Pacific Ocean.

However, the process of water traveling from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean via these circulation patterns can take a considerable amount of time, potentially years or even decades, due to the complex and slow-moving nature of ocean currents.

It's also worth noting that while water from the Atlantic Ocean may eventually reach the Pacific Ocean through these circulation pathways, it undergoes mixing with water from other sources along the way, and its original identity as "Atlantic water" may become indistinguishable.

there is
only one
ocean.

Love you



Land



PROJECT

minutiae

minutiae is an ongoing photo documentation practice featuring small people and big landscapes.

Photobook
8.5 × 11 inches
170 pages

2024

Analog photographs are made with silver. The “thickness” of the negative depends on the light sensitive quality of silver when it’s bonded with salts.

Digital images rely on an even more complex relationship between electricity, metals, and minerals. Graphite is used in the lithium ion batteries; silicon, quartz, and germanium conduct electricity; sphalerite is used for liquid crystal displays, and so on. As philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe writes in his book *The Earthly Community*, the “immateriality of images is based on the materiality of machines.”

The raw material of image-making is land.

Baseline shift is the generational adjustment we make to new conditions, our acceptance of new norms.

Like glaciers, the movements of norms are often invisible to the naked eye, but powerful enough to carve rock.

As the climate shifts more extreme, making images is an act of witness. It marks a continuity of relationship—even as the relationship changes, picks up speed and navigates turbulence.

I have always been driven to make images of small people in giant landscapes.

Experiencing life as a tiny component and as part of a giant whole—simultaneously—gives me a rush that makes me feel happy to be alive.

The project is not about identification or surveillance. The figures who roam the following landscapes remain unidentified, unless you recognize them, in which case—you recognize them.

Tiny traces of people haunt the landscape on a massive scale. Forever chemicals contaminate rainwater everywhere it falls. Microplastics are embedded in the blubber of marine mammals.

Perhaps in a similar way, images haunt us. A picture creates a relationship between image and viewer. Its immediate influence may be weak and imperceptible, but over time, it can build. Images are stable, but as the context of the world changes around them, their meanings also shift and grow. They can communicate in feeling, creating and circulating emotion.

Images memorialize experience, illuminate values, and establish connections. They embed intangible values and narratives into tangible representations we can share and pass on.

What we care about makes a difference in our survival. It’s harder to care about what we can’t see.













*“The physical landscape
is baffling in its ability
to transcend whatever we
would make of it. It is as
subtle in its expression as
turns of the mind, and
larger than our grasp;
and yet is still knowable.”*

—Barry Lopez
Arctic Dreams
1986

annika ord

Annika Ord is a master's student in Geography at the University of British Columbia in Victoria. Originally from Juneau, Alaska, she has been a commercial fisherman, glacier educator and researcher, wildlife biologist, and place-based storyteller.

Her research gathers place-based knowledge of glacier retreat and landscape change in Southeast Alaska to support local climate concerns through community initiatives.



BAW: Oh my gosh, where are you?

AO: I am in my house in Squamish. I'm turning you around so you can see the mountains out there, how sunny it is. It is so nice!

BW: Looks springy there.

AO: Yeah, I was just on a four day walk over on Vancouver Island, On the coast. It was so sunny, it was 60s and spring, and all the leaves are starting to blossom. I should say too, I'm definitely still working through concussion symptoms. So if I'm not like looking at you as much—

BW: You can ignore me. You don't have to look at the screen at all. Protect yourself first. I'm sorry to hear that you've got a concussion.

AO: It's getting a lot better. Which is great. It's been a long haul.

BW: Yeah.

AO: Yeah. But I'm feeling more like myself, and I have more energy. And that's amazing.

BW: Good.

AO: Yeah. But anyways, I know we have—I'm curious to learn a little bit about what the project is, or what you're looking for today.

BW: It might just be easiest to start by asking you . . . what have you been studying for the last few years?

AO: Yeah, I'm doing a master's in geography. I was really interested in the physical side of geography—physical sciences—and the social side—human geography. And I was more interested in doing both of them than doing one, and was curious—I think, motivated in some ways by similar questions about relationship to land and place. How that's changing with climate change, and how we need to change some of the

relationships we have inherited through capitalist colonial systems that are sort of . . . driving the crisis—what does that look like? Specifically, I was really interested in doing work with communities; how do we work better as scientists and climate researchers in this era of climate crisis, where a lot of systems are becoming unstable? I don't think it works to follow the same patterns of reason and research, originating at the university, apart from community. So how do we do a better job working closely with community priorities and community partners to support climate resilience? And adaptation, both in scientific or technological ways, but also culturally, in our value systems, which . . . I think they are all really related. My project was doing interviews with people in southeast Alaska and Tlingit áani around glacier retreat, how it influences downstream ecosystems and communities. The motivation was seeing a lot of scientists coming at it from a very institutional background, not valuing or engaging with local or indigenous knowledge. Assuming glacier retreat had implications to communities that mattered to them, but not actually . . . talking to those communities. So, I wanted to ask, how is glacier retreat relevant to you, to the people I spoke to, which were fishermen and harvesters, and some like local scientists, and a handful of elders and knowledge-holders with Hoonah Indian Association and Taku River Tlingit First Nation out of Atlin. I'm writing up that thesis now. Slowly but surely.

BW: I feel you. Did you feel like you had a big takeaway from your research or a couple of things that surprised you?

AO: I think engaging with local and Indigenous knowledge and play-space knowledge in the way I did shows the relational fabric of a place, the physical and ecological systems, and also our human systems. I think it does that really well, particularly compared to say, a glaciology background or paper. The number of connections and relationships captured through conversation, the knowledge felt far more expansive—while less

like “analytically backed” in the scientific term of that— it was far more expansive and holistic. They just captured how everything is interconnected, including ourselves, to that system, which I don’t think is surprising at all, but I think it is an important thing for academic, scientific pursuits to value and acknowledge. The other thing that is not surprising is salmon—like, the conversation started around glaciers, and the thing that made glaciers relevant to people were salmon. There’s some other connections you can find, but like that was the main, driving connection. And how I’m framing a big portion of my thesis! Lastly, I would say glaciers in general, while people recognize they provided important services for the landscape and the communities, whether it’s cooling salmon streams or providing a stable freshwater source for aquatic habitat, they were not the primary climate concern for pretty much anyone in the region. Which is also not surprising, but I think is something that’s important for scientists hyper-focused on cryosphere and ice to recognize. So I find that my thesis is really just trying to put glaciers into perspective within this wider web, of both relationships between physical and biophysical human worlds, but also like . . . what is important for communities to focus on in this era of the climate crisis?

BW: Why do you feel like narrative is such a valuable tool for exploring those relationships, compared to the more analytical kind of Western science worldview you just referred to?

AO: I think stories and narrative try to capture the imprints of our lives and our experiences. I think there are relationships that science—and sort of Western European science is what I’m referring to when I say science— is just not good at capturing. The importance of having a relationship to salmon, for instance, a species you’re harvesting— what having those physical interactions means, and what you learn from them, and how it ties you to the land and a value system, or many different value systems. We need science, but it’s just one

component of a much bigger picture. And I see a lot of transformations that need to happen to move forward more sustainably with the earth, and each other. And I don’t think science alone is gonna get us there. In fact, I know it’s not. I think stories and narratives, and valuing people’s experiences and knowledge, is a really important element to so many things like building strong relationships and communities and having a value system that extends beyond analytics or numbers. I don’t know. I don’t really know. There’s so much.

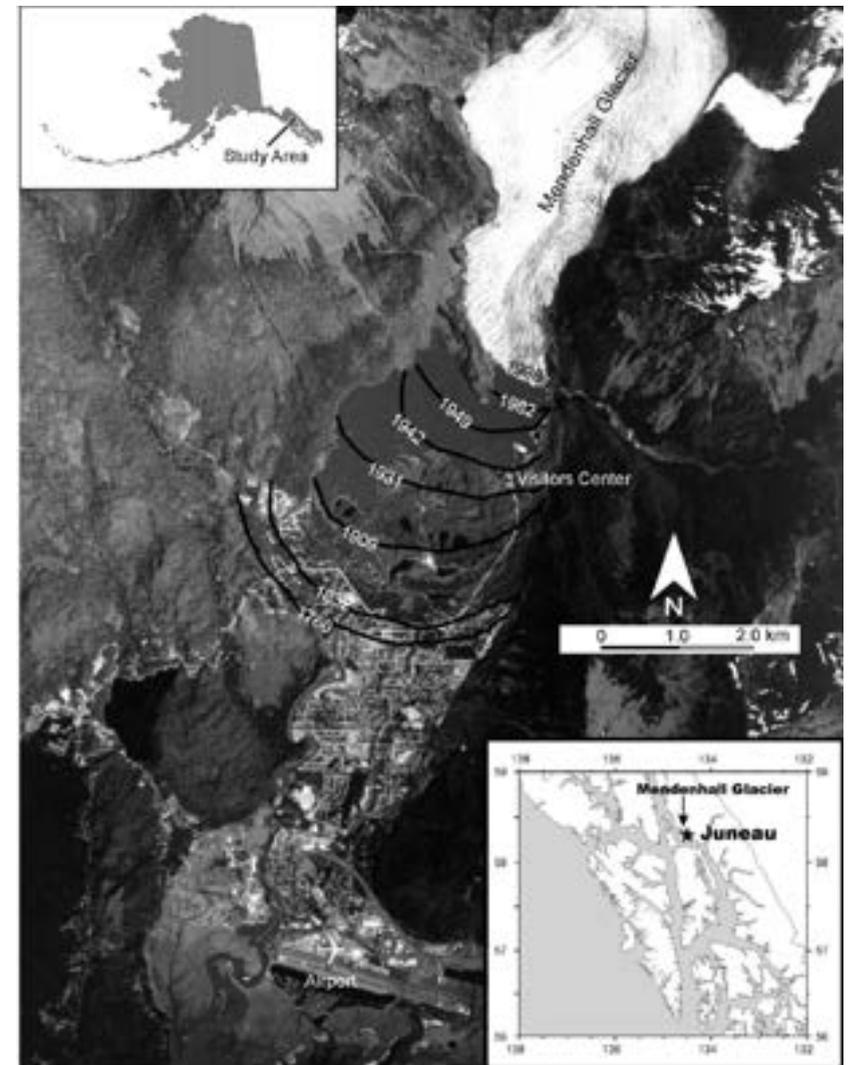
BW: It is a big question. There’s not a right answer or a wrong answer, between the qualitative and the quantitative. I’m hearing you have a lot of the ideas and struggles I feel like I’ve been having in the design world about the valuation of quantitative over qualitative. One of the things that you just mentioned was talking about how land shapes your value systems. How do you think the land that you are from has shaped your value system?

AO: Yes, such a question, and in so many ways. It has . . . I mean, I feel like if I’m telling a story to someone about my life, it always starts with where I’m from. Which in itself feels telling—it’s the first thing I have to explain to people. That relationship to home, in place. It feels like so much of me and my values and community grows from that. I think growing up in a commercial fishing family, living semi-remotely for a good chunk of the year, being really tied to the weather and the tides and the seasons and the fishing schedule and when you’re gonna go up the river and catch salmon and smoke it and can it with your family, and like all of these things are just . . . they just root me in the world and root me to a place, and have instilled like a kind of a deep sense of . . . what is the right word? Like, responsibility, I guess? Or maybe it’s more than . . . I mean, it’s like love, but also like a need . . . a responsibility to care for that part of the world. And to be putting my energy into hoping the future looks a little less bleak. When you think about what’s already happening, but what is supposed to be happening with climate change . . . How has it shaped my values? I mean, I think in like, almost

every way, like . . . It just feels like the anchor, my anchor in the world. And while other things might change, I know that place is home and I want to see the seasons change and harvest the food when it’s ready and help make sure that people after me get to do that, too, in a way that doesn’t harm the land, or that is sort of like, partners with that place.

BW: It’s a question I too am trying to come to terms with. When you are not at home—out working and studying in places that aren’t the homeland— do you feel homesick, do you long for the land?

AO: Yeah, totally. No, absolutely. I think there’s an adjustment period, always. The first year I was living here, I’d never lived in the city before, I’d never been to Vancouver before. And I packed up my life and my world and left many things and people, and came here and I felt keenly, deeply homesick. I think the experience of being surrounded by more mass media market marketing and lights and advertisements and noise and living in an urban environment after spending a lot of my years in what people would call very wild places, I felt very eroded. Very thin around the edges. I craved returning, yeah, returning to the land and the place that feels like that nourishes me in a way, or is more restful and energizing for me. I think that there’s not really any question in my mind that that part of Alaska is home. Leaving has made it really apparent that I want to spend my life knowing that place and giving back to it. And like that’s been very clarity inducing, I guess.



Location map and aerial photo of Mendenhall Glacier; with several post-Little Ice Age terminus positions are mapped in shown. Figure drawn from the paper Twentieth century thinning of Mendenhall Glacier, Alaska, and its relationship to climate, lake calving, and glacier run-off by Roman J. Motykaa, Shad O’Neela, Cathy L. Connorb, and Keith A. Edelmeye, in Global and Planetary Change, 2002.

Annika Ord pulls the boat to shore at Couverden, her family's remote home site in Southeast Alaska in 2016.



I've always had a little bit of this bug of needing to leave and go do new things, or make sure that I'm not just settling. I think that getting space has been very clarifying in that way. It has been nice to really embrace—the first year was hard, but while I've been finishing my master's, maybe particularly knowing the assurance of going back very soon, I'm just really trying to appreciate existing and have a different frame. Yeah. But it has certainly got a lot of gravity. Just tugs you back every time. Tugs me back.

BW: Can't stay, can't stay away.

AO: This time of the year! You start to think of all the things that are growing, and the herring coming back, and Sitka, and the nettles, and the salmon-berry blossoms are gonna bloom soon and my family goes to Couverden and it's time to work on the cabin, and there's like smell . . . Like the smell and . . . I was walking this this last weekend, and there was like blooming salmon berries and skunk cabbage coming up, and like the smell of early spring mud and I was walking along this really rocky shoreline that was rugged . . . and the forest was a lot closer to home, too, more like hemlocks and spruce. less Douglas fir. And just like the smells . . . I don't know, they just call to you.

BW: Yeah. I think it's interesting when you frame it that way, because that feeling of home . . . it's about this environment you're familiar with. So the forest on the Coast can feel like home, even though it is still very far away from the literal place you were raised. This idea that these ecosystems feel like home. No land is interchangeable, but I guess to me, the idea of home is more than the map.

AO: Totally. Even smell, I think so much about smell, and that smells are just like homes—when they pop up and you suddenly get transported back to all these moments and times. But I do like that home is not necessarily always a geographic location, you can find it in a lot of different ways.

BAW: Okay. Another thing I want to ask you about is about growing up in a commercial fishing family and your relationship to death.

AO: I thought about that question, I like it. I'm supposed to get my heart rate up right now to try to get my brain back in action, I thought about it as I puffed my way up the hill. Yeah, I think that is a great question—I think that growing up fishing, commercial fishing, where you're getting a lot of fish—or in my family halibut and crab—you're catching a lot of creatures and killing them—or at least sending them off to die, in the case of crab—

BW:—oh, yeah. You are the instrument of death—

AO:—the instrument of death! I think it has made me think a lot about it. I think it has made me very aware of what I'm doing. And also question it at times. Or maybe all the time?

BW: Question in what sense?

AO: Oh, whether it's sustainable to harvest what we do. And my energy in life going towards harvesting at that scale. Or like, killing at that scale.

BW: Meaning, a commercial level, where you're selling your catch for money as opposed to eating it?

AO: As opposed to subsistence, what you and kind of your extended family need. I guess I'm not convinced the way we are going about it, even in Alaska where the fisheries are claimed to be so sustainable—meanwhile, we're seeing a lot of things collapse. I think if I truly believed it was sustainable, and that food was going to good places, I would have less struggles with that. I mean, every time I go out—particularly halibut fishing, because you're pulling up really big fish that sometimes weigh more than I weigh—you're using a knife to bleed them out on the deck. And making that choice every time. Puncturing their gills. Especially with the big ones, that makes me really sad. And very grateful. And that like every

fish, I have to say thank you to. With crab—I mean, I’m a softy on the boat. We get the big halibut, and I’m like Dad, can we send her back? We need the big ones to make all the babies. Or like every hundred crab, I send a rogue one back into the ocean because, You get to live! Or like I would be pitching crab from the hold to the processor . . . Yeah, occasionally I would just toss it over. Because they’re still alive! I’m just like, you know, I can’t . . . I don’t know. There’s part of me that really struggles with that. While also thinking it’s like a very beautiful way to—particularly living in southern British Columbia where salmon runs are pretty decimated, every forest you walk in feels clearcut, and this place is still quite wild on the scale of things compared to many other places in the world. Like leaving Alaska . . . what a privilege it is that we got to grow up the way we did. And also that balance, that experience and those relationships hang in the balance of a changing climate, over-extraction, over-harvesting. So yeah, it makes me have a lot of complicated feelings about death. And the role I play in it. But yeah . . . being able to make a living from a wild—wild including humans of course—landscape . . . harvest salmon or fish or halibut or crab. Yeah, it is really exceptional. I’d like to ensure that it could continue happening. But I do wonder . . . at the scale. The scale of death within the commercial fisheries. If it’s too much.

BW: Yeah. Especially with all the king salmon stuff happening, you know, in the last couple years wrestling this deep investment and meaning I feel with the fishery, and also feeling of complicity, I mean, yeah, it’s hard. It’s impossible to resolve, basically.

AO: I know. It’s like, anytime you get to eat a king salmon, it’s just like the most special thing in the whole wide world. Or catch one. Then you’re also just like . . . These fish are like . . . actively going extinct. Or . . . hopefully not? It’s not looking bright in places, or at least in certain rivers.

BW: I mean, to me, the fact that king salmon are not returning to the Yukon River feels like . . . insane, five alarm fire, press the red button. But I grew up in this specifically, incredibly, king-salmon-focused-family, you know? So my metric for the danger zone is completely tripped, whereas it feels other people just aren’t operating in that context. We all have our own metric you know?

AO: Yeah, absolutely. I think that makes so much sense. Yeah, I mean, I think at a young age, bonking a silver you catch up at the salmon hole, and then later in life teaching friends who’ve never killed a fish, or an animal, and it’s like . . . This is something that I have been doing my whole life. And always was taught to make it swift and to give thanks and appreciate the life you’re taking.

BW: Do you feel like it makes you think about your own life differently from a mortality perspective?

AO: I’m not sure.

BW: Fair. How could you compare?

AO: I’m not sure. I think in general, living in a place where the environment feels like such a big piece of mortality . . .

BW: Like, in an “the ocean always wins” type way?

AO: Yeah . . . people die at sea. Or you know, hypothermia. Just living in a place with less safety net. And driving the skiff back and forth to the cabin, an hour and a half across Lynn Canal which is some gnarly water at times . . . You just get confronted with the fact that the ocean and the weather and a bear, or whatever it is— your life can be a fragile thing. And the environment really plays a big role in how you make choices.

BW: How do you think it’s possible for people who grow up in urban environments to have deep connections to the environment and the ecology in the place that they live?

AO: I think relationship to place, and valuing that, is such a big piece of how we need to move forward. As, inhabitants of homes. I do think Alaska sometimes feels unique when you go to an urban or suburban setting. We grew up having relationships to wild animals, making our living from the sea, having to watch the tides so that you could make it back to Juneau for your soccer game and the boat didn’t go dry. These parts where the environment is a main character in your day-to-day life. And I think sometimes our human institutions separate us from that experience, oftentimes in more populated places. There’s more red tape around what “wild,” or the environment, or engaging with place, looks like. Because we don’t want to have too much impact. And so much of the world is impacted by people.

BW: Do you think we have been good at changing our environment compared to other animals? Or do you think that’s not true—that other animals have an equal amount of impact on their environment?

AO: I definitely think animals have a big impact on their environment, as well. But I do think that humans . . . I mean, there’s many, many of us. There’s also many, many insects and things like that . . . I’m just throwing that out there.

BW: Oh, no, totally. It’s like numbers alone can’t explain our disproportionate impact. And so what is it?

AO: I mean, there’s so many things. I think there’s like the power structures that exist in the world driving consumption and capitalist systems that are assuming infinite growth on a finite planet. I think those things are just like, inherently incompatible. So I think there are value systems and power structures that have been made by humans that encourage a really unsustainable relationship to the environment, to the land. To consumption. There’s just this urge to consume. Which I imagine other animals have as well, but humans have developed so many different tools

of consumption. We need to change the power structures around that, and the inequity where that power lies, but we also need to change our values and our dreams. Because I think if the dream is to just have more . . .

BW: You can never actually satisfy that dream. If the dream is only, for always, more—it can never be fulfilled.

AO: It can never be fulfilled. And we’re also bombarded by that messaging. I think having this concussion, you have to totally change your consumption. I have even changed what I’m eating, to try to heal my brain. But it’s sort of been this . . . having to learn to be content, sitting with yourself. Not consuming a story, or a news article, or getting something done, or reading a book, or seeing a friend. So much of our day is consumed with busyness. I think that’s a very American trait, and also a capitalist trait. Having a head injury—you really have to maintain a positive space within your mind, to like, keep yourself healing. If you dip low or you get too high, it spikes. But also, you really have to change what it means to move through a day and to still enjoy it. Or to still stay steady. I’m not saying everyone should get pounded on the head—

BW: —Society needs a collective head injury?—

AO: —we just need to rethink our obsession with consumption and production and busy-ness.

BW: When you said we need to change our dreams, what for you? What is a dream you have for your own life that you feel like is right?

AO: Dreams I have for my own life . . . I like deeply knowing a place, and a community, and feeling like I’ve put in a lot of my life’s energy into supporting more caring and equitable relationships between human and natural systems. I read this really interesting article around Maori conceptions of relationship to land, and it made this very— I was surprised, like why don’t we think about this more often, why have I not thought about this before? —

when people have positive relationships to land, everything is healthier. The land is healthier. I think at one point there was like a really conscious shift in my life, about what I thought I wanted to do. And when I was learning about climate change, and the extreme and over-whelming impact humans are having on global systems. And each other. Just feeling this deep sense of being like, we really need to work on our relationships between people and landscapes. Since I've learned more about those ideas, it's grown also to this understanding that actually, doing work in communities around racism, or poverty, or these other kind violent human structures—is also work of restoring relationship to each other in the land.

BW: Right. Yeah, like restoring a sense of humanity to relationships. "Humanity" does not really go far enough, because it is like, the more-than-human-architecture of all the things. Do you understand what I mean when I say that?

AO: I think so.

BW: Do you have a word for that?

AO: Do I have a word for that?

BW: Yeah. That kind of like more than human connection? Yeah. All things.

AO: I don't, but I do love this notion. I see it a lot like—well, I think in a lot of different Indigenous cultures—in the oral history that I've read, the Tlingit oral histories around the salmon people, the herring people—that humanity does not just exist within humans. And that is something that I've been thinking a lot. How do we . . . collectively create that same framework from those knowledge systems and those values? Because if you understood that same humanity to extend beyond like, homo sapiens, it would go a long ways. But I do often come back to—as my friends here on the human geography side of things remind me—it's not just like, *Oh, we just need to change our values!* Like, there are huge systemic power structures ensuring that you know, the machine keeps churning.

BW: All those structures, yes, we have been born into them. And yes, they are large and intimidating. But they are also systems that operate by design. And changing values is part of coming up with a new design. It's hard because we're trapped in this capitalist worldview that really respects cynicism and elevates rationality. Engaging with emotion is looked down upon. Yet, so much of the things we find most meaningful in life have nothing to do with quantitative experience.

AO: Yeah, absolutely.

BW: I've been thinking about the whales and how, with AI, one of the big projects that scientists are working on is using AI to understand recordings of whale songs. To be like, What are they saying to each other? It's so funny—we really live in this world of doublethink where we think of animals as like, these empty shells with no intention in them, we don't ascribe human beliefs or inner lives to them. And yet at the same time, we are like, crunching the numbers to decode what they're secretly saying to each other behind our backs so we can get in there and put our two cents in, you know? How do we really look deeply, and see the ways that we are living in this doublethink?

AO: Yeah. Absolutely. Gosh, I would love to be able to talk to a whale.

BW: What would you say, though?

AO: Oh, I would ask them so many questions. I'd be like, *Man . . . we're pretty fucked up. You guys are doing better.*

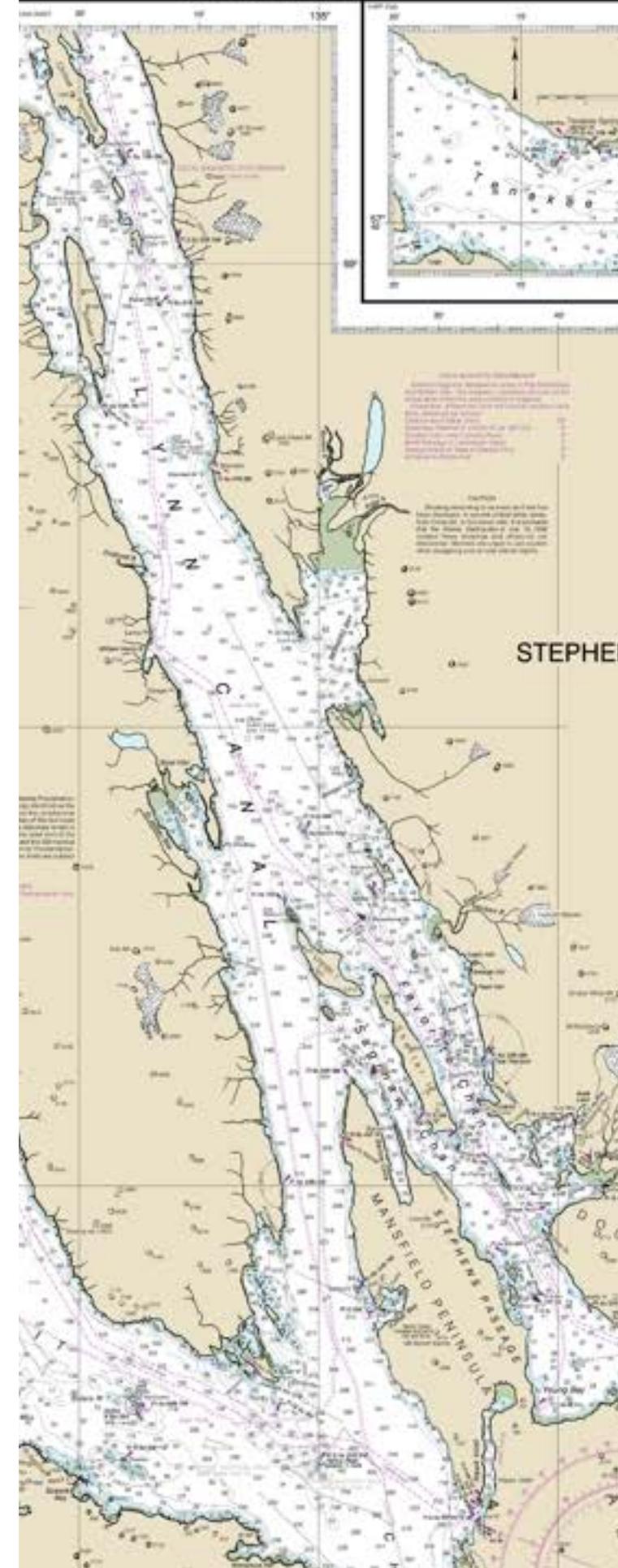
BW: Really sustainable architecture structure in your society. We build nuclear weapons. You sing to each other. Nice work.

AO: We got a lot to learn. Maybe to end the double-speaking . . . I feel like for many of the people I know, the young people, there's this assumption the structures we grew up with, and experience now, perhaps—and this is like coming from a very privileged, white person perspective, the only one I have lived—knowing

that a lot of people aren't experiencing the kind of security that I have . . . but like, the collapse. That within our lifetimes, we're gonna see the collapse of a lot of those things. Whether it's Social Security, or, you know—it will be big and small. Insects species, king salmon. There just will be a lot of loss. And there's this daily doublespeak, cause sometimes you're thinking about your future and what's coming down the line, you're like, Oh, yeah, when I'm old, I want to go travel to this part of the world . . . or . . . and the world, I actually think, is going to look so different. And I do believe that. Sometimes I'm reminded how many times humans on the face of this planet have thought Armageddon is coming, or whatnot, sort of this doomsday. . . And I do like to think of this . . . opportunity. I mean we face a lot, a lot of loss, but there's such a deep need for a reevaluation of our relationships to each other and land. And because of that, and because of the urgency of that—I mean, there's just so much important work to be done. There will be a lot of collapse and a lot of loss, but hopefully a lot of new beginnings. I guess I do find solace in that.

BW: How do you cope with that? We now have technology that allows us ubiquitous access to all suffering, all the time. Worldwide, especially when it comes to climate change. All the different ways that the climate is changing, and the real life like ramifications of that happening for people in radically different environments than us who are nevertheless like facing similar consequences—loss of homeland, loss of keystone species, loss of economic opportunity, loss of the deep meaning that we get from having an ongoing relationship to the place that we are. How do you cope with grief that in some ways feels so big that it cannot be even described, really?

AO: Yeah. Definitely a lot of cognitive dissonance. Sometimes it comes up and overwhelms, and other times we're just creatures trying to live a good life, you know? Or go through grief or whatever. But yeah. I think it's interesting. I took a class where we were reading things—really powerful, emotional



climate writing and poetry and stories, fiction, nonfiction. And I cried, like, every day when I was doing that work. And since then, I have not been consuming those stories. Because it's kind of like, being cracked open, seeing the immensity of the loss and the challenge in a new or really deep way. But I think we can't always hold all that. Even a small cup full. I think it's important, I don't know . . . I think the choices I've been making in the last couple of years make me feel a little bit better, because for a while, I felt like I was just monitoring loss. Like I was on the glaciers, watching them melt. I was out doing sea lion surveys; monitoring natural systems and in a lot of instances, there was a diminishment. And I think that's a big reason why I went back to school: How do we build more support, more resilient systems, and sustainable communities back home, as this continues to happen? And in transforming and investing in a different value system—a model of existing in place together. I think that is a tiny piece of what needs to happen all over the world, you know, in different, big and small ways. So, I think part of my coping is feeling like I've had the privilege to invest in education and pursue a line of work that feels constructive in some way. Even though I know it won't transform the world. Yeah, I think that that helps me.

BW: What kind of tools do you think you're going to use in your new job to do some of this work you've talked about?

AO: I think a lot of listening. Trying to support perspectives and community, Indigenous and First Nations, in what's needed to develop more equitable systems. I think that's really big in our part of the world. Everywhere, of course . . . But I think doing that work can be really important. And it really can be really humbling. And challenging. Particularly as I'm looking forward to learning a lot, and being a good ally. I also think valuing sustainability that isn't— this is sort of what makes me most excited about this job, even while it comes from more of a science adaptation route, it's partnering with the Sustainable

Southeast Partnership, which seems to be really invested in thinking about sustainability beyond *What science projects we can do?* or climate adaptation, but also thinking—*what are the community values? What are the cultural initiatives we need to work on? What are the economic initiatives?* That is really exciting to me, to not see the world within the frame of disciplines, but okay—we know supporting salmon is supporting people. How do we support salmon in a way that's equitable for communities as well? Some of the systems we have— like around permitting?— historically have not done that. You look at how many permits are in the hands of Alaskan Native people and communities now, and it's astoundingly low. I think about what ALFA [*the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association*] is doing to support salmon sharing between the Yukon and Bristol Bay, where you have a boom system in Bristol Bay right now and then a total collapse on the Yukon. And 99.99% of our salmon gets shipped out of state? And enough isn't saved to feed communities who have been existing on salmon forever? Things like that are so important, and they extend beyond all of the ways humans like to look at the world, whether it's culture, science or technology. Taking care of the food, taking care of these really important harvest species, is a really powerful way to also take care of each other. And to take care of it in a way that is thinking about more equity.

Annika Ord scrambles down a temporary waterfall beneath the Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau, Alaska, 2016.

BW: Food has so many different aspects of relationality. Its physical sustenance, its nutrients we need to live, but it's also connected to the environment, it's sharing culture. I was thinking today about how salmon are a kind of clock. They come every year and then they come back. In a way they're like this timescale. And just wondering about who is benefiting from the systems that tell us not to think about salmon that way.

AO: What it would look like if salmon is our clock? And a really important actor for solidarity.

BW: Totally. I make a lot of work about fish and some people are like, Huh. You . . . think a lot about fish. And it's like, at the Anchorage museum right now there's an entire exhibit about salmon. You know? It's not some unique, original analysis I'm doing—in many ways, it feels like a cliché!

AO: Isn't that funny though? It's where you exist in the world. I imagine for every one of those people who kind look sideways at you when you do another salmon thing, there's something in their lives—or maybe many things—that they could touch on, that feels really central to their community. Again, I think it is just so special that so much of our food, and our experience, come from the land. Like I think that that exists around the world, of course, but is something that often feels like it is dwindling. And it's so powerful!

BW: How do you deal with that dissonance of believing really deeply in values which could be considered similar to some indigenous values—connection to landscape, seeing environments as actors, seeing animals as actors—while also being a white settler who lives in a place that was violently colonized?

AO: Yeah, I think it's really hard. I mean, well, no, it's not really hard, what am I saying?

BW: It feels bad. That is a kind of hardness.

AO: Yeah, but being in this role is not the hard role. I think there's just so much we have to learn. And I think that there can be a respectful, generous way of both sharing and learning that seeks to move towards justice and healing. And I think that part of that healing, as a world—well, without co-opting Indigenous values that are specific to places—I think . . . those communities, those cultures, developed in place to live for long times in places, with value systems that support it. I would love to see a world where Indigenous governments were leading the way and enacting those kinds of laws and value systems, and actually have the power to do that. So it wasn't just some settler person being like, Oh, I really admire your value systems—but that we could support enacting them, or support that transfer of power. So much work is needed in that healing/relational piece between settler and Indigenous communities, and I think that work will only help support everyone in the long run. But it has been really special to take this time in school and read like a lot, to try to learn from Indigenous knowledge systems and values and oral histories, particularly from Tlingit aani, which was the place we both grew up in. That feels really special. I think about that often— how can I learn from these value systems, without claiming them as my own, but also kind of wanting to enact them, you know, to be an ally, support them, support these ways of seeing the world?



The Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau, Alaska. According to Southeast Alaska glaciologist Christi Hekkers, the capital city's glacier recedes over 160 feet a year.

PROJECT

livestream

livestream is a website that combines digital and hydrological streaming to explore our assumptions about natural and digital resources.

kaasdaheen.com

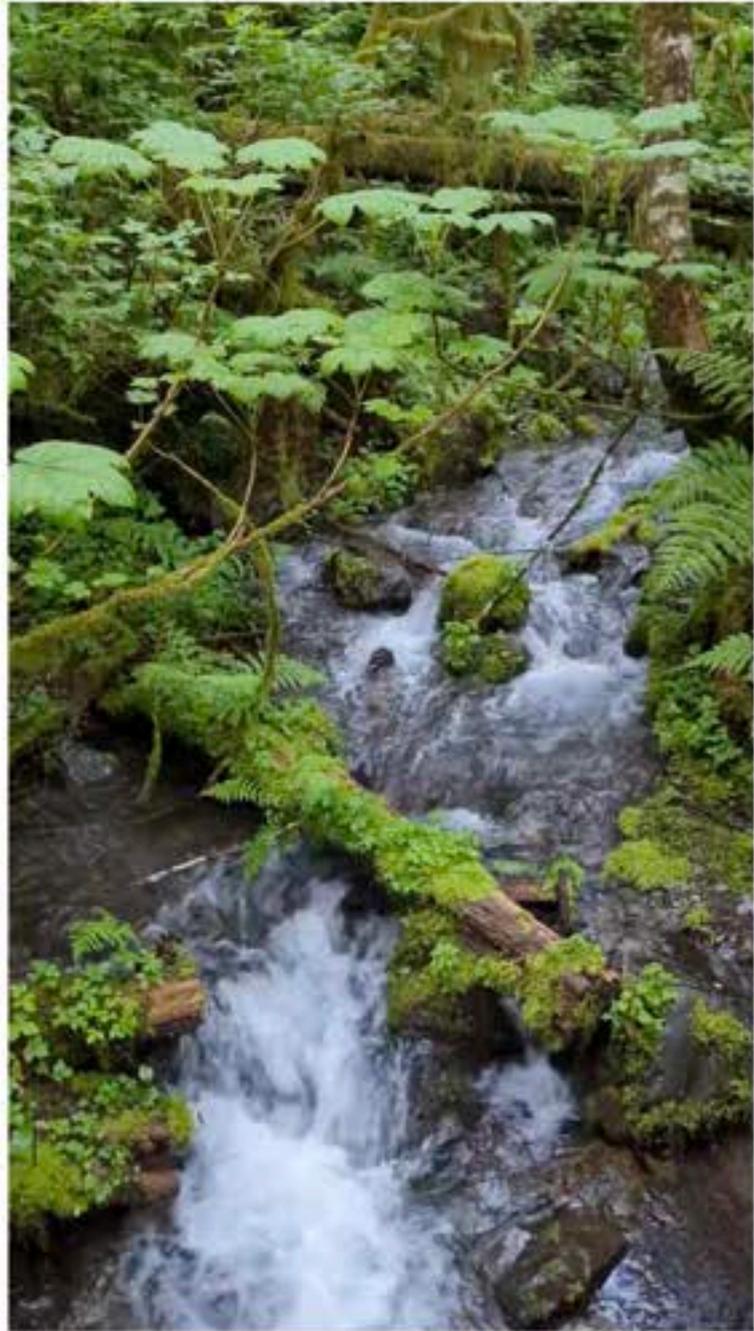
coded by Gabriel Drozdov

2023

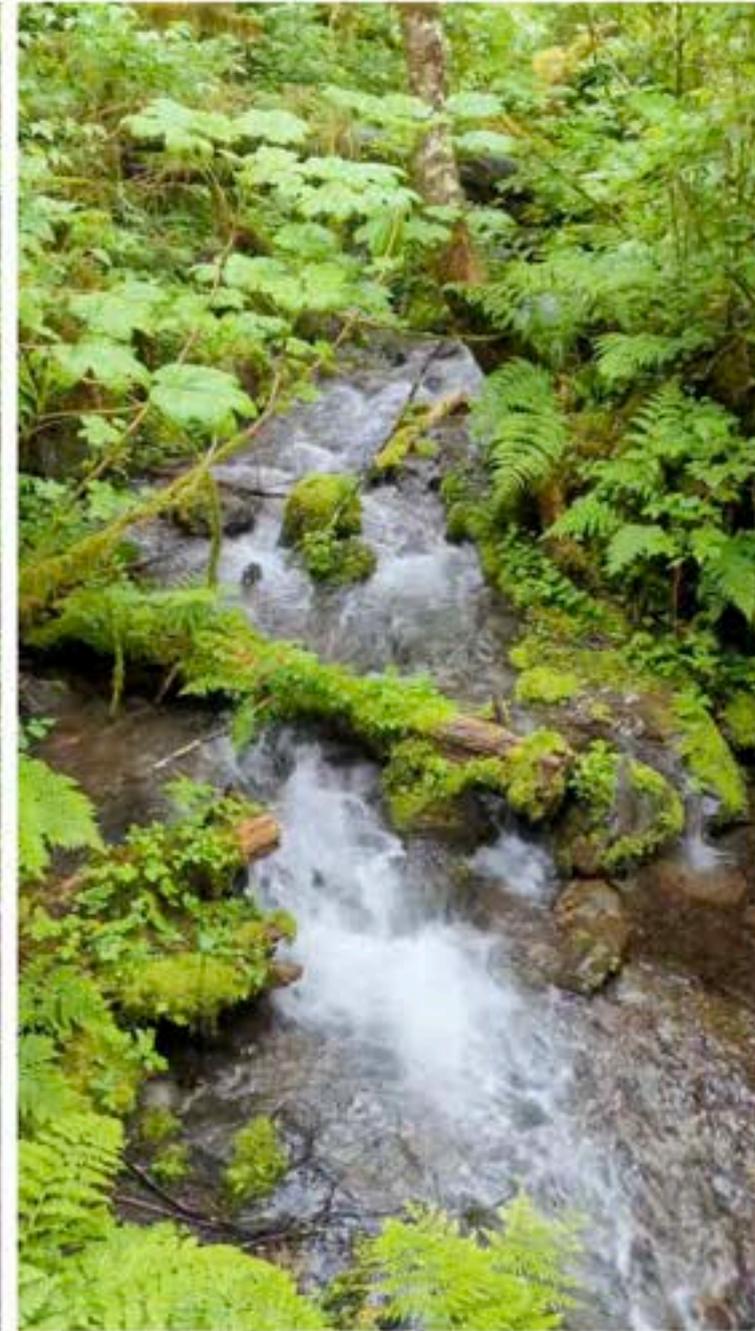
LIVESTREAM



JUNE 11



JUNE 11



JUNE 11



JUNE 13



livestream is a digital project giving a single river an ongoing web presence.

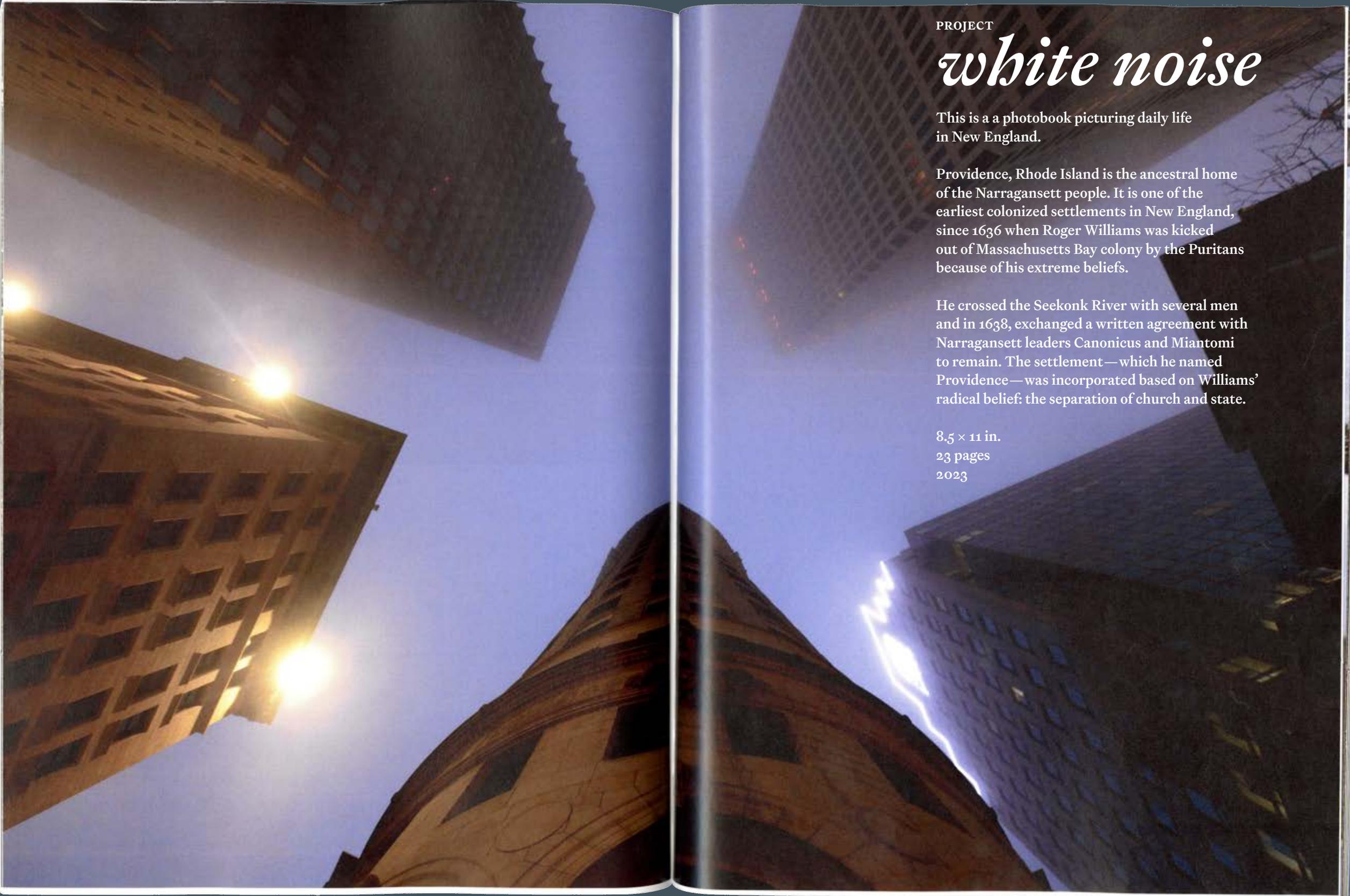
Stream recordings collected over the 2023 summer season now live in digital perpetuity, in an infinite carousel that allows the viewer to loop through the summer. As the weather, the light, the flora, and rate of flow shift, changes in the landscape that would otherwise go unseen can be identified. Close viewers can identify the day salmon arrive in the tributary on their annual migration.

This project examines the assumptions we have about the continuity, infinity, and permanence of resources, tangible and intangible. Our relationships to the digital and material worlds are rapidly changing each other: What will maintain continuity for longer, streams on the web or streams in the ground? Are either permanent? What's the likelihood they'll be disrupted in the next ten years? The next fifty? Who or what will disrupt them, and why?

What do we consider more stable, access to technology or access to land? What inputs are required to maintain each of these streams? How do they relate to their larger watersheds? Are their boundaries and limits related? Who's allowed access to these sites?

Stream recordings were made over the course of a summer in Sitka, Alaska. This is a small tributary of a river called Kaasda Heen in Tlingit and Indian River in English. As time goes on, recordings the stream will remain the same. Off-screen, it will continue to flow, change, and adapt.





PROJECT

white noise

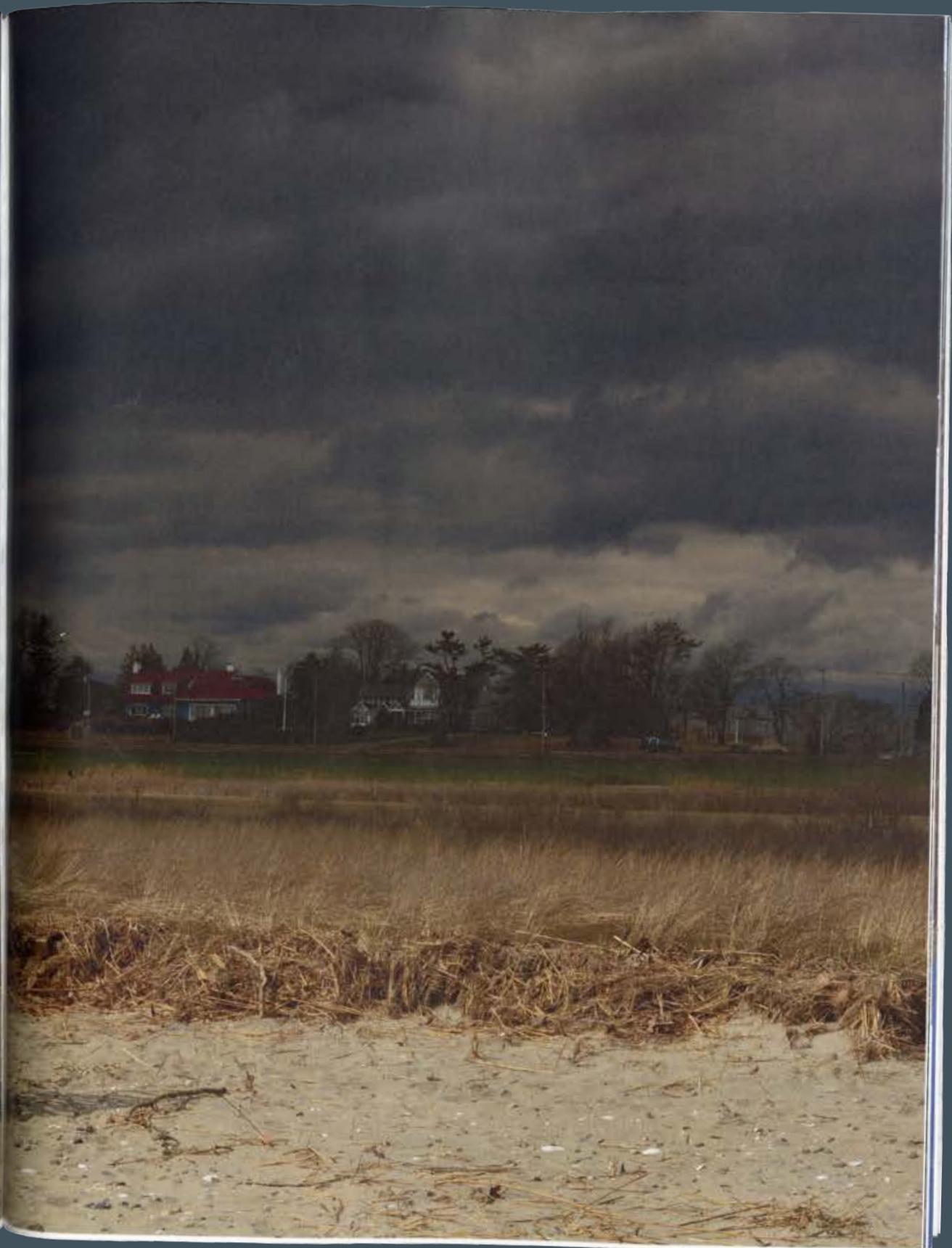
This is a photobook picturing daily life in New England.

Providence, Rhode Island is the ancestral home of the Narragansett people. It is one of the earliest colonized settlements in New England, since 1636 when Roger Williams was kicked out of Massachusetts Bay colony by the Puritans because of his extreme beliefs.

He crossed the Seekonk River with several men and in 1638, exchanged a written agreement with Narragansett leaders Canonicus and Miantomi to remain. The settlement—which he named Providence—was incorporated based on Williams' radical belief: the separation of church and state.

8.5 × 11 in.
23 pages
2023







Old Coffee House.

*Manufacturers' Hotel, the Old
Stage Rendezvous.*

*The Old City Building.
Franklin Hall.*

Franklin House.

Hoppen Building.

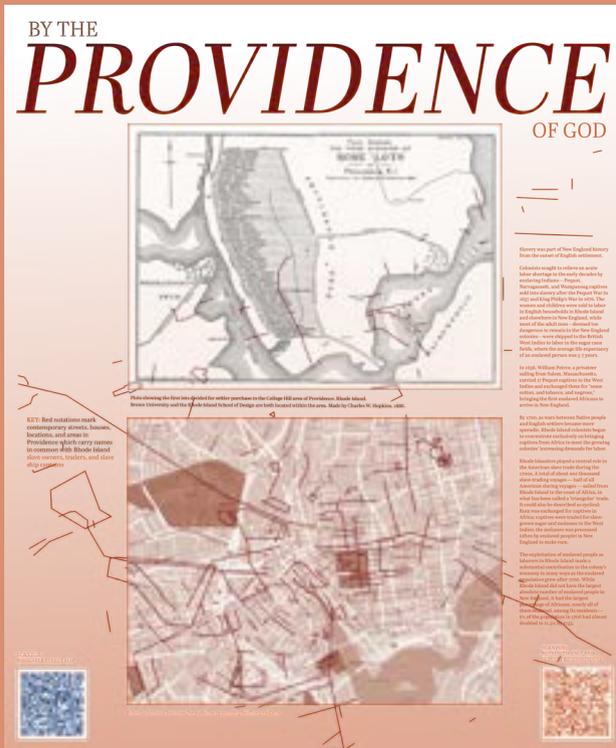
MARKET SQUARE IN 1844.

The contemporary RISD campus runs right through the heart of Providence, Rhode Island's Market Square of 1844. Some architecture from the time remains.

PROJECT

providence plantations

providence plantations is a research and mapping project tracing contemporary Providence place names (including schools, streets, parks, buildings, houses, and other features) to Rhode Island slave owners, traders, and ship captains.



Newport Arrow Peter Bartraç Disimbo Bay Bonner
 Brown Liverpool Brown London Brown Primus Brown
 Providence Brown Waitstill Brown Peter Browning
 Quaco Butler William Cesar York Chantlin Deborah
 Church Cato Coggeshall Isaac Cooper Dick Cozzens
 Prime Cushing Cudge Earl Cuff Easterbrooks Comfort
 Ephraim Yockey Fenner Cato Freeman Jacob Freeman
 Cato Gardner Patience Gardner Primus George Tobey
 Harris York Hanover Sampson Hazzard Pleasant
 Hicks Ebar Hopkins Pamp Hopkins Primus Hopkins
 Sant Hopkins Bazil Human Prince Jencks Cato
 Johnston Quaco Johnston Medford Keen James Lippitt
 Cesar Lyndon Lewis Manning James MacKenzie
 Plato M'Leannen Member Nagra Mary Newfield Quam
 Nightingale Bristol Olney FreeLove Parker Thomas
 Pegan Abijah Read-Baston Roggles Brittan Salltonston
 Samuel Sharp Ebij Sior Mode Siscoe Quam Simmons
 Jack Smith London Spear Fortune Stanford Patience
 Sterry William Stoves Henry Tabor Newport Tew
 Cesar Waterman Robert Wainwood Bristol Yamina

“Unmarked elements of the landscape could be left that way, if there is no compelling need to attach a word to them. Let each of us call the places we know or use by the names we've chosen for ourselves, to serve our momentary purposes. Then let them die with us, while the land endures.”
 — Richard Nelson
 1941-2009

Place names are part of larger technologies of power used to inscribe national heritage & identity narratives justifying contemporary social structures.

Indeed, Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou Māori) has long argued that renaming the landscape was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land.



Words are monuments.

providence plantations is a set of six 25 × 35 inch cotton cloth posters exploring the relationship between land, colonization, and the slave trade and mapping, place names, and public memorializations in Providence, Rhode Island. It is named after the state, which officially remained the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations until a 2020 name change, dropping the last three words through an executive order which had to be approved by a constitutional amendment.

This project was supported by an award from the Gonda Fund.

Set of 6 cotton cloth posters
 25 × 35 inches
 2023

Slavery has been a part of New England's history from the outset of English settlement.

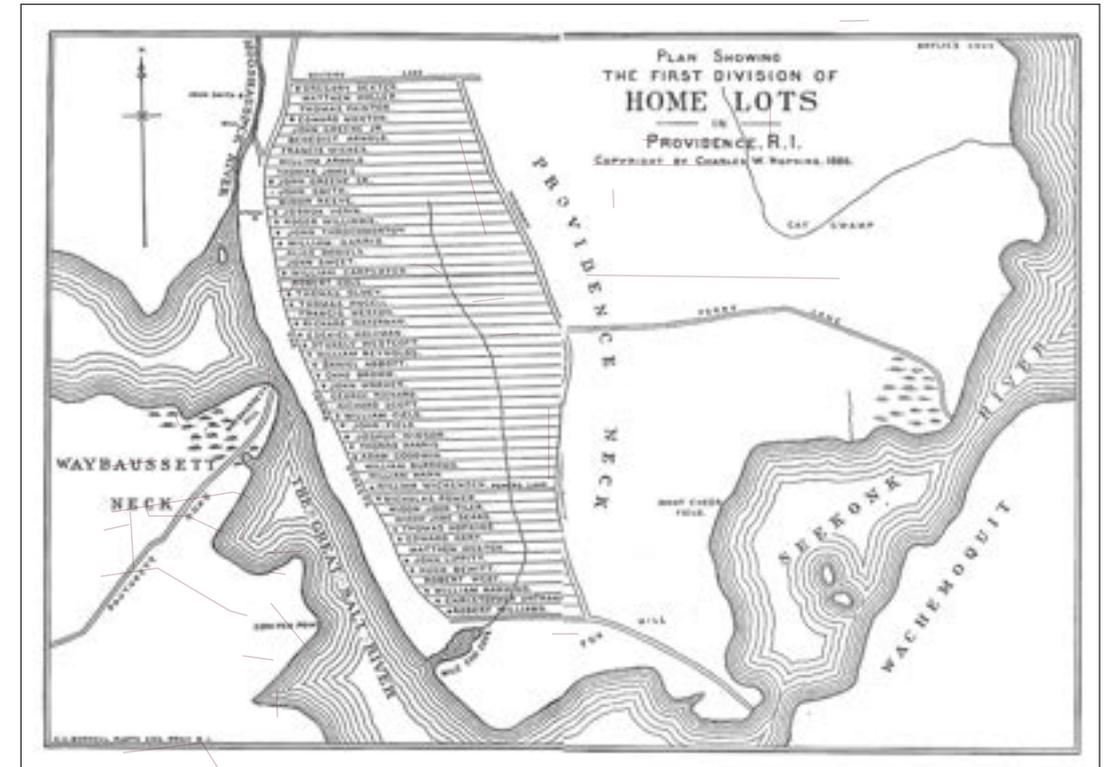
Building settlements required labor. Especially in the wake of the 1637 Pequot War and 1676 King Philip's War between the Indigenous locals and the English colonists, Indigenous people were sold to labor in English households in Rhode Island and across New England.

Most of the adult men, deemed too dangerous to remain in the colonies, were shipped to the British West Indies. They were forced to labor in the sugar cane fields, where the average life span was whittled to only only 5-7 years.

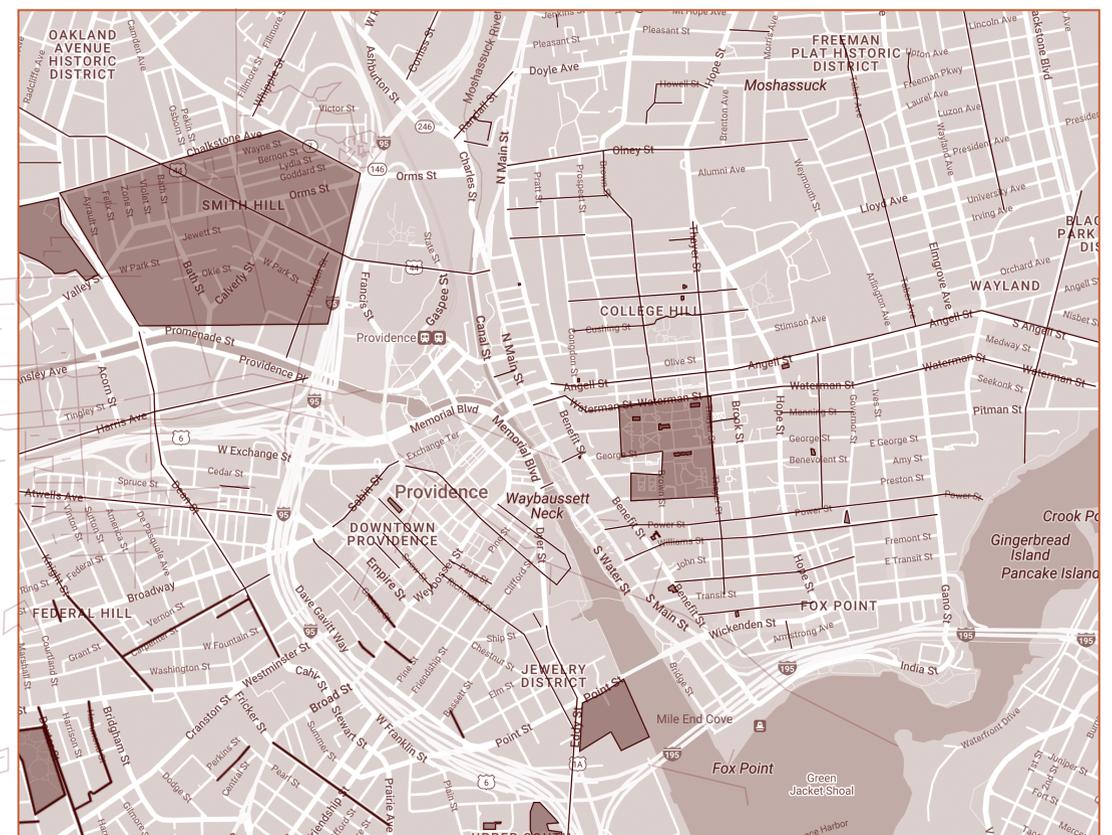
The first Africans were brought to New England in 1638 by William Peirce, a privateer out of Salem, Massachusetts who took 17 Pequot captives to the West Indies and exchanged them for African captives and goods.

By 1700, as wars between Native people and English settlers became more sporadic, Rhode Island colonists began to rely heavily on African captives to meet their growing desire for labor.

Plan showing the first division of home lots in Providence Rhode Island, in the area now known as College Hill. Map by Charles W. Hopkins, 1886.



Contemporary Google Map of the larger College Hill area. Dark lines and enclosures show streets, schools, houses, bulidings, gardens, compounds, parks, and areas named after Rhode Island slave captains and merchants, as well local as slave owners.

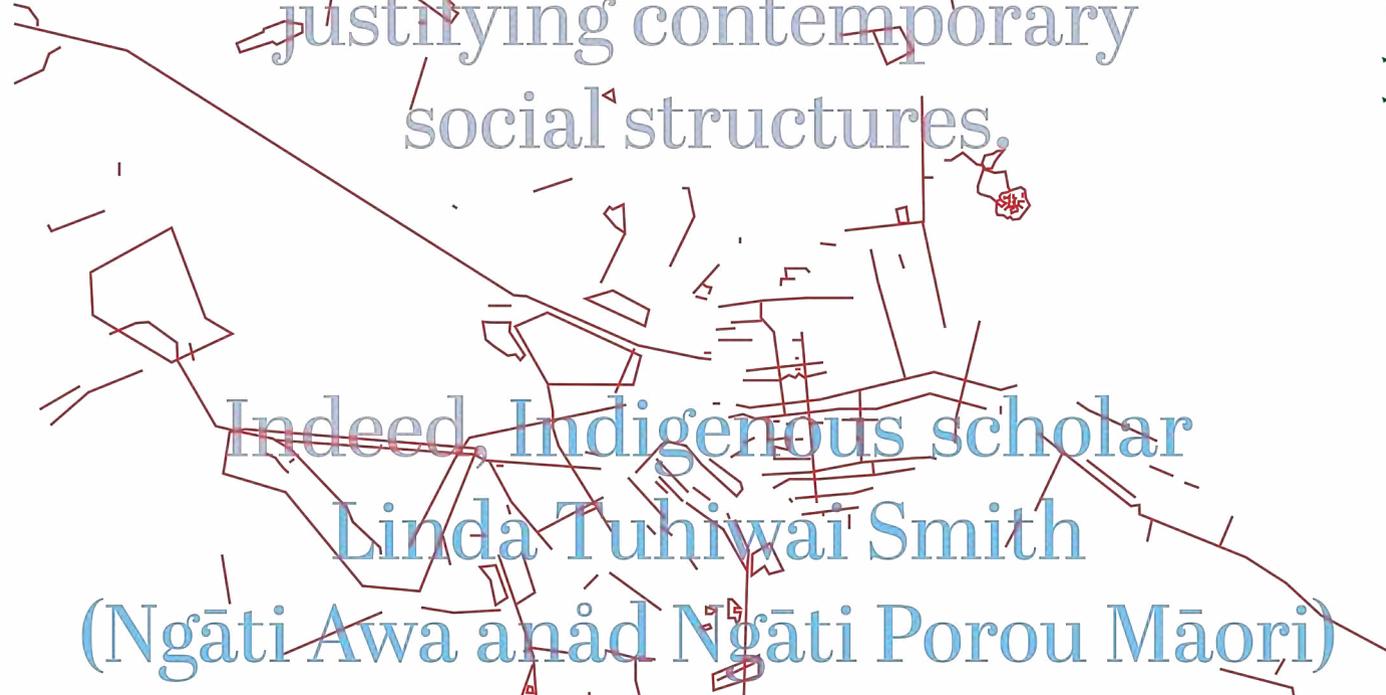


Rhode Islanders played a central role in the American slave trade during the 1700s. Half of all American slaving voyages sailed from Rhode Island to the West coast of Africa, in what has been called a 'triangular' trade.

It was a self-sustaining system: Rum was exchanged for captives in Africa. Those captives were traded for slave-grown sugar and molasses in the West Indies. The molasses was taken to New England and made into rum—often by those who were enslaved—to be taken back to Africa for more lives.

Enslaved people who were made to labore in Rhode Island were critical contributors to the colony's economic success. In all of New England, Rhode Island had the highest proportion of Black residents, nearly all of them enslaved.

The proportion of Black residents in Rhode Island doubled between 1708 and 1755, growing from 6% to 12% of the total population.



Place names are part of larger *technologies of power* used to inscribe national heritage & identity narratives justifying contemporary social structures.

Indeed, Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou Māori) has long argued that renaming the *landscape* was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land.

Words are

monuments.

AHORN
ADAMS
ALDRICH
ALLEN
ALVERSON
ANDREWS
ANGELL
ANTHONY
ARNOLD
ATWELL
BACON
BAKER
BALLOU
BARTON
BEUNDELL
BOWEN
BROWN
BUCKLIN
BUDHOUGHES
BURTON
BUTLER
CARPENTER
CARTER
CHAET
CLARKE
COLE
COMSTOCK
COOKE
COOPER
CORLISS
CORNELL
COTTER
COZZANS
CRAWFORD
CRUSHING
DAVIS
DEAN
DENNER
DENTER
DONOVAN
DURFEY
EDDY
FENNER
FIELD
FISK
FOSTER
GREENE
HALSEY
HAMLIN
HAMMOND
HARDING
HARRIS
HIGGINS
HOEDEN
HOPKINS
HOPPIN
HOWELL
HUNTER
JACKSON
JENCKES
JONES
KELTON
KING
KNIGHT
LAWTON
LIPPETT
LOCKWOOD
MANCHESTER
MANNING
MANTON
MARTIN
MATTHEWSON
MAWNEY
MCLELLAN
MILLER
MITCHELL
MOWRY
NIGHTINGALE
OLNEY
OWEN
PACKARD
PAGE
PECK
PHILIPS
POTTER
POWER
RANDALL
RAY
REMYNGTON
RHODES
RICE
RICHMOND
ROSE
ROWLAND
SABIN
SAYLES
SCOTT
SEAMANS
SEARS
SESSIONS
SHERRIN
SMITH
SNOW
SPENCER
STRANGE
STERLING
STERRY
STEVENS
TABER
TAYLOR
TEW
THAYER
THOMPSON
THORNTON
THROOP
THURBERS
TILLINGHAST
UPDEKE
WATERMAN
WEST
WHIPPLE
WHITMAN
WILCOX
WILKINSON
WILLIAM
WILLIAMS
WILMARTH
YOUNG

Language is one of the most important means by which humans announce and demonstrate values. Like statues and monuments, place names are cultural symbols that can embody or erase Indigenous knowledges. Critical examination of place names is not new—for at least a century, Indigenous Americans have resisted settler colonizer place names, including in what are now national parks.

To many Indigenous groups, specific places and their place names reflect relationship to the lands and waters, and are a fundamental part of how they define their cultures and identities. Names embody ancient creation and origin stories, serve as mnemonic devices for Indigenous knowledges and memory, and recall generations of ancestors in relation with specific places. Settler colonial place names can explicitly or unintentionally normalize and perpetuate hegemonic myths, naturalize racist structures and erase or displace Indigenous knowledges. In all these ways, words are monuments.

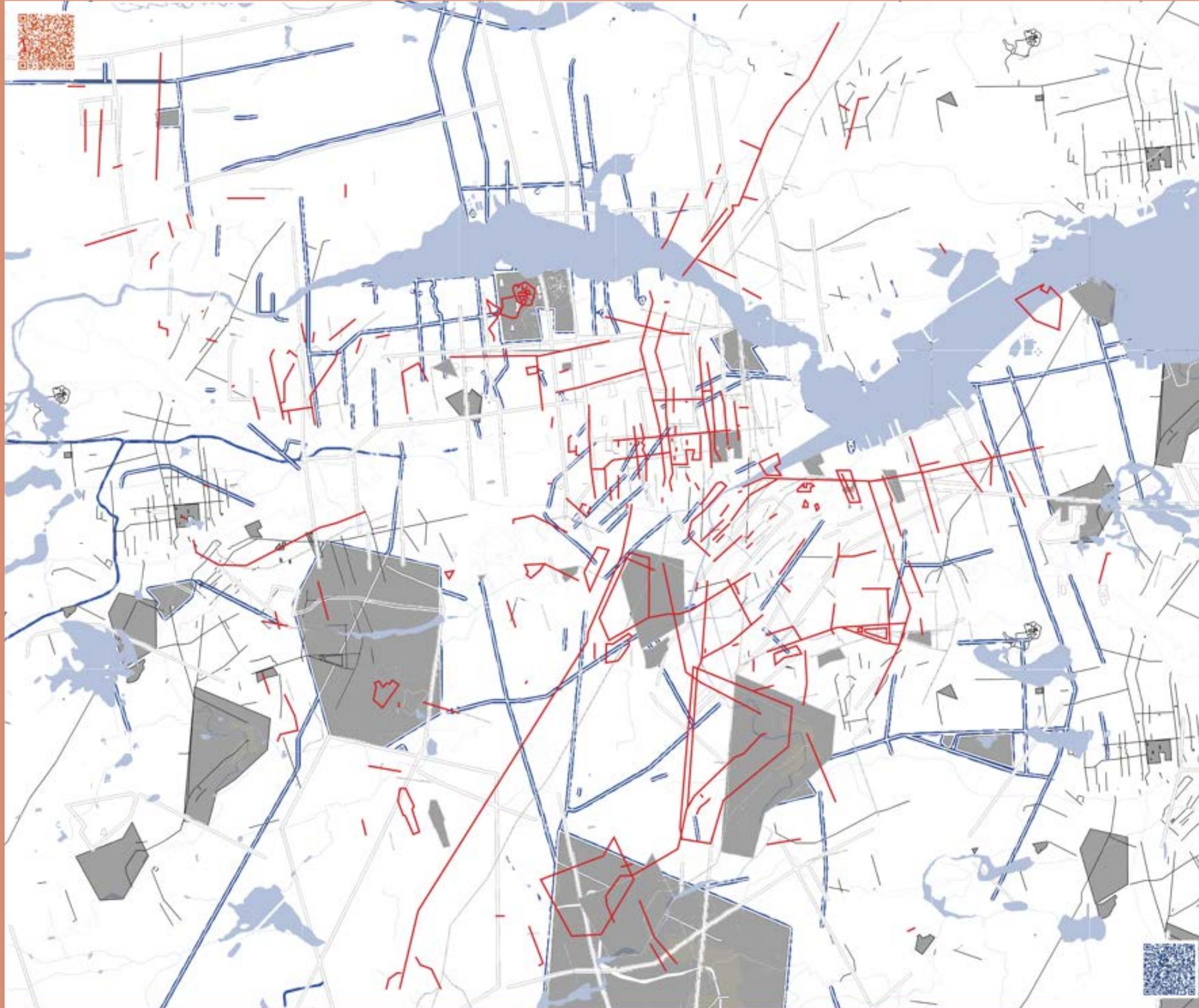
Settler colonial maps and place names that naturalize this narrative of white dominance or that displace Indigenous knowledges and presence are, thus, direct reflections of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

Place names are part of larger ‘technologies of power’ used to inscribe national heritage and identity narratives justifying contemporary social structures. Indeed, Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith

(Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou Māori) has long argued that ‘renaming the landscape was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land.’ Today, place names (and statues) are a form of ‘socio-spatial exclusion’ defined by Sibley as ‘the more opaque instances of exclusion . . . taken for granted as part of the routine of daily life’ by the mainstream.

Yet, the mundane nature underlying the politics of naming and place names is now well documented. To many non-Indigenous people, a settler place name might appear benign. But, even ‘neutral’ place names (e.g. Inspiration Point) communicate non-neutral choices to ignore the history of settler colonial violence, obscure the fact that landscapes were and are Indigenous spaces, and accept the continued invisibility of marginalized people.

Thus, for Indigenous peoples, a settler place name may represent colonization and a history of exclusion from their homelands, such that restoring Indigenous place names is often understood as a small (even symbolic) step towards justice and restoring powers of self-determination. —*Bonnie M. McGill*



“Languages do not exist in a vacuum and languages do not simply ‘die’ of natural causes.

Imperial and colonial governments have sought to either displace, replace, or deliberately exterminate Indigenous languages and cultures.”

— Paul J. Meighan, with Susan Chiblow
Language is land, land is language:
The importance of Indigenous languages

“Unnamed elements of the landscape could be left that way, if there is no compelling need to attach a word to them. Let each of us call the places we know or use by the names we’ve chosen for ourselves, to serve our momentary purposes. Then let them die with us, while the land endures.”

— *Richard Nelson*

1941–2019



*“Ritual is an
enactment of myth.”*

— Nora Marks Dauenhauer
& Richard Dauenhauer
Haa Shuka: Our Ancestors
1987



nicholas galanin/ yéil ya tseen

Examining the complexities of contemporary Indigenous identity, culture, and representation, Nicholas Galanin works from his experience as a Lingít and Unangax artist. He brings Indigenous perspective, traditions, and resistance into conceptual work that blossoms through different forms and mediums. Many of his works address contemporary Indigenous visual culture, the impact of colonialism, and the selective amnesia in its wake.

“My process of creation is a constant pursuit of freedom and vision for the present and future. I use my work to explore adaptation, resilience, survival, dream, memory, cultural resurgence, and connection and disconnection to the land.”

— *Nicholas Galanin,*
Peter Blum Gallery



Nicholas Galanin tintype by Will Wilson. 2012.

BW: You must be in Sitka right now.

NG: Yeah, I'm home.

BW: I'm jealous.

NG: It's a beautiful day out today.

BW: Oh my god.

NG: Yeah. So we're working outside—

BW: Nice.

NG: Let's see if I can show you. We've got the doors open. But, yeah.

BW: Yeah. Yeah what are you working on?

NG: I'm doing some wood projects at the moment.

BW: Cool.

NG: Yeah.

BW: And I hear the herring are there? You said you were—eggs—

NG: Yeah, we've got some eggs, we were harvesting this last week.

BW: Nice. Yeah! Easter in New England, not the same.

NG: Oh yeah, I bet.

BW: We have a nor'easter blowing through right now, supposed to get a couple inches of rain and lots of wind, but no snow. At least there's that. So . . . I think the best way to start is just to ask you if you would be willing, to introduce yourself.

NG: My name is Yeil Ya Tseen, Nicholas Galanin. I'm a Tlingit-Unangax Indigenous visual multidisciplinary artist and musician based in Sitka, Alaska.

BW: Why do you choose to work across so many different mediums?

NG: For me, the work I do, it's empowering, in continuum, our culture. I've never separated medium. I feel like, especially working in a time where colonial categorization is heavily pressed up on us in many ways as Indigenous artists, it's a form of sovereignty to work freely in any means necessary. So for me, I work with concepts often, and then the medium will follow. That's not always the case for projects, but for a lot of the work I do.

BW: When you're thinking in concepts, do you have a time where you like, sit down and try to think of stuff?

NG: Sometimes! It varies. Now, I'm so busy, that the work is . . . you know, I go research locations. I have deadlines of time, oftentimes associated with projects. Yeah. Have constraints and budget or you know, place—whatever, many different things, to navigate. So the closest I come to working freely without those types of specifics is through music. And even that can still be faced with those things. But yeah, I try to make sure I have time to experiment and explore creatively when I can, in between deadlines and project-projects. Yeah.

BW: When you say research, what are different kinds of research for you? What might different kinds of research look like?

NG: It varies! I have been out to sites and locations. I travel the world and meet different communities and people and artists and makers and scholars and thinkers. So, it's ongoing, even if it's not very specific. Or even if I'm in a place and I'm doing a project there, maybe I won't apply something particularly to the project, to that space, but I'm still, you know, still taking things in. For the Biennale of Sydney, I went out to visit Sydney and to the Tiwi Islands, met with communities out there. For the Aichi Triennale in Japan, I was out in Japan touring around the year before. For this Abu Dhabi Biennial, public art biennial, I've been out there twice now. Or, just visiting cultural sites and spaces. I think that's a form of it, for sure.

BW: How do you balance things . . . do you get homesick? When you are traveling?

NG: I mean, it's . . . Yeah, I have children, so it's . . . you know, I've been traveling for over 20 years, and it's kind of a lot. My next trip's in two weeks, I go Venice and then I go to Atlanta, you know, then I'm home for a bit. And then, mid-May trip. And then, end of May, I go to Australia. So it's like . . . continuing. I don't know. I've learned to appreciate traveling. When I get into that mode of telling myself I'm not going to leave in the summers . . . but it's just not happening right now.

BW: Yeah, the rest of the world doesn't follow that schedule.

NG: Yeah.

BW: Yeah—I wonder what it was like growing up in Sitka in the 80s and 90s?

NG: It was good. Traveled a lot then, too, though. My mother and father at the time separated, so she brought us all over. Then we'd come back every summer. But it was a place we always looked forward to being, and we moved back to do eighth grade, so. It was good. Things change, and some things don't. It's a lot of familiarity here, you know—all the things we love about this place. Getting out on the water, the forest, hiking, camping. That stuff's still here . . . We got two new stoplights in that time. And a roundabout. Had to learn how to use a roundabout, what the heck.

BW: Gosh, that's so funny. I remember when that went in, and people were up in arms—

NG: It's a big deal. Big changes.

BW: Big changes! So funny. Yeah, I mean . . . I feel like you have changed so much . . . not you like as an individual person, obviously, I do not know you closely as a person so I can't speak to that—

NG: I've grown. We all change.

BW: Yeah! For me, walking into a studio in New York and seeing your work in the gallery, or your installation for Desert X—it's crazy to see somebody from my hometown exhibiting on this really worldwide scale. It's exciting—to me, it also seems very scary. How do you balance living this small-town Alaska life while also living this capital A Art-world life?

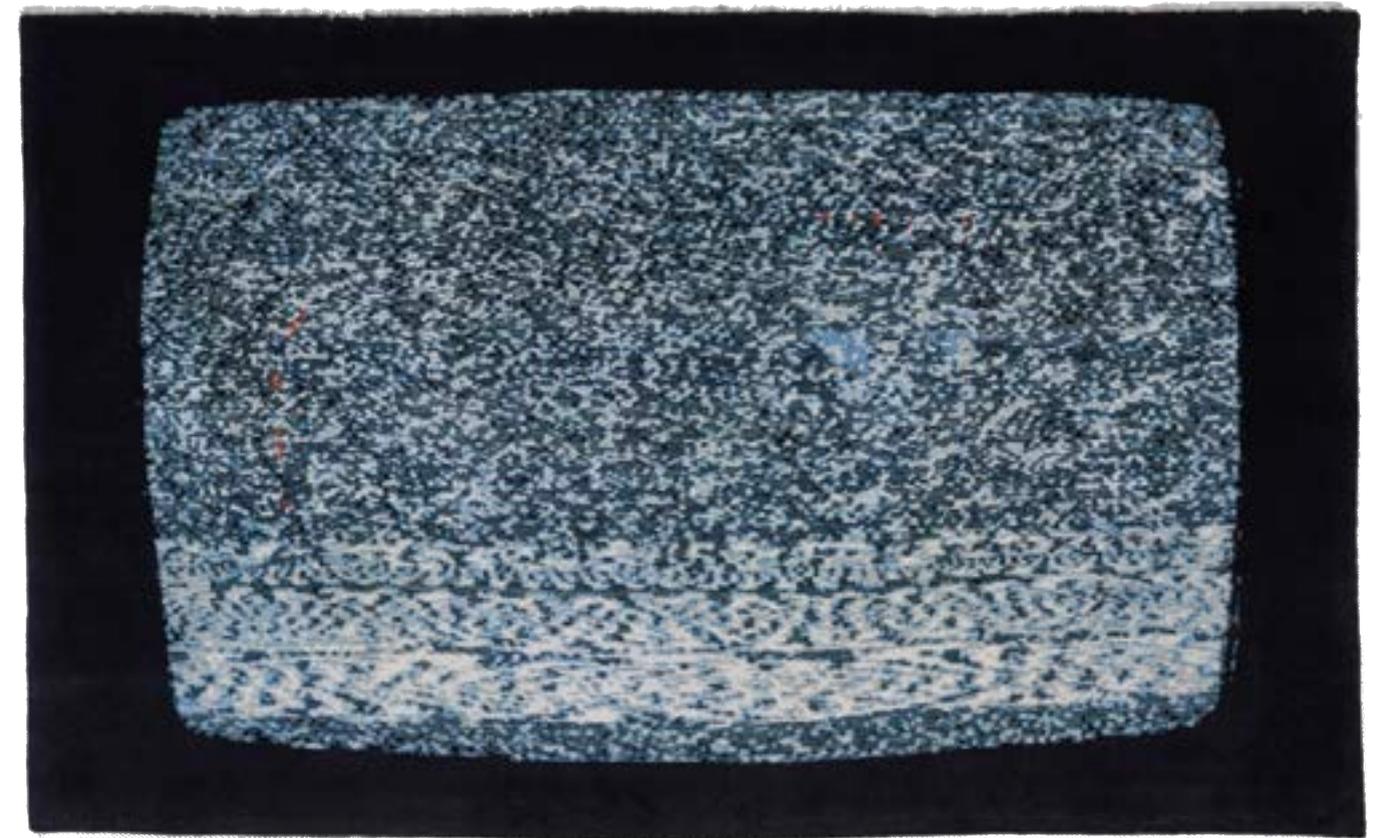
NG: Being here is grounding, with the land and all of that. So. I get to be here. I don't—I still participate in all these things, but I can come and go to those pretty . . . I can show up and I can leave it. So that's always been important for me, I think.

BW: Yeah.

NG: Some people will say, "I'm moving to New York, to expand my . . ." you know, whatever they think they need to be, or wherever they think they need to be. Like, New York is a typical

one for a lot of artists, I think. To be on a scene or something. And that makes sense. I never went that route, obviously. I don't know. Some people end up—once they feel like they've achieved something they wanted to, they end up backtracking. Getting away from those things. Right? I'm always seeing artists buying these farms, and whatever, you know. But . . . we live in a time where we can access those things still and travel. Of course, travel here is never that straightforward— I was just supposed to speak in Utah, and both flights, both days were mechanically delayed to the point where I just canceled the trip, because I wasn't gonna make it. Those things.

*My work
speaks when
I'm not there.
That's part of
the purpose of
it, I think.*



White Noise: American Prayer Rug. Nicholas Galanin. 2018

BW: Yeah, it's common to move to New York after graduation. That's a very accepted path.

NG: I know. I mean, it makes sense. I guess it makes sense for folks that feel . . . I don't know. There's a lot of things in New York.

BW: Yeah, definitely. Many, many things.

NG: Yeah.

BW: We talked a little bit about land and its relationship to your work. And I was wondering if you would be willing to speak more on that, and how you feel land and your work are related.

NG: I mean, it's everything, really. It's where we—the connection of place, and understanding to time, and continuum, and the future and the past. We belong to it.

And that extends significant in every form of our conversations and our well-being of politics, power, structures, capitalist societies . . . violence that we're witnessing in the world, even right now. So it's a foundation, for sure.

BW: Do you ever try to explain to people who have no concept of relationship to land?

NG: I mean, I don't have to change everybody. My work speaks when I'm not there. That's part of the purpose of it, I think.

BW: When you think about your audience, are you trying to speak to people who don't have any understanding of where you're trying to come from? Or people you feel like know where you're coming from? Or is it just kind of like . . .

NG: I mean, it completely completely varies. It really varies for projects, varies for space and location, for the community, and material, and process . . . It's never like, this is for somebody specifically, only. There's room for multiple forms of intersection, for viewers from different perspectives, to engage in almost everything. And most of their engagements are representations of their own positions, in comments, in the space of a conversation.

BW: Yeah. It's a lot of what people bring.

NG: Yeah.

BW: Do you have a favorite large piece or public installation in the last five years? I know you've had a couple . . .

NG: I don't think so. They're all challenging in different ways, and they still kind of continue even when the work is down, not there. They've all done different things. They're all part of the next project, and the ones previously, in certain ways, I feel like, so I don't think I have a favorite.

BW: I followed along with the Whitney Biennial, when you had requested to have your work taken down as a consequence of Warren Kanders being on the board. And how that—I mean, from my outside perspective!—seemed to effectively work. He resigned from the board. I thought that showed how art can be used for activism far beyond its content. Using the display itself of your work as a form of activism —would you talk about what experience was like?

NG: Well, our engagement in the world as artists doesn't end in our process of studio work, doesn't end in the piece only. It's an extension of everything else. And as artists and people that work within community and culture, we're engaging institutions. We're not the only ones engaged in these spaces, we're working alongside academics, we're working alongside critics, and other communities that build and you know, work

within these spaces—including funders. And understanding a lot of the violence in this world that is still perpetuating in—especially our communities of you know, brown, black, Indigenous realities—I feel like there's a responsibility of everybody, not just ourselves to, you know, envision worlds where we're not supporting and upholding that. Kanders—since that was directly profiting off that violence through rubber bullets, tear gas canister manufacturing, that is largely used against our communities, in instances like Standing Rock, Ferguson, the U.S.-Mexico border, Puerto Rico . . . And also, ammunitions manufacturing. Profiting from that oppressive violence in Palestine. There was, you know, a large amount of collective work in that. I was one of the four artists that actively pulled out and then four other artists followed. After that, things continued from there to . . . succeed, in the sense. It's never been a full success. Because there's still lots of variations of this in a lot of these institutions continuing today. The other one was D.C., the National Gallery exhibition. And obviously, this is still ongoing as we look at all of the funding and sales of weapons to Israel from the U.S., and taxpayer monies that are funding these things. Obviously, something like that's not going to shift everything, I don't think, one action, by any means . . . but it is important, I believe, because it's in a time when people are afraid, or worried, deeply afraid to voice themselves for fear of repercussions in their professional lives, in their many forms. And as we watch time drag, we see how actually really brutal the realities are of this. And more and more people are slowly, not fast enough, but speaking against genocide and those sorts of things happening right now. Those things are not just important for artists and art communities. It's important for the world to, you know, be mindful of and take action when they can.



In every language there is Land / En cada lengua hay una Tierra, combines English and Spanish, two languages imposed in North America since colonization. Nicholas Galanin, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Public Art Fund. 2023-24

BW: Do you see direct parallels between what's happening in Gaza between Palestine and Israel and what happened in the United States between—

NG: There are direct parallels, and it's known. That is the removal and forced removal of communities. And the destruction of land and water, and all that is in that land and that space. In the U.S., the history of that is highly documented. That we're still navigating that to this day. With our land rights, and with our subsistence rights, and waterway rights, and all of those things. It's not just land. It's also our culture, the children that had been removed from their families. You know, it's borders. Border walls. Colonial borders that are still up here in the U.S.

BW: Thank you.

NG: Absolutely.

BW: I appreciate you answering that question.

NG: It's also collectively demonstrated, there's a large Indigenous community that exists—not even just Indigenous—Black and African, South African, Irish, that are speaking towards these things. They're referencing their histories too, right? Like, in Ireland colonial governments and violence—hold on a second—[to someone in the room] *Oh, nice, is that pickle? All right. I got a call here and then I'll have a little. Got a pickled kelp and herring eggs brought in!*

BW: Nice!

NG: So . . . yeah, it is. It is connected in those ways. It really triggers a lot of people.

BW: Yeah, for sure and it connects a lot of people. Do you feel like the way that the art world perceives or interacts with Indigenous art has changed over the course of your career?

NG: Have I seen it change? Yeah, and it's always changing, it's been changing, generations and generations. Is it fast enough or swift enough or . . . great forms of it? No, definitely not. Statistics can speak to that. But yeah, it is changing. We're working towards changing it, in our work, and the people who came before us doing this work.

BW: As an artist, what roles other than making art do you feel go into your role in your community?

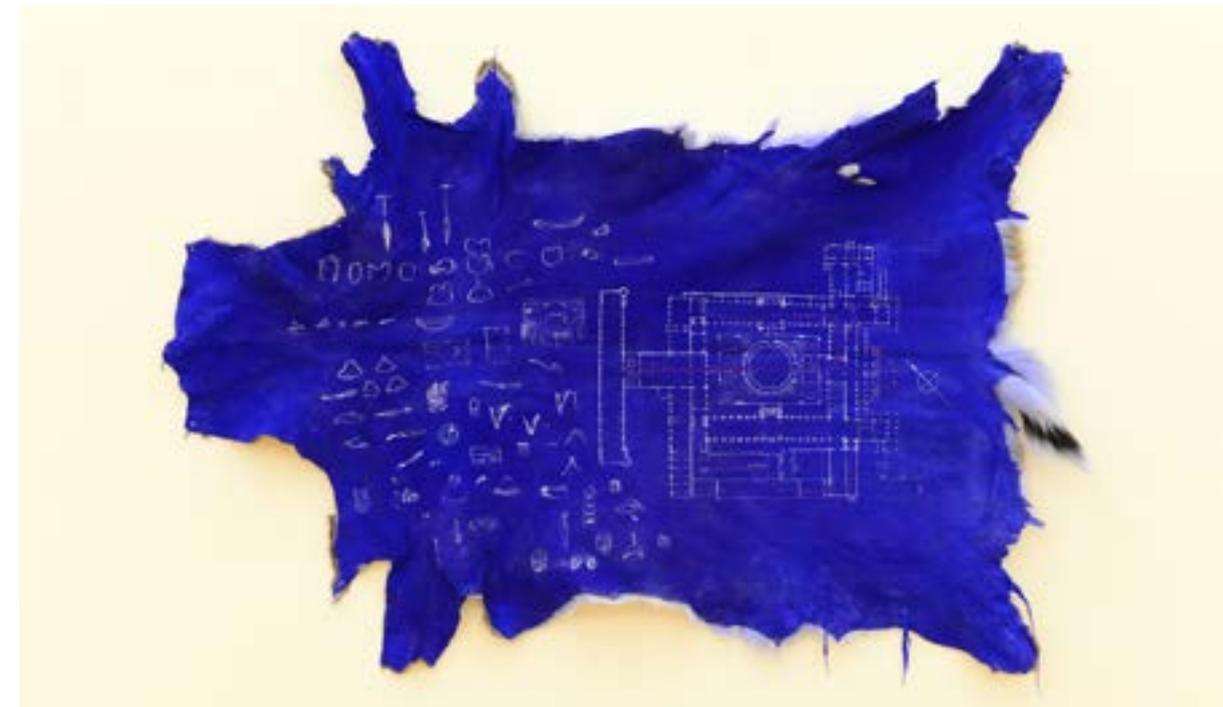
NG: I mean, there's tons of different roles in this career, in my work. I'm not gonna speak towards everybody else, because we're not under the same umbrella . . .

BW: No, I mean, yeah, I mean, specifically you.

NG: Yeah, for me, it's connection. Place and culture. History and the future. Envisioning futures, collectively, for community. For understanding our history, for sharing knowledge and care of that, transferring that to generations. All of those things are part of that. And I understand that from my cultural standpoint of our work. We've done so. The work that I've been trained in and know, culturally, has always provided things beyond just mere Western colonial ideas of art and decoration. Our work has connected us to place, connected us to time. It was used historically by healers and our medicine men and women through very intentional avenues of creating and practicing. But yeah, it does weigh. It does more than sit in a space as an object.

BW: Would you be willing to talk about a little bit—if you want to—the Tlingit concept of at.óow?

NG: Yeah, I can briefly speak on that. I mean it's cultural and ceremonial objects that don't belong to one specific individual. The best thing that I've heard is that it belongs to your grandchildren's children's children, and it's represented in ceremonial clan objects. And I feel like that idea of ownership . . . has not aligned directly with . . . like, the privatization of land.



Architecture of Return, Escape (The British Museum). Nicholas Galanin. 2022

Or some of the colonial collection projects, where items were purchased—“purchased”—from communities in time of duress, through violence. So those understandings and definitions are being navigated today, in museums and repatriation, NAGPRA. All these other forms of ownership, ideas of ownership.

BW: Yeah. I see strong parallels in the way Western culture understands land and understands art, as something to be owned, as a consumer object, as a resource . . . Do you have any apprentices right now?

NG: Yeah, I do. I mean, my daughter is learning from me right now. Carving, which is—she's doing really good. I think some of my past apprentices are always—I'm still working with them in ways, and moving them and sharing with them. Yeah. And also project to project it might vary.

BW: Yeah. Is the apprentice system as you see it formal, informal, or neither?

NG: I feel like it's informal. As in, there's not a guideline. But there's understanding—in terms of, it's a lifelong journey. I'm friends with artists and my uncle . . . I feel like . . . you succeed if your apprentice succeeds.

BW: One of the last things I wanted to ask you was about the role of creativity in your life. How do you think of creativity? Is it like . . . a drive that you have? Is it a gift that has been given to you? Is it something you feel you have to use to support your community? Like where do you see it, in your world?

NG: I feel like it's a force, of sorts, that I'm aware of. And that it's something that you have to listen to, and be aware of. And nurture. And rest. It's not something that you can just, like stare at and have. It takes a lot of different things to get to be open.



I guess, the easiest way for me to understand it was . . . Early on, I knew what I didn't want to do in this world. And that was found through doing jobs that were non-creative. And being like, I'm not . . . I can't be here doing this. In contrast, it was understood when I was in the studio and learning and apprenticing and seeing the process, and the power of that process, I suppose—was like . . . a deep joy. Being in the right place, doing the right things, I guess, that I need to be doing. And it's not always like that . . . but . . . it's always shifting, too, with life.

BW: What is your favorite way to eat herring eggs?

NG: Ooooh! Lately, salad. But it's not like— with sesame oil. It's kind of more like a Japanese style like poke a bowl or something. But also— Anyway. Yeah.

BW: Okay, well, I think I got through most of the questions that I specifically wanted to ask. We have about two minutes left. Is there anything else that you feel like you would want to say?

NG: No, can't do anything right now. Where are you at again?

BW: RISD. Rhode Island—

NG: Oh, nice. Yeah, I think I've given a talk there before.

BW: Have you? I wouldn't be surprised. Actually, Preston Singletary came in the fall! He was here.

NG: Yeah, I think I've spoken there. And I've spoken at Brown, which is near there, right?

BW: Yeah, it's like right down the street.

NG: Yeah. That was years ago. But yeah.

BW: Yeah. Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me and I hope the rest of your spring is great, and that the harvest goes well. And thank you.

NG: Yeah, good luck.

BW: Thank you!

NG: All right. I gotta get back. Take care!

White Flag
Nicholas Galanin
2022

rhode island

1638 Agreement Over Moshassuck

Called "Providence," as signed by Roger Williams and Narragansett Sachem Canonicus (bow) and his nephew Miantonomo (arrow).



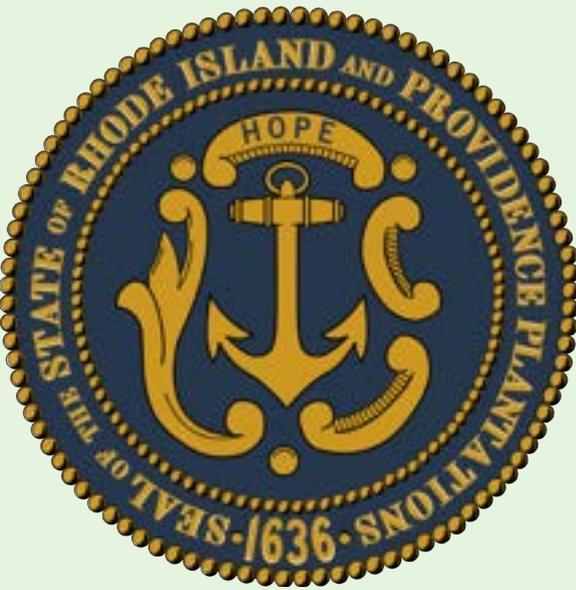
“Roger and his companions rowed from Slate Rock around the point of land now called Fox Point and continued up the river to the Great Salt Cove. A Native highway stretched from Massachusetts Bay Colony to New York along the coast. The English named the part of this highway, that ran along the eastern edge of the Cove, Towne Street. On the west side of Towne Street, a freshwater spring emptied into the Cove. Roger built his house across the street from the spring. The Great Salt Cove was a resource used by Native Americans for at least 5,000 years. Thousands of ducks and geese stopped there when they migrated for the winter. There were also eels, lobsters, crabs, clams, quahogs, and oysters. Every spring, fish swam up the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers to spawn.

The English claimed the salmon ran so thick at one spot in the river, that they could walk across the river on the backs of the salmon without getting their feet wet.

Roger negotiated a deal for the land that was to become Providence with the Narragansett Sachems Cononicus and Miantonomo. In return for the land, Roger allowed the Sachems to come and take whatever English trade goods they wanted. By giving the land to Roger, the Narragansett now had close access to English trade goods. They now would not have to deal with Boston or Plymouth, whom they trusted far less than Roger. Mary and their two children rejoined Roger in Providence later that year.”

— *Founding Providence*
Roger Williams National Memorial

Seal of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



RECORD

alaska

Treasury Warrant for the Purchase of Alaska

With this check, the United States completed the purchase of almost 600,000 square miles of land for what would become the 49th state—Alaska.

On March 30, 1867, the two parties agreed the United States would pay Russia \$7.2 million for nearly 600,000 miles of unceded territory—less than two cents an acre.

This Treasury Warrant, issued August 1, 1868 at the Sub-Treasury Building at 26 Wall Street in New York transferred the payment to the Russian Minister.

— National Archives
August 1, 1868

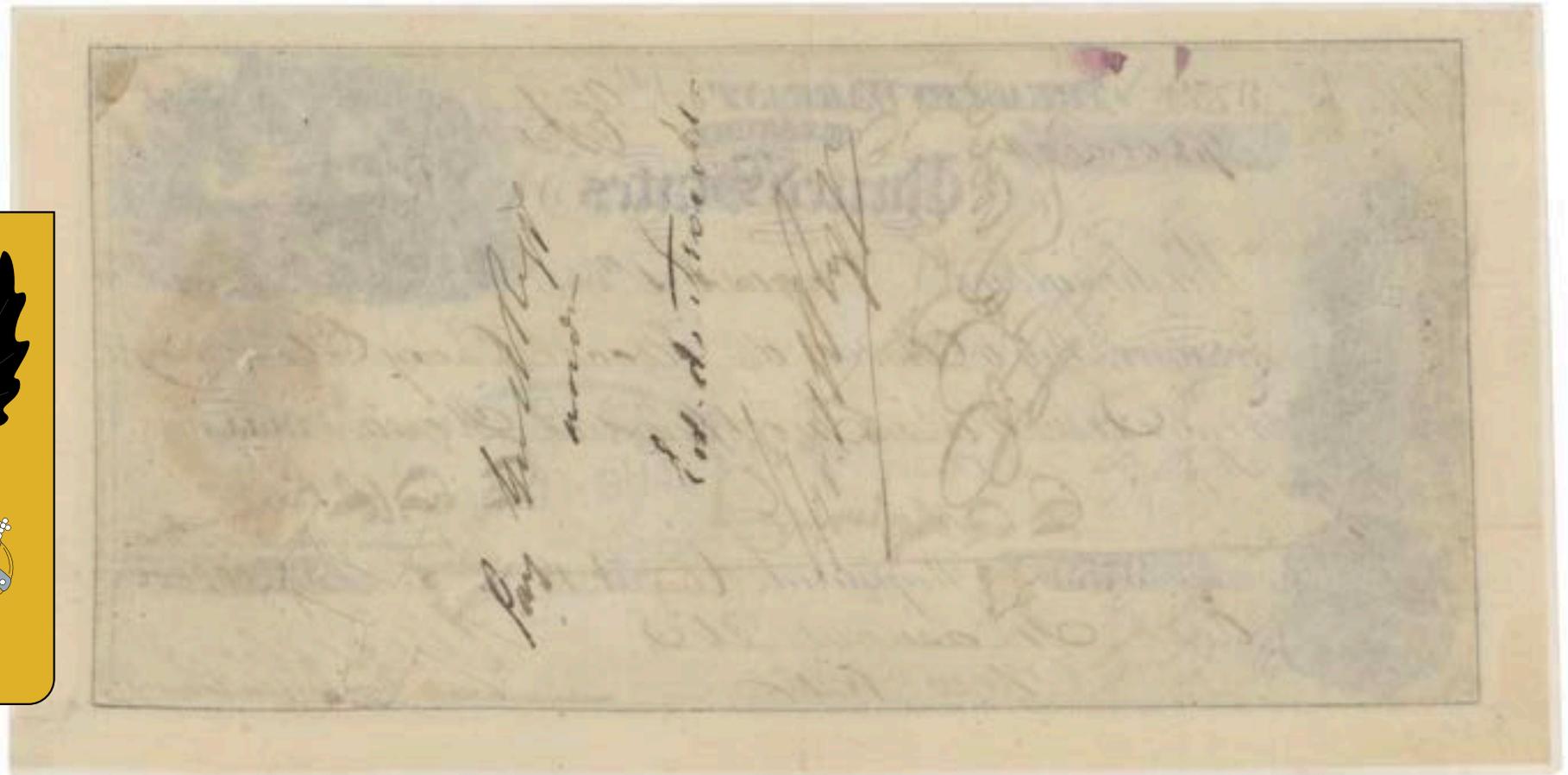
Great Seal of the United States



Coat of arms of the Russian Empire in Russian America



WARRANT TEXT
Dfl. No. 9759
on Treasury Warrant
No. 927
\$7,200,000 Treasury
of the United States
Washington,
August 1, 1868
At sight, pay to Edouard
de Stoeckl de Baron
On order: Seven
million two hundred
thousand dollars
[signature]
Treasurer of
the United States
No. 9759, Registered
August 1st 1868
\$7,200,000
Asst. Treasurer
U.S. New York
[signature]
Register of
the Treasury



Alaska Purchase Treaty 1867

A state runs on money, language, and power, codified in written documents. The Alaska Purchase treaty, through which the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, is less than 1500 words. It represents control of more than 250,000 acres per word. Signed in 1867 (significantly younger than many of the houses on Benefit Street), the document projected U.S. federal ownership onto the land and the resources beneath it. This document, and the exchange of the paper check on the previous page, was the legal justification for power over the land, and the immediate extraction and export of material including fur, salmon, timber, oil, gas, coal, zinc, copper, lead, silver, and gold.

In its guise as a frontier, dismantling Alaska's ecosystems into raw material for shipment to capital and cultural centers became the primary focus. These "natural resources," which actually required a significant amount of energy to render, were considered more important than the value of the land as it already was—alive, richly interconnected, and home since time immemorial to more than 230 tribes who spoke more than 23 unique languages, and had highly developed technology which allowed them to live in some of the most challenging environments on Earth. With just 1500 words on paper between two large outside powers, the future of the land and the people who called it home shifted. Documents structure land, through the channels of government, business, and culture. The symbolic and binding nature of written agreements has become one of our most powerful shared beliefs.

unincumbered by any reservations, privileges, franchises, grants, or possessions, by any associated companies, whether corporate or incorporate, Russian or any other,

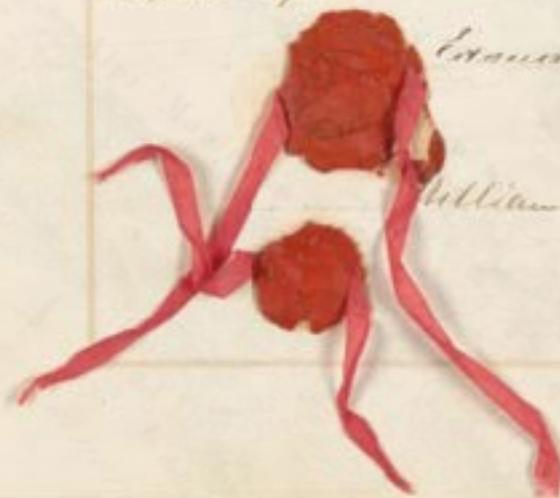
les Russes d'une part et par le President des Etats Unis avec l'avis et le consentement du Senat de l'autre, les ratifications en seront echangees a Washington dans le terme de trois mois a compter du jour de la signature en plus tot si faire se peut.

En foi de quoi les plenipotentiaires respectifs ont signe cette convention et y ont appose leurs sceaux de leurs armes.

Fait a Washington le 30 jour de Mars de l'an de Notre Seigneur, mil huit cent et soixante sept.

Edouard de Saxe.

William H. Seward,



article thereof may be observed and fulfilled with good faith by the United States and the citizens thereof.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this twentieth day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty seven, and of the Independence of the United States the ninety first.

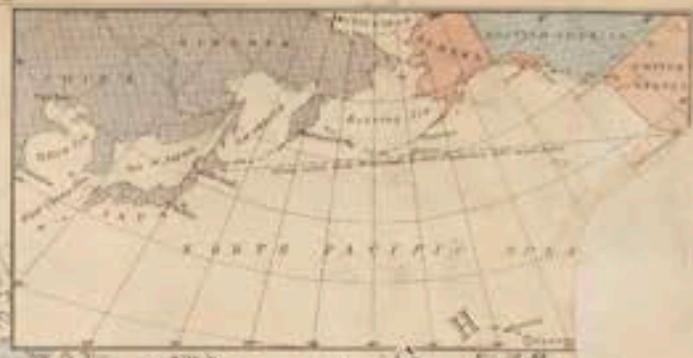
Abraham Johnson
By the President
William H. Seward
Secretary of State.

“The original treaty for the purchase of Alaska by the United States from the Russian Empire, written in parallel columns in French and English, is presented here with the signatures of U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and the Russian Minister to the United States, Eduard de Stoeckl. The official diplomatic language of the Russian imperial court was French, so there was no official Russian version of the treaty. The Russian tsar, Alexander II, affixed his signature at the end of this copy of the treaty following a short commentary on his ratification in Russian. This version includes a lengthy listing of the tsar’s historical titles in Russian on the first page, which is absent in the American copy. Following consent by the U.S. Senate, President Andrew Johnson signed an equivalent ratification on June 20, 1867. The subsequent Certificate of Exchange noted minor textual changes in the English and French versions of the treaty. The U.S. House of Representatives failed to appropriate funds for the Alaska Purchase for more than a year, on account of internal American political opposition and the impeachment proceedings against President Andrew Johnson. Alaska became United States territory on October 18, 1867. The U.S. government finally issued a treasury warrant to Russia for payment for Alaska on August 1, 1868.”
—Library of Congress



"The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots. History is the fruit of power."

—Michel-Rolph Trouillot



Historical
America.
4.

NORTH WESTERN AMERICA
SHOWING THE TERRITORY
CEDED BY RUSSIA TO THE UNITED STATES

COMPILED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE
of the
U.S. COAST SURVEY OFFICE
E. Pelee, Capt.
1867

The names given to the coast are those in common use at the date of the first discovery of the territory.
Scale of Statute Miles 10000 20000 30000
Scale of Nautical Miles 10 20 30
Scale of Russian Miles 1000 2000 3000
Scale of Spanish Miles 1000 2000 3000



AS A CHILD,

Suzanne Simard often roamed Canada's old-growth forests with her siblings, building forts from fallen branches, foraging mushrooms and huckleberries and occasionally eating handfuls of dirt (she liked the taste). Her grandfather and uncle, meanwhile, worked nearby as horse loggers, using low-impact methods to selectively harvest cedar, Douglas fir and white pine. They took so few trees that Simard never noticed much of a difference. The forest seemed endless and infinite, pillared with conifers, jeweled with raindrops and brimming with ferns and fairy bells. She experienced it as "nature in the raw" — a mythic realm, perfect as it was. When she began attending the University of British Columbia, she was elated to discover forestry: an entire field of science devoted to her beloved domain. It seemed like the natural choice.

By the time she was in grad school at Oregon State University, however, Simard understood that commercial

clearcutting had largely superseded the sustainable logging practices of the past. Loggers were replacing diverse forests with homogeneous plantations, evenly spaced in upturned soil stripped of most underbrush. Without any competitors, the thinking went, the newly planted trees would thrive. Instead, they were frequently more vulnerable to disease and climatic stress than trees in old-growth forests. In particular, Simard noticed that up to 10 percent of newly planted Douglas fir were likely to get sick and die whenever nearby aspen, paper birch and cottonwood were removed. The reasons were unclear. The planted saplings had plenty of space, and they received more light and water than trees in old, dense forests. So why were they so frail?

Simard suspected that the answer was buried in the soil. Underground, trees and fungi form partnerships known as mycorrhizas: Threadlike fungi envelop and fuse with tree roots, helping them extract water and nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen in exchange for some of the carbon-rich sugars the trees

make through photosynthesis. Research had demonstrated that mycorrhizas also connected plants to one another and that these associations might be ecologically important, but most scientists had studied them in greenhouses and laboratories, not in the wild. For her doctoral thesis, Simard decided to investigate fungal links between Douglas fir and paper birch in the forests of British Columbia. Apart from her supervisor, she didn't receive much encouragement from her mostly male peers. "The old foresters were like, 'Why don't you just study growth and yield?'" Simard told me. "I was more interested in how these plants interact. They thought it was all very girly."

Now a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, Simard, who is 60, has studied webs of root and fungi in the Arctic, temperate and coastal forests of North America for nearly three decades. Her initial inklings about the importance of mycorrhizal networks were prescient, inspiring whole new lines of research that ultimately overturned longstanding misconceptions about

forest ecosystems. By analyzing the DNA in root tips and tracing the movement of molecules through underground conduits, Simard has discovered that fungal threads link nearly every tree in a forest — even trees of different species. Carbon, water, nutrients, alarm signals and hormones can pass from tree to tree through these subterranean circuits. Resources tend to flow from the oldest and biggest trees to the youngest and smallest. Chemical alarm signals generated by one tree prepare nearby trees for danger. Seedlings severed from the forest's underground lifelines are much more likely to die than their networked counterparts. And if a tree is on the brink of death, it sometimes bequeaths a substantial share of its carbon to its neighbors.

Although Simard's peers were skeptical and sometimes even disparaging of her early work, they now generally regard her as one of the most rigorous and innovative scientists studying plant communication and behavior. David Janos, co-editor of the scientific journal *Mycorrhizas*, characterized her published

Simard has discovered fungal threads link nearly every tree in a forest.

she compares mycorrhizal networks to the human brain. And she has spoken openly of her spiritual connection to forests.

Some of the scientists I interviewed worry that Simard's studies do not fully substantiate her boldest claims and that the popular writing related to her work sometimes misrepresents the true nature of plants and forests. For example, in his international best seller, "The Hidden Life of Trees," the forester Peter Wohlleben writes that trees optimally divide nutrients and water among themselves, that they probably enjoy the feeling of fungi merging with their roots and that they even possess "maternal instincts."

"There is value in getting the public excited about all of the amazing mechanisms by which forest ecosystems might be functioning, but sometimes the speculation goes too far," Hoebeema said. "I think it will be really interesting to see how much experimental evidence emerges to support some of the big ideas we have been getting excited about." At this point other researchers have replicated most of Simard's major findings. It's now well accepted that resources travel among trees and other plants connected by mycorrhizal networks. Most ecologists also agree that the amount of carbon exchanged among trees is sufficient to benefit seedlings, as well as older trees that are injured, entirely shaded or severely stressed, but researchers still debate whether shuttled carbon makes a meaningful difference to healthy adult trees. On a more fundamental level, it remains unclear exactly why resources are exchanged among trees in the first place, especially when those trees are not closely related.

In their autobiographies, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace each credited Thomas Malthus as a key inspiration for their independent formulations of evolution by natural selection. Malthus's 1798 essay on population helped the naturalists understand that all living creatures were locked into a ceaseless contest for limited natural resources. Darwin was also influenced by Adam Smith, who believed that social order and efficiency could emerge from competition among inherently self-



Vervet monkeys and prairie dogs cried out to warn their peers of predators, even when doing so put them at risk.

ish individuals in a free market. Similarly, the planet's dazzling diversity of species and their intricate relationships, Darwin would show, emerged from inevitable processes of competition and selection, rather than divine craftsmanship. "Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is obviously 19th-century capitalism writ large," wrote the evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin. As Darwin well knew, however, ruthless competition was not the only way that organisms interacted. Ants and bees died to protect their colonies. Vampire bats regurgitated blood to prevent one another from starving. Vervet monkeys and prairie dogs cried out to warn their peers of predators, even when doing so put them at risk. At one point Darwin worried that such selflessness would be "fatal" to his theory. In subsequent centuries, as evolutionary biology and genetics matured, scientists converged on a resolution to this paradox: Behavior that appeared to be altruistic was often just another manifestation of selfish genes — a phenomenon known as kin selection. Members of tight-knit social groups typically share large portions of their DNA, so when one individual sacrifices for another, it is still indirectly spreading its own genes. Kin selection cannot account for the apparent interspecies selflessness of trees, however — a practice that verges on socialism. Some scientists have proposed a familiar alternative explanation: Perhaps what appears to be generosity among trees is actually selfish manipulation by fungi. Descriptions of Simard's work sometimes give the impression that mycorrhizal networks are inert conduits that exist primarily for the mutual benefit of trees, but the thousands of species of fungi that link trees are living creatures with their own drives and needs. If a plant relinquishes carbon to fungi on its roots, why would those fungi passively transmit the carbon to another plant rather than using it for their own purposes? Maybe they don't. Perhaps the fungi exert some control: What looks like one tree donating food to another may be a result of fungi redistributing accumulated resources to promote

themselves and their favorite partners.

"Where some scientists see a big cooperative collective, I see reciprocal exploitation," said Toby Kiers, a professor of evolutionary biology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. "Both parties may benefit, but they also constantly struggle to maximize their individual payoff."

Kiers is one of several scientists whose recent studies have found that plants and symbiotic fungi reward and punish each other with what are essentially trade deals and embargoes, and that mycorrhizal networks can increase conflict among plants. In some experiments, fungi have withheld nutrients from stingy plants and strategically diverted phosphorus to resource-poor areas where they can demand high fees from desperate plants.

Several of the ecologists I interviewed agreed that regardless of why and how resources and chemical signals move among the various members of a forest's symbiotic webs, the result is still the same: What one tree produces can feed, inform or rejuvenate another. Such reciprocity does not necessitate universal harmony, but it does undermine the dogma of individualism and temper the view of competition as the primary engine of evolution.

The most radical interpretation of Simard's findings is that a forest behaves "as though it's a single organism," as she says in her TED Talk. Some researchers have proposed that cooperation within or among species can evolve if it helps one population outcompete another — an altruistic forest community outlasting a selfish one, for example. The theory remains unpopular with most biologists, who regard natural selection above the level of the individual to be evolutionarily unstable and exceedingly rare. Recently, however, inspired by research on microbiomes, some scientists have argued that the traditional concept of an individual organism needs rethinking and that multicellular creatures and their symbiotic microbes should be regarded as cohesive units of natural selection. Even if the same exact set of microbial associates is not passed vertically from generation to generation, the functional relationships between an animal or plant species and its entourage of microorganisms persist — much like the mycorrhizal networks in an old-growth forest.

Humans are not the only species that inherits the infrastructure of past communities.

PROJECT

the social life of forests

Publication and editorial design for a speculative magazine featuring a *New York Times* article by Ferris Jabr on the tree communication research of Suzanne Simard.

with Lucy Hitchcock

2022



the **SOCIAL LIFE**
of **FORESTS**

Trees appear to communicate and cooperate through subterranean networks of fungi.

What are they sharing with one another?

by **FERRIS JABR**



The emerging understanding of trees as social creatures has urgent implications for how we manage forests.

Humans have relied on forests for food, medicine and building materials for many thousands of years. Forests have likewise provided sustenance and shelter for countless species over the eons. But they are important for more profound reasons too. Forests function as some of the planet's vital organs. The colonization of land by plants between 425 and 600 million years ago, and the eventual spread of forests, helped create a breathable atmosphere with the high level of oxygen we continue to enjoy today. Forests suffuse the air with water vapor, fungal spores and chemical compounds that seed clouds, cooling Earth by reflecting sunlight and providing much-needed precipitation to inland areas that might otherwise dry out. Researchers estimate that, collectively, forests store somewhere between 400 and 1,200 gigatons of carbon, potentially exceeding the atmospheric pool.

Crucially, a majority of this carbon resides in forest soils, anchored by networks of symbiotic roots, fungi and microbes. Each year, the world's forests capture more than 24 percent of global carbon emissions, but deforestation — by destroying and removing trees that would otherwise continue storing carbon — can substantially diminish that effect. When a mature forest is burned or clear-cut, the planet loses an invaluable ecosystem and one of its most effective systems of climate regulation. The razing of an old-growth forest is not just the destruction of magnificent individual trees — it's the collapse of an ancient republic whose interspecies covenant of reciprocation and compromise is essential for the survival of Earth as we've known it.



The razing of an old-growth forest is not just the destruction of magnificent individual trees — it's the collapse of an **ancient republic** whose interspecies covenant of **reciprocation & compromise** is essential for the survival of Earth as we've known it.

**“To many, our forest may seem
pristine and untouched,”**

the Menominee wrote
in one report.

**“In reality, it is one of the most
intensively managed tracts of
forest in the Lake States.”**



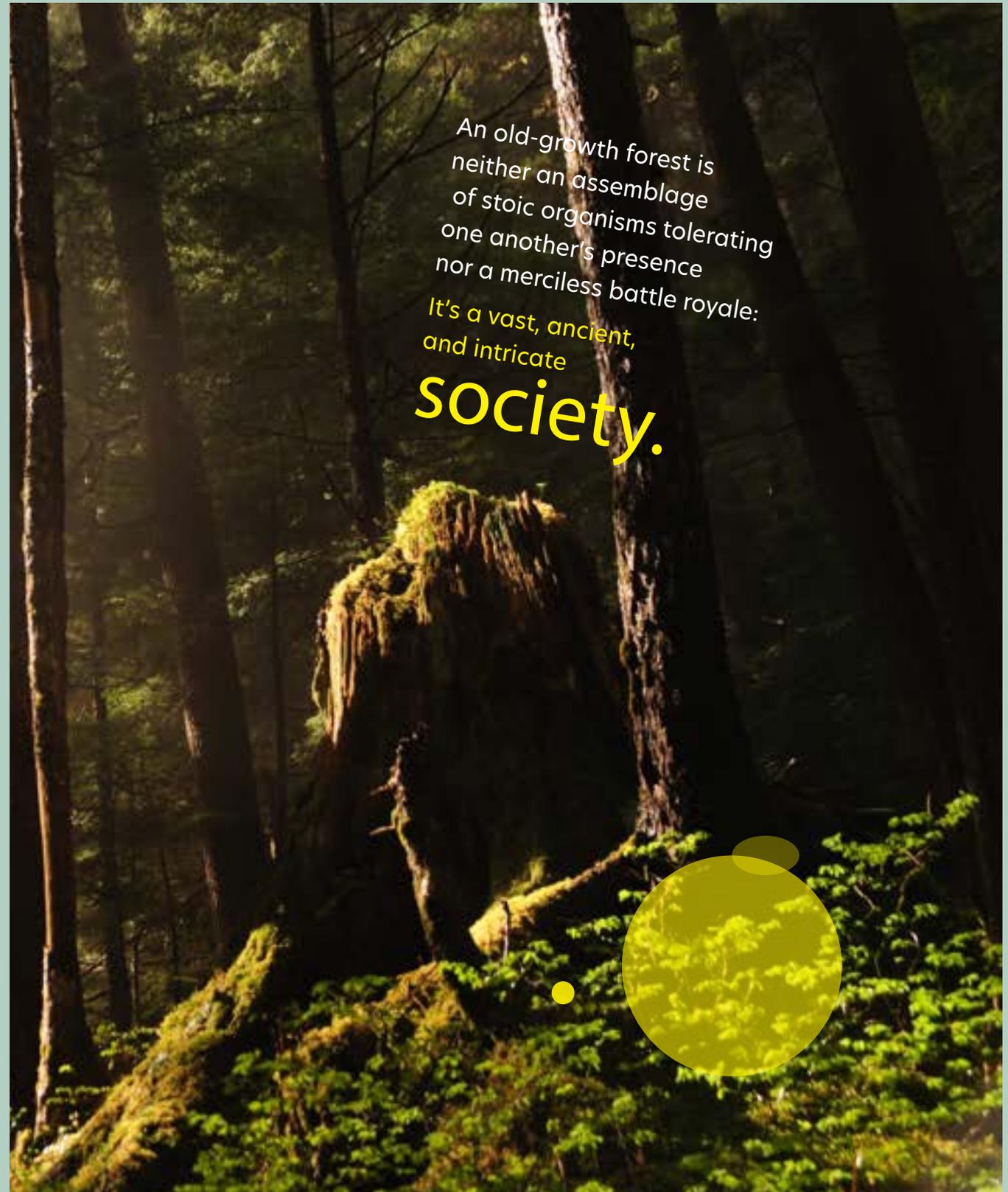
splintered trunks. Simard was so quick and nimble that I had trouble keeping up until we traversed the bulk of the debris and entered a clearing. Most of the ground was barren and brown. Here and there, however, the mast of a century-old Douglas fir rose 150 feet into the air and unfurled its green banners. A line of blue paint ringed the trunk of every tree still standing. Simard explained that at her behest, Erik Leslie, the Harrop-Procter Forest Manager, marked the oldest, largest and healthiest trees on this site for preservation before it was logged.

When a seed germinates in an old-growth forest, it immediately taps into an extensive underground community of interspecies partnerships. Uniform plantations of young trees planted after a clear-cut are bereft of ancient roots and their symbiotic fungi. The trees in these surrogate forests are much more vulnerable to disease and death because, despite one another's company, they have been orphaned. Simard thinks that retaining some mother trees, which have the most robust and diverse mycorrhizal networks, will substantially improve the health and survival of future seedlings — both those planted by foresters and those that germinate on their own.

For the last several years, Simard has been working with scientists. North American timber companies and several of the First Nations to test this idea. She calls the ongoing experiment the Mother Tree Project. In 27 stands spread across nine different climatic regions in British Columbia, Simard and her collaborators have been comparing traditional clear-cuts with harvested areas that preserve varying ratios of veteran trees: 60 percent, 30 percent or as low as 10 percent — only around eight trees per acre. She directed my attention across Kootenay Lake to the opposing mountains, where there were several more experimental plots. Although they were sparsely vegetated, there was an order to the depletion. It looked as though a giant had meticulously plucked out particular trees one by one.

Since at least the late 1800s, North American foresters have devised and tested dozens of alternatives to standard clearcutting: strip cutting (removing only narrow bands of trees), shelterwood cutting (a multistage process that allows desirable seedlings to establish before most overstory trees are harvested) and the seed-tree method (leaving behind some adult trees to provide future seed), to name a few. These approaches are used throughout Canada and the United States for a

An old-growth forest is
neither an assemblage
of stoic organisms tolerating
one another's presence
nor a merciless battle royale:
It's a vast, ancient,
and intricate
Society.



Technical objects do not only provide mediation between the humans and the natural and supernatural worlds. In reality, human being itself gets materialized in technical objects. Human beings delegate some part of humanity to the object, which thus becomes the human's double, its recipient. Endowed with a part of the human's humanity, the object is transformed into a being in its own right. It is no longer a pure assemblage of matter. It is now vested with intentions, as an expression of the human being's desire for mastery and power.

Since mastering fire, humanity has continually turned to other, always more powerful and energy-intensive sources. This is how the major leaps from one civilization to the next have occurred, right up to nuclear civilization. Certainly, in many parts of the world entire communities still rely on wood burning to convert energy into food. And there are other places in which domestic animals and human populations continue to produce energy using muscle power, leaving the sun to do the rest.

Technological development in itself is persistently framed as a history of uninterrupted improvements and thus of human emancipation. This quasi-automatic inscription of the technical object within an emancipatory trajectory has led to the negation of the very idea of planetary limits. . . . For every natural resource consumed, some artifact can simply be made to replace it. Technical systems can be used to supply the same services that the planet's ecosystems fulfill.

It is the idea that through technical power, humanity can overcome everything, including the very idea of limits; that it can produce more and more in spaces that are a priori restricted, and that it owes no debt of life to anything.

Gigantic computing devices will be to the 21st century what the alliance of steel and concrete was to the 19th and 20th centuries. It will provide this world with a semblance of unity, will also drag it into a process of splintering and endless fragmentation. In this, technology will leave a profound mark on the world's future. More than this, it will be our environment, the territory through which we move our biotope.

Death is ultimately a way of nourishing the Earth. Its function is to reaffirm the principle of consubstantiality between the soil and the human person.

Earth is not like a carpet.

You can't roll it up and take it with you.

A fold-out accordion book combining excerpts of historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe's book *The Earthly Community: Reflection on the Last Utopia* and a range of mapping schematics. They include language maps, nautical charts, Beaufort wind scale measurements, star charts, the actual stars, food webs, hardiness zone maps and more. The book is folded using alternating switch-backs and opens into a single sheet.

5.5 x 7 inches, unfolds to 33 x 60 inches

with Anne West

2023

earthly interpretation

PROJECT



Technological development in itself is persistently framed as a history of uninterrupted improvements and thus of human emancipation. This quasi-automatic reinscription of the technical object within an emancipatory trajectory has led to the negation of the very idea of planetary limits For every natural resource consumed, some artifact can simply be made to replace it. Technical systems can be used to supply the same services that the planet's ecosystems fulfill.

It is the idea that through technical power, humanity can overcome everything, including the very idea of limits; that it can produce more and more in spaces that are a priori restricted, and that it owes no debt of life to anything.

Almost everywhere today, private property has been erected as a natural, sacred, and

our personality, our moods, our emotions, our lies, our vulnerabilities, every level of our intimacy. The purpose here is not only to boost the predictability of our behavior, it is also to make life itself more amenable to datafication.

We are surrounded by ubiquitous computing technologies that are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. Whether it operates on bodies, nerves, material, blood, cellular tissues, the brain, or energy, the aim is the same: to convert all substances into quantities; to convert organic and vital ends into technical means; to capture forces and possibilities; and to amass them through the language of a machine-brain transformed into an autonomous and automated system.

The immateriality of images is based on the materiality of machines.

As for the dream

The computational is also the institution through which a common world, a new common sense, and a new configurations of power, perception, and reality are brought into being today. The globalization of corporate sovereignty, the extension of capital to every sphere of life, and the escalation of technology in the form of the computational are all part of one and the same process.

The age is thus one of miniaturization and universalization of new technical objects. Everything seems to happen as if seeing and acting at smaller and smaller scales — those of microbes, radionuclides, dusts, viruses, fine particles, and nano-particles — henceforth conditional humanity's technological future. In addition, new entities, slightly visible or not at all, unstable yet proliferating, now populate the human experience.

One historical response has been to spatialize exclusionary set-ups — reservations, island prisons, camps, penal colonies. In modern models of colonial occupation, a combination of tactics were used to control vulnerable, unwarmed, surplus, or racialized people, key among them being confinement, and

initially apparatuses, surveillance capitalism threatens what she calls "human nature" in the 21st century, just as industrial capitalism disfigured the natural world in the 20th.

We have only to examine how these figures of the infinitesimal are articulated in what some call the "horizontal panopticon" or "participatory panopticon" — that is, the form taken by power in our networked society in which "everyone watches, controls, judges, and gauges each other without a general supervisor."

Every reflection on technology returns us to the reality of the body, whether human or animal. The body only has meaning through, in and for movement. This return to their initial shape after deformation is what we call elasticity. Without this capacity of return, rotation, and transfer, movement is almost impossible.

The revival of state surveillance devices through the Internet and the commercial control of consumers are structuring aspects. Combined with the quest for visibility and online celebrity on networks, this leads to the surveillance and control of all by all.

Technology, especially in its digital form, has not only become permanently integrated into all aspects of our lives. It has become our condition.

It splits reason from consciousness and memory.

Yet we often forget that the body is not just a matter of engineering. No technology can ensure that failing tissues will be replaced once and for all. But try as we might to imitate nature or be inspired by its forms and materials, the techno-body will never replace the human body. The body that breathes, runs, eats, urinates, excretes, gives birth, or sings can never be broken down into its technical components.

Technology mimics these elementary functions of the body — the walls of lungs and trees that expand and contract, in short, elasticity of its many expressions. Technology seeks to make itself a body, free of the genetic syndromes that would induce it to lose elasticity.

Human bodies are increasingly divided between those that master and those that do not, those that can move and those that cannot or ought not to, or ought to but under very strict conditions only. Such bodies are kept drifting between invisibility, waiting, and effacement. They are trapped in fragmented spaces, dilated time, and indefinite waiting.

PROJECT

land/language

with Tina Zhou and Viśhakha Ruhela

This project was a formal interpretation of two texts:

1. *Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist manifesto* by Indigenous Action

2. *Language is land, land is language: The importance of Indigenous languages* by Susan Chiblow and Paul J. Meighan.

Laser cut engraved plexi-glass box filled with sand, shells, rocks, seeds, feathers, nuts, leaves, grass, berries, branches, and bones collected together from the Providence area.

with Pouya Ahmadi

11.5 × 8 inches x 2 inches

2023







پشاور



PROJECT

dreamland

dreamland is a video essay about the place we go when we sleep. It explores the landscape of unconsciousness.

Made with classmates, neighbors and inspirations Kaela Kennedy, Alec Figuracion, and Michelle Belgrad.

4 min, 38 sec
2023



dreams are maps



In Mark J.P. Wolf's introduction to *Building Imaginary Worlds*, he sets up the idea of a continuum of creation along which secondary (imagined) worlds range in relation to the "primary" world. While the primary world, too, requires plenty of imagination and creativity to navigate, it is a tactile world, in which we exist on a plane with plates and plants and nuclear weapons and hot, running water. Secondary worlds, though no less real, can only be entered through the mind — and the senses.

dreams reward surrender



all animals dream



The more creation required to fill in the gaps between the primary and secondary world, the farther away it's found on the continuum.

But even secondary worlds require consistency, a sense of stability generated by a specific place, a distinct border separating it from the primary world, and consistent laws of behavior or action that allow us to maintain our belief of the world's existence.

Wolf's offers the idea that the primary world is riddled by secondary worlds. "Places set farther away from populated and well-known areas, their remoteness and inaccessibility begin to isolate them from the Primary world, making them into separate or secondary worlds," he writes. "Uncharted islands, desert cities, hidden mountain kingdoms . . ."

Hailing from an island and (debatably) a hidden mountain kingdom myself, this makes some sense. As much of the world continues to grow more and more homogenous under a global market system that values familiarity, replaceability, and legibility to the state, to outsiders, the island remains a secondary world, more imagined than real, despite the fact we appear on the same maps.



The Haudenosaunee (known to English settlers as the six nations of the Iroquois) believed deeply in interpreting the power of their dreams. In their book *The Dawn of Everything: a New History of Humanity*, David Wengrove and David Graeber write briefly about the Haudenosaunee of North America and their ideas about dreaming, power, and knowledge.

Their political order was one in which no one could be compelled to action by an order from another, Wengrove and Graeber write—no kings, no emperors, no enforced hierarchy, no hovering hand of power to which subjects were equal beneath.

(The philosophy and framework of their diplomacy, which emphasized both personal freedom and collaborative decision-making, deeply influenced 17th century colonial thinkers who made many Indigenous governance principles familiar to us by using them in the U.S. Constitution.)

“But where any member of Haudenosaunee society given an order would have fiercely resisted it as a threat to their personal autonomy,” Graeber and Wengrove write. “Dreams were an exception.”

“Dreams were treated as commands, delivered by one’s soul, or possibly, for particularly vivid or portentous dreams, by a greater spirit. Dreams, they felt, communicated in a kind of indirect, symbolic language, difficult to understand . . . but it was considered the responsibility of others to realize a fellow community member’s dreams.”

dreams are ordinary visions



The messages of dreams were trusted voices that deeply influenced relationships in the waking world—relationships that actively resisted other structures of authority.

“Dreamers could become prophets, if only, usually for a brief period of time.”

Dreamers as temporary prophets. This feels right somehow—all animals can dream.

dreams cannot be turned on or off

dreams release us from gravity

bell hooks reminds us it is okay to know in fragments. We do not need to be a master. We do not need to be a whole. It is okay, and it is necessary, to recognize that we only ever need to be or to know a small part, a fragment, a shard.

The International Code of Signals is a primary flag signal system recognized across the world's oceans. Standardized in 1857, it allows ships to communicate specific words, phrases and ideas, as well as individual letters of the alphabet, by signaling with a standardized set of colored flags.

But the act of flag signaling—semaphore—is a much older tradition, helping mariners coordinate their movements and communicate across the waves.

It reaches back through the ocean-goers of antiquity: there are records of the Greeks used flags to coordinate their fleet's battle movements. The Bayeux Tapestry shows the Norman fleet flying white flags with golden crosses during their 1066 conquest of England. Flags are symbols representing distinct meanings that can remain stable for centuries—but on a day-to-day level can still be defeated by a thick fog.

The symbols and forms of communication our cultures adopt—their color, material, form, and utility, illustrate and define how we try to represent ourselves to others, whether they are Japanese mon or Maori tattoos, Tlingit formline or Oaxaca ceramics. They are a specialized reflection of how we want the rest of the world to interpret us, and as a consequence, a critical tool to understand how we see ourselves.

J.M.W. Turner's painting *The Battle of Trafalgar* (oil on canvas, 1822-1824) commemorates the most famous moment of British naval signaling history. When facing the French fleet, Lord Horatio Nelson had his signal officer hoist a series of flags to read "England expects that every man will do his duty." This message of literal life and death was fulfilled by England's decisive victory in the Napoleonic wars.

PROJECT

semaphore dummies

decoding booklet for the international code of emotional signal flags



J. M. W. Turner
The Battle of Trafalgar
1822-24



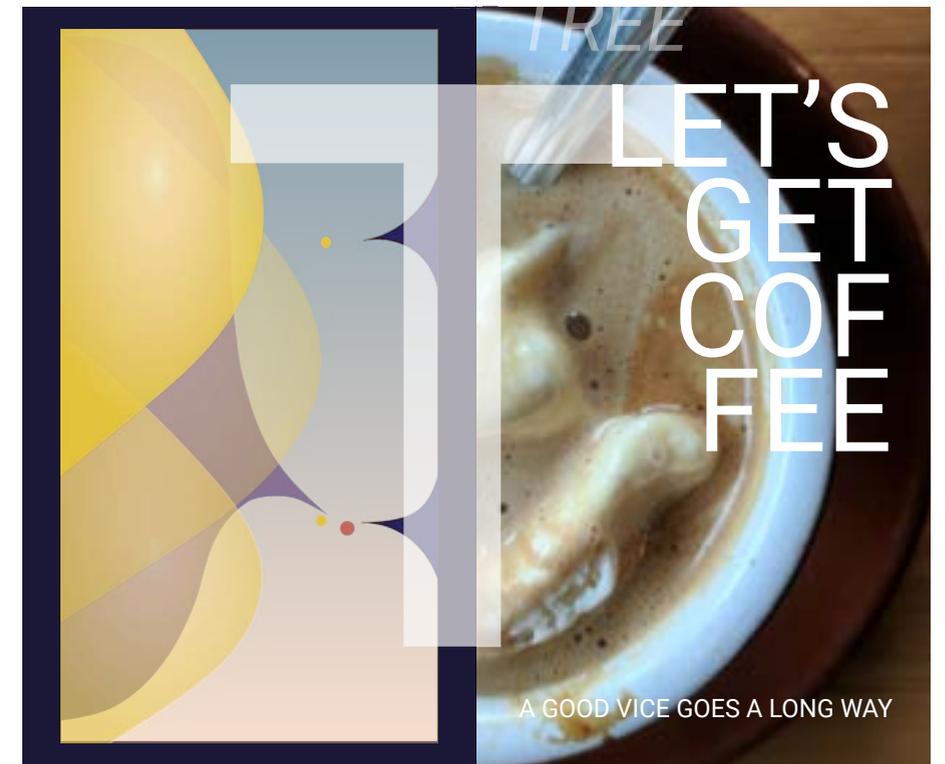
Nelson's iconic directive has been repurposed and reused in mediums ranging from Margaret Thatcher's cabinet speeches to Joyce's *Ulysses* to the script of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws II*.

We rely on flags to guard the borders of life and death. We fly flags at half-mast to respect death and disaster, and wrap them around the bodies of those shipped home from war. We use them to say what we cannot put words to, what is too complicated, too bittersweet, too painful, too vulnerable, too broad, or too much to grasp: 'You are now expected to fight and die,' and 'Here we are standing on the moon,' and 'We own Alaska now.' We rely on flags to confer legitimacy across their domain from above.

Who has the power to broadcast their message? Who has the freedom to die for their cause? Who has the right to live for their children? Who is allowed to go home? Who is allowed to choose where home is?

Signaling flags are a mode of interpretation that require no technology but the naked eye. Because they rely on the reflection of light to transmit information, they emit no footprint. Their transmission cannot be bugged, interrupted, or altered by digital means. Operating with a fully literate understanding of each flag depends exclusively on having learned the signals in advance, or having a manual close by to decode pre-assigned meanings as received.

Modern technological communications methods, from the phones in our pockets to the satellites overhead, continue to require a growing amount of energy and resources it is clear our planet cannot sustain.



If and when complex communication networks we currently rely on to communicate are overextended, destroyed, or collapse, flags will continue to maintain their ability to transmit stable, clear messages over great distances with ease.

Especially as technology plays a larger role in mediating our interpersonal relationships, many of us in modern life find face-to-face communication difficult. There are things we need and want to communicate for which we have no words—or simply do not feel capable of saying.

Being able to name, identify, and share our feelings—those little internal flags we wave to ourselves—offers us a lever to pause and reframe the flight, fight, or freeze instincts. Being able to recognize those internal signals gives us the distance to choose how we act, instead of a knee-jerk reaction. Whether you don't want to be emotionally vulnerable at work, have a crush on your coworker, need a hug, or just want the world to go away for a few minutes, a set of modern communication flags allows you to send emotionally turbulent messages effortlessly and as clear as day.

Linen flags printed on inkjet
3 × 5 feet and stab-bound decoding
booklet, 7 × 9 inches.

with Ryan Waller
2022–23

flag key

letter, word & phrase

- adrie* who goes there?
- bundt* leave me alone
- charlie* drink water, eat an orange, get a good night's sleep & if it's not better in the morning we'll take it out to the shop and cut it off
- dig* garlic forever
- eels* get over here and listen to this
- fox* not lost
- grid* let's talk fish
- halo* hot hot hot
- icicle* you are forgiven
- juneau* assistance required
- koala* let's get out of here
- lime* please don't talk to me about AI
- mollie* mayday
- noise* nihilistic dread
- ocean* congratulations
- poem* i'm sorry
- quilt* in over my head
- rain* hug please
- sky* ask me about my bad idea
- tree* let's get coffee
- umami* batten down the hatches
- vulture* let's get a drink
- water* indigenous land
- ex* staying sober
- yachties* i'm queer
- zing* it's cool to cry





PROJECT

phone book

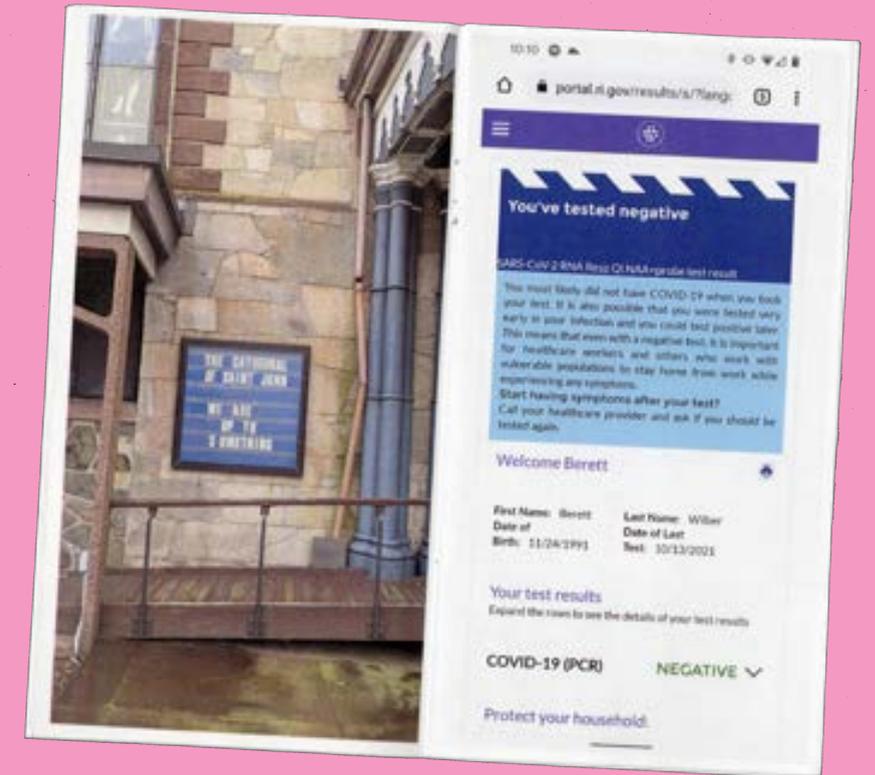
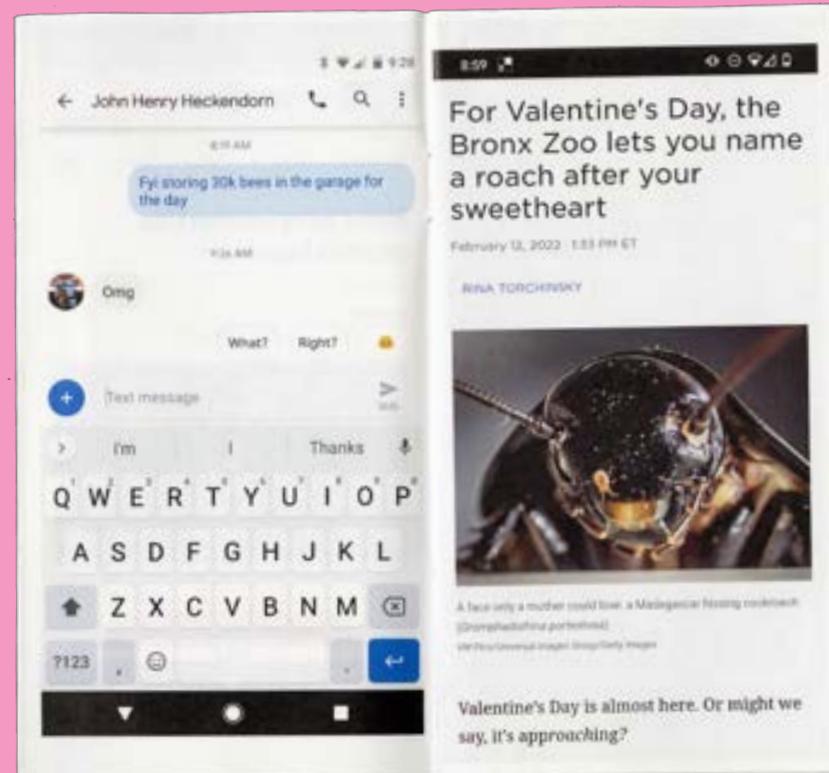
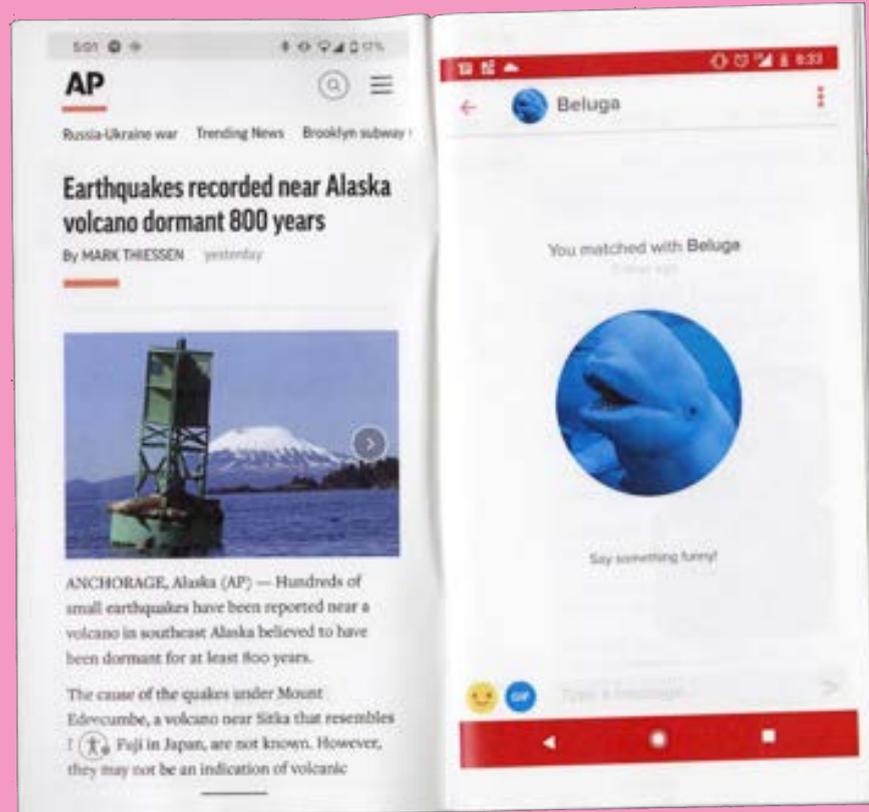
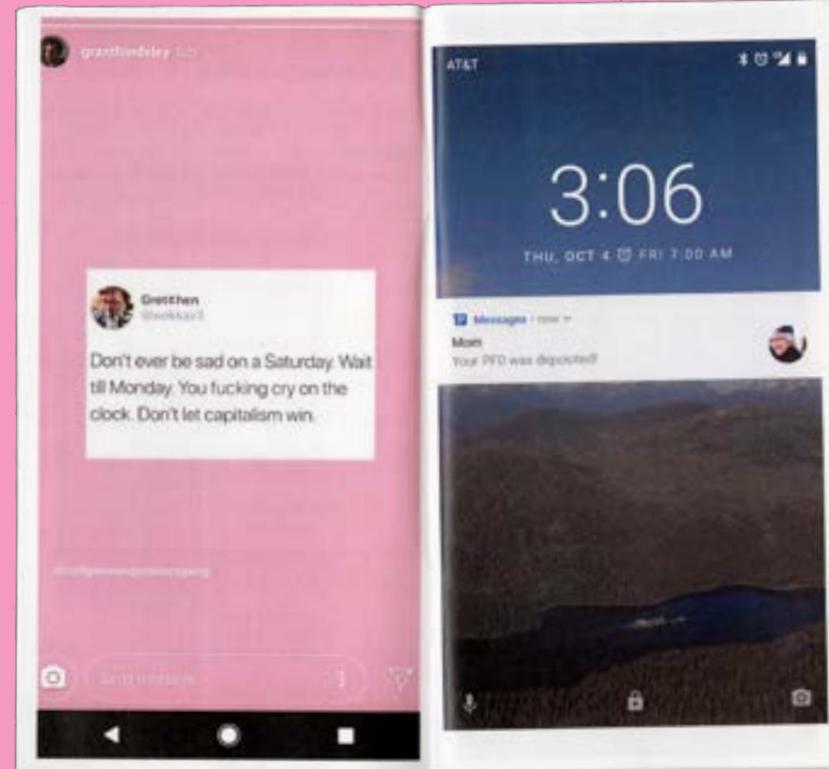
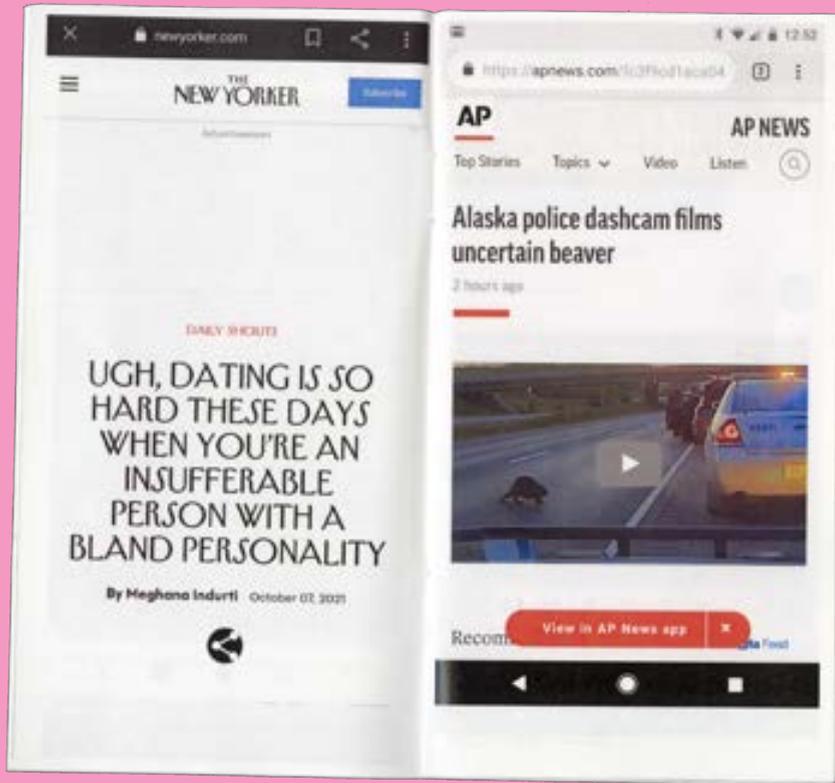
A smartphone-sized photobook of images curated from the screenshots folder of my mobile phone.

Contrasts life between Alaska and Rhode Island, in the realms of media, dating, survival, and apocalypse.

with Steve Smith

37 pages
2.5 × 4 inches
2022







I RESIDE IN A STATE
OF TRUST AND ALLOWING
I AM GOOD TO THE EARTH AND
THE EARTH IS GOOD TO ME
I SMILE AT OTHERS AND
THEY SMILE BACK AT ME
NO HARM AND
DONE TO ME
LIBERATE PEOPLE
AND LOVE
OTHERS AND
PEACE WITH ME
MOMENTS I AM
THE ONES
PRESENT CONTRAST



*“But the law is not
an instrument to find
out truth. It is there
to create a fiction that
will help us move
past atrocious acts
and face our future.”*

—Hilary Mantel
The Mirror & the Light
2020

INTERVIEW

elizabeth maynard

Liz Maynard is an art historian and professor in Theory and History of Art and Design at RISD and works in the art department at Rhode Island College.

She is the editor of *Providence Arts and Letters* online magazine operated out of Providence College Galleries.

She earned her doctorate in Art History from McGill University, Montreal, and a master's degree in Humanities from the University of Chicago.

BW: I love this coaster.

EM: I'm into felt. I like things that are you, know, certainly mass produced but feel —

BW: Homey!

EM: Yeah, less plastic, more homey.

BW: Yes. Makes sense to me. Thank you for the tea, also.

EM: Yeah! They're both very Midwestern cups. Frank Lloyd Wright—

BW:—yeah, the Prairie School and . . . Driftless? Is this a geologic reference?

EM: You are one of the only people to get that!

BW: I was driving through the Driftless area this summer with my mom,

EM Nice. It's beautiful, right?

BW: So beautiful. Yeah.

EM: Yeah that's where my mom was from.

BW: Oh, cool. Yeah, my mom's from Madison. Do you have a preferred mug? I don't know which one is yours —okay. I will take this one since it is slightly closer to me.

EM: One of my favorites.

BW: Thank you. Great. Well, I might start just by asking you to introduce yourself.

EM: My name is Liz Maynard. Elizabeth Maynard. Is this like when you ask me what's for breakfast and we check sound levels?

BW: Haha, it can be. Just make sure it's all working.

EM: I am an art historian, and I am a professor in Theory and History of Art and Design at RISD, and also in the art department at Rhode Island College. And I also am the editor of *Providence Arts and Letters*, which is an online magazine operated out of Providence College Galleries. And those are . . . some of the hats I have around. Is that enough?

BW: Yeah, that's definitely . . . I mean, any one of those things is enough.

EM: It's too much, I would suggest. It's actually far too much to be doing.

BW: Yeah, I would believe that! So we met of course, because I was in your class. How did you arrive at a space where you are teaching that class?

EM: I did my master's research and my doctoral research on the construction of historical narratives. How and what are the ways in which we try to memorialize or depict trauma in a way that's ethical and effective? Of course, when you think about effective . . . you're thinking about what effect you're trying to accomplish . . .

BW: It's complicated.

EM: It's very true. But that comes from my own family history and relationship to narrative with trauma, especially you know, narratives of war trauma. That's the research I pursued. And I found it important, I found it ethically important, But also personally exhausting. It was one of those things where it's like: *Well, this is what's meaningful, and it's the way I can be of service in the world.*

“Trauma impacts our visceral experience, which can lead to generational trauma, not just through narrative, but through the body.”

To think about the ways that we are grappling with these issues in a way that . . . hopefully we are . . . well, I don't know, making the world marginally better. So, it always felt pretty personal and pretty ethically significant to study. And I found the way that grad school was structured, my own relationship to grad school, my relationship to the content that I was pursuing. I didn't have a lot of good boundaries around stuff. And so I got really exhausted, which meant that after I finished my PhD in 2014, I was in a lot of physical and spiritual and emotional pain, and so I decided to leave academia. And I pursued wellness! I did the very cliché thing of dropping out and becoming a yoga teacher and a massage therapist and all that stuff. It was transformative for me. Eventually—I always wanted to be teaching, that was always what I thought my profession was. And so I got gigs at RIC and at RISD as an adjunct, because that felt like I could be half in, and half out. And then it felt like well . . . I have training in this really specific discipline. And it's a thing that's important, so I should probably teach about it. So I did. And I've taught that class [*Art and Trauma*] now for seven years. And I am going to take a break from that material for a while.

BW: So you went from studying historical narratives in academia to work that centers around the body. Did you find parallels between those worlds?

EM: It's fascinating—I think it was in the year of my dissertation defense, that there just started to be research being published around epigenetics, the idea that trauma actually impacts our visceral experience, in a way that is not just a manifestation in the cognitive realms. Which can lead to generational trauma, not just through narrative, but through the body. That felt like a thing trauma theory, as an academic discipline, was really missing. And it was such a huge component of you know different somatic work I was doing, right? The way that trauma is held in the body.

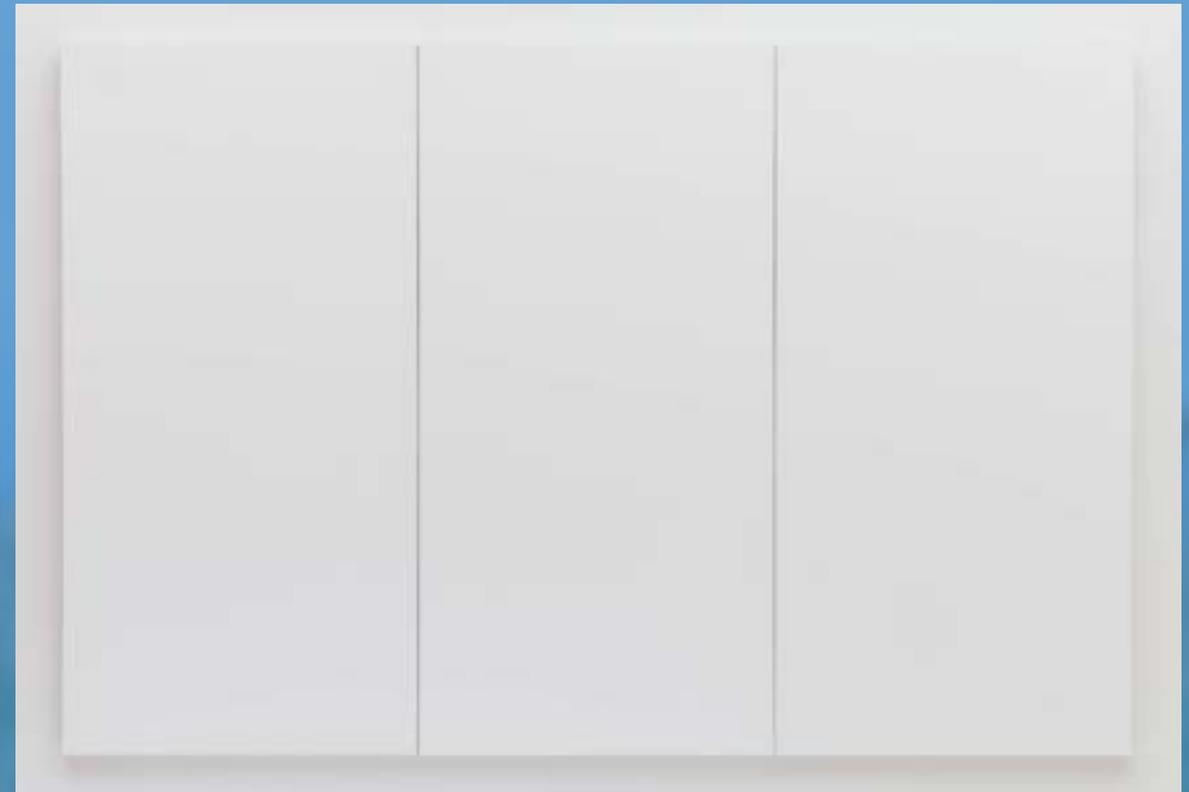
BW: Yeah. A physical link.

EM: Yeah. My art historical grounding was always kind of in this critical debate between form and contents, which is this very capitalist and modernist thing. But the artists that I was studying for my PhD were war veterans living in Chicago, who went to art school on the G.I. Bill. So what I was looking at was—why do we have these grand narratives? About the United States as a political power, you know, post-WWII, and also a grand narrative of what the Avant Garde art movement looks like. And it's abstract . . . So this question of, what is the problem with figuration in the post-War period?

BW: Like, why did people move away from it?

EM: Yes. Or why does it have the same level of acknowledgement or success or whatever—like in Europe, you have Giacometti and all the humanists of the post-war period, where there's a lot more depiction of the violated body, the grotesque body. So, for me, looking at that historical period, it was discursively about turning away from bodies. That was the dichotomy I was tracing in the historical narrative, in the art historical narrative, and then also my experience of grad school. It was just like—*Just get it done. Just get it done. It's just an intellectual project.* And in the meantime, I'm like, I'm doing profound physical damage to my body. And so there was just a very visceral experience of it. So, in my mind and in my experience, the two never really lived apart. Trauma is always about the body because we live in bodies.

BW: What you're saying really echoes to me through design—constant obsession about the relationship between form and content. I wanted to ask you about how you see the relationship between the body and the brain. Our culture has a narrative about them as separate entities, similar to the way graphic design considers form and content as separate entities. Except . . . they're not. What do you think about the relationship between the body and the landscape . . . in the context of thinking about the difference between form and content . . . if that makes sense?



White Painting (Three Panel)
Robert Rauschenberg
North Carolina, United States
1951

This 1951 painting is a prime example of the United States' post-WWII avant garde era of painting's preoccupation with abstraction.



This 1951 sculpture demonstrates the figurativity of the European surrealist and expressionist artists of the same period, such as Giacometti, whose sculpture practice defied categorization.

Dog
Alberto Giacometti
Paris, France
1951

EM: I feel like that's the question I've been sitting with for the last three years. Like, relationship to land and body. One of the other classes that I'm not teaching at RISD anymore is on bodies—body as object, subject, medium and lens. And we start with the Cartesian split, right, the mind-body split; then essentially finding ways to interrogate how that split has been weaponized. What are ways to subvert that idea? And essentially, ending with a complete dissolution of any boundary of the binary.

BW: Yes.

EM: Aspirational, you know, getting into like, interspecies kinship and things like that. To come to a personal level for me, it was it you know—whatever I'm doing in my classes, always has to do with kind of what's going on in my physical life, my lived experience. So this idea of mind and body, and finding the kind of tenuousness between those distinctions, had a lot to do with recovering from grad school. And relationship to body and land has a lot to do with figuring out relationship to home.

And so— thinking about my grandparents as refugees. Thinking about my mother's family as farmers . . . like, what is this relationship between humans and land?

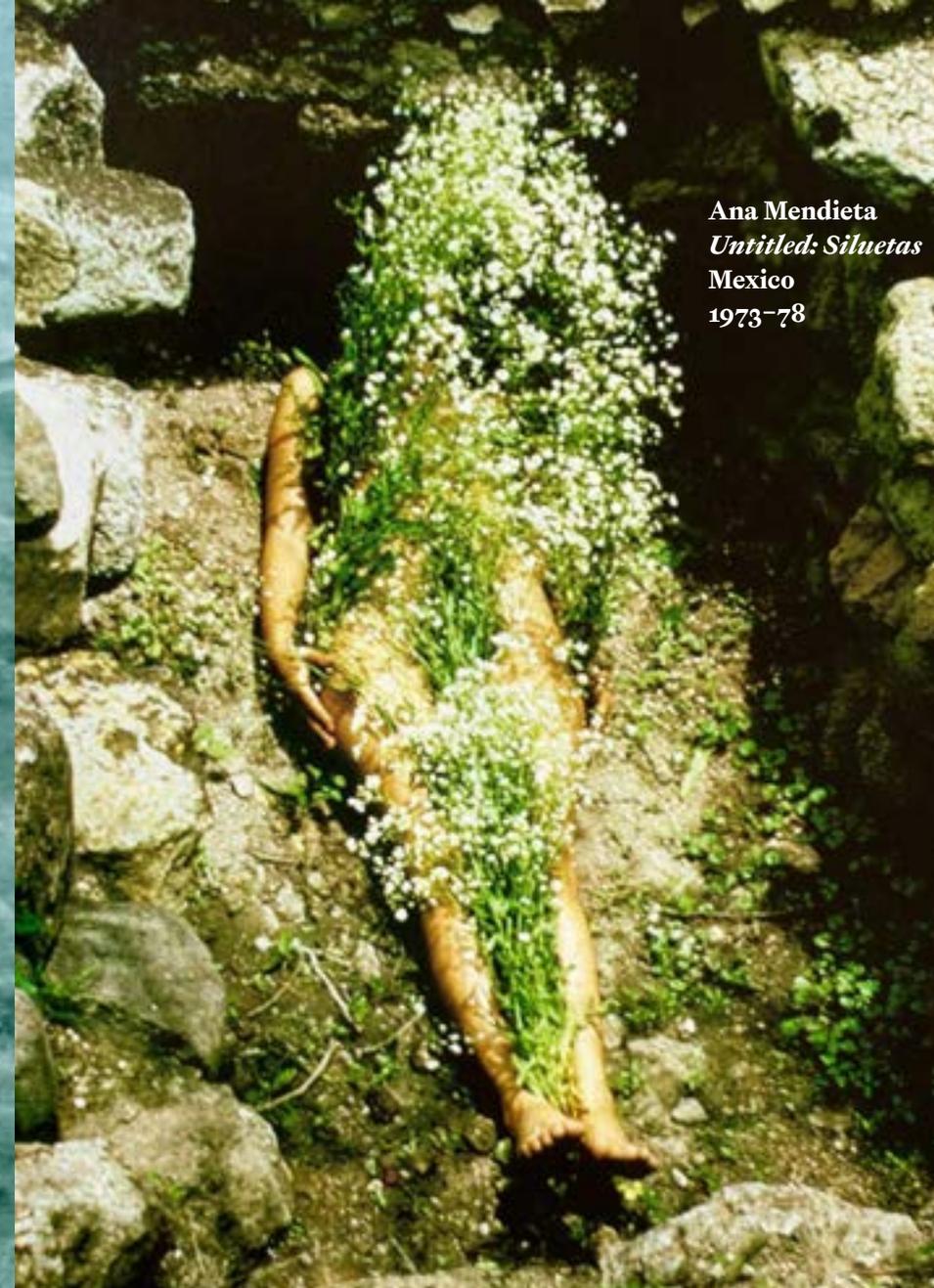
BW: And when you think about home, what is it you're thinking about? Are you thinking about a place where people feel physically safe? A place in which people feel spiritual connection to a . . . geography, for lack of a better word? Is it about the lived experience of spending time in a place which builds a value system within you as a consequence of interacting with it?



Ana Mendieta
Untitled: Siluetas
Mexico
1973–78

When you think about the idea of home, do any of those resonate with you, or are there other things that you think about in that relationship that you think would be important?

EM: Yeah. Well, I think safety is a thing that a lot of us get to take for granted. And that feels primary. But this idea of safety and impenetrability is not . . . like, that's where you get into violent ideas around position—you know, a king in his castle. This idea of ownership in a way that's about violation.



Ana Mendieta
Untitled: Siluetas
Mexico
1973–78

Honestly, since I've moved to the suburbs, I've been thinking a lot about relationship to land. I used to live in an apartment where you had your little floor. It feels very granular. And now I'm like, *Oh, no, I am responsible for this little ecosystem!* And so I've been thinking a lot about stewardship. This idea of, you don't own land, but we are obliged to care for where we are Which I know is not the—that's not our most common construction of relationship to land in our current paradigm. But it's what I've been sitting with—*[bird outside begins to sing]*—you see!

EM: Well, if we're coming at it from an understanding of interconnectedness, there is no subject position that is outside. Right? So the witness is always part of things . . . Oh my gosh. I'm sorry. I'm just like, we should talk about Ana Mendieta. I've been sitting with this since I had this residency in Boulder.

BW: What is a namendieta?

And there is bird song. It's magical. It's magical to be able to be in a place and understand I'm not the only one here, and understand that what I'm doing has an impact on the other beings around me. And that feels, to me, increasingly like an incredible privilege to be able to cultivate that relationship. And very healing.

BW: Yeah, I think when you were talking about some of the problems of ownership—the king in the castle—I was thinking about the flip side, the epidemic of loneliness. Which is about being isolated, ostensibly for protection, but then losing so much of what makes being meaningful—interconnectedness. Something I wanted to ask you about: the role of the witness in an interconnected system. I think we have a cultural narrative about the witness being a person who is apart, separate, not participating. Do you see the witness as an active participant?

EM: Ana Mendieta is a contemporary artist from the 70s and 80s, who was doing these land art pieces. She did this silhouette series that was a lot of Goddess imagery. And she was a refugee who came to Iowa from Cuba in the late 60s.

BW: Silhouettes? In the land? [gesticulation] Okay!

EM: Yeah, yes. But in her practice she's working with a lot of land imagery, Goddess imagery; she was doing a lot of research into Santeria and various land-based spiritual practices that had roots in Cuba. She has this beautiful work—working with film, you had these recordings where she buried herself so you can see parts of her flesh, but then she was covered in flowers. This work where the Earth is breathing, embedding herself in the land. An artist who is thinking really profoundly about the relationship between body and land, and the diaspora and race. Yeah. She's an artist that I've been thinking a lot about—that desire to be in the earth. So the idea of witness . . . the idea of witness and land is really interesting. In trauma theory, the function of a witness is somebody who can receive testimony. A reassurance of something having really happened.

BW: Like a fail-safe.

EM: Yeah, and again it's that fear of isolation, right? If it's just me, and I can't, I can't say it, if I can't testify it, and there's nobody to witness it—like how can we be sure, right? So I think . . . of the idea of relationship between land and spirit as authentic kinship. If you accept that witnessing doesn't just happen through human cognition, that's a different relationship to witness.

BW: What do you mean by that? What do you think of as an act of witnessing outside human cognition?

EM: People talk about trees, land that bears the trace of trauma. This idea that there's resonance of experience, even if there's not a witness to testify to it.

BW: Yes! Things happen to animals! Happen to the land. Like there's all kinds of things that occur when someone isn't standing there to be like . . . "The tree in the forest—"

EM: "—It has fallen!" Yes.

BW: Yes, yeah.

EM: Yeah. The world unfolding is more complex and multifaceted than we can ever really comprehend. And there's this way in which trauma can be a narrowing of the lens. And take this with a grain of salt, this is not my expertise, I have some light reading in this area, but that hallucinogens are increasingly used to treat PTSD, anxiety and depression. obsessive thoughts. Michael Pollan's book—who is, again, not an expert, is a journalist—but talks about the way that hallucinogens can soften the neural pathways that do the thing that narrows your lens right? So they make it possible to have a more expansive vision of experience. And that can help a lot in terms of getting through cycles of trauma, or like loops of obsessive thinking. That expansiveness is a piece of it. That idea that I feel comforted when I hear the birds, because then I am like, oh, I have a relationship to these birds. Where if I can feel the sun, and I'm like, I have a relationship to the atmosphere. In your list of questions you talked about, what do you do to ground yourself? And increasingly, I'm like, boy, I gotta get out. Like, just the ease with which I can be in my head. I have a predisposition to depression and anxiety and loneliness and melancholy and all the things that make us tender little creatures. And being outside I find it so helpful not just because it's like, oh, you get endorphins from moving—but for me, it's really focusing on, what is my relationship to all of the things around me? And trying to feel interconnection that way.

BW: It's a contradiction I am trying to understand: when you are outside in a landscape so infinitely larger than yourself, you feel so tiny and meaningless, and you also experience great feelings of meaning and connection and



Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) was a German entomologist and scientific illustrator who documented the process of metamorphosis (with plant hosts) of 186 European insect species, including illustrations and descriptions of their life cycles. Merian is considered to be among the more significant contributors to the field of entomology: Until her careful, detailed work, it had been thought that insects were “born of mud” by spontaneous generation. Her pioneering research in illustrating and describing the various stages of development dispelled the notion of spontaneous generation and established the idea that insects undergo distinct and predictable life cycles. —Wikipedia



Theresa Ganz was born in New York City in 1980. She earned her BA from Vassar College in Film and her MFA from San Francisco Art Institute in photography.

She works in photo-based collage and installation and has shown her work inter/nationally in group and solo shows. She divides her time between Providence, where she teaches in the Visual Art Department at Brown University, and New York where she is a director of curatorial collective Regina Rex.



significance. And I'm wondering, what is that contradiction? Why does our awareness of feeling so small make us feel so good?

EM: Because you're not alone. You're not alone. At least for me, that's what it is. You know, when you're alone in your head, you're alone! And then when you're in a world that's bigger, it could be that I'm like *Oh, my existence means nothing*. And there's also like— *Oh, thank goodness, none of this matters. And I'm a piece of something so much bigger*. And I think there's a great comfort in that.

BW: I think it's so funny that you said that as if it was so obvious, and it's true. I mean, I truly never thought about it that way until now. I mean . . . yeah.

EM: I'm just like, I don't know. I've been sitting with this for a few decades, you know? Yeah. I was I was not an outdoor kid. I'm a city person.

BW: What city are you from?

EM: Well, I'm from the suburbs. Wild to be back here. But we lived outside of New York City. We went to the city all the time; My dad was from the Bronx. So I had a very strong relationship to oh, city is where culture happens. City is where so much human vitality unfolds. Which is true, right? There's a lot of truth in that. And then lived in Boston, and Chicago, I lived in Montreal you know. . . And so I'm like, *Oh, why would you want to be anywhere where you couldn't have access to all these things?* And then I was like, *Ah, I want to be around nature more. Actually, that is the thing that makes me feel better*. Where was I? I was in DC this weekend, I was in a museum, and I was like, *why are there so many people here???* And I just started to have this weird, like, *Oh my gosh, I hate this*. Which is an experience I've never had before. Like feeling really alienated from being surrounded by other humans.

BW: Yeah.

EM: Yeah. And you don't feel that from trees, right?

BW: Which I think is also interesting! Because we now that trees communicate. So much research has come out in the last few years; Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree*, all the rhizomatic networks. So, we know there is awareness out there. This is one of the questions I asked Annika Ord, studying as a geographer: do you have a word for this? What is the word you use for the more than human world?

EM: You know . . . and this totally is about my personal spiritual practice—yeah. The divine unfolding. Yeah, that's the way that I have really come into understanding interconnectedness, through a Jewish Buddhist practice. That sense of nothing—and snatching this directly from I think Margaret Wheatley—nothing living lives alone.

BW: Yeah, I think it's also like an old scientific Darwinian idea—that nothing in nature lives alone. Right, maybe. I don't know. I'd have to double check that.

EM: Yeah. I've been struggling with this article that I've been writing around Theresa Ganz's work. She's done these neat 3D renderings of invasive plants in Rhode Island—ovoid windows, very much Victorian. But they're all digital; so there's that link to that Enlightenment impulse towards categorization, and really possessing knowledge through representation. You know Dutch illustrator Maria Sibylla Merian was one of the major, major contributors in the conversation around spontaneous generation, right? She was the illustrator who set the standards for representing insects with flora, the flora required for their transformations. So I've been like sitting with her work, sitting with that thing, sitting with what we mean when we're talking about . . . invasive species. That are a product of like, desires for specific kinds of floral beauty. How were they brought? Why were they brought here? What do we cultivate, what do we not cultivate? You know, there is the human desire for recognition. You know, we all want to be seen . . . It's just like . . . what degree of seen-ness are we going to be satisfied with? Like, do you need to be in MoMA? You know, like I have, I have a

friend who says—I'm as famous as I want to be. I want to be able to make an impact here, with these birds, with this land, with these students.

BW: Okay, but then what do you think . . . once you cross the digital rubicon, whatever it is you're putting out there is hugely magnified, which also means our desire for recognition is magnified?

EM: I'm not the right person to talk to about this because I'm like conscientiously, trying to step away.

BW: Why are you trying to step away?

EM: Because it makes me really unhappy. It's about scope and loneliness for me. When I'm online, and I see, my digital footprint is so small, I'll never be recognized. Like it feels lonely, right? And it feels like . . . you know the World Wide Web is about connectivity, but it's not a groundbreaking thing to say that we feel so isolated online. It's an incredible way to build connection and make community and increase visibility. It's also a way in which we feel profoundly lonely.

BW: Please feel free to say, at any time, if I've asked something that feels too personal, or that you don't want to answer, please, just say so. But what made you feel kind of like, okay within yourself just saying like, *No, I don't want to pursue that, I don't want to live that life?*

EM: I think, just really admitting how hard it was for me, really admitting how much pain I was in. Understanding how much I was suffering. And being in an ongoing process—sabbatical as part of this, currently working on this—of restructuring my idea that life is about suffering. You know, that it should be about, you work really fucking hard. And then you get the thing done, and then you're happier. It's like, what if I don't want to really work hard? What if I no longer have an aspirational life? I'm just going to live the life that makes me happy. I'm not gonna get the tenure. I'm not gonna do it. I've had to do a lot of work to be okay with that, you know, but .

. . . really recognizing that I get a lot of joy from like, really basic things. I love gardening. I love gardening so much. It makes me so happy, in a way that writing articles does not make me as happy. People, are like, "Well, that's a hobby. . ." and it's like, Why? Why have we decided work is hard? And you only get to spend a fraction of your time doing the stuff that makes you really happy? And you know, I understand I'm incredibly privileged to be in a position, I've done this adjunct teaching thing for so long, but I've managed to cobble together a life that somehow works where I still get to take the summers and do weird stuff. Like what else, what else has a lineage of suffering been for if not to have a good life and help others have good lives? And I just know that scrambling to the top of the pile is not the way that works for me. That works for some people, or so they think, I don't know, but I know it doesn't work for me. I wish you would have been in my Bodies class, this is a big part of what we talked about. Have you read Audre Lorde and the —

BW: —*Uses of the Erotic?*

EM: —*Uses of the Erotic?*

EM: Yeah. Like that's it, right? It's like the nursemaid to our deepest wisdom. . . We're still in thrall. I think we're less in thrall, but we're still in thrall to the idea of rationality and linearity over hysteria and feeling. I think about . . . the importance of controlling the narrative? Because if you control the narrative, you're the one who makes sense. It's literal rationality. And you know, I think about my own heartbreak around Gaza, and the way that narratives of trauma are weaponized to recreate violence—we read *Moses and Monotheism*, I think, in our class together? Freud in the 1930s, witnessing this rise of fascism, looking for an explanation: *How has this happened? How are we here?* And I just think about the way that the narrative of the Holocaust is repurposed for the State of Israel has been . . . has been used to justify so much devastation. In a way that I have just . . . I'm like . . . in my moments of despair,



Cocoa Tree with Southern Armyworm Moth
The Insects of Suriname
Maria Sibylla Merian
1702

I'm like, *I do not know how the Jewish people as a people recover from this gross betrayal. Which is my own hyperbolic relationship to my identity, because . . . it's like . . . humans. Humans sure are humans. They sure are humans. And boy, do humans do terrible things. But . . .*

BW: It is particularly magnified when you see a people or a population that has been so horrifically oppressed become the oppressor, in such an almost textbook way. I think what you're saying about the narrative is true.

EM: Yeah Which I think gets to your point about media. We have the ability to witness things—and to willfully turn away from the documentation of things—that is greater than it's ever been in the world, in our history, that we know of. That is the thing to grapple with. It is

incomprehensible. And it's also about land. It's about land, it's about imperialism. I think one of the things that feels so painful is—the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles, all these lies about the UN that we've been telling ourselves, that we're done with old-school empire? And it's like . . . No, we're not. No, we're not.

BW: Because we have not dealt with the consequences of it. It has really taken me like thirty plus years to realize the history of the country I've inherited is radically different than the history of the land on which I am from. In some ways, I just can't believe how long it took me to figure that out.

EM: It's not like you give up the right to being in relationship with the beings that are around you.

BW: I think for me, that's part of it—land is everywhere. It *is* in the city. It *is* in the suburbs. It *is*. I think of the sea as basically another kind of land, you know? A radically different type, but in some ways . . . there is nothing *but* that!

EM: The divine unfolding!

BW: How divorced from it could you really be?!

EM: You know, my teacher, my main teacher is a student of the Kabbalistic Hasidic rabbi, was like . . . this is the primary: all is God, and nothing but God. Like, that's it. Right? I think talking about land in that way feels just as authentic to me. It's all there is. Everything is land and nothing but land. I'm going to keep that with me.

BW: It's very interesting for me to hear you talk about it that way because I have never had any kind of religious upbringing. And yet, I feel the same feeling. It echoes so deeply for me, you know, this moment of like—Oh, is this what people are talking about? When they're talking about God, or the Divine or you know, whatever it is that they are. Maybe that is the word for it, for some people, that's what it is. Yeah.

EM: I mean, I know we all have different relationships to religion. You know, this has been one of my come to Jesus moments about . . . not all Jews operate within the same ethical framework you thought you received in your Jewish education. It's part of why I'm so into cults—I'm very into cults. There is a longing, right? Especially for people who have fraught relationships with their religion, or consider themselves secular, there is still a longing. This desire to be part of something larger than yourself. It's why CrossFit is popular.

BW: Yeah. Significance! We seek it even when we have more material resources at our fingertips than we could ever use. I see that in the capitalist tradition really strongly—that for many of us, capital has replaced, or enmeshed, this sense of significance that we

are longing for. I want to specifically ask you if you think of vulnerability as a strength. And if so, why? And if not, why?

EM: Brene Brown says yes . . . I think it's one of those things—appropriate application. You know, since I had my post-dissertation reorientation to things, it was very much about admitting a lot of weakness. What I had capacity for and what I didn't. Which is a vulnerable thing. And that was part of what allowed me to make a lot of shifts in my life that really helped with my health. And I think that my personal vulnerability is also a big part of my pedagogy, right? And how I relate with people in a classroom. Modeling a willingness to be wrong. A willingness to not know. A willingness to admit that it's hard; that learning new things is hard, processing new material is hard. And I think that makes things easier. You know, so there is that. Vulnerability is also a privilege. Not everybody gets to be vulnerable without experiencing grievous harm.

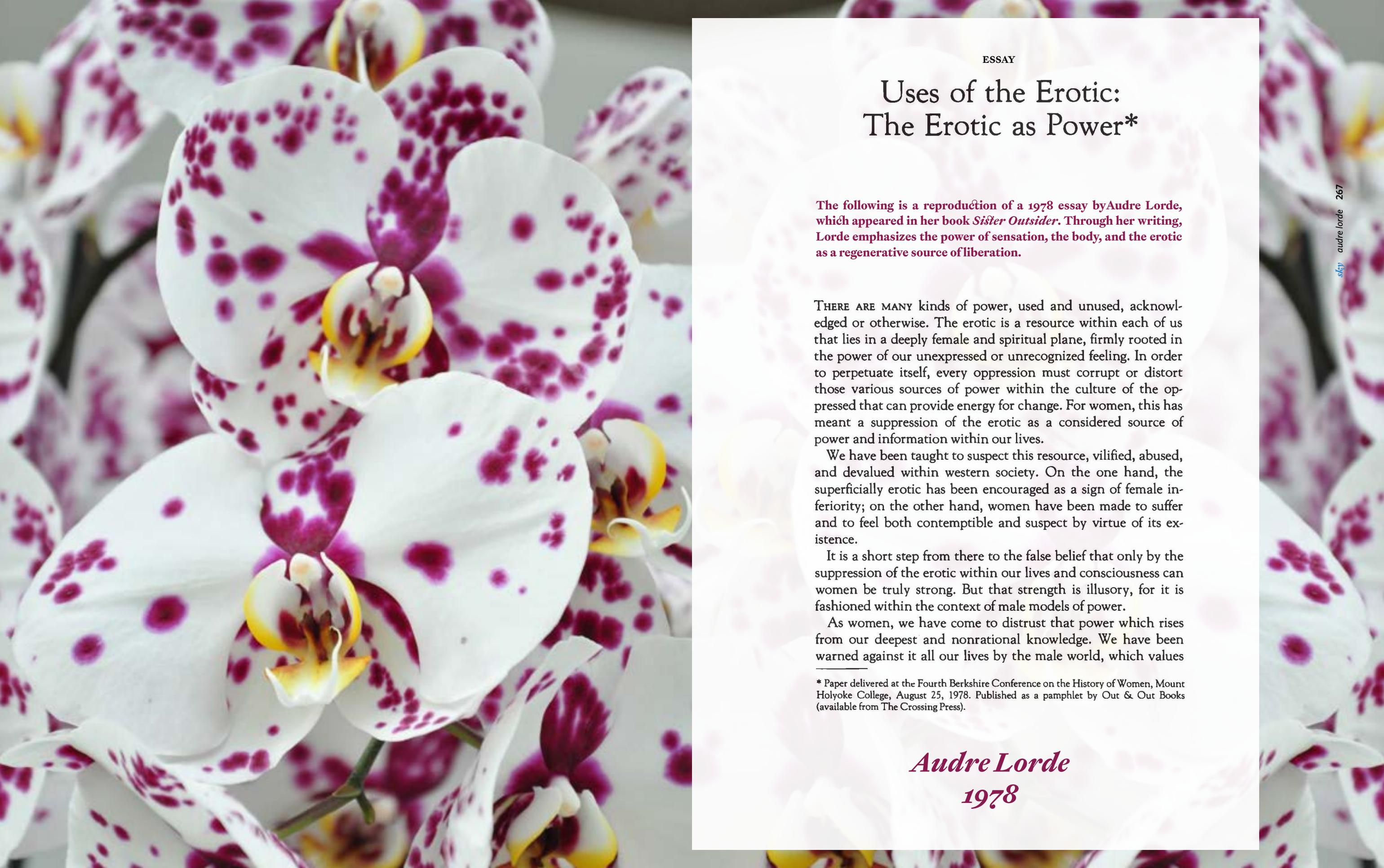
BW: Yeah. Some people don't get to make the choice, they're forced.

EM: Yeah. And so, nothing is ever one size fits all. I have found it tactically very helpful. And I also found that for me, personally—not always, but mostly—I want to be able to be vulnerable with my community.

BW: Yeah. I mean, I think following that thread of thought, it ties back to loneliness. Can you become unlonely without vulnerability? I don't know if that is really possible.

Iris à feuille large
The Insects of Suriname
Maria Sibylla Merian
1702





ESSAY

Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*

The following is a reproduction of a 1978 essay by Audre Lorde, which appeared in her book *Sister Outsider*. Through her writing, Lorde emphasizes the power of sensation, the body, and the erotic as a regenerative source of liberation.

THERE ARE MANY kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values

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Audre Lorde
1978

we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.

The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision – a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.

Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex. And the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfactions of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do. For instance, how often do we truly love our work even at its most difficult?

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need – the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love. But this is tantamount to blinding a painter and then telling her to improve her work, and to enjoy the act of painting. It is not only next to impossible, it is also profoundly cruel.

As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them.

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

There are frequent attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual. Because

of these attempts, it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. “What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunrunner?” In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic – the sensual – those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, “It feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether

it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.

We have been raised to fear the *yes* within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to

suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.

And yes, there is a hierarchy. There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.

This brings me to the last consideration of the erotic. To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.

In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized. The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within

the european-american tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings-together. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else, whether a religion, a fit, mob violence, or even playing doctor. And this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity – the abuse of feeling.

When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.

The erotic cannot be felt secondhand. As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively european-american male tradition. I know it was not available to me when I was trying to adapt my consciousness to this mode of living and sensation.

Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.



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