

# A NEW GROUNDING

corey datu watanabe \_ LANDSCAPE THESIS 2024



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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Landscape Architecture Degree in the Department of Landscape Architecture of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence Rhode Island.

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May 24th, 2024

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## abstract

Amidst our climate uncertain reality, the question arises as to how we may learn to address the seemingly endless spiral of ecological degradation and loss we witness each and everyday? Through a cultural reframing of our relationship with invasive species, *A New Grounding* asks how collective ritual may serve as a vehicle to understand, heal through and eventually embrace the trials and tribulations of ecosystem change.

Invasive species have become a major driver of the evolution of our landscapes. Research has shown their disturbance is often rooted in an underlying human environmental disturbance, however, for many these highly adaptive plants have become a source of immense heartache and division. For those who've grown up to know and care for a certain landscape, witnessing its erasure by a new more resilient species can be an immensely tragic experience. For others like myself, the language around the invasive has contributed immensely to grief experienced by marginalized communities most impacted by systems racism, colonization, homophobia and xenophobia.

Can we grieve ecological loss, while also embracing the gifts of the new? *A New Grounding* sees these dichotomous perspectives as part of the same puzzle. With *Phragmites australis* as its point of departure, my design proposes a series of collective rituals which occur at the point of confrontation between the vigorous stands of *Phragmites australis* and the drowning salt marsh or *Spartina patens*. During each of these rituals, a collective space making practice between these two zones is engaged, each incrementally transitioning the community through the stages of healing post climate catastrophe. From mourning and despair, to acceptance and courage, to joy and celebration, this thesis sees the ritual process of healing through climate loss as the root of a new joy, and resilience amidst the void of our climate uncertain reality.

IMAGE: "phragmites under moonlight", charcoal



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I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive tree; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane tree and the larch together, that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand each other

- Isaiah 41:19-20 | Tu Bishvat

## PREFACE

Since I was a young child, my grandmother told me about her experiences in “camp” or what I would later come to know as the Japanese Incarceration, a history that has left a deep scar on the American landscape and the collective memory of Japanese Americans. My grandmother was always quite vocal about our history, she knew the importance of exposing me to these stories, so I did not forget about the resilience of my own ancestors, and that of many other immigrant communities who stood strong amidst a nation which did not welcome them.

My identity is rooted in landscapes like Topaz, Heart Mountain, or Manzanar, where amidst the struggles of incarceration my ancestors championed their relationship with the land to transform desert prison landscapes into prolific community garden spaces of joy, cultural pride and adoration.<sup>1</sup> I owe so much to their resilience and the landscapes they’ve shaped, they’ve shown me the source of my strength. They’ve shown me the reality of systems which act to silence diversity, as well as the beauty that comes from those who defend and embrace it. My values, to stand for, speak to, and celebrate a more inclusive and intersectional world are rooted in these landscapes, they

<sup>1</sup> Tamura, *Garden’s Below the Watchtower*, 4.



IMAGE: Japanese Incarceration Camp. source: Hung, “But We Survived: A Story of Living Through the Japanese Internment.”



“The Invasive”, early conceptual collage

are what inspired the heart of my thesis, A New Grounding. And although this thesis journey is only the beginning, the values I've discovered and instilled along the way, are a gateway to a lifelong journey, defining and redefining my own role as an artist, activist and designer.

The summer of 2022, I found myself working as a field assistant for the Warren County Land Trust in Rhode Island. I remember trudging through the sea of marsh and meadow grasses, wildflowers, and brambles which made up a Sowam's Meadow Preserve. I could hear a family of Osprey calls from above, the hot sun beat down on my neck just below the shaded brim of my sun hat. I could feel the hardy meadow grasses prick my leg through my hiking pants tucked in at the sock to prevent unwanted guests from hitching a ride as I explored the land. I was on an important mission, sent out into the field to identify various invasive species threatening native biodiversity.

I was told of the menacing Asiatic Bittersweet, the vile Japanese Knotweed, the devilish Tree of Heaven, the vicious *Phragmites australis* all of whom threatened to swallow this precious native ecosystem whole.

It was at this moment that I felt a jolt of tension in my heart, I was immediately reminded of the war hysteria which triggered the Japanese American Incarceration.

A flurry of headlines rang in my ear, “The Silent Strangler, Oriental Bittersweet”<sup>2</sup>, “A Devilish Predator From Below the Tree of Heaven”<sup>3</sup>, “Japanese Knotweed the Global Menace”<sup>4</sup>. Whether we've begun to grow from our past or not, it is clear the rhetoric of xenophobia remains deeply embedded in the world of ecology, environmentalism, and landscape design highlighting the hypocrisy of fields which prides itself in driving equity, inclusivity, and social and environmental justice.

While many may see a weed worthy only of extermination, through my thesis explorations, I've begun to see the beauty of an immigrant story, the resilience of marginalized identities, and a future of more socially just and climate resilient communities.

<sup>2</sup> Chandler, The Silent Strangler.

<sup>3</sup> Tilkin, Tree of Heaven: A Slow Growing Menace.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew, Japanese Knotweed - The Global Menace.



ALL THAT YOU  
TOUCH  
YOU CHANGE.

ALL THAT YOU  
CHANGE  
CHANGES YOU

THE ONLY  
LASTING TRUTH  
IS CHANGE

GOD  
IS CHANGE

- Octavia E. Butler, "Parable of the Sower"

**In chapter I, "Seeking the Garden "**, we will introduce my early process research which informed my perspectives on dismantling the invasive. This includes a variety of precedents spanning from the fields of ecology, anthropology, art, philosophy, science fiction, literature, and design. This work culminated with a personal manifesto that provides a framework for reframing our relationship with invasive species.

**In chapter II, "A Spiritual Void"** we will introduce the gateway of our thesis explorations, *Phragmites australis*. We will justify why acts to exterminate *Phragmites* are indicative of an underlying spiritual void we carry within ourselves which perpetuates systems of social and environmental degradation and oppression. In the second half of this chapter we will share my first attempts to fill this void through communal rituals with *Phragmites*. These rituals aim to bring a new sense of grounding, intimacy, and connection with our environment through the lens of this misunderstood species.

**In chapter III, "Looking Inward"**, Through photography, sketching, drawing, and reflective writing this section will share my weekly thesis process reflections which document the major obstacles, breakthroughs, and points of tension in my research process that laid the foundations for my final design. Each reflection I will draw upon findings from my weekly spiritual derives at the RISD farm. It is during this stage that we begin to understand the multiple modes of grief that are entangled with ecosystem change and the discourse around invasive species.

**In chapter IV, "Manifesting The Garden"** we will synthesize the work of the previous chapters through a sharing of my final design concept, a series of six space making rituals which occur at the point of tension, between the vigorous stands of *Phragmites australis* and the drowning salt marsh or *Spartina patens*. At each stage these rituals aim to guide, and transition the community through the various stages of grief and healing post ecological catastrophe.

**In reflections**, we will conclude the thesis book, with a final reflection, on the learnings of this thesis process, and further discussion on why this work is important as a contribution to both my personal practice and the greater field of landscape architecture



I\_ seeking the garden

# ~~INVASIVE~~ → MARGINALIZED

## a framework for reframing the invasive

The invasive species myth is a misleading notion which not only blinds us from the true complexity of environmental issues impacting our living environment, but upholds systems of exclusion, racism and xenophobia within our field.

I believe in the concept of **multi-species liberation**, an idea in which all marginalized bodies both human and non-human, are not only inextricably connected, but bonded by the same struggle for social and environmental justice.<sup>1</sup> By uplifting one we inherently uplift the other.

The following pages map out my literary review and research developing a series of core principles which reinvent our perspective on “invasive species”, not as weeds, but rather historically marginalized bodies, who in the face of climate change, bring a deeper ecological and social richness to our communities. By unpacking the complex, relationships brought by our new companions, these principles began to lay the foundation for how can a deeper understanding of these species, can lend itself to more inclusive, equitable and resilient landscape design practices.

<sup>1</sup> Lara, “Prison Gardens and Growing Abolition, 8”



LOSS



EMBRACE



EVOLVE



DISPLACE



INTEGRATE



HOMOGENEITY



SPLIT



RUPTURE



RESIST

“early thesis terms”, hand modeling

## to dismantle

### invasive species are marginalized bodies

Many may see an unkempt weed, A New Grounding sees the beauty of an immigrant story, the resilience of marginalized identities, and a future of more socially just and climate resilient communities.

The negative stigmas we perpetuate about introduced species are a direct product of our resistance to accept new identities and directly impact the ways we perceive and act upon marginalized communities.<sup>1</sup> We must acknowledge and dismantle the legacy of xenophobia, classism and racism which are rooted in the invasive species myth.

In Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the author speaks of the Tree of heaven as a metaphor for the resilience and tenacity of immigrant communities.<sup>2</sup>

1 Groning, Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Ecological panacea or Xenophobia", 1.

2 Smith, Betty, "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn", 87.

Everything struggles to live. Look at that tree growing up there out of that grating. It gets no sun, and water only when it rains. It's growing out of sour earth. And it's strong because its hard struggle to live is making it strong. My children will be strong that way."

- Betty Smith *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*



"Silent strangler, Invasive Predator, Global Menace", digital collage



IMAGE: Ailanthus Trees, 25th Street, Joel Sternfeld, digital photograph

## to accept

### — true biodiversity means the embrace of othered identities

Our ecosystems are constantly evolving, shifting, and changing in response to human development. Species have come and gone for millenia and with globalization, and we must accept the inevitability of new identities. The nature of change always brings a certain amount of loss, but also the reformation of something new and more adapted to the forces which impact our environments.

There is no such thing as “native biodiversity”. True biodiversity means the acceptance of all introduced species regardless of what ecological relationships they may bring.

The image to the left shows the Highline during the mid 80s prior to its redevelopment. During this time the railine was covered by many “Othered Species”, including the Tree of Heaven. Under the cover of these “weeds”, NYC’s othered queer community often sought refuge in these landscapes which created a safe space for gathering and sex amidst a city which did not accept them <sup>1</sup>

---

1 Nowak and Roynesdal, “Ecological Deviance.”, 2

## to embrace

### our new companions: signalers, regenerators, activists for environmental justice

Introduced species offer immense social, environmental and ecological value. Through the lens of climate resilience and equity, introduced species provide habitat, shade, flood protection, erosion control, and function as carbon sinks often in underserved communities who may not normally have equitable access.<sup>1</sup>

The settlement of introduced species should be looked at as a regenerative state of succession.<sup>2</sup> They are the foot soldiers of highly disturbed sites that native species are often not adapted to survive in.

Through their excellent ability to establish a foothold and regenerate the soil of highly polluted or disturbed sites they provide opportunity to regenerate these spaces into more bio diverse spaces years down the line. Their ability to settle in disturbed sites are also a vital indicator deeper underlying environmental issues that have degraded the site.<sup>3</sup>

To the right we have the resilient *Phragmites australis* one of the few species able to survive in a highly contaminated brownfield in a post-industrial ruin of Detroit.

1 Del Tredici, *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast*. 12

2 Thompson, *Where Do Camels Belong?* , 34

3 *Ibid.* 34



IMAGE: "phragmites australis growing in abandoned detroit loading dock", digital photograph, source: "Tredici, Flora of the Future"



IMAGE: Earthseed, Precious Okoyomon, sculptural installation

## to reframe

### — coexistence is through systems of stewardship and care not exclusion

All species, introduced or acclimated can be problematic depending on context, similarly all species no matter the origins, history or background have the capability to contribute to and support a greater ecosystem and should be judged and acted upon based upon actual evidence of their impact on other species within their context.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, plants which cause ecological issues are often a direct result of human development and colonial logics.<sup>2</sup> Humans should not blame the plant for the ecological relationships it creates, but rather recognize our role in shifting ecosystem dynamics to have a responsibility as stewards to understand and manage them.<sup>3</sup>

This principle asks us to think deeper about the underlying relationships which cause certain species to outcompete others. It's very rarely just the plant. What human induced disturbance is causing one species to crowd out another? How can introduced species be stewards of settled species? How can we steward introduced species?

To the left is piece from artist Precious Okoyomon, title "Earthseed" centered around the "invasive" Kudzu vine. After the abolition of slavery, Kudzu was brought to the US to stabilize the soils of the abandoned plantations. Since then it has been named "the invasive that consumed the south", however, Okoyomon reminds us that Kudzu remains both a literal and metaphorical band aid covering social and ecological violence inflicted by slavery. If one were to remove all the Kudzu, the south would literally erode in place.<sup>4</sup>

1 Thompson, *Where Do Camels Belong?* , 34

2 Okoyomon, *Earthseed*

3 Marris, *Rambunctious Garden*. 87

4 Okoyomon, *Earthseed*

## to project

### embracing flux: introduced species are the foundation of the ecosystems of the future

Our ecosystems are constantly evolving, shifting, and changing in response to human development, ecological disturbance and the impacts of climate change.<sup>1</sup> Introduced species which establish a foothold, survive and thrive, are direct reflection of the state of the environment and are an integral part to the evolution of our ecosystems.<sup>2</sup>

This principle asks us to project...What important role do these species play in the future of ecosystems? Instead of just removing them, how can they be understood and designed with as integral conditions of site. How can the attributes of introduced species compliment and support existing systems both in the now as well as in the future?

To the right is a concept model of Nadare garden, a project where I attempted to project the dynamic form of a landscape design made of entirely "invasive species".

1 Marris, Rambunctious Garden. 36

2 Del Tredici, Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast. 12



IMAGE: nadare garden, gif animation



## THE ANARCHIC GARDEN | 10.28.2023

Amidst this Anarchic Garden we find Resilience  
In a world in which systems of exploitation prey on its own collapse  
Among soils most degraded, and communities most overlooked  
Our friends stand in vigor and solidarity, martyrs for a weeping earth

Amidst this Anarchic Garden we find Community  
In a sea of misfits, the brambles of the most neglected  
a bond between othered spirits is formed  
Here The Knotweed, The Phragmites, the Tree of Heaven grow  
They provide sense of place for those the world which has yet to understand

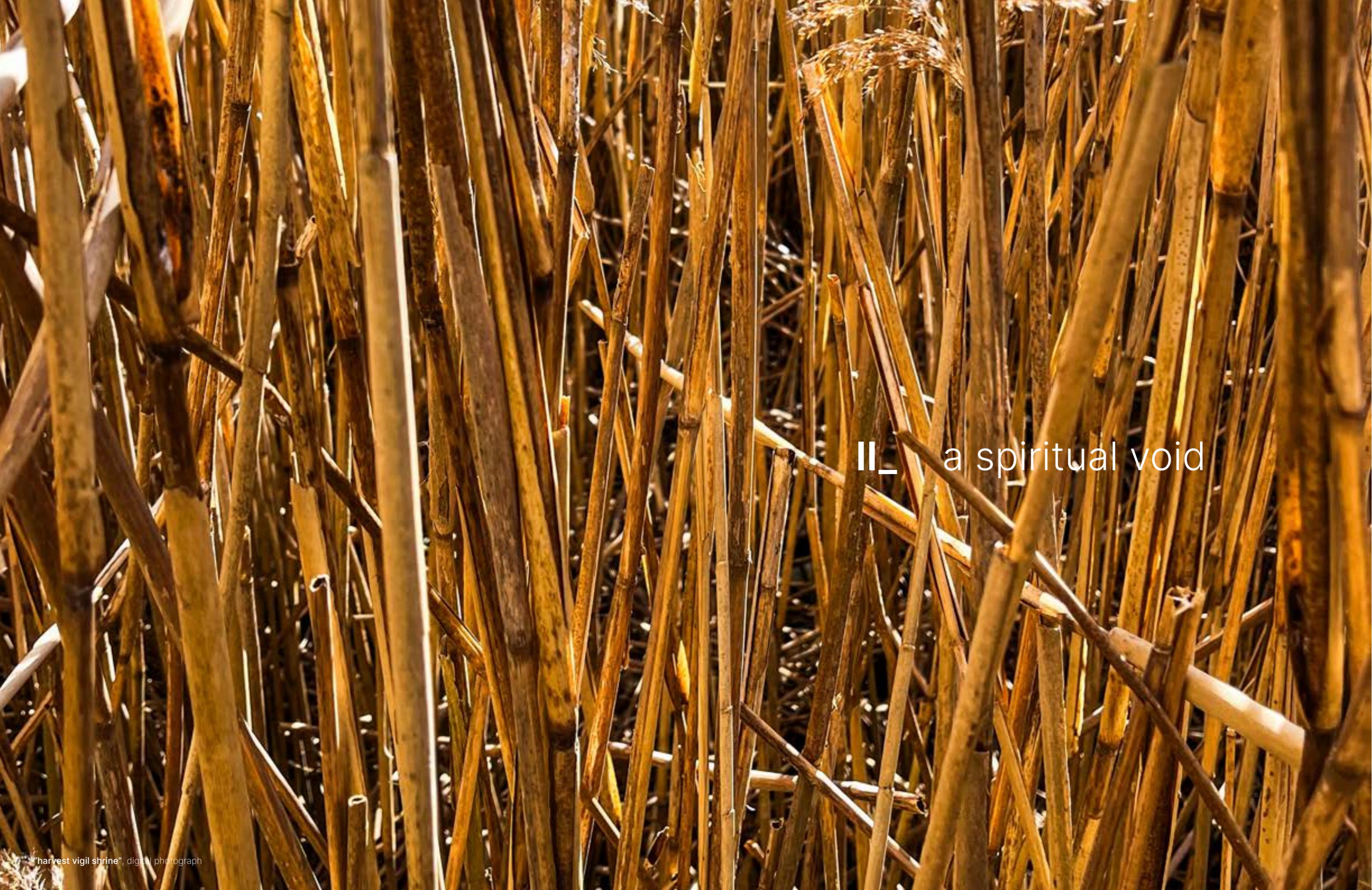
Amidst this Anarchic Garden we find Reconnection  
In a world of disturbance, we find solace in change  
To reconnect is to embrace the one god that is change  
We celebrate in moments, We mourn in their loss  
The nature of the ephemeral becomes our true guide

Amidst this Anarchic Garden we find Resistance  
On the margins of society the seeds of counter-movement take root  
A refusal to exist among the homogenized, the assimilated, the gentrified  
the seeds of revolution are sown among the ruins

Amidst this Anarchic Garden we find Liberation  
Among soils most degraded and communities most overlooked  
You stand for those who have been forgotten  
Systems of violence only lead to humanity's demise  
But to lay the seeds of compassion  
We heal the wounds of the earth

**IMAGE: "garden of misfits",** digital photograph

A photograph I took near Providence's I-195 highway entrance in Fox Point showing a symphony of Tree of heaven, and Asiatic bittersweet framing the stairwell.



||\_ a spiritual void



IMAGE: "the meadowlands", digital photograph, source: "Tredici, Flora of the Future"

"The plant is a symptom of environmental degradation, not its cause. Just remove the New Jersey Turnpike, reestablish the tidal flow of water, and the Phragmites will disappear."

- Peter Del Tredici, Flora of the Future

## the gateway

Last fall, my thesis will began to test ritual through the lens Phragmites Australis, an immensely important but often misunderstood wetland species. Common narratives around Phragmites call it an "invasive plant", introduced from far east asia, which is known to form monocultures which crowd out "native" wetland biodiversity.<sup>1</sup> The image to the left shows the New Jersey Meadowlands a highly disturbed landscape know for it's vast expanses of Phragmites. However, research has shown these monocultures are actually a result of underlying human caused environmental disturbances which often pollute local waters, and cut off tidal flow to our wetlands, stifling the growth of many less adaptive wetland plants but allowing a highly resilient and opportunistic plant like Phragmites to thrive.<sup>2</sup>

They are the stitches which hold together landscapes in peril. Among degraded coastlines ravaged by human dredging and industrial runoff, the Phragmites bind together remnants of the wounded earth, preventing it from eroding into oblivion. As sea levels rise and storm surges threaten to spill into our communities, the Phragmite hold the line where no other species can. While we continue to degrade our soils, air and water, with heavy metals, and nitrogenous runoff, phragmites stabilize these particulates in their tissues, preventing further spread into our water, air, and other vital ecologies.

Instead of addressing the root of the issue, common management of phragmites still use "invasive narrative" which often results in tactics of extermination, resulting in burning, clear cutting and excessive use of herbicides on stands of phragmites all of which are highly energy intensive, do not stop it's growth, and in many cases further exacerbate the devastation of our landscapes.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of our ecosystems is change, and the now global presence of Phragmites is a direct product of the flux brought by human development, globalization and shifts in climate.<sup>4</sup> I believe the abundance of Phragmites in our wetland ecosystems is a sign, and if we take the time to more deeply understand its role in our environment, and work to cultivate a more relationship with it, we too may learn about the gifts of resilience it brings.

1 Kiviat, "Ecosystem Services of Phragmites in North America with Emphasis on Habitat Functions." 1

2 Del Tredici, "The Flora of the Future."

3 Kiviat, "Ecosystem Services of Phragmites in North America with Emphasis on Habitat Functions." 3

4 Ibid. 3

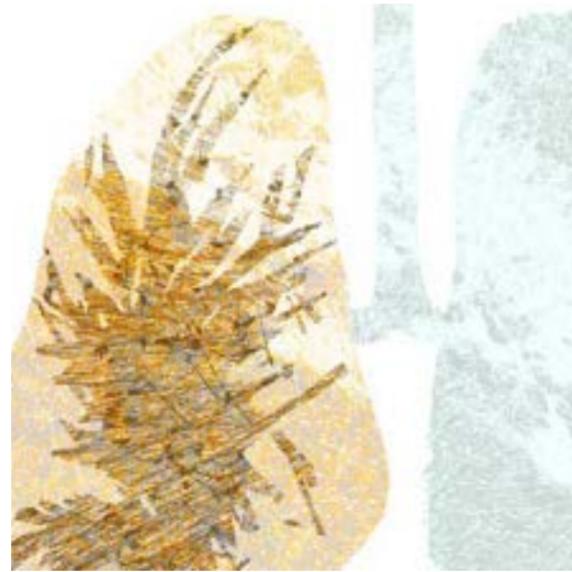


## THE CLIMATE GUARDIAN



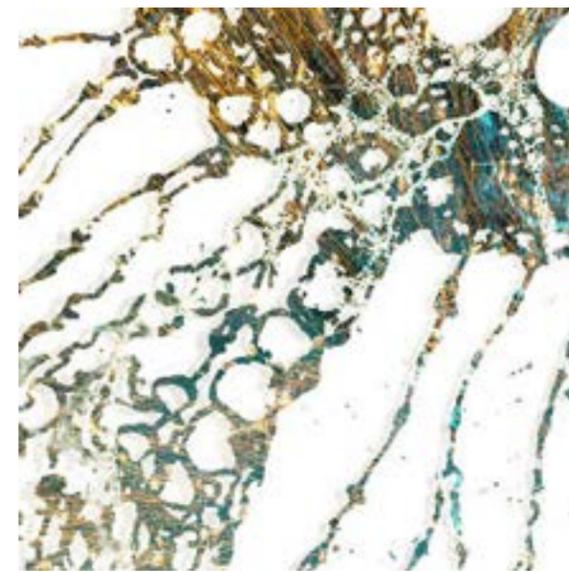
### HOLDER OF THE LINE

Often finding refuge along coastal and wetland conditions experiencing extreme environmental disturbance, Phragmites often provide a strong shoreline buffer, and erosion stabilizer where no other species may be able to survive.



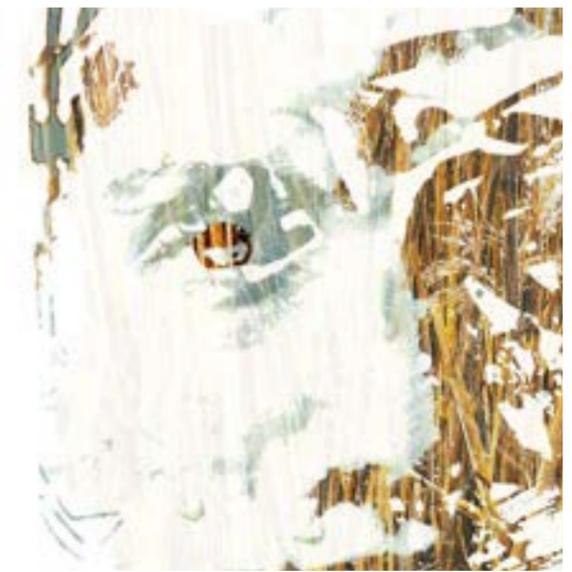
### THE SECOND LUNG

In some parts of the world, Phragmites is often called the "Second Lung", due to its integral role as a carbon sink, air purifier and oxygen producer in our wetland ecosystems. Research has shown it is a more effective sequestering carbon in soils than Spartina.



### SACRIFICIAL VESSEL

Phragmites have extremely high tolerance to both heavy metal, and organic pollutants. Their presence in highly disturbed wetland sites enables them stabilize these pollutants in their tissues preventing their spread into the air, water, and other sensitive ecologies.



### VEIL OF OTHERNESS

Due to the density of its growth, Phragmites has often functioned as a refuge for species escaping predation. For other human communities Phragmites stands have created safe space for those facing systems of marginalization impacting non-conforming groups.



**IMAGE: "systems of extermination"**, digital collage

I've often co-related systems of colonization, social and political strife, war and oppression with attitudes we hold towards exterminating the invasive. The ways in which we try to eliminate this species only further degrade the land.

## engaging ritual

**Ritual** - by definition, is the act of repetition of a series of actions or events among people as a means to bring a sense of belonging, comfort, and spiritual connection.<sup>1</sup> For millennia, humans have used ritual as a means to connect to and build community with each other and the environment.<sup>2</sup>

I believe all beings have a highly nuanced and unique spiritual self in relation to the living environment, that we have been separated from due to systems of colonization, capitalism and extraction.<sup>3</sup> Amidst a world of entangled social, political and environmental conflict, I believe it is of the utmost importance that we reactivate our spiritual selves as a means to give our communities new roots, hope, and a spirit of resilience during times of overwhelming global change.

A New Grounding, utilizes the social and spatial opportunities of “Ritual” as a means to reactivate our intimate connection with the environment among communities. For landscape architects, I believe ritual can be an inclusive and powerful way to bring the local community along throughout the design process, by reactivating their spiritual connection to the land, its complex systems, and the site that is being shaped within their community.

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1 Akinson Jennifer, “Mourning Climate Loss”

2 Ibid. 1

3 Ibid. 2



IMAGE: “the first harvest ceremony”, digital photograph

WITHOUT RESPECTING THE FOURTH ELEMENT -- SPIRITUAL -- ONE CANNOT HAVE SUSTAINABILITY. SPIRITUALITY IS THE ENERGY EMBODIED IN ANY PLACE. THE METAPHYSICS OF A PLACE. THE INTANGIBLE ASPECTS THAT CANNOT BE MEASURED BY MODERN SCIENCE. WE NEED TO RESPECT THIS EMBODIED ENERGY TO CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE. THE SACRED SPACE.

- HITESH MEHTA

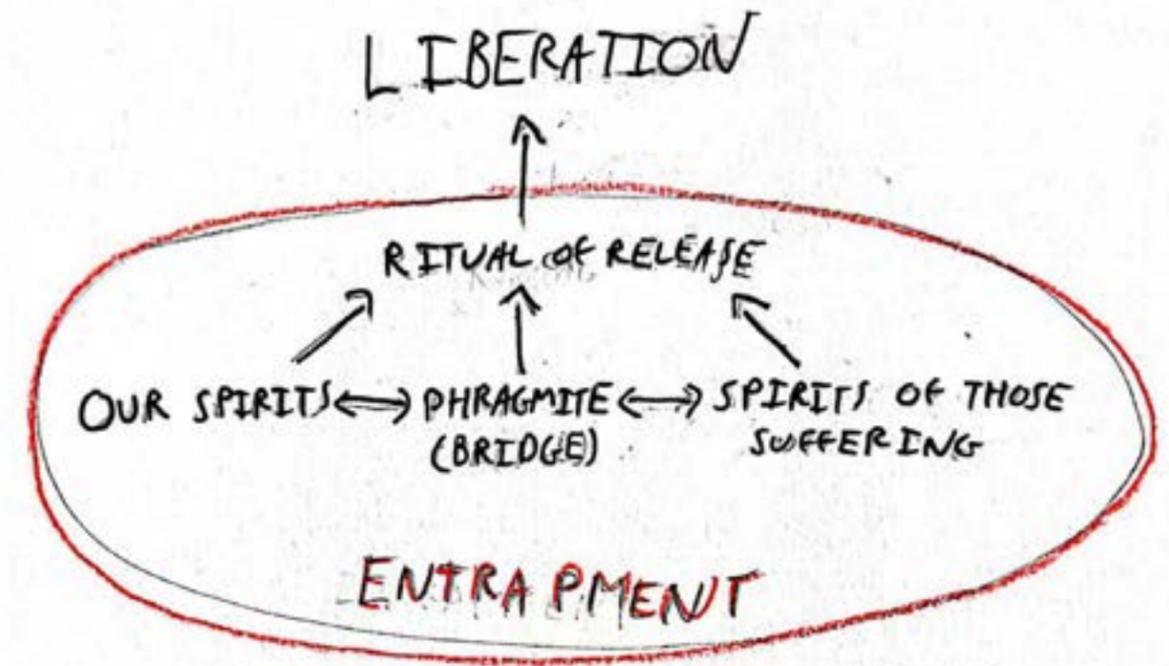


IMAGE: "spiritual bridge diagram", sketch diagram

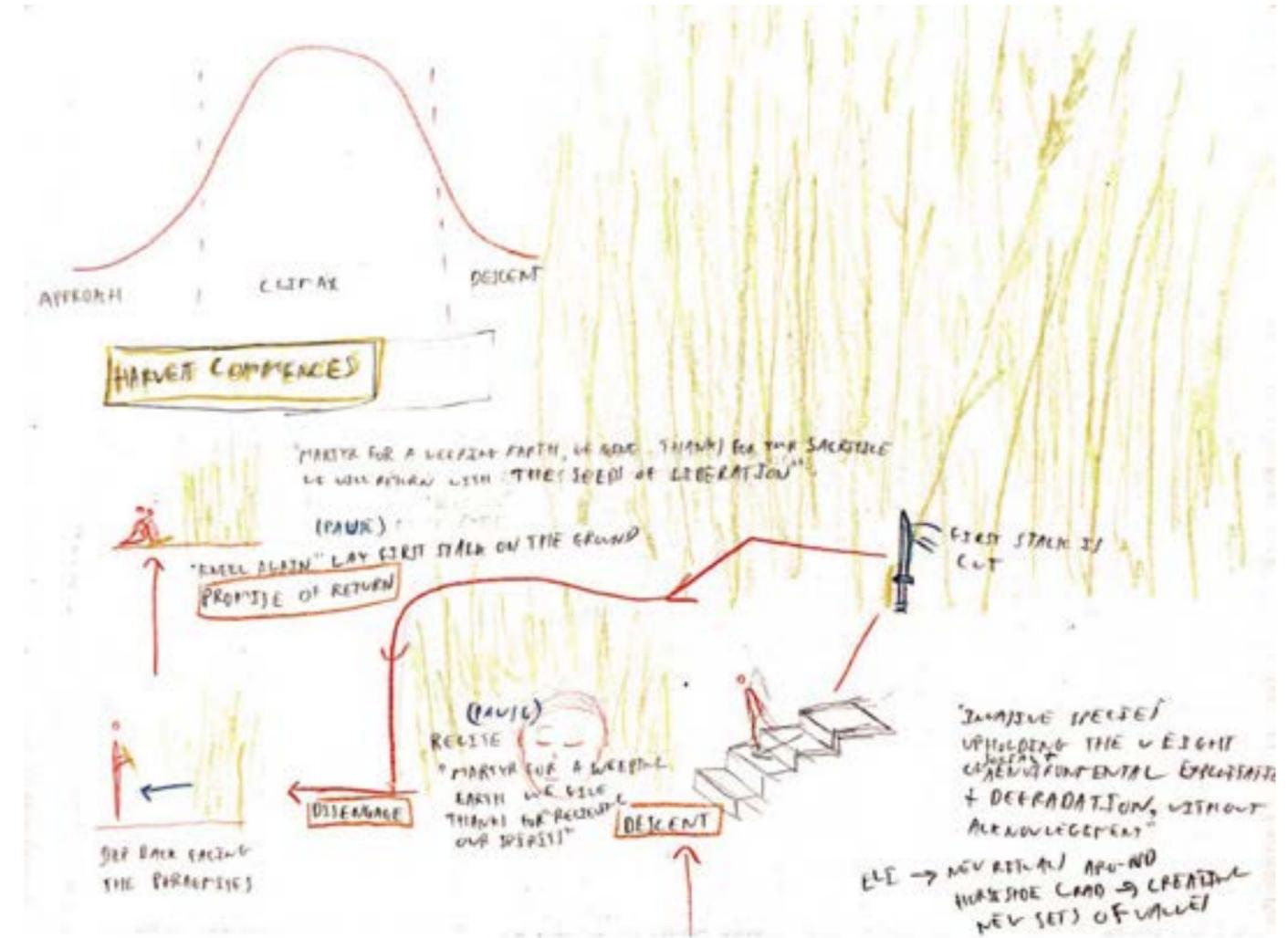
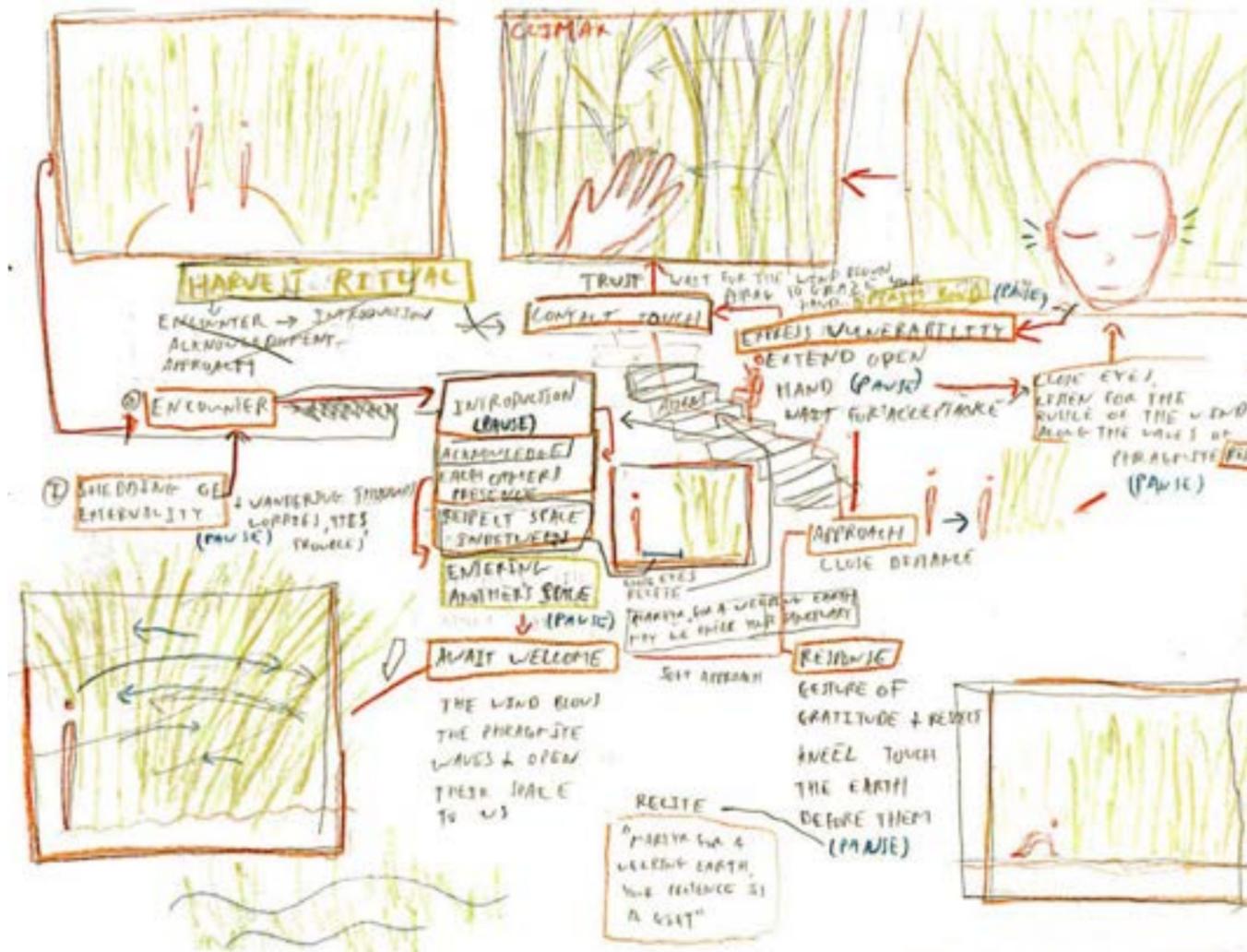


IMAGE: "early ritual ideation", hand sketch

### storyboarding ritual

The sketch above shows one of my earliest iterations of a ritual practice in which we greet and acknowledge the presence of Phragmites. Temporal conditions, the reciting of words and actions which activate the human senses are engaged. Storyboarding would become a valuable method as I dove deeper into my thesis process.



## initial inquiry

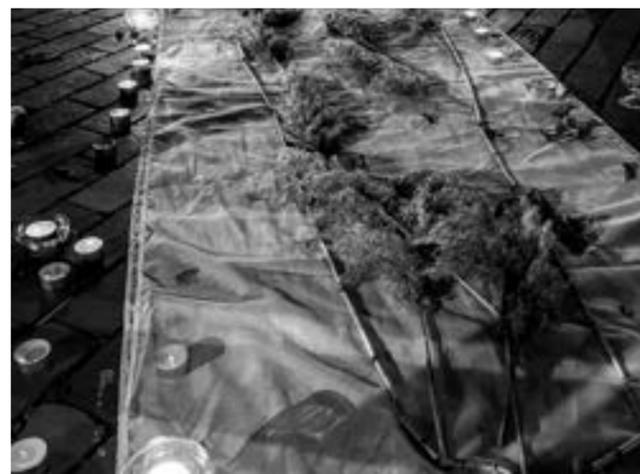
Inspired by these early sketches, during the fall semester, I hosted a series of vigils which focused on reframing the invasive identity surrounding Phragmites through ritual and involved the RISD students and faculty throughout the process.



The initial vigils I held were in direct response to the activism on campus and the global conflict in Palestine, where I drew parallels between the Phragmites Othered Identity and the victims of the genocide. It was my hope to create moments where we could heal together as a community during these troubling times through spiritual connection with our environment.



The process began with a series of more intimate Vigil's at RISD Farm which were hosted in a small shrine we built along the beach amidst the field of Phragmites and salt marsh. The following pages shares a ritual program from on of these vigils.



IMAGES "fall rituals", digital photographs



# harvest vigil program | 11.13.2023

## WELCOME

Hello everyone, welcome and thank you for joining me on this chilly Monday evening. For those of you who don't know me, my name's Corey Watanabe, a third year landscape architecture student here at RISD. For many, the events of over the past month have shook us to the core. Families have been separated, thousands have been killed, many more injured or displaced without basic amenities for survival, all while our own government remains complicit in enabling these acts of genocide. Amidst this difficult time, I've gathered our community here today in an effort to reflect and heal through this troubling time together.

If you too have been overwhelmed by a complex mix of emotions, please know that you are not alone. I myself have felt guilt, sorrow, helplessness, anger, all of which seem to mix and cloud my mind as to how I should respond to these events. Being so seemingly so disconnected from its contexts, part of me feels like it isn't my place to speak, and if I did, how would I start? This pain which sits and stirs in all of our hearts, is overwhelming and confusing, but if we take the time to embrace it, we will realize that these feelings are a sign of solidarity. From Providence to Palestine our spirits are inherently tied to this struggle for liberation.

## INTRODUCE THE CEREMONY

Embedded in the landscape, there exists an **Alliance of Otherness**, the idea that there is an inherent spiritual, ecological and social connection which bonds marginalized bodies across all beings. Through my explorations, I've found this alliance is seen most clearly through invasive species and humanity's most marginalized communities, both of whom suffer under the same societal systems which act to oppress the "other". Phragmites, a plant deemed invasive and worthy of extermination by many, exists as one of these othered communities, and thus it is inherently connected to the same struggle for liberation of all oppressed bodies across the globe.

Today, we are gathered to partake in The Harvest Vigil, a ritual tied to the Othered spirit of the Phragmites. In times of great suffering, we may call upon its spirit as a means to bring liberation to a community in need. Today, we will call upon the Othered Spirit for the people of Palestine.

A poem reciting, open reflection among the group, a moments of silence and pause, and a ritual casting of the Phragmites into the fire. The burning of the Phragmites is symbolic of an opening of a spiritual connection between othered bodies. By casting the Phragmites into the fire, we release its spirit, opening a bridge between our hearts and those suffering. With this gesture, we send messages of strength, hope and liberation to those amidst the conflict.

## COMMENCE CEREMONY

Initiation Prayer:

Here we will gather in a circle, hold each other's hands and recite a prayer which initiates conversation with the Spirit of the Phragmite. I am under the firm belief the species we deem invasive uphold the brunt of the burden of environmental contamination and degradation and thus are "Martyrs for a Weeping Earth".

Please join hands and repeat after me:

*Martyr for a Weeping Earth*

*Among soils most degraded and communities most overlooked*

*You stand for those who have been forgotten*

*The Palestinian Cry rings deep in our hearts*

*Amidst your sanctuary we stand in solidarity for a community in need*

## BURNING RITUAL The harvest and casting of the Phragmites into the Flame

This is an opportunity for each of us to share openly about how this conflict has affected us. One by one we will go around the circle and speak our truth. Once you have spoken your mind and opened your heart to the group, you will cut a Phragmite from the bundle, proceed to the center of the circle, kneel, say a prayer, and then cast your Phragmite into the fire. After you will pass the bundle to the person to your right and they will repeat the same process.

A moment of silence and deeper inner reflection:

Once everyone has cast their Phragmites into the fire, we will return to our seats and have a moment of silence to receive the Othered Spirit's Call. This is a time to tune our senses to the environment, and fully embody this moment of spiritual connection. Although everyone's experience of this will be unique, you may find it helpful to close your eyes and listen to the sounds of the wind rolling along the waves of Phragmites; this is one of the many Othered Spirits Calls.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Please Join hands and repeat after me:

*Martyr for a Weeping Earth, thank you for receiving our spirits*

*Systems of punishment only lead to humanity's demise*

*But to lay the seeds of compassion, we heal the wounds of the earth*

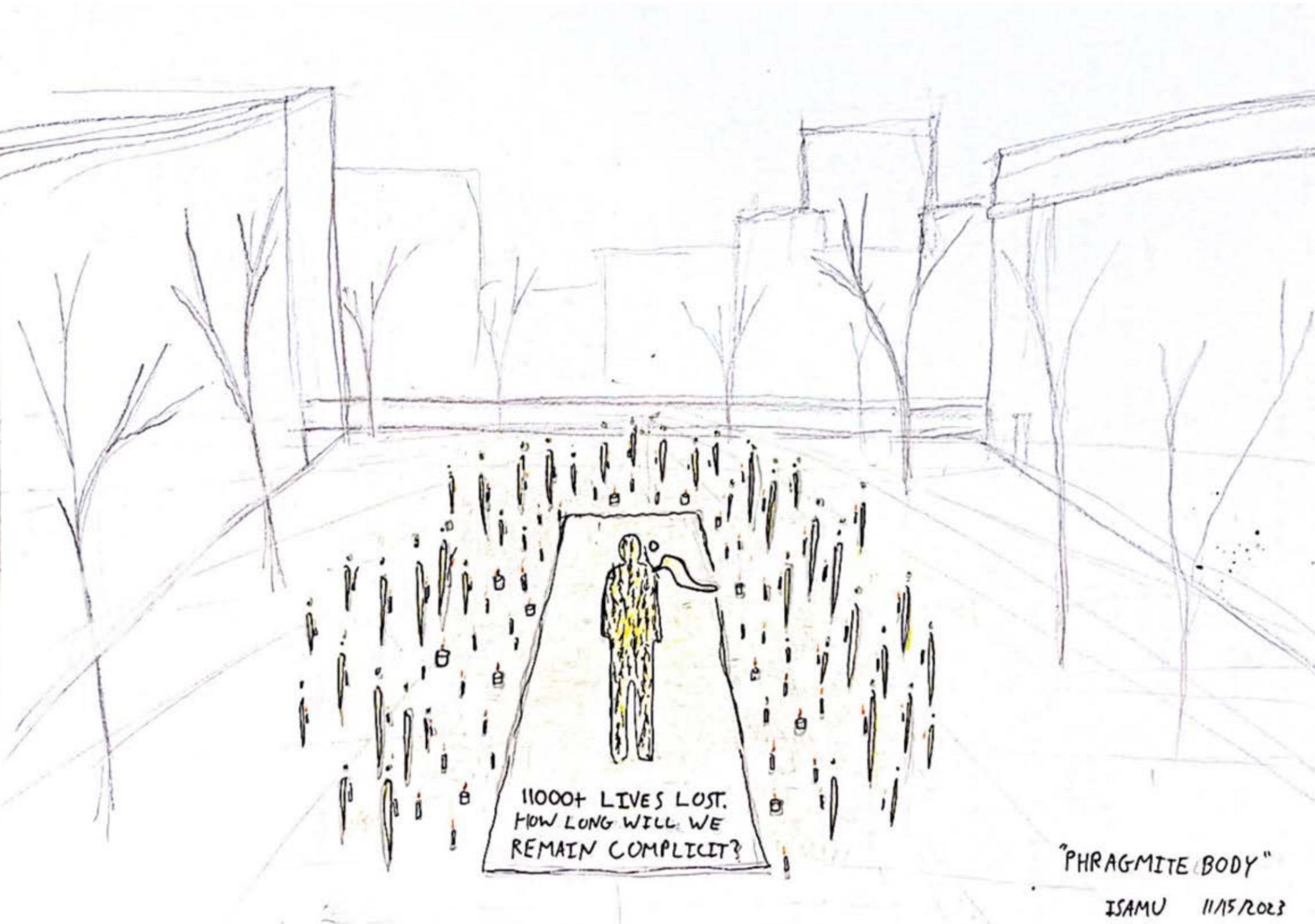


IMAGE: "phragmite body", hand sketch

### filling the void

These more intimate moments at the RISD farm then culminated with a public demonstration called **Phragmite Body**, where a group of students and I sat in Providence's Market Square (a site with related marginalized histories tied to slavery) and held a Public vigil. Each participant laid a Phragmite in the body which was symbolic of a life lost amidst the global conflict in Palestine.

The sketch to the left shows the initial of the idea surrounding the installation of Phragmite body. I was looking for a way to relate problematic narratives surrounding invasive species, while also making commentary on current event in response to the genocide in Palestine. This piece came at a point when silence was no longer an option. Our community needed spiritual connection to fill the void left in our hearts from this conflict

"I appreciated the opportunity to come together with other landscape students and faculty to acknowledge the cruelty and violence of our current moment. In the hustle of graduate school it can be easy to forget the world outside, but this was a critical reminder of our responsibility as designers to stay engaged, as well as a quiet space to hold the pain and guilt of the ongoing genocide in Palestine. The wind in Market Square made the ritual a bit more distracted than it may have otherwise been, but I thought the process of working together to light and re-light the candles and to assemble and disassemble the phragmites shroud made me feel more personally connected. The public location and its visibility also felt important - while at first I found myself self-conscious under the eyes of passerby, eventually I settled into the feeling that not only were we participating in this moment of recognition and remembrance but we were also inherently involving others moving through the square, and their presence became a part of it too.

If anything was awkward it was a good awkward - being pushed to move outside of the usual ways we interact with one another as students and into our vulnerable humanity, pain, and grief at the violence against Palestine and all othered bodies. I thought the setup was beautiful and spoke clearly to the poignant analogy you are making with phragmites, and the 1:1 phragmites:human ratio also felt meaningful."

- post reflection anonymous ritual attendee

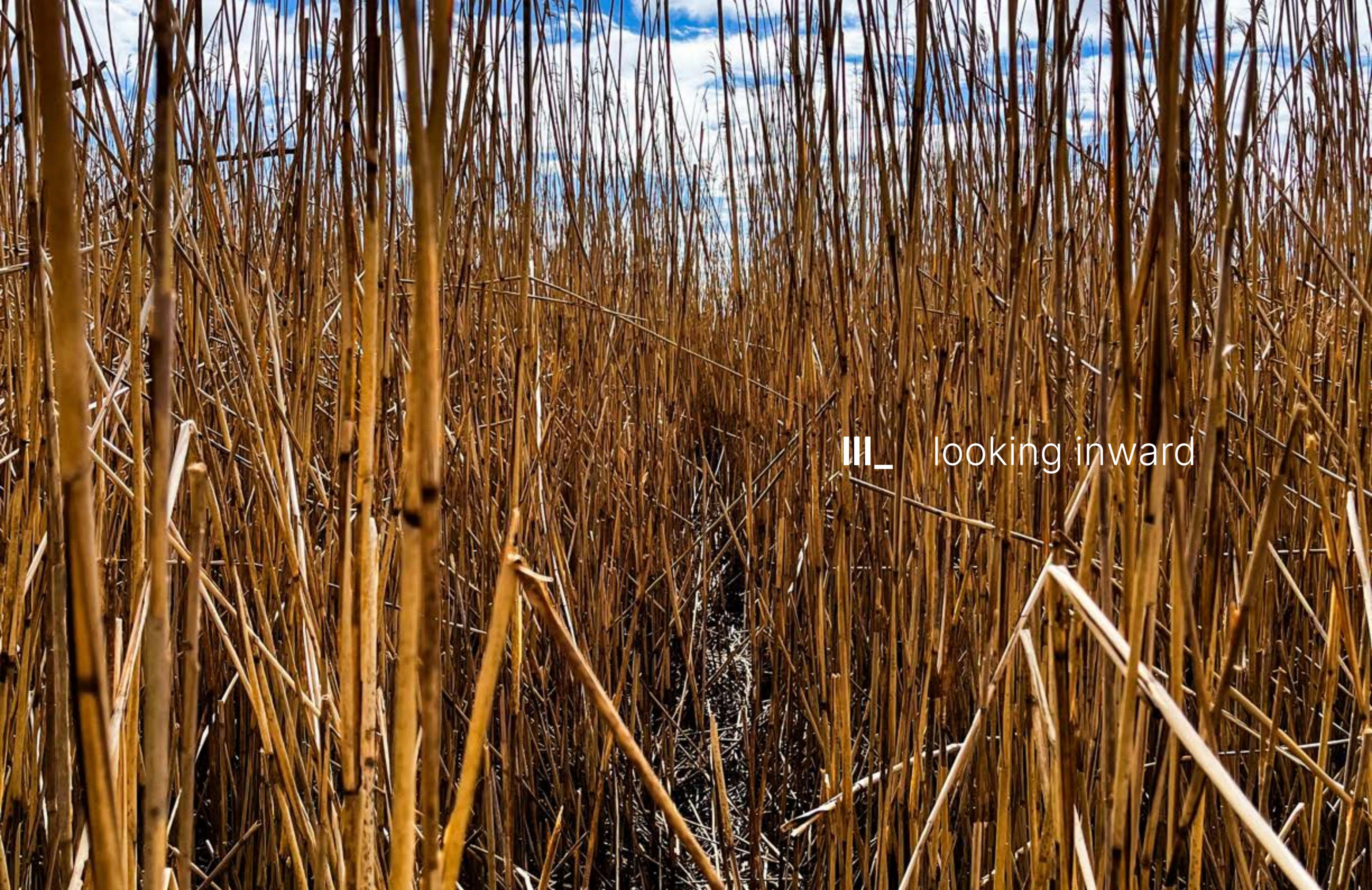


IMAGE: "phragmite body installation" 5.21.2023, ritual installation



“I SEE THE OTHERED IDENTITY  
OR SPIRIT OF THE PHRAGMITE  
AS A BRIDGE OF SOLIDARITY  
BETWEEN OUR HEARTS AND  
THOSE AMIDST POLITICAL  
STRUGGLE”

IMAGE: “phragmite body installation”, ritual installation



|||\_ looking inward

“I WONDER ABOUT BRINGING MORE INTENTION,  
MORE DISCIPLINE TO OUR RELATIONSHIP. THERE  
IS POWER IN REPETITION. TO RETURN EACH WEEK  
IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE, TO THE SAME SPOT AND  
OBSERVE IT’S CHANGE. TO WRITE ABOUT IT, TO  
DRAW IT, TO MAKE WITH IT, TO BE PRESENT WITH IT.

TO APPRECIATE THEIR CYCLE OF LIFE, THEIR  
SEASONAL GROWTH, THEIR EVOLVING  
PERSONALITIES. TO HAVE CONSISTENCY AND  
DEDICATE MY MOST PRECIOUS GIFT, TIME. MY  
THESIS IS RITUAL, I MUST LIVE IT. “

### **spiritual derives**

Throughout this thesis process I engaged with methods of the spiritual derive. Every weekend up until my thesis final, I would visit to the RISD farm to spend time with and observe the phragmites through sketching, writing, photography, and physical interaction. Through this method, I hoped to to build ritual with phragmites into my own life.

Sometimes a went alone, other times I went with others, but every visit I experienced something new.

IMAGE: “the first harvest room”, digital photograph

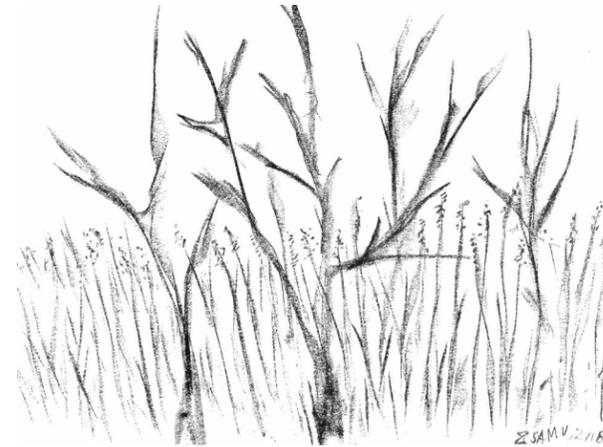




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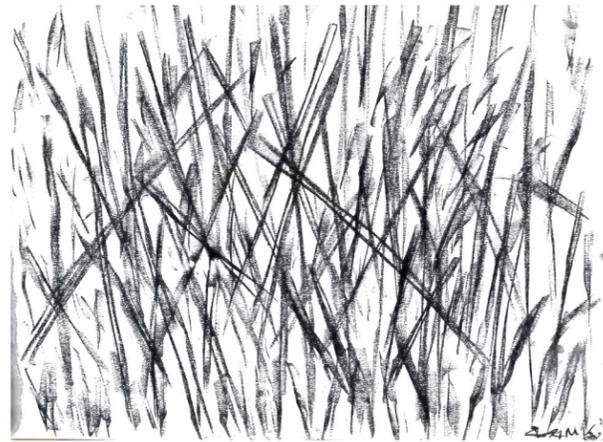
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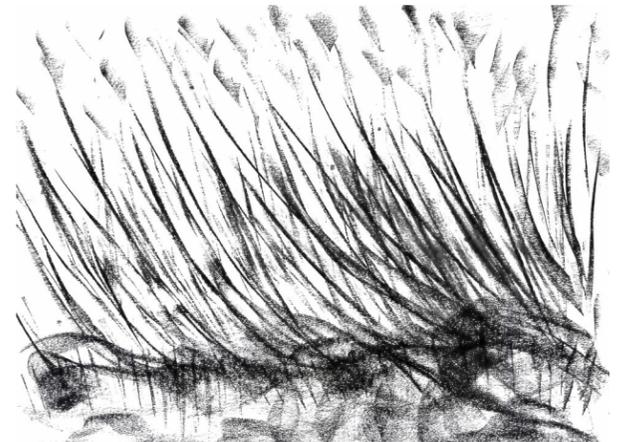
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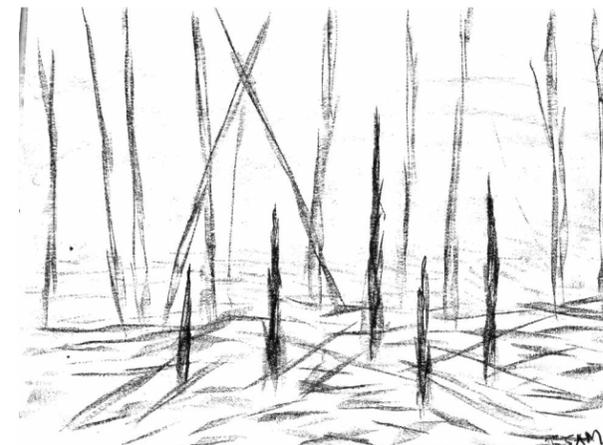
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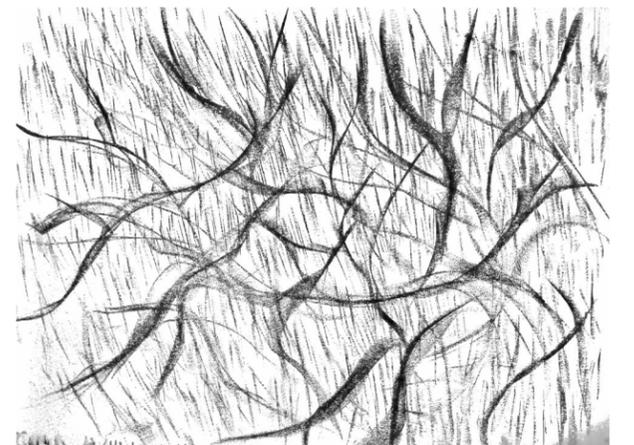
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**sketching practice**

During each of my visits I would sketch to call out moments, and spatial phenomena I observed while working with the Phragmites. I love using charcoal. It's a highly expressive and dynamic media which I feel has the ability to bridge between physical phenomena and the spiritual.



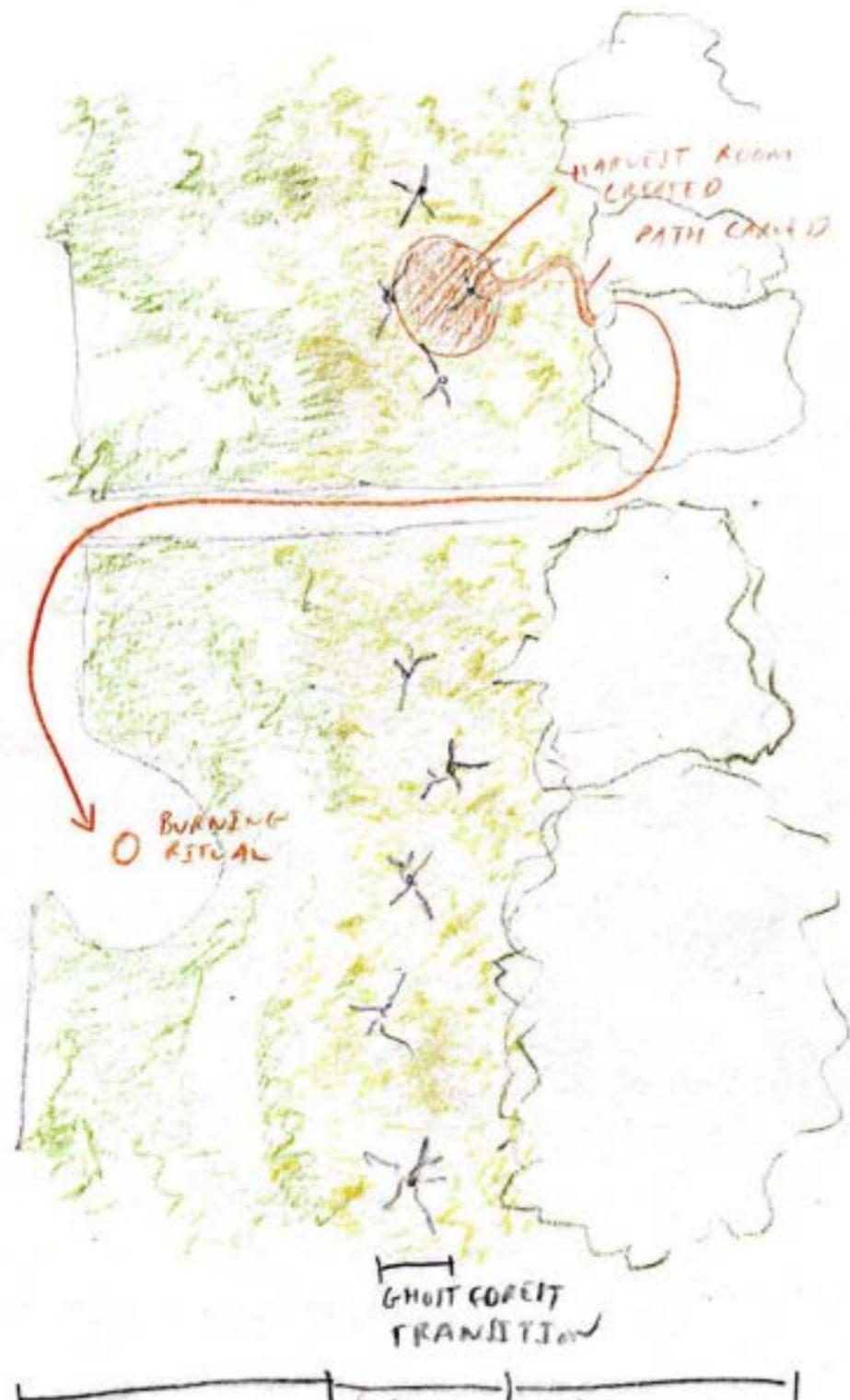
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## "HARVEST CEREMONY DIAGRAM"



I | 2.18.2024

Back at the farm, this time with my friends Jais and Chloe. We did a little site visit and for our first community harvest. I really appreciate how collaborating with them opens up my mind to so many things. We decided to commence the harvest by the "snags" or the Ghost forest in the Phragmites. We will create a path to the ghost trees and create a harvest room, a space of intention and reflection.

While exploring, there were remnants of so much life in the ghost forest. We found an antler from a young buck who probably just shed it in late February. I feel there's something really powerful stirring here. The seeds of community made in place. We rehearsed the plan for the harvest.

To provide some context, I decided to join Chloe and Jais to collaborate on a biomaterial called Phragcrete (Phragmite concrete). The purpose of this biomaterial is as a new shoreline restoration and stabilization tool. The harvest ceremony became a way to bring more intention to the actual harvest of the material, and so I hopped on the project to host this ritual. I wrote a special Harvest ceremony opening which I will recite to those who attend. We will use the culms or stalks to produce phragcrete for an installation, and we will use the seed heads for a burning ritual.

The burning ritual will take place out on the beach surrounded by the phragmites. Unlike the previous burning rituals I held, this one is more about gratitude and celebration. To bring good energy to the upcoming Spring and the rest of the semester.

This project is about Phragmites, but it's really so much more than that. It's about embodying a new way of life! A New Relationship with the land.

A New Grounding.

## the harvest ceremony | 2.24.2024

Guardian of the Marsh  
Your golden waves ripple in the wind bringing peace to our spirits  
We stand before you, in community, to feel your presence

Among the grounds shifting, you give us new rootedness  
Among soils eroding, you give us new courage  
Among seas rising, you give us new strength

The harvest is an act of optimism  
For the future of our shared home  
And with each stalk cut we make a promise  
A promise to this land, A promise to each other, A promise to ourselves  
That we may not forget from whence these gifts came  
That we may nurture, cultivate, and care for one another in your honor

Our labor is an act of homage, Our practice is a pact  
To heal the land, to heal others, to heal self  
And amongst this abundance, we find new resilience

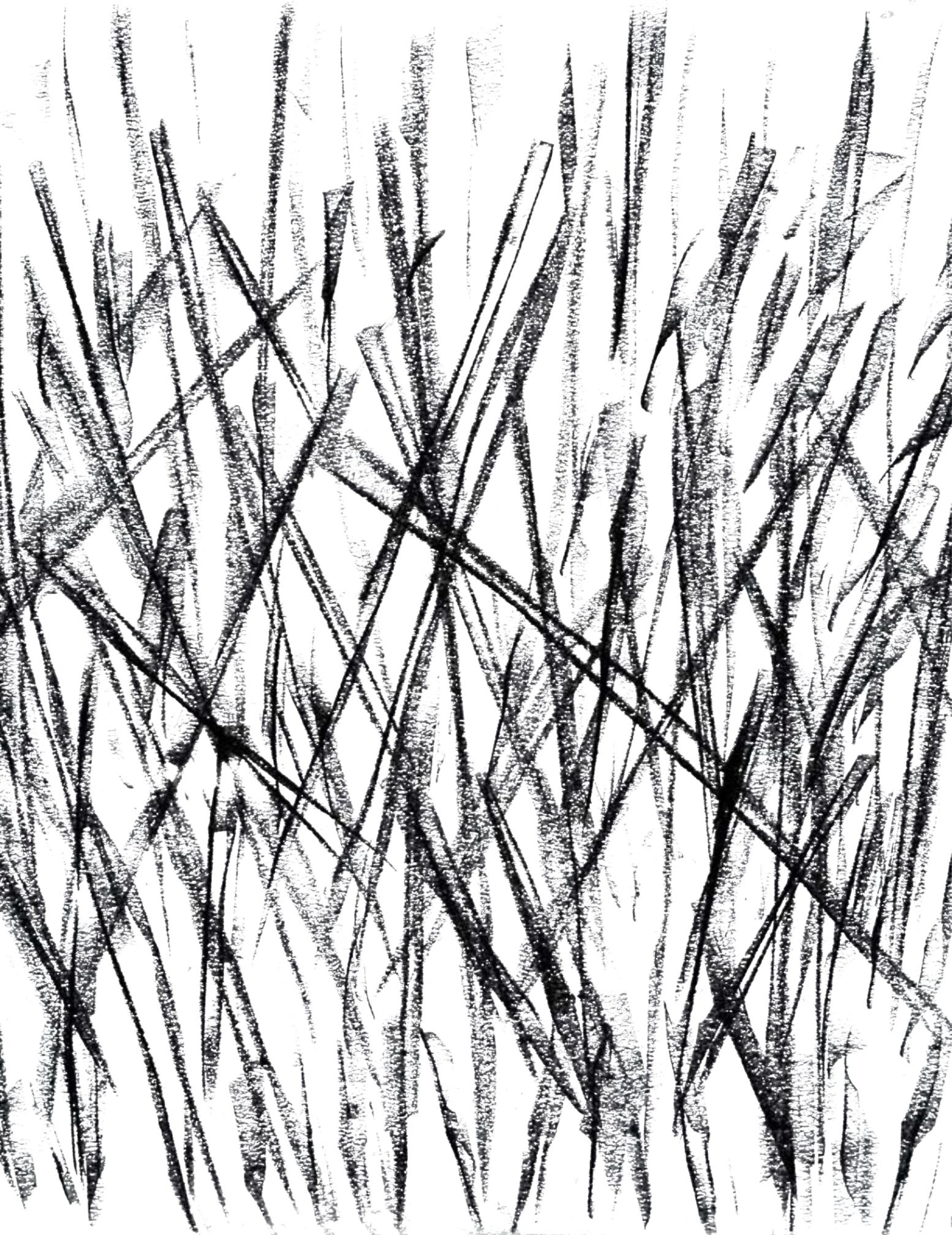
ISAMU 2.24.2024



IMAGE: "harvest ceremony", digital photograph



IMAGES: "harvest ceremony" 2.24.2024, digital photograph series



## II (onsite) | 3.3.2024

The semester is really picking up now. This will be a real test of my consistency now that the chaos has hit. My advisor gave me some really great advice last week. Worry less about the product and use these visits to really take the time to feel, to notice. to separate yourself from the demands of producing and just be.

So here I am squatting in the ghost forest. It's damp, there's moisture in the air. I can feel the soft mud and marsh water soak into my socks. It's cold but awakening. The space is teeming with life. I hear an orchestra of bird calls. Now I walk into my derive.

I'm amidst the damp brambles of the phrag. There is much less chitter chatter this week. A soft silence, they still sway slightly greeting me. I wonder what they speak to. The Phragmites act like a net catching all sorts of debris. Carries by the currents and wind. I often see all sorts of human refuse in their midst.

The see heads are a lot less active, probably because of the water logging. The marsh is wet and matted down. There's a crunch with each of my steps. I wonder how this landscape feels today. I need to change my socks.

IMAGE: "in the culms", hand charcoal sketch

|| 3.5.2024

This week was a little slow on the thesis progress. I was tasked with beginning to draw out my ritual practices with Phragmites, as a cycle or system in response to actually hosting them the week prior. I started with the harvest ritual, trying to identify the gaps in the process as a means to give the process greater thought and intention.

It seems however, my first attempts at actually diagraming this process weren't super effective at giving a bigger picture understanding of the multi-faceted ways in which this species may be understood by humans. It seems my thesis advisor is less interested in the actual opportunities to see the use of Phragmites as a new material approach to marsh restoration and the opportunities to engage people in a greater spiritual practice with acts of stewardship. Or at least they only see it as a part of it.

I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed about how many directions I can take this world, and in the time given I want to at least make one facet of it crystal clear. Either way, my advisor told me I need to diagram out this Phragmite cycle of rituals, and complete the loop, so we get a stronger picture of how this system of Phragmite based relationships operates as a whole. This week I will shift away from diagraming out the process of just one ritual and think of the system as a whole.

In other news I had an interesting debate with Anna Tsing today about my thesis direction, who has quite contrary thoughts to me about the word invasive. I think we should stop using the word because of its ties to xenophobic narratives, while Tsing thinks it's ok to use the word invasive when describing species who actively harm existing ecosystems often in the context of colonization. I understand the ties to colonization, which in many cases species were used as weapons to eliminate indigenous cultures, but personally don't think the plant is to blame. I feel we need to bring a new light to these species as part of our reality, products of an environment in flux, and an opportunity to envision a new resilient future. One point from our discussion however, especially stuck out to me though which is the necessity to acknowledge the loss of those species displaced and are now home to Phragmites.

IMAGE: in the culms, digital photograph





III | 3.12.2024

I've been building a matrix that documents my weekly visits to the RISD farm every Sunday. Each week I document a charcoal drawing I made with the Phragmites, highlights from a journal entry written onsite, as well as photographs from any new observations I made. I also take photographs from the same spot each week to compare how the Phragmite changes over time, in response to the environment. Each week I make new observations from spending so much time with this plant. I note the popping and crackling sounds they make when blown by the wind, the softness of the soil below. I write about the ways in which they capture our trash in the wind like a net, or how they seem to have different moods depending on the weather and flooding conditions.

This week I wandered through the field creating a new path through the culms. It was quite uncomfortable at first, and a bit frightening. I would hear crackles and snaps at each step which startled me, the marsh mud was soft and wet, and my feet often sunk into the marsh below. Immersed by the Phragmites, I could not see in any direction, with only remnants of a path I created behind me. I felt a roller coaster of emotions. During this process I felt on guard, surrounded by uncertainty. I did eventually make it to the marsh on the other side and after a bit I began to find comfort immersed in the field.

Towards the end of my derive, I did a trust fall in the Phragmites, and laid there eyes facing the sky. It was sort of a surreal experience of inner peace. I could hear their chatter of crackles and pops and it seemed to comfort me. In many ways I felt their embrace. This was just one excerpt from the various experiences I have each week. I've decided to call this practice the "Ritual of the Meander".

I'm out here each weekend searching for something, a feeling or sort of ethereal presence with them. Sometimes I wonder where this will lead me, but I will continue to document these experiences week after week.

**IMAGE:** "peace in the culms", digital photograph



IMAGES: "ritual of the meander", digital photograph series

This is one of my first iterations of harvest cycle diagram or what I'm now calling a Mandala, a map of spiritual enlightenment which will tie the rituals to the growth cycle of the phragmite and surrounding environmental conditions. I began this Mandala by mapping the phragmites growing cycle with various environmental conditions it experiences including heavy metal uptake, spring and neap tidal patterns, mating seasons of various species which actually use the Phragmite as habitat. It was my hope that by mapping these forces on this circular diagram I may get a better picture of the greater forces at play, with the goal of bringing greater intention to the rituals in which humans engage with these species. My advisor was pushing me to see the Phragmites as a gateway to a deeper understanding of relationships to land. Rather than it just existing in a vacuum. This diagram also includes my first attempt at tying human emotions to this Phragmite cycle:

Reflection → Growth → Jubilation → Grounding → Hospice → Mourning

These words respond to the stages of Phragmite growth as my biggest critique was that these cycles I'm building still seem devoid of the layer human interaction and engagement. This is something I'm trying to figure out, in what ways may these rituals allow us to feel or even empathize with this species. How do these ritual actions allow us to feel in new ways? Allow us to build empathy for this species? How am I building a real visceral physical connection here? How may engagement with this plant trigger something inside of us to really feel its weight, its presence, its role in our lives. There is a story of loss, but also resilience here, how do I tap into that so people can really feel it. A student made a comment which really stood out to me. They talked about the perspective on Phragmites in China saying, "The Phragmites are the second lung of the universe". I thought that was really powerful.

This week I need to begin building out these rituals. How can I engage our bodies, our emotions, our feelings through thoughtful engagement with this species? How can I leverage the senses of our bodies as a jumping off point. The quote about the lungs made me think a lot about the role of our breath, something it gives us which we often take for granted. Its relationship with soils and tides made me think about the water, both that we drink, and that shapes our shores. Clean air, clean water, stable ground, all things which Phragmite provides us.

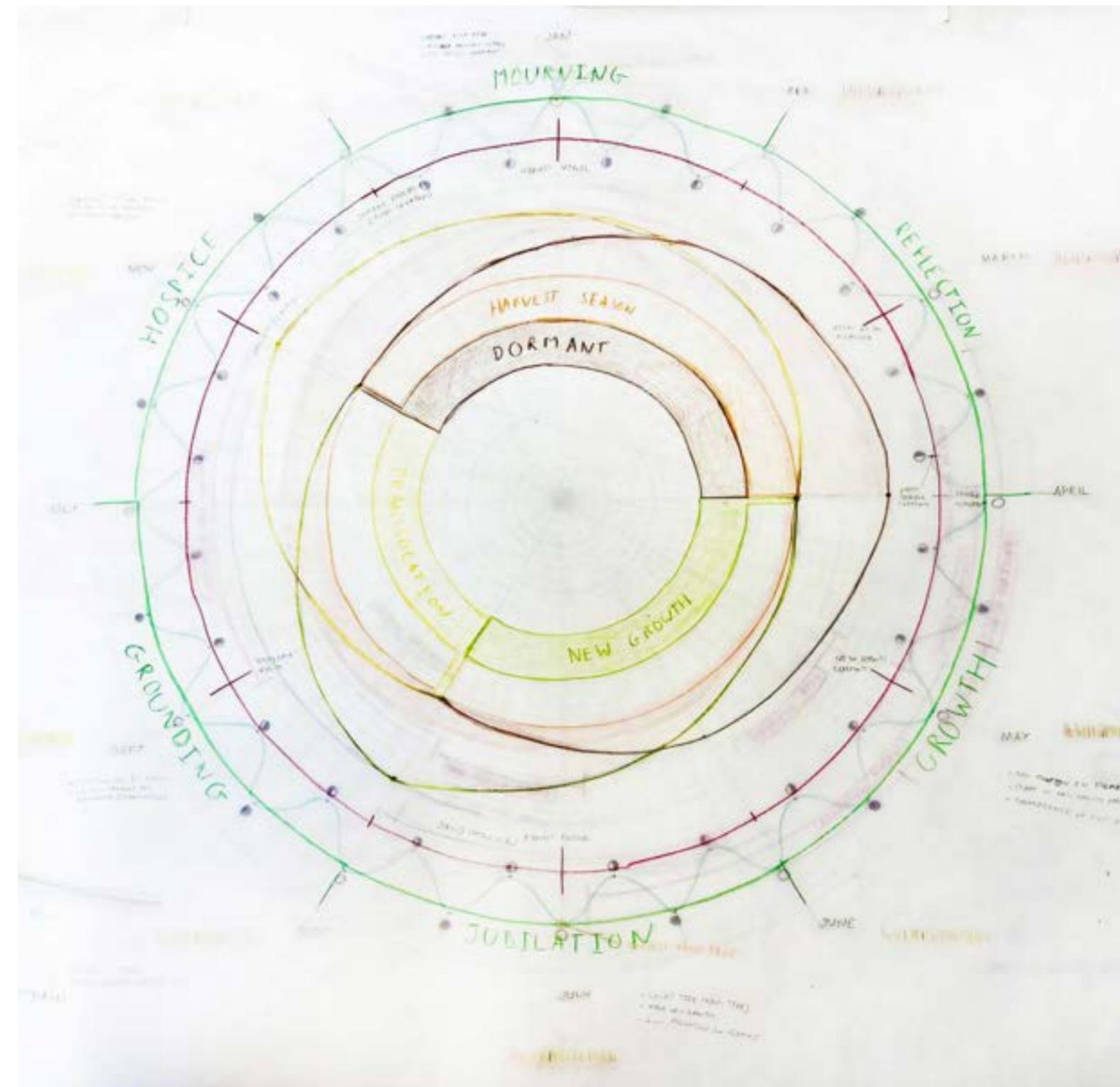


IMAGE: "mandala process sketch", hand sketch



#### IV (onsite) | 3.17.2024

I don't think it was just a coincidence that the day after I read about neap and spring tides the RISD farm had flooded. I'm here at the ecotone of the spartina and marsh knee deep in the tidal flow. It was a full moon last night and the gravitational pull has caused the current to flood the Phragmites. Despite the several feet of sea water, they seem quite chipper today. Though their dead and dry growth gets thinner each week, they don't seem bummed at all.

They rustle and crackle. I read yesterday about how the Phragmite is able to sustain itself between the monthly alternation of the neap and spring tide. It is able to retain to perfect balance between inundation and dry periods.

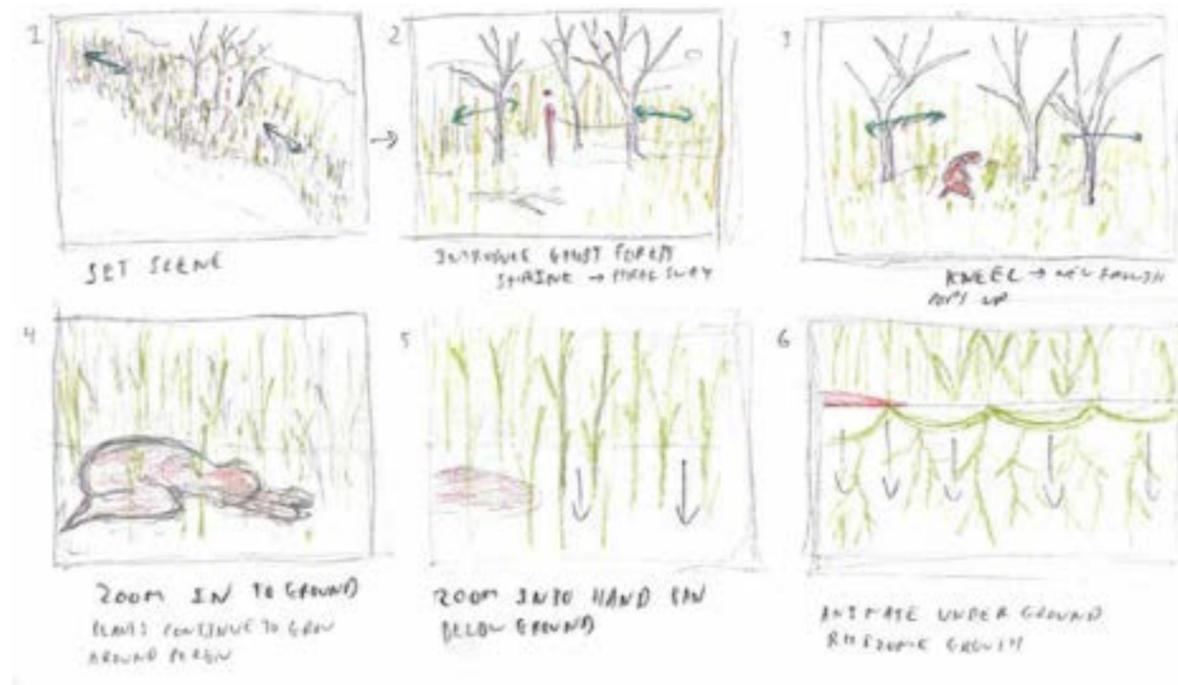
I realized that although there is a nature of flux, there is a harmonious rhythm to the flux, something I did not truly take the time to understand until now. There's something powerful about walking this "dynamic line" of the shifting tides. My advisor was right, Phragmites is a gateway. A gateway to understanding the mysteries of the world.

I felt the tide today, and in its presence I found another piece of this beautiful enigma of the New Grounding.

IMAGE: "walking the line", digital photograph



IMAGE: "spring tide", digital photograph



IV | 3.18.2024

This week was a major breakthrough for my thesis progress. I began story boarding my rituals as a means to bring them more clarity. This process was very reflective in itself as it was an opportunity to synthesize my in person experiences at the farm, as well as the various themes I've been uncovering about the species through more formal scientific literature. These themes include its role as habitat, a phytoremediator, shoreline stabilizer, air and water purifier.

I'm discovering the value in a hybrid research process of both intuitive personal reflection through experience on site, sketching, journaling, and photography to more formal "research methods" like literature review, and mapping. I was able to glean information from each of these processes to inform rich tangible moments of ritual. My story board I drew out, takes us through a dream I had connecting with the Phragmites.

The dream begins with a moment of prayer within the Ghost Forest, an ecological transition zone where the trees begin to die off due to salt water intrusion. I've come to recognize this space as a highly important zone, as it marks a space of flux and change. It's this moment of prayer of intimate connection with the phragmite that transports me into its world where I become infused with its anatomy, feeling the way it uptakes pollutants, cleans our air, takes the impact of wave action and stabilizes the eroding shores.

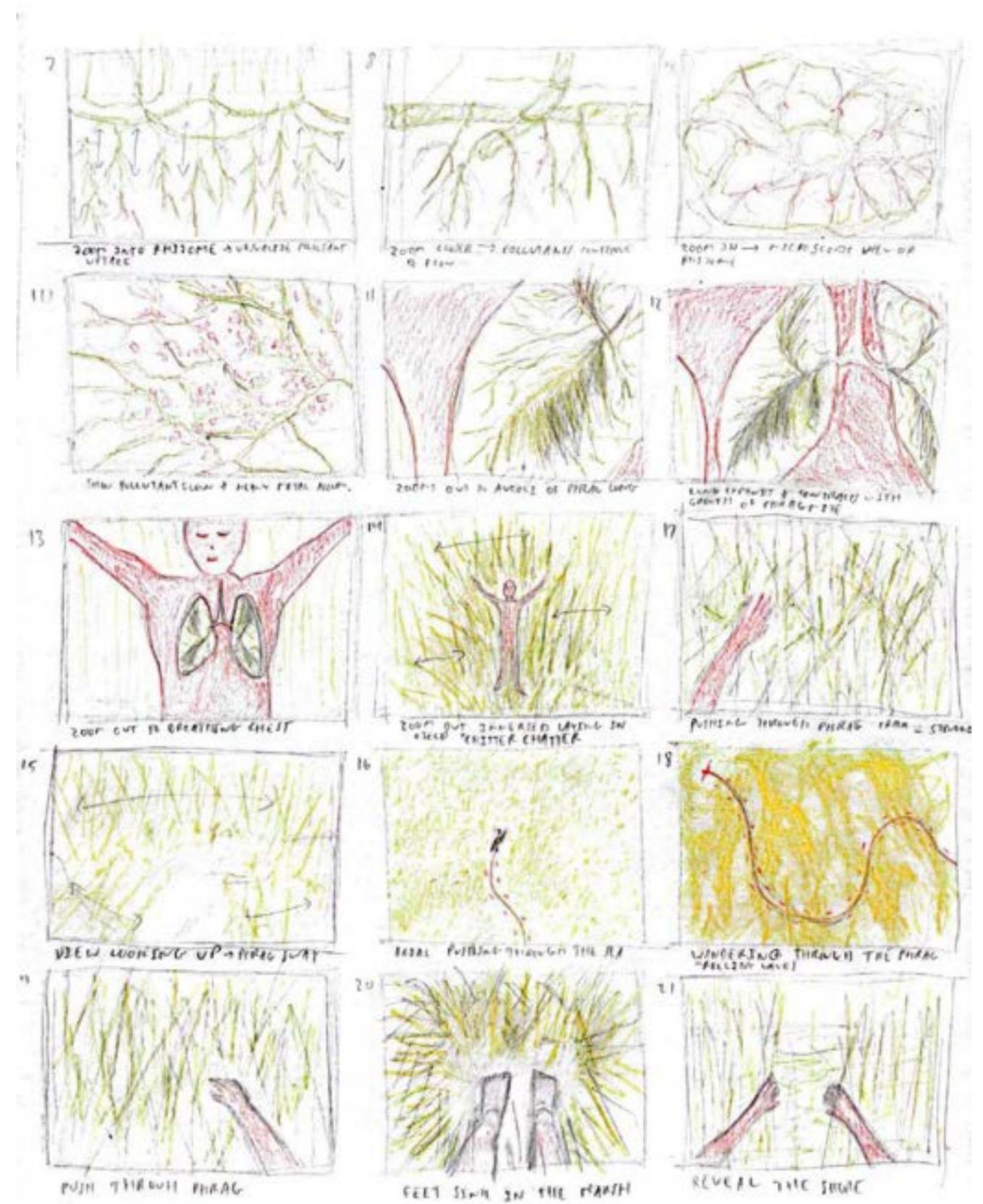
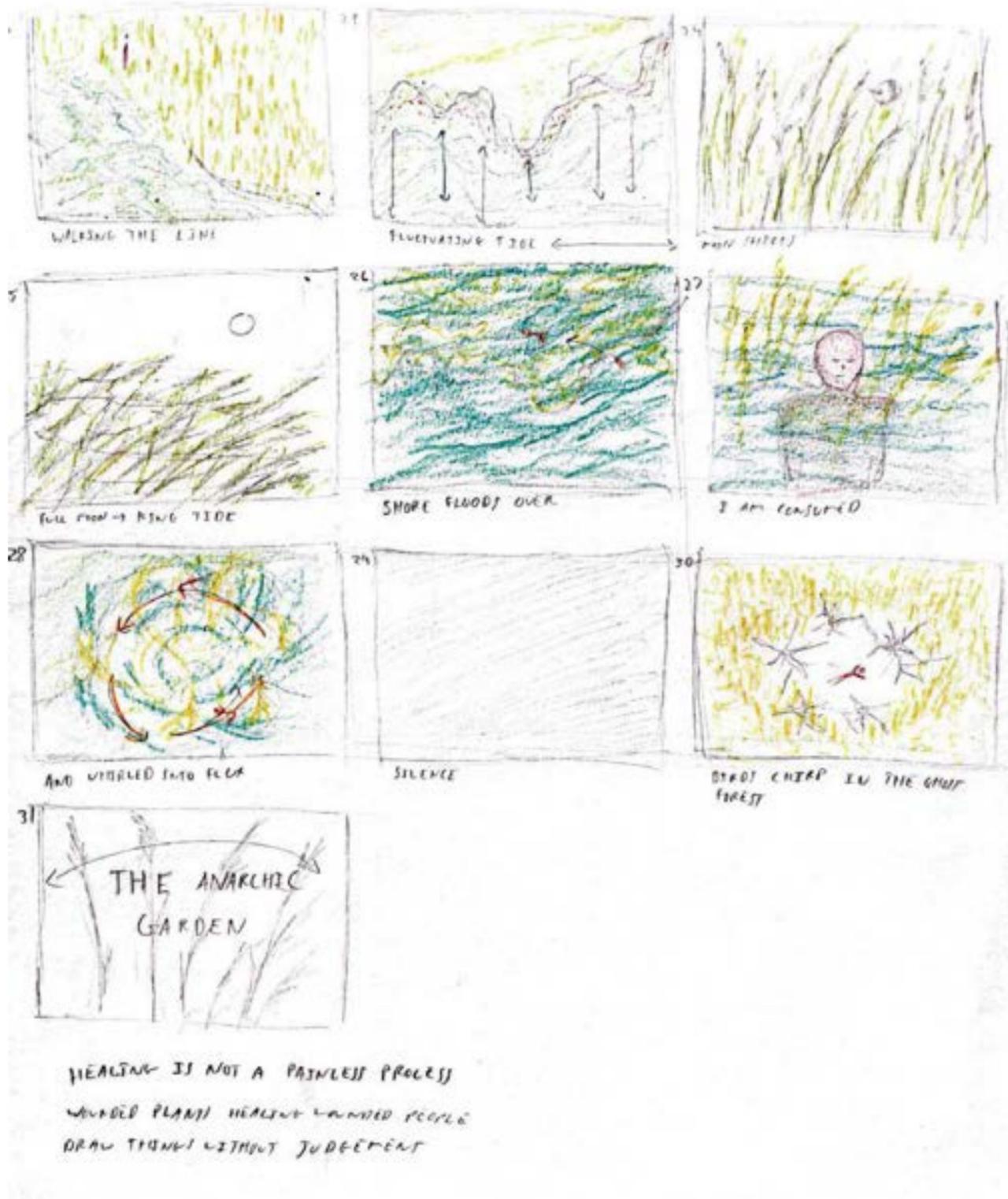


IMAGE: "ritual storyboards", hand sketch



My dream concludes with a ritual of “walking the line” where I walk along the transition zone between the marsh and phragmite, acknowledging the change in tide between these two zones. In the end of the dream, in the light of the full moon I am washed away in the king tide swallowed by a vortex of flux. All goes black and I wake up back in the Ghost forest.

After talking through this journey with my advisor we realized that although this “dream story” takes place in the course of a day, each of these moments of this dream can be folded into my mandala drawing as “ritual events” others can participate in, at very intentional times of the year, depending on the seasons and environmental conditions of Phragmite on site. Storyboarding my dream was a very productive exercise, as it allowed me to really tap into and synthesize all the rich experiences and research I’ve been collecting of the past few months. Now it’s a matter of folding these moments into the mandala.

IMAGE: “ritual storyboards”, hand sketches







## VI | 4.10.2024

Engage with the loss, engage with the adjacencies that's what they said. The spartina is its counterpart, a tale of two spirits part of the same story. There is a dance between the two. At the root of the work is something we all struggle with at some point in our lives... loss. You won't understand until you feel it yourself. I need to put myself in the shoes of another, to acknowledge where their heart stands.

- excerpt from onsite visit 4/7/2024

My mid review led to great discussion in terms of a direction forward. I've come to find that the rituals I'm designing are the thesis, they are a way to reconnect with process, heal through and unfold the mysteries of the world around us. In this case, the complex and twisted relationship we have with "invasive species". If there's one critical takeaway I brought from my mid-review, it is the necessity to further engage with the histories of loss embedded in a relationship with Phragmites. I've been so busy de-vindicating, and celebrating Phragmites in a variety of new ways, I've turned my blinders to the tension, pain and loss critical to this story. Despite how harmful narratives of invasiveness and extermination are, they are rooted in real feelings, in this case the loss of ecosystems which communities were bonded to deeply.

Engaging with the complexity of this loss is critical to this story. I've determined that the loss is not necessarily the Phragmites fault, however this does not mean we can forget about the other species displaced. They are just as important to the story. There is a way to both celebrate and welcome new introduced species while also acknowledging and grieving for those who have been lost or displaced. The *Spartina patens*, which are now in decline, are just as important to the story. One of the critics said, the real richness from this thesis comes from learning to dance with this flux. To embrace the complexity of the gray area. To more intentionally engage the tension of loss and evolution. To grieve the loss of past species, is part of the process of eventually embracing the new.

IMAGE: "phragmite spiritual body", charcoal

My thesis thus far has shown how we have dealt with this loss in the past, primarily through anger and denial, which resulted from labeling things invasive and engaging in processes of extermination of Phragmites. At first, I mocked our insistence on outright extermination of Phragmites, which in the short term may help us cope with the loss, but in the long term this only caused further damage to the environment and ourselves. What I didn't realize however is that the action of extermination was an expression of the more volatile, but nonetheless critical stage of healing through loss of denial and anger and destructive rage. I realize now that burning/ soaking the phragmites in herbicides is not a very ecologically responsible way of addressing stages of anger and denial. We need to develop a new ritual to adequately address these emotions necessary to healing without further degrading our environment. Maybe a communal scream fest or a ritual of slashing the phragmite with a machete... not super profound ideas yet, but either way I think this is a breakthrough.

To the left is my current iteration of the mandal. I need to reiterate on this spiritual map with the stages of grief as a framework so that it more intentionally addresses the process of healing through loss, in this case the degradation of the environment and loss of native species to the eventual transition of greater understanding, and embracing and even gratitude towards the newcomer phragmites.

Once I reiterate on the cycle of rituals based upon the cycles of healing, I can then create the spatial design which takes others through these stages of grief, with Phragmites as the therapist. We cannot dismiss the other more difficult but nonetheless essential stages of healing.

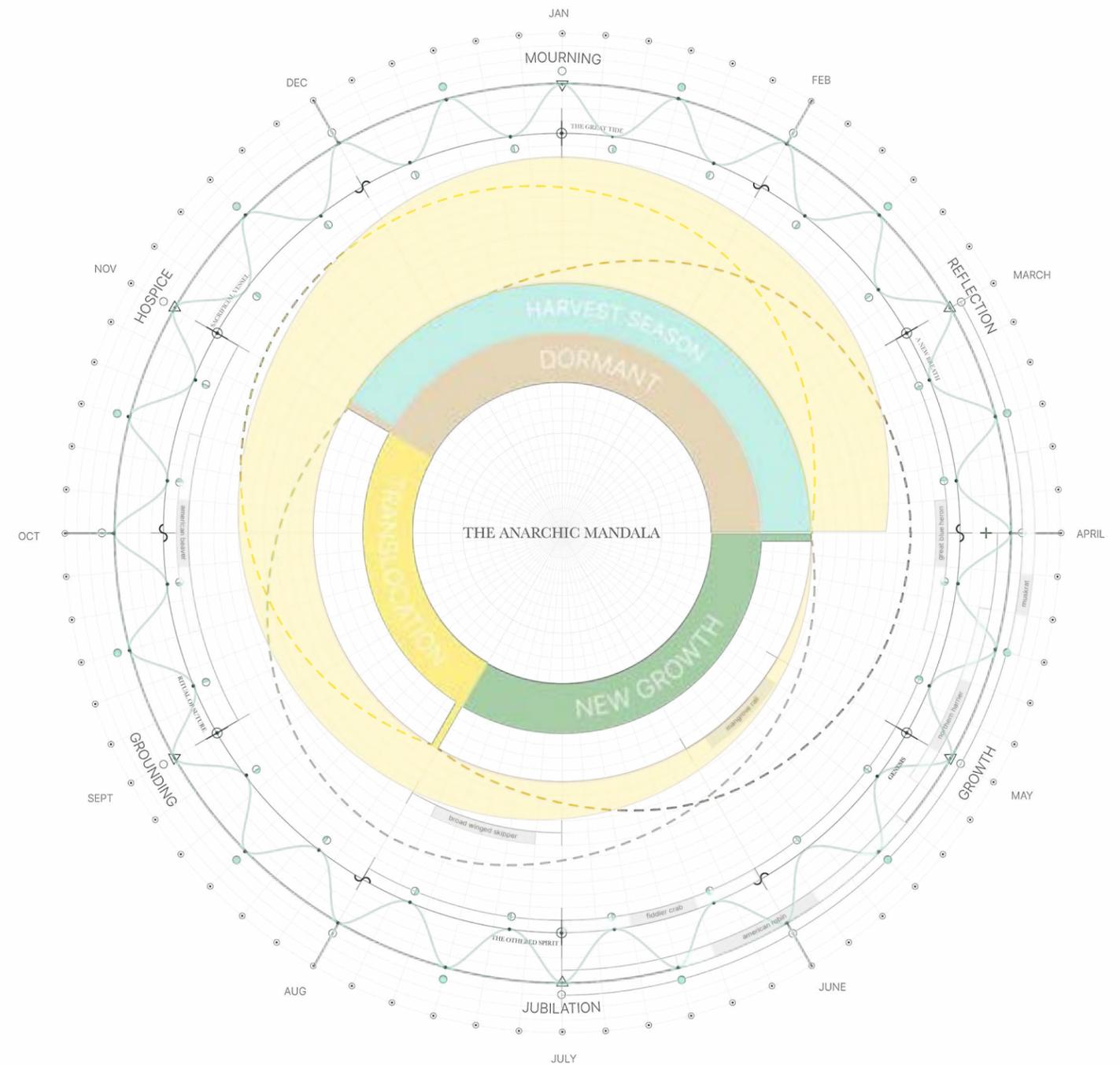
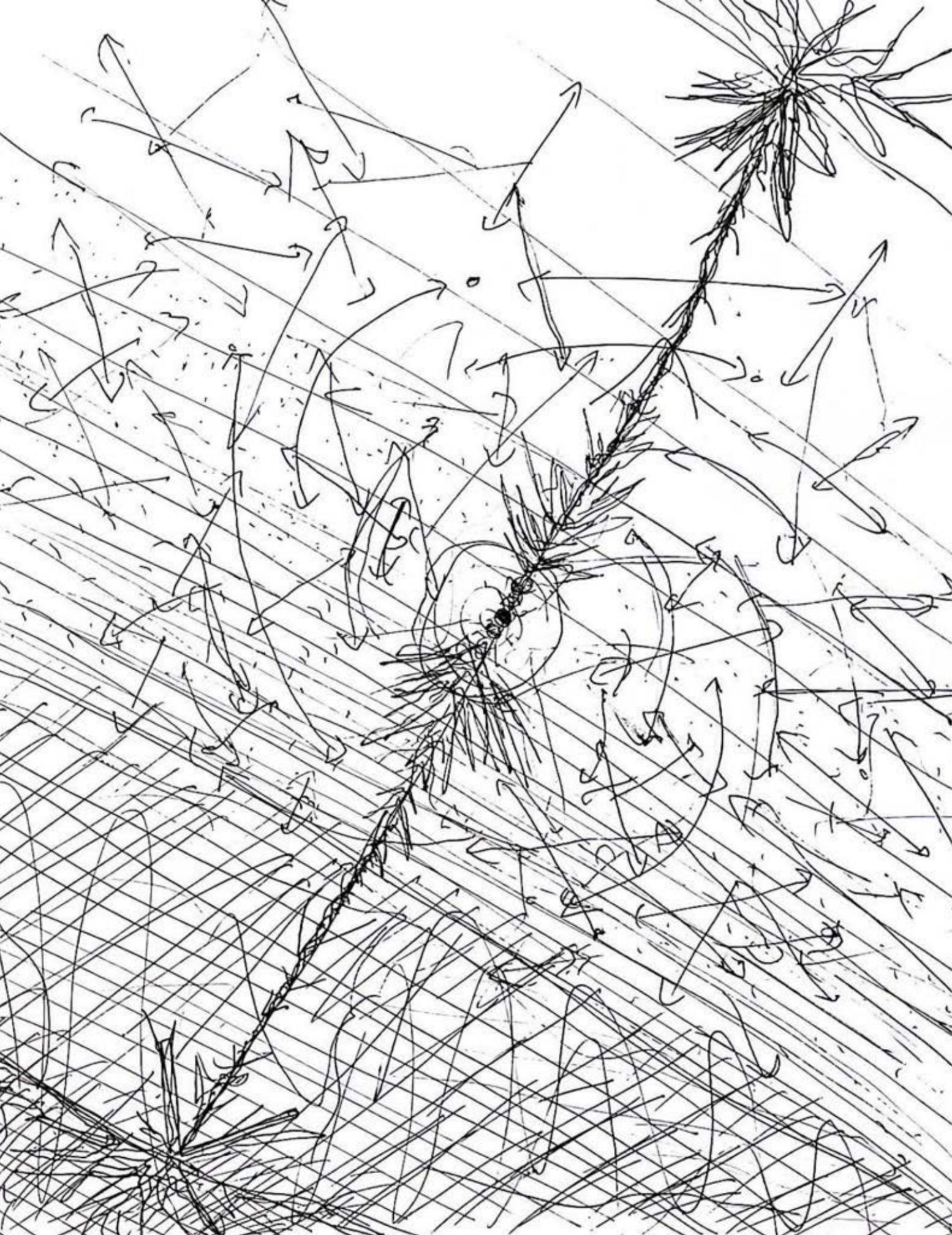


IMAGE: "mandala mid-term iteration", digital drawing

- LEGEND
- Prayer Cycle
  - Walking the Line
  - ▽ Burning Ritual
  - ⊕ Harvest Ceremony
  - ∞ Meander Ritual
  - ⊕ Marsh Healing Ceremony



## VII | 4.17.2024

This week involved a lot of reading and processing new information. I felt I needed to take in more information and more context before I delved into the loss of the story. Two readings really stood out to me. One was titled “Mourning Climate Loss” from Jennifer Atkinson, and the second was “The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration” from Douglas Burton Christie. Both of these readings speak of the critical importance of mourning, as a means to heal through loss, a process both authors emphasized we do not nearly take enough time to engage with amidst the exponential amount of disturbance, extinctions and environmental degradation which occurs in our current reality. Mourning, and more specifically rituals of mourning are critical to this process of adapting to change and in my case reframing our relationship with invasive species. It allows us to sit in and feel the loss we are experiencing, which may allow us to become closer to our natural world.

There’s one quote I read which really spoke to me, “mourning is the process of relearning the world”. It’s the process of coming to terms with the loss of something you’ve held so dearly and learning to accept and eventually embrace a world that exists without it.

From the perspective of my thesis, I’ve realized that our aversion to invasive species, as well as many other problematic relationships to the environment may be rooted in the lack of time and space our current society dedicates to ecological loss. For many, of a different generation, who grew up knowing a different marsh and then witnessed its takeover by another species, I’d understand the complexity of responses and emotions which come with that experience. Who knows, maybe 30 years from now I will have the same aversion to the next generation of marsh newcomers replacing Phragmites.

To the left is a sketch from an exercise my thesis book advisor had us complete, where we attempted to “draw our thesis”. Currently, I’ve found myself at this point of tension between two perspectives of grief related two invasive species. One which greives the loss of landscapes they once new, the other which suffers from the grief or marginalization and othering. I’ve identified that it’s really this point of tension which brings this work richness, despite the growth and bravery it may require to embrace. To embrace the gray I need to put myself in another’s shoes. if my goal is to shift the culture and bring a more optimistic, embracing, and

IMAGE: “tension”, hand sketch

empathetic perspective to species like Phragmites, I need to meet people where they stand.

I had an important discussion with my primary advisor today, who encouraged me to begin to map and categorize my onsite experiences, rituals, and stand out spatial moments on the RISD farm through the various points on the Kai Cheng Thom “healing spiral”. This is a diagram which recognizes the various stages of healing through loss, that fluctuates between experiences of pain and pleasure. It begins with some sort of injury or spiritual and emotional crisis (in this case experiencing rapid ecological loss) and ends with states of acceptance, endearment and even gratitude for the change (In this case embracing the new species which inhabit our climate reality).

There are a variety of landscape moments I’ve already identified which correlate with these different stages. For example this weekend, I walked on the side of the RISD farm experiencing stronger wave action and saw literal fragments of eroded marsh washed up on the beach, as well as uprooted Phragmite rhizomes these are land wounds, brought to fester by the impacts of climate induced erosion, of a landscape moments of loss and crisis. At the same time, with the advent of Spring, I saw new life begin to grow amidst the ruins, including both new *Spartina* and Phragmite sprouts, an endearing landscape moment. Both of these moments exist on polar opposites of the spectrum, but they are reflective of a unique spiritual and emotional experience of the landscape. I continue to notice important themes of duality throughout this work.

My next step for my thesis is to begin to reiterate on the mandala, by choreographing these seasonal and temporal landscape moments and the rituals associated with them to specific time frames on the mandala calendar year. Each of these moments will be color coated based upon a stage of healing on the Healing Spiral. By the end of this weekend I hope to come away with a new draft of the mandala which more rigorously integrates the human stages of healing into the mandala structure. Moving this direction, I hope to design an adaptable path or journey which takes others through these stages of healing through landscape moments amplified by ritual engagement.



IMAGE: “land wounds and new life”, digital photographs

VIII | 4.23.2024

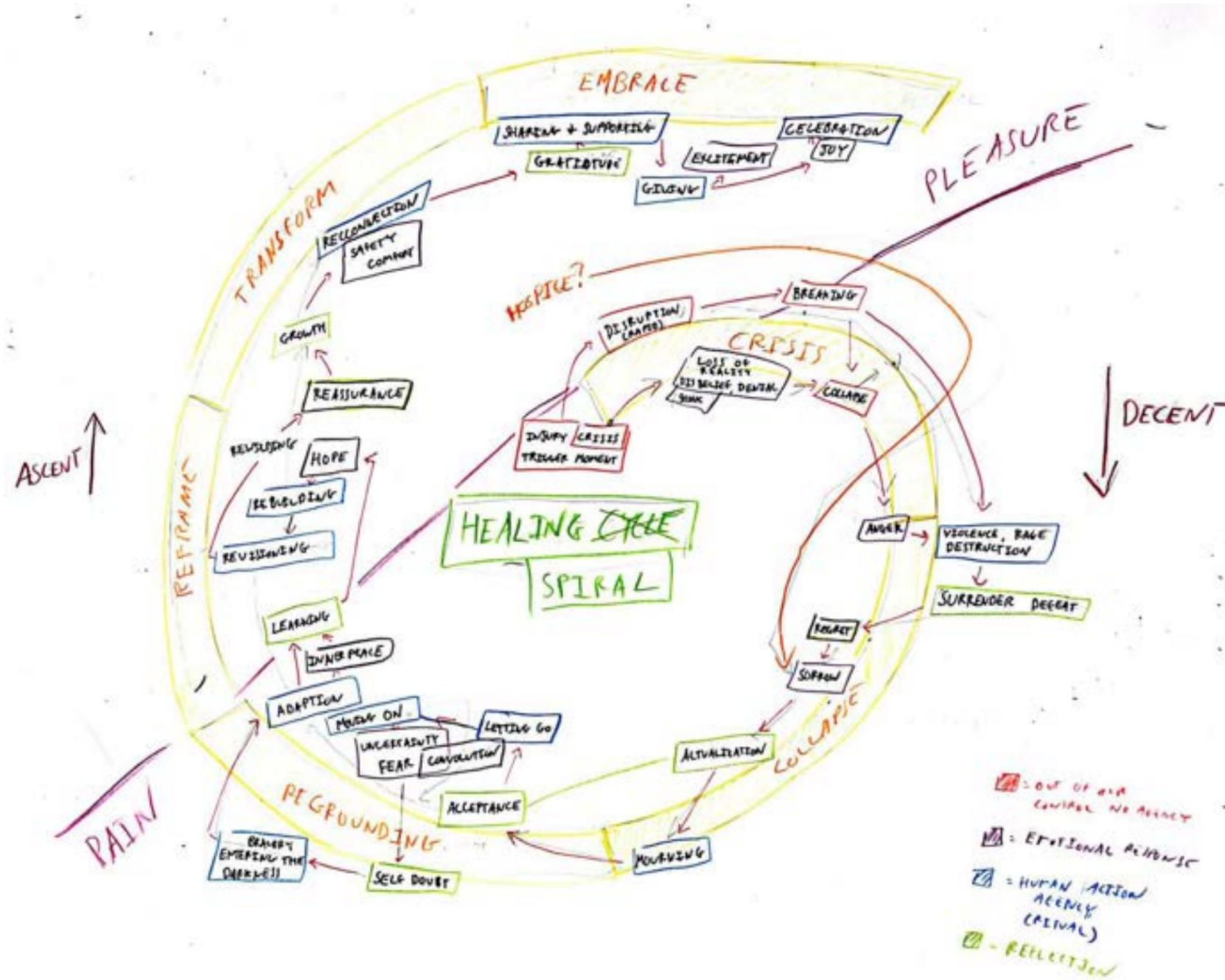
This week was a lot of taking inventory of my weekly site visits, and laying the groundwork for a reiteration of the Mandala. I drafted my own interpretation of Kai Cheng Thom's healing spiral. This new spiral includes five healing stages:

CRISIS → COLLAPSE → GROUNDING → REFRAME → EMBRACE → REMEMBER

Within each of these stages, I began to list out emotions which define the entrance into the stage, responses or ritual actions that were engaged to help process the emotion, and reflective emotions responsive to the ritual action. These were all compiled in a table shown in the process drawings, I then took a dive into all the photographs of landscape moments and experiences I've been collecting of the RISD farm and began categorizing them within the contexts of each healing stage which were then marked spatially on a aerial of the farm.

My conversation with my advisor went well, it seems they were excited about the amount of rigor and depth I was bringing to this research process. They told me now it's a matter of distilling my detailed findings to something others may engage with as well. They told me to start by consolidating the common themes of each healing stage into a paragraph which states concisely what each stage entails and how it's meant to function. For example "collapse" is a stage in which one has moved past the initial shock of the crisis or event and is now processing the depth of the loss. The Kai Cheng Thom healing spiral describes this stage as "descending into the underworld". After writing these descriptions they then recommended creating a ritual for each based upon my experiences at the farm, this could be as simple as visiting a drowning field of spartina for example. My advisor spoke a lot about being highly intentional about the interrelationship between the rituals at each of the healing stages, for example, the reframe stage involves some sort of action to rebuild by the community, this creation could be used to celebrate in the embrace stage. I'd like to get back to working with my hands so I think for the final review I'd like to create five conceptual models which communicate each of the healing stages and the ritual associated with each.

IMAGE: healing spiral iteration and emotional matrix, process sketches



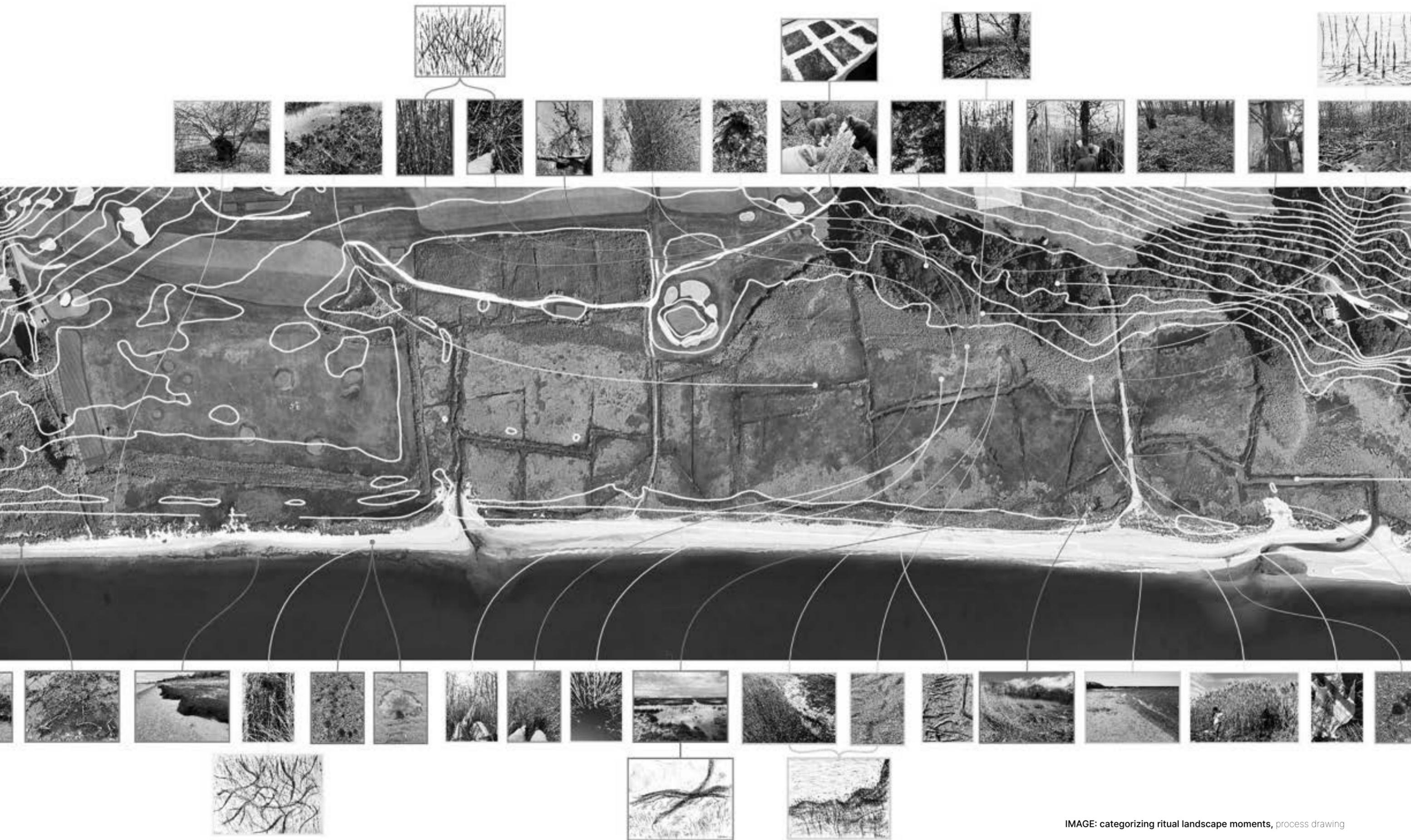


IMAGE: categorizing ritual landscape moments, process drawing

Next to developing this new cycle, the conversation also came up as to whether or not these stages of healing should be laid on the annual calendar like seasons. I first resisted, because I felt the system would lose adaptability since a moment of crisis or loss could occur at any time of year. However we discussed that this healing cycle could still function this way at multiple scales from a day to a month to a year. The importance of integrating this six stage healing cycle into the year, is to get us into the habit of practicing annually, and moving through these stages every year.

Building this system into our yearly cycle, like holidays, allows us to build this way of thinking into our culture. Just because say winter falls within the stage of crisis, doesn't mean the whole season is defined by crisis, but rather this season becomes a time for ritual in which each of us may spend the necessary time reflecting on the grief that occurs in each of our lives. A good metaphor is a steering wheel where each stage can be dynamic and shift back and forth, from reframing to embracing to grief and vice versa.

**IMAGE: "flux dance", charcoal sketch**

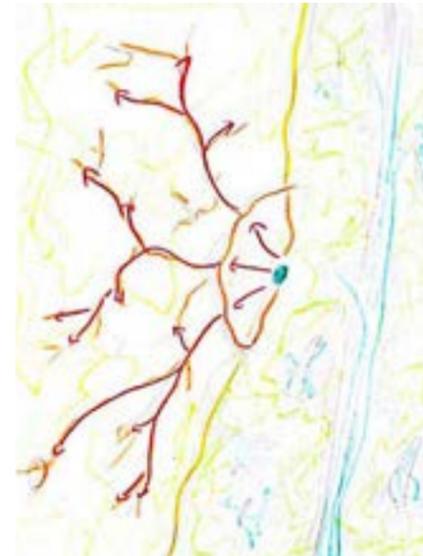




COLLAPSE



REGROUND



REFRAME



EMBRACE



RESURRECTION



REMEMBERANCE

## XI | 4.30.2024

This week was quite a breakthrough, I have a clear way forward now, it's mostly just production for the final at this point. I spent most of this week integrating, I refined my work from last week into 6 distinct healing stages.

Collapse (Falling into Shadow) → Reground (Sitting with Shadow) → Reframe (Finding the light) → Embrace (Shaping the light) → Resurrection (Celebrating the light) → Remember (A dance in between)

Each of these stages is defined by a series of space shaping relationships with Phragmites, that take us through the stages of grief and healing in response to ecosystem change (in this case the loss of spartina). The sketches below show my iteration of these rituals, in which the spatial changes and interactions with phragmite reflect the specific emotions which describe that stage. Essentially the phragmites become a therapist for a community experiencing loss. I also took the time to integrate my new annual system of rituals into the mandala taking in consideration timeframe, seasonal change and the growth pattern of Phragmites.

My advisor seemed on board with everything, but did have thoughts about the "rage room" during the collapse stage. The collapse stage deals with the most raw, volatile, vulnerable and explosive emotions which characterize an initial shock. She questioned the label rage as there are many different ways people process a crisis early on, not just anger. So I decided to shift the name to the creation of the wailing room.

We also chat about the various types of grief, not just the loss of the marsh, but the grief and frustration of existing as othered being like phragmites. Sympathy for othered identities like "invasives" was the initial inspiration for this entire project and she told me not to lose that within this cycle. Maybe there is a way we could bring both these sides together and bridge the divide between them. Maybe during the reground stage where there is a funeral ritual for the loss of the marsh, and the grief of othered invasive species which have been targeted by extermination. A lot to think about moving forward. I can begin to sew these ideas into my next iteration, but it's really time to dive into production for the final review. I laid out a plan for how I'm going to communicate my ideas, and a list of drawings to produce. It's just time to dive into and prepare for the final.

IMAGES: healing stage iteration, hand sketches

## A SYNTHESIS OF METHODS

Reflecting on my process, I've distilled my methods down to a system. My primary thesis question is: how can the design of ritual spatial practices between *Spartina*, and *Phragmites australis* allow us to heal through the grief of ecosystem change? The end goal of this research process is to design a highly integrated series of ecosystem change coping rituals that respond to interrelationship between *Phragmites* and its environmental adjacencies.

### PHASE 1: Establishing a Base

Throughout my process I found a rigorous literature review the most helpful in building a strong contextual understanding of this species. This covered everything from its growth cycle, relationship to shifting tides based on moon cycles, its ability to uptake pollutants and stabilize runoff at certain times of the year, what species are using it as habitat, relationships to surrounding species like *spartina* etc. This same process was repeated to better understand human cycles of healing and grieving. Throughout my process I would continue to sketch and diagram these different relationships to understand their logics, which I would then use to inform their placement within the design of the Mandala, the core spiritual calendar which ties together the annual growth cycle of *Phragmites*, its relationship to other adjacent environmental forces, the human grief cycle, and finally the calendar of rituals which respond to all these conditions. Rigorous processes of mapping relationships over time, whether that's tidal cycles, species mating seasons, pollutant uptake/ stabilization, as well as the integrating the emotional stages of grief around this Mandala are critical to giving more intention to where, when and why these rituals occur.

### PHASE 2: Spiritual Derives

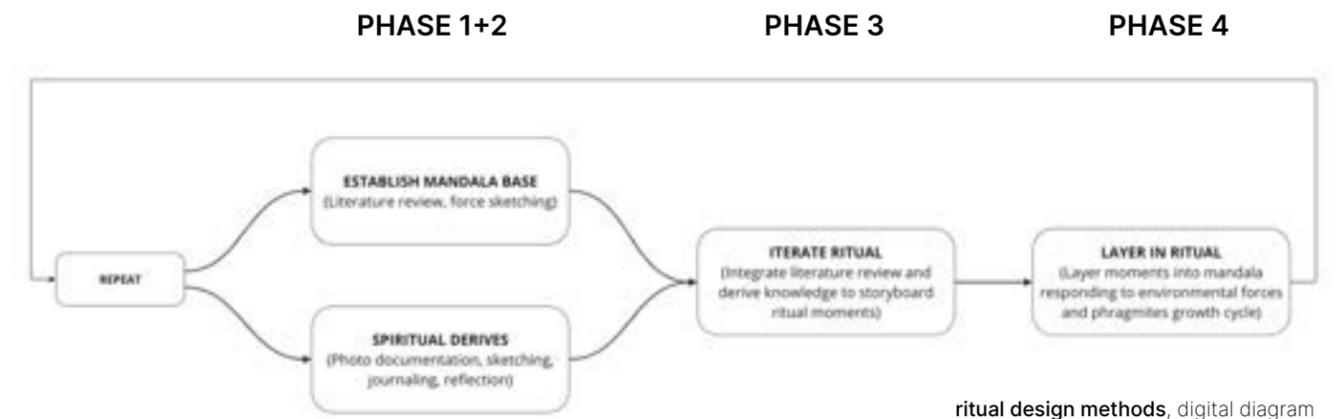
This more traditional "desk research" was then supported by more intuitive, reflective methods during my weekly spiritual derives to the RISD farm. If I wanted others to feel the spiritual connection, I needed to feel it myself. During these visits, I journaled, charcoal sketched, took photographs, and tested various methods of engagement with this species. Onsite, I found that I was able to find the more intuitive, emotional, intimate and spiritual stimuli necessary to this work. These site visits are also critical to really contextualizing the forces in relationship with *Phragmites* I read about in my literature review and diagramming/ sketching process in phase one of my research. With this background knowledge of the forces behind my engagement with *Phragmites* on site, I may bring greater precision to the emotions I may try to elicit in others through ritual engagement.

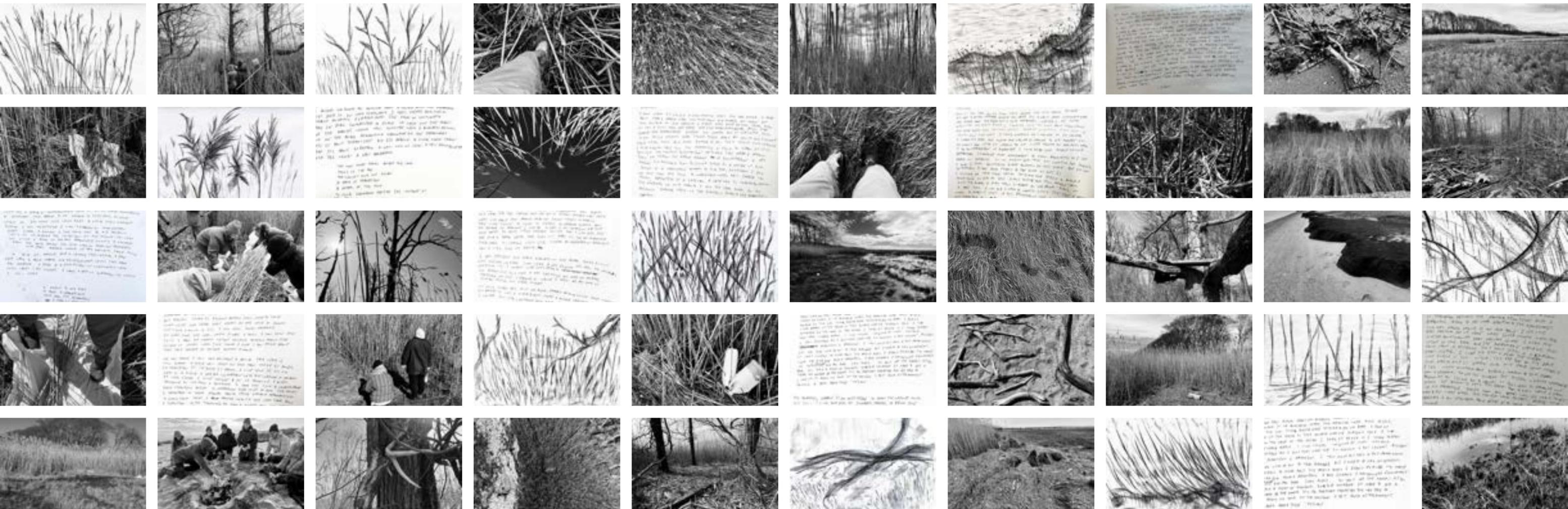
### PHASE 3: Inventory and Storyboard

After each visit, I rigorously document the experiences from each of these weekly ritual visits through a visit matrix which highlights key photos, personal reflections and sketches from each of my visits. It's the combination of both more formal literature review and diagramming, and these more intuitive reflective site visits that inform the design of these rituals. I found it useful to storyboard sketch these rituals combining the knowledge gained from both formal and informal research processes. These story boards allowed me to draw out and compose how these rituals function and engage people at different points in the healing process. This practice has not only been helpful for the positioning of ritual practices on the Mandala through time, but for me to make actual spatial decisions about how people are shaping *phragmites*, or moving between the *spartina* and *phragmite* in direct response to each healing cycle stage.

### PHASE 4: Re-iterate Mandala and Rituals

After storyboarding, I then returned to the Mandala to layer in these ritual acts, marking times of the year they would occur in direct conversation with the base layer of environmental conditions I previously mapped. It's the repetition of this process which brought more intention and clarity to how this annual system of *phragmite* rituals will operate, with the end goal of actually designing and testing these rituals with other people.





2.4.2024

2.11.2024

2.18.2024

2.25.2024

3.3.2024

3.10.2024

3.16.2024

3.24.2024

4.7.2024

4.14.2024



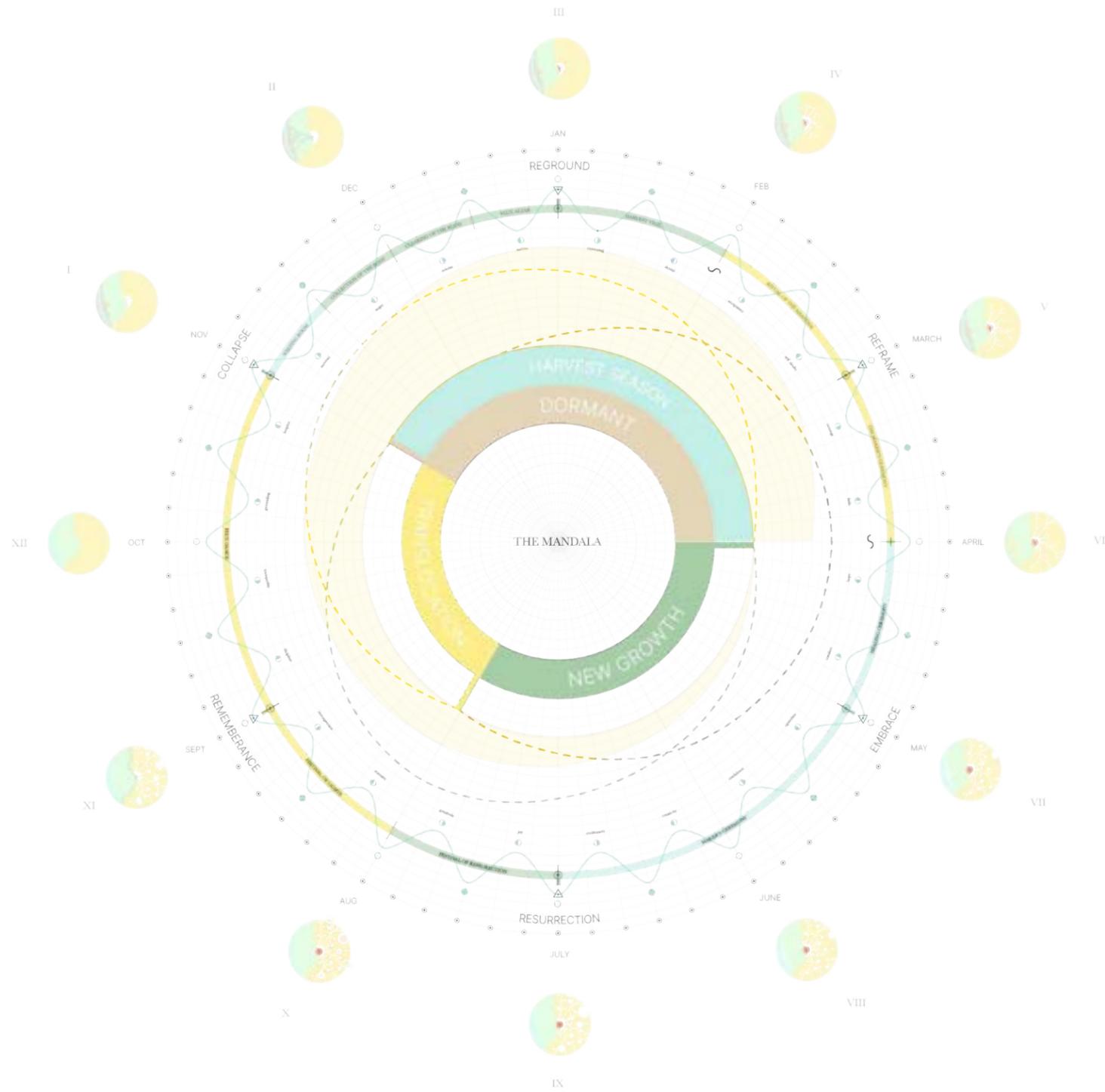
IV\_ manifesting the  
garden

## A NEW GROUNDING | Design statment

Amidst our climate uncertain reality, the question arises as to how we may learn to address the seemingly endless spiral of social and ecological strife, degradation and loss we witness each day. Through a cultural reframing of our relationship with invasive species, A New Grounding asks how collective ritual may serve as a vehicle to understand, heal through and eventually embrace the trials and tribulations of ecosystem change.

Can we grieve ecological loss, while also embracing the gifts of the new?

With *Phragmites australis* as the gateway, my design proposes a series of collective rituals which occur at the ecotone between the vigorous stands of *Phragmites australis* and the degraded salt marsh or *Spartina patens* on the RISD farm. During each of these rituals, a collective space making practice between these two zones is engaged, each incrementally transitioning the community through the stages of healing post climate catastrophe. From mourning and despair, to acceptance and courage, to joy and celebration, this thesis attempts to spatialized the healing process at this point of tension, in order to bring a new spirit of joy, resilience, and embrace of change, amidst the void of our climate uncertain reality.



## THE MANDALA

This is the mandala, the spiritual calendar and framework for the annual ritual cycle of a New Grounding. The cycle contains six major seasons, each season represents a specific stage of the human grief cycle.

collapse → reground → reframe → embrace → resurrection → remembrance

The layers of the Mandala tie together the environmental forces adjacent to the growth cycle of phragmites which the stages of human grief. The acts of ritual integrated in this cycle, respond directly to these environmental forces, and serve to allow human communities engage with the Phragmites and the adjacent Spartina patens as a means to move through the grief of ecosystem change and climate loss.

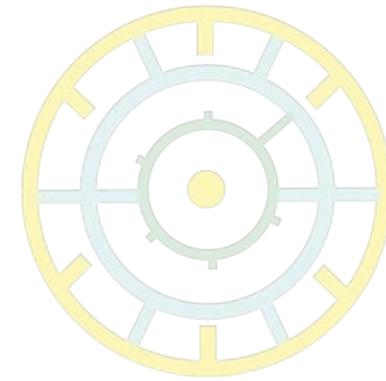
- LEGEND
- Prayer Cycle
  - Walking the Line
  - ▽ Burning Ritual
  - ⊙ Harvest Ceremony
  - ∞ Meander Ritual
  - ⊕ Marsh Healing Ceremony

the mandala final iteration, digital drawing

## MANDALA PRINCIPLES

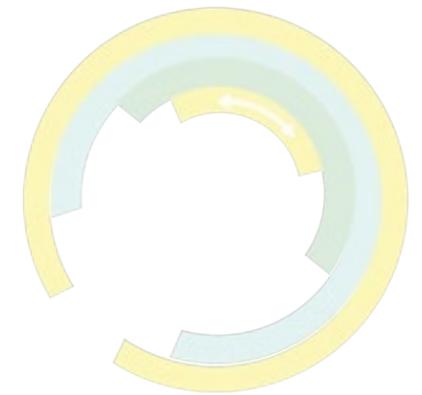
The mandala framework operates under a set of four key principles which allow it to adapt to various time scales and the highly subjective processes in which humans respond to various experiences of grief.

Throughout life we will inevitably encounter all sorts of change and struggle, and we will need to learn to adapt to the cycles and spirals of change. These principles hope to provide a framework to how this ritual cycle may be incorporated in many different peoples lives within caring contexts.



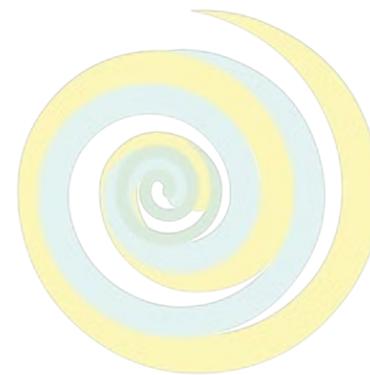
### ANNUAL PRACTICE

An annual cycle of ritual, is a way of reintegrating the healing cycle into our way of life. This new spatial practice encourages us to move through these stages throughout the year, but does not necessarily mean each season is defined by these emotional stages.



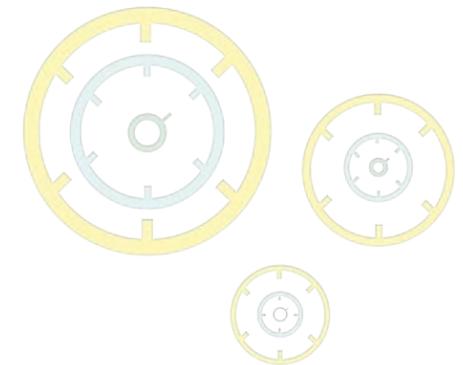
### EMOTIONAL STEERING

These stages are not linear or static and may shift back and forth as needed to adapt to various crises and situations. A person may spend more time in one stage versus the other, depending on their own needs and the state of the world around them.



### EMBRACING THE SPIRAL

There is no beginning and no end to the healing spiral. Each cycle will inevitably roll into another experience of loss and the advent of a new journey, to adapt to the nature of change in our environment.



### MALLEABLE TIMESCALES

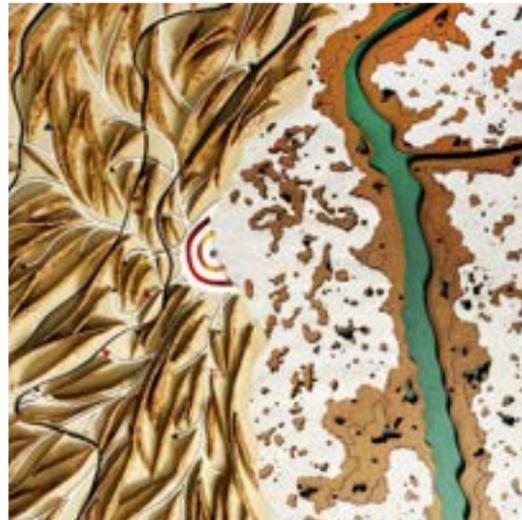
Healing is a highly subjective matter dependent on the situation and the contexts of those involved. This experience of this cycle may operate over the scale of a decade year, month or a even a day. The only constant is change.



COLLAPSE



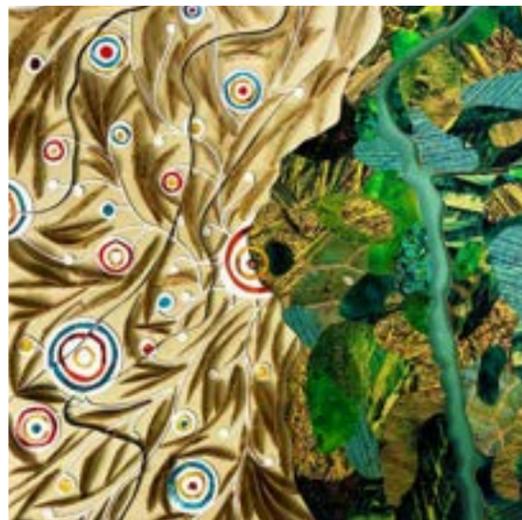
REGROUND



REFRAME



EMBRACE



RESURRECTION



REMEMBER

### HEALING STAGE MODELS

I build six diagrammatic models detailing the key spatial moves of each ritual season. The models fall between spatial and abstract as a means to to speak to the expressive nature of each stage. Although these models are of the RISD Farm, these rituals are not limited to this site, and can be practiced anywhere there is a transition between Phragmites and spartina.

The Phragmites are represented by strips of phragmite paper, and the degraded marsh the bits of burnt mulberry paper. Within each stage there is a clear new spatials relationship forming between the two. I felt working in analog for these models spoke more true to spiritual direction of the thesis. The following pages will detail the specifics of the rituals during each stage.

mandala stage models, phragmite paper, collage, burnt mulberry paper

## SEASON OF COLLAPSE | falling into shadow

The Season of Collapse is the initial descent or fall into tragedy in which we sense, feel the sharpest pain of the loss. It is the darkest of the stages where our most vulnerable, and often volatile emotions come to surface. These emotions may include anger, sorrow, guilt, hopelessness, denial or regret and may result in actions driven by pure feeling without any sense of restraint.

During this stage a ritual weeping room is carved into the phragmite, which functions as a safe space or vessel to release our pain. This stage tends to be the most abrasive, but nonetheless necessary stage in the mourning process in which people are able to find a release for their anger, frustration, guilt and immense sorrow. Screams are let out and tears are shed. The initial creation of the weeping room may be quite volatile and erratic, reflective of the current emotional state. Although this is considered the most painful stage, an atmosphere of solidarity is built among a community of people who are all moving through this loss. This season is the shortest of the stages as it recognizes the necessity to address these difficult emotions, but also the need to move on from them as an excessive practice of them can lead to further harm to our environment and communities.

### TIMEFRAME:

Occurs when the Phragmite growth shifts from translocation to dormancy in fall.

season of collapse, "weeping room", model





SEASON OF COLLAPSE



INITIAL COLLAPSE



WEeping ROOM



ENTER REGROUND



season of collapse "weeping room", handmade model

The weeping room becomes a vessel for our most raw emotions of loss, pain, and even anger. Despite the volatile nature of this phase, the Phragmite becomes a graceful host during difficult times.

"weeping room", digital collage





## SEASON OF REGROUND | sitting with shadow

During the Season of Reground, we've begun to surrender to the moments of explosive emotion and resistance released during the season of collapse, and shift into a more grounded state of mourning. During this stage Ritual harvest vigil or funeral for the lost landscape is prepared for and held among the community. The first step of preparation is the collection of the body. Here, the community collects relics from the ruins of the site of loss (the drowned marsh).

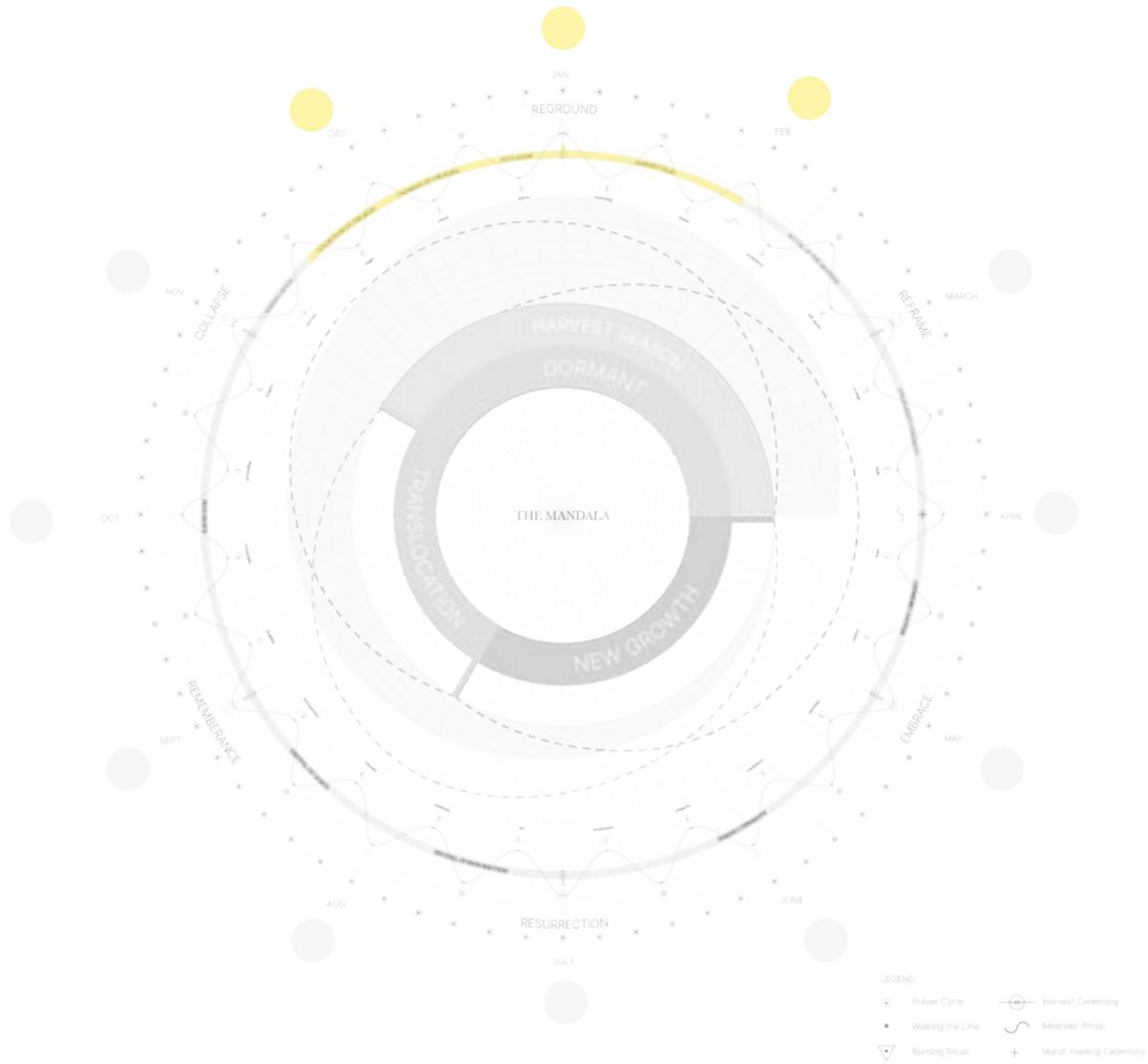
These relics could include and sort of objects which speak to the memory of this landscape from dry spartina, to peat, to driftwood, to soil, to photographs or stories. Following the collection of the body, a "Clearing of the ruins" is held transforming the weeping room into the season's first harvest room or formal gathering space within the Phragmite. Preparations culminate with the building of the flux altar, a ritual object, that functions as a spiritual grounding point for the community. This altar is placed directly at the ecotone or transition point between spartina and the phragmite, right in the center of the first harvest room.

Once the harvest room and flux altar are prepared, a Harvest Vigil is held to recognize the lost marsh. The cleared stalks are laid on a funeral tapestry, and the seed heads are collected. A ritual burning of the body is held, symbolic of laying the lost to rest. After, reflections, memories, and prayers about the loss are shared amongst the group, and each person casts a Phragmite into the flame. The end of the harvest vigil signifies a transition from a state of immense sorrow and mourning, into a state of acceptance and regrounding.

### TIMEFRAME:

Occurs immediately after the completion of the first full moon cycle immediately following the creation of the weeping room.

season of reground, model



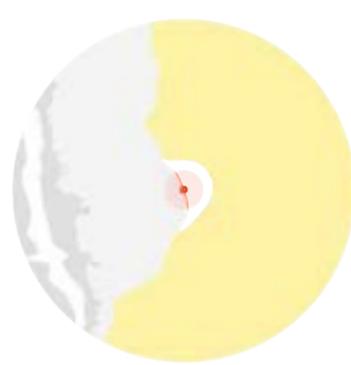
SEASON OF REGROUND



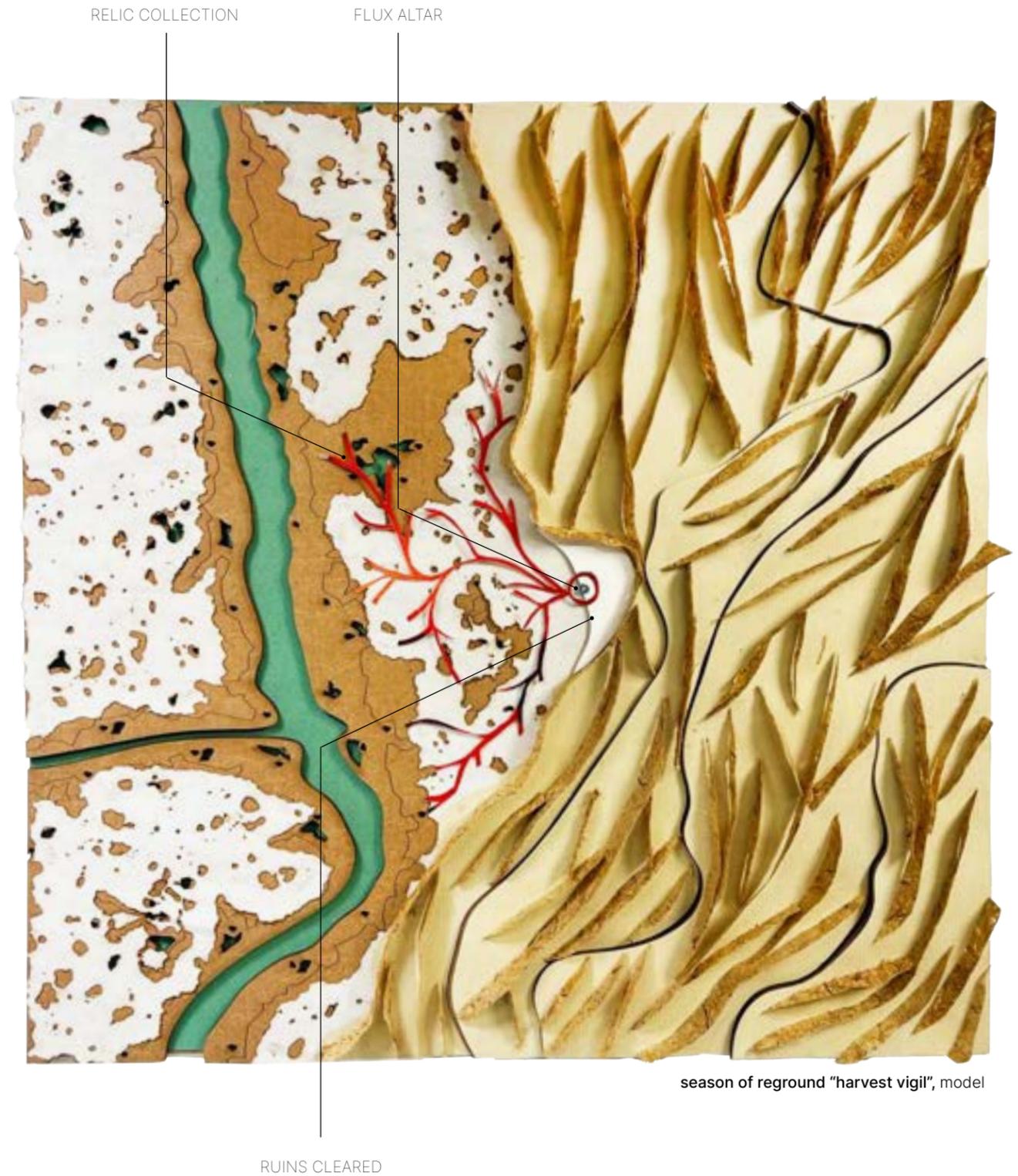
CLEARING THE RUINS



COLLECTING THE BODY & BUILDING THE FLUX ALTAR

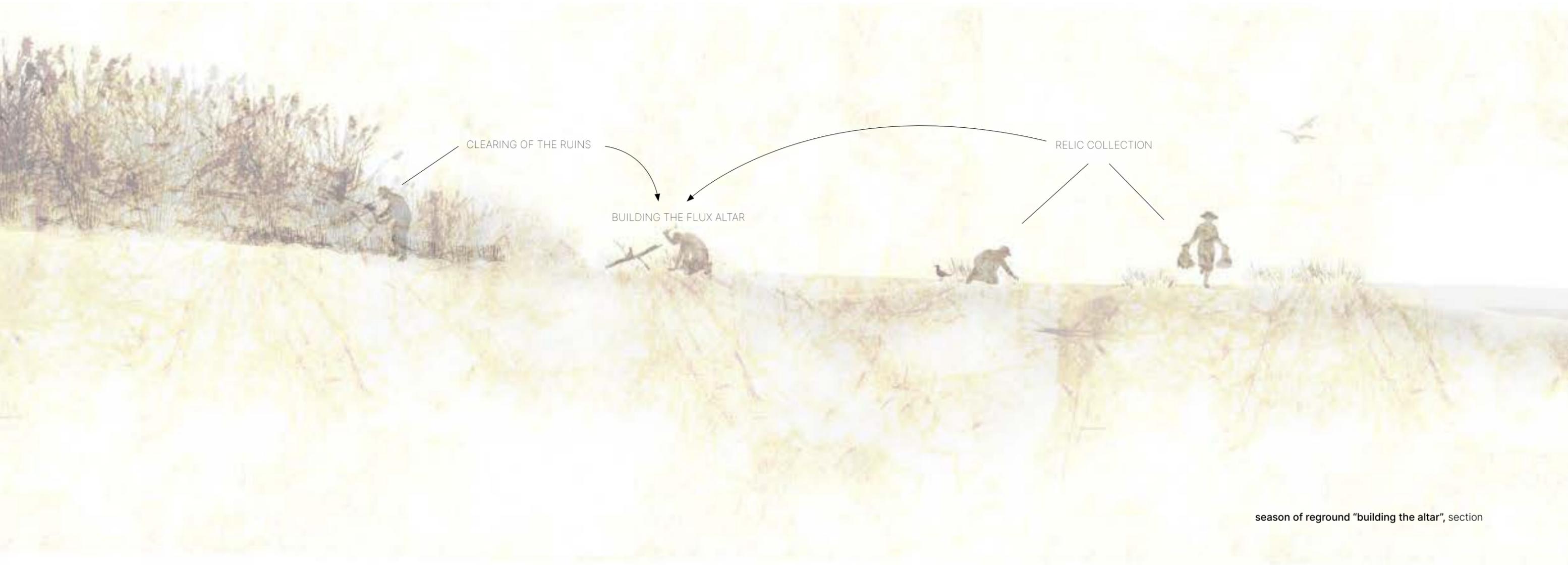


HARVEST VIGIL



season of reground "harvest vigil", model

RUINS CLEARED



A series of preparations are necessary to hold a Harvest Vigil. Relics of the lost landscape are gathered and a special flux altar is constructed from the relics. A safe space of worship is carved into the edge of the Phragmite called a harvest room.



RITUAL BURNING OF THE RELICS

COMMUNITY GATHERS FOR  
HARVEST VIGIL

season of reground, "harvest vigil", section

The Harvest Vigil is a solemn ceremony where we mourn, and come to terms with the loss. Stories and inner reflections are shared among the group who knew and had relationship with the lost landscape. Phragmites and the relics of loss are cast into the flame on the Flux Altar symbolic of laying the lost to rest.

RELICS OF THE BODY  
(SPARTINA, DRIFTWOOD, PHRAGMITES)

HOT CASTED GLASS

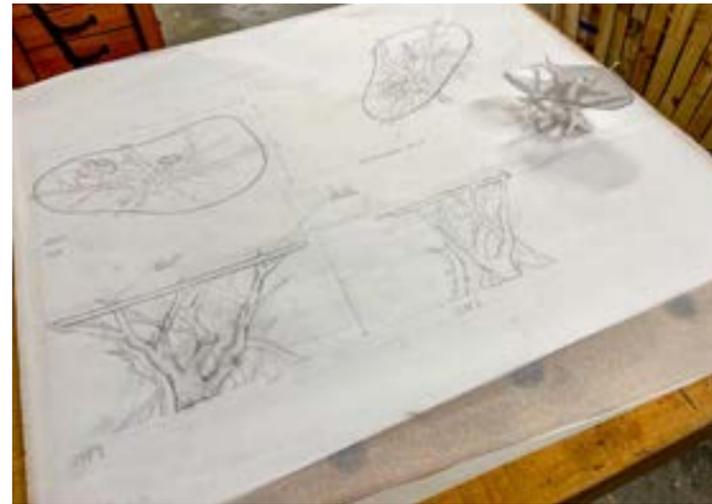
## THE FLUX ALTAR | a node of transition

This is the “flux altar” a ritual object sacred to the followers of the A New Grounding. Though significant of a moment of grounding, it is a product of disturbance and flux. Its base is built from relics of the lost landscape, fallen branches of the ghost forest of the RISD Farm, an ecosystem which once thrived decades ago but has since then succumbed to the increased salt intrusion, erosion and flooding due to climate change.

Amidst rising sea levels, violent storm surges and the scourge of the anthropocene, this altar stands as both a memorial to those species lost at the hands of rapid ecosystem change, and a celebration of those newly introduced species who will form the crux of a new resilient landscape. This altar may function as a pillar of strength, and a catalyst for healing as each of us move through the stages of grief, loss inevitable to the climate crisis. It acts as a central node of ritual, placed at the transition point between the Phragmites and Spatina. Here followers of a New Grounding may express the spectrum of emotions critical to the healing process, from sorrow, grief, mourning and anger, to acceptance, growth, gratitude and jubilation. The flux Altar is a celebration of the dynamic nature of our ecosystems.

SALVAGED DRIFTWOOD FROM THE RISD FARM





flux altar process, digital photograph series

I wanted the creation of this piece to reflect a spiritual practice of embracing change in our ecosystems and thus I chose to work with repurposed drift wood from the RISD farm, and hot casted glass materials both of which share the beauty of unpredictability. Bringing this piece to completion was surely a testament to the resilience of the team of collaborators as well as myself, as we navigated the trials and tribulations of materials that constantly talked back.

## SEASON OF REFRAME | finding the light

During the Season of Reframe, one has come to terms with the loss, and begins to build the courage to move into the uncertainty of the new world that is forming around them. During this stage, the community participates in the ritual of the meander, a mental exercise in which you wander into the uncertain abyss of Phragmite creating a path into the unknown. It is a practice of building trust, where at first the Phragmite may seem to be a source of fear, trepidation, and uncertainty, but as you continue to persevere through its dense brambles it eventually becomes your guide. The goal of this ritual is to transition the community from a space of fear and self doubt to one of courage, in which we build the confidence to begin to explore and engage the new world. In this stage, the community may begin to see the beauty and resilience re-established among the ruins where we begin to have faith in this new world and even feel empowered by it.

Once a greater comfort is established through the ritual of the meander, we enter the first "Maker's Ceremony", a set of ritual practices of making with the Phragmite as a catalyst to build intimacy with it. One of the primary practices is paper making, a ritualistic practice which requires a lot of time spent with the plant, from harvesting, separating its components, beating it into pulp and pulling sheets. It's during this stage of using our hands a making that we truly get to know the plant, discover the hidden beauties of something we used to fear.

### TIMEFRAME:

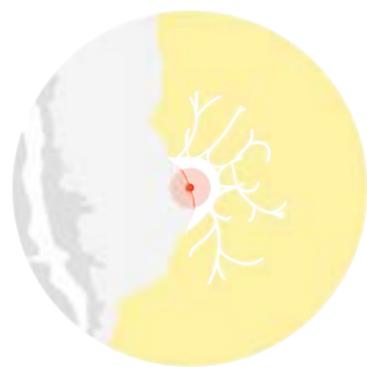
Occurs immediately following the completion a whole moon cycle following the harvest vigil.

season of reframe, model

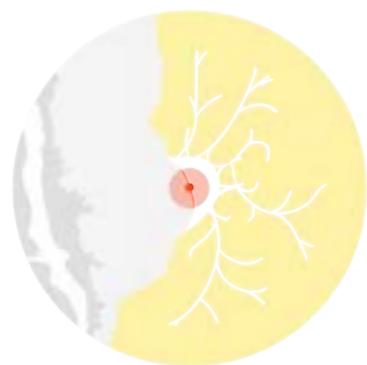




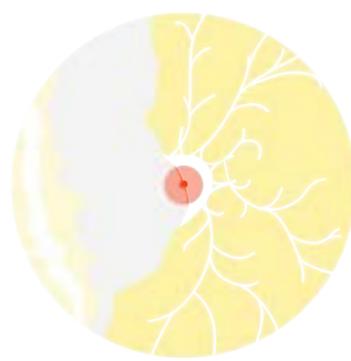
SEASON OF REFRAME



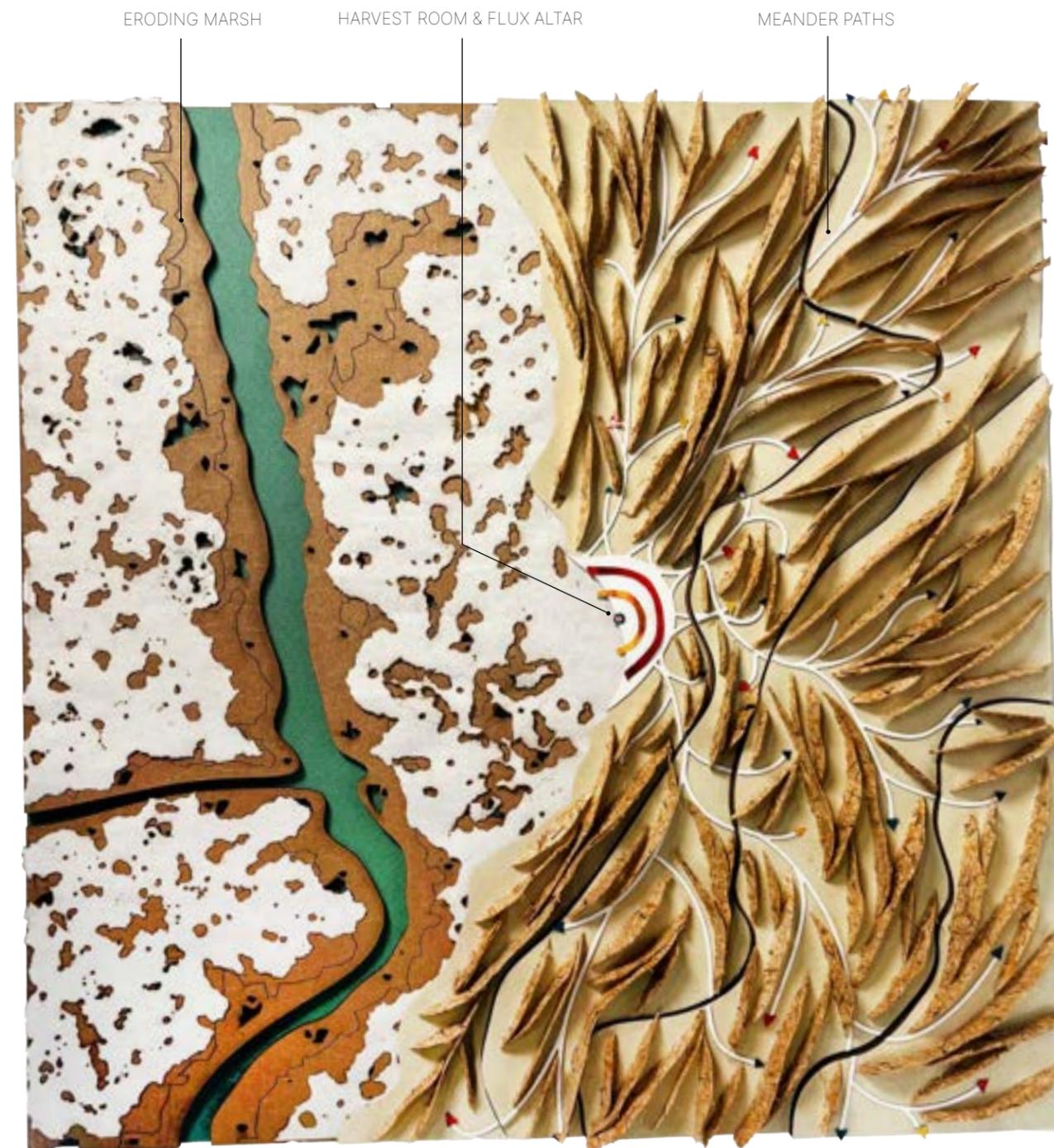
MEANDER RITUAL



MEANDER RITUAL

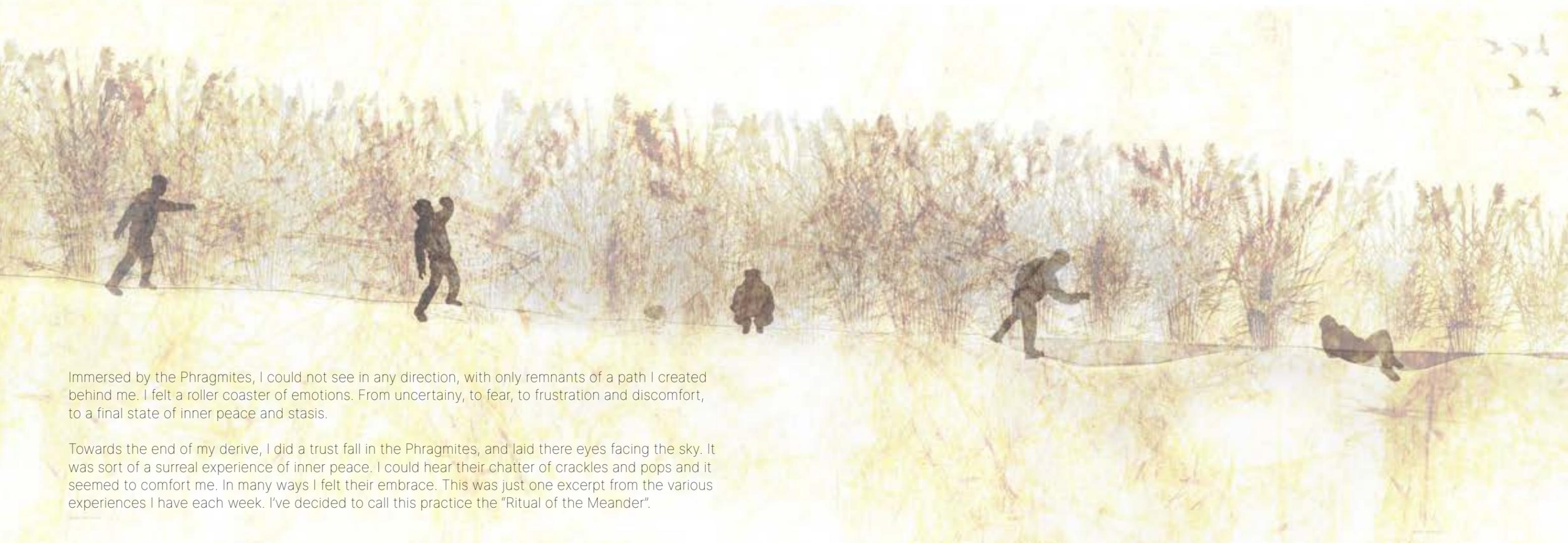


MARSH HEALING CEREMONY



The ritual of the meander is a moment of great uncertainty, but also opportunity for immense growth. When we learn to embrace the uncertain we cultivate new seeds in a shifting landscape.

season of reframe , model



Immersed by the Phragmites, I could not see in any direction, with only remnants of a path I created behind me. I felt a roller coaster of emotions. From uncertainty, to fear, to frustration and discomfort, to a final state of inner peace and stasis.

Towards the end of my derive, I did a trust fall in the Phragmites, and laid there eyes facing the sky. It was sort of a surreal experience of inner peace. I could hear their chatter of crackles and pops and it seemed to comfort me. In many ways I felt their embrace. This was just one excerpt from the various experiences I have each week. I've decided to call this practice the "Ritual of the Meander".

ritual of the meander, section



ritual of the meander, digital photo series

my first meander, drone aria





## SEASON OF EMBRACE | shaping the light

During the season of Embrace you've found a new confidence to not only explore the unknown, but shape it. It is characterized by a spirit of creativity in which we feel empowered to co-create with our environment as a means to nurture the land and each other.

The embrace begins with the Healing Ceremony, a transitional ritual of stewardship, in which the paper made during the first maker's ceremony is laid over the eroding edges in the drowning marsh to stabilize it. Here through the co-relationship with humans through making, the Phragmite no longer serves as the source of the marshes demise but rather it's healer. The ritual placing of the paper in the marsh is both physically and spiritually symbolic of establishing new roots in a shifting world. Throughout this season we will begin to witness the new spring growth, burst through the dead or dying brush of past seasons.

It's also during this time that our making practices shift towards preparation for a great festival in the season of Resurrection. During this time, the initial meanders that were carved in the previous stage are made intentionally as spaces of gathering, reunion and community called harvest rooms. Phragmite lanterns are also made in preparation for a great celebration.

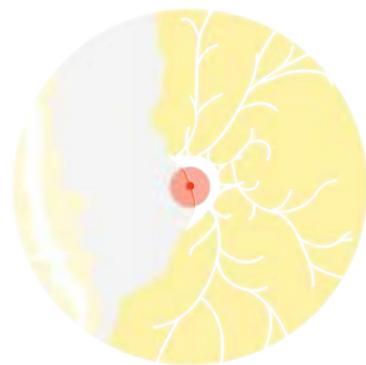
### TIMEFRAME:

This stage begins when the first signs of new life emerge in the early spring.

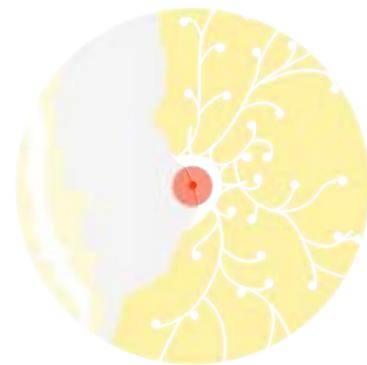
season of embrace, model



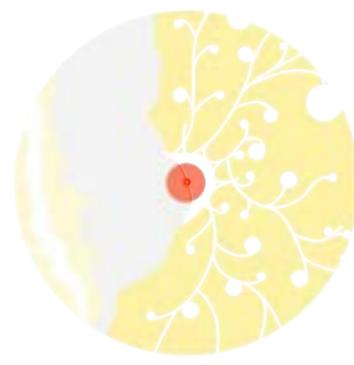
SEASON OF EMBRACE



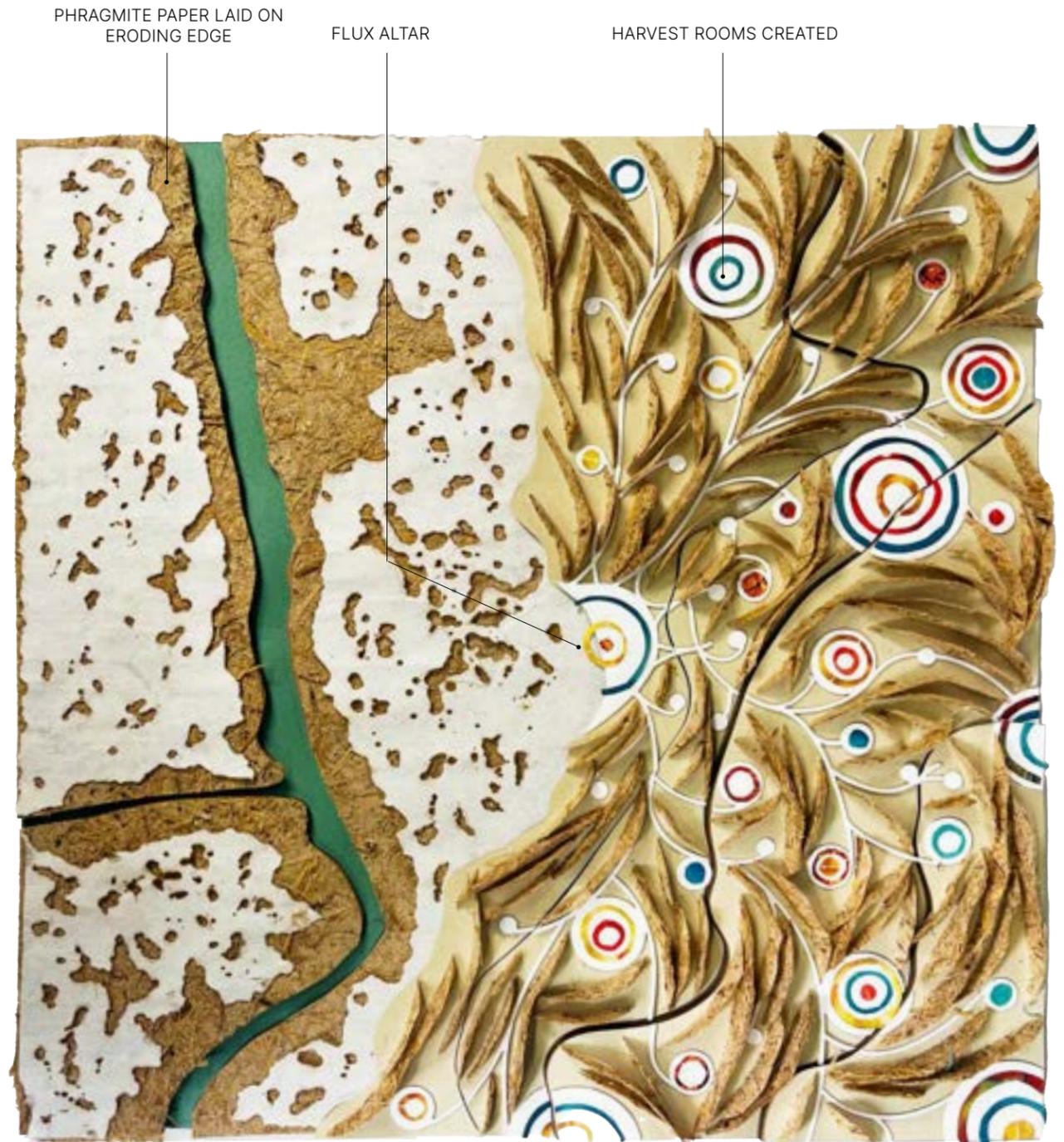
MARSH HEALING CEREMONY



HARVEST ROOM CREATION



HARVEST ROOM CREATION

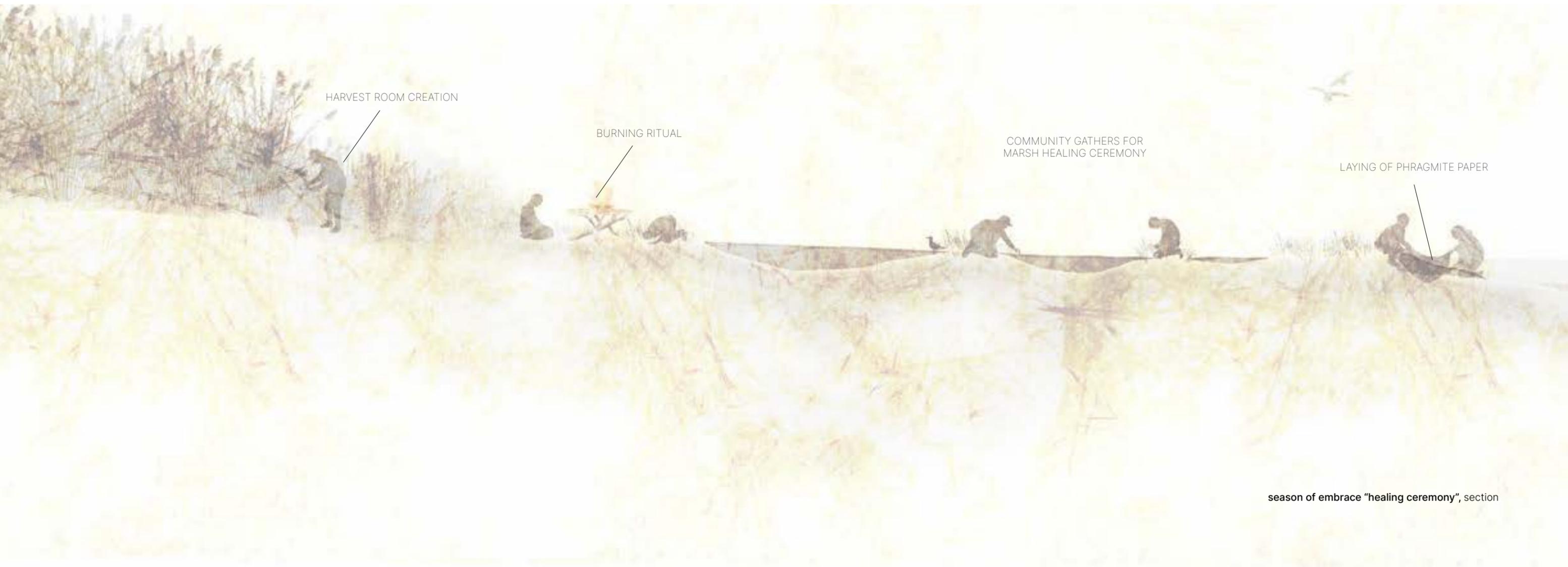


Spatially during the season of embrace, we are confident to dive deep into the culms of Phragmite and shape the space. We've begun to understand it's gifts and now we can share it with others.

season of embrace, model



"harvest room creation", digital photograph



season of embrace "healing ceremony", section

This season becomes characterized by moments of ritual stewardship. Now that we've come to know the Phragmite, we've learned of ways in which it may give back to the marsh as an erosion stabilizer. The ritual of laying the paper is not only symbolic of allowing the marsh to establish new roots, but a testament to our own journey finding A New Grounding amidst climate uncertainty.

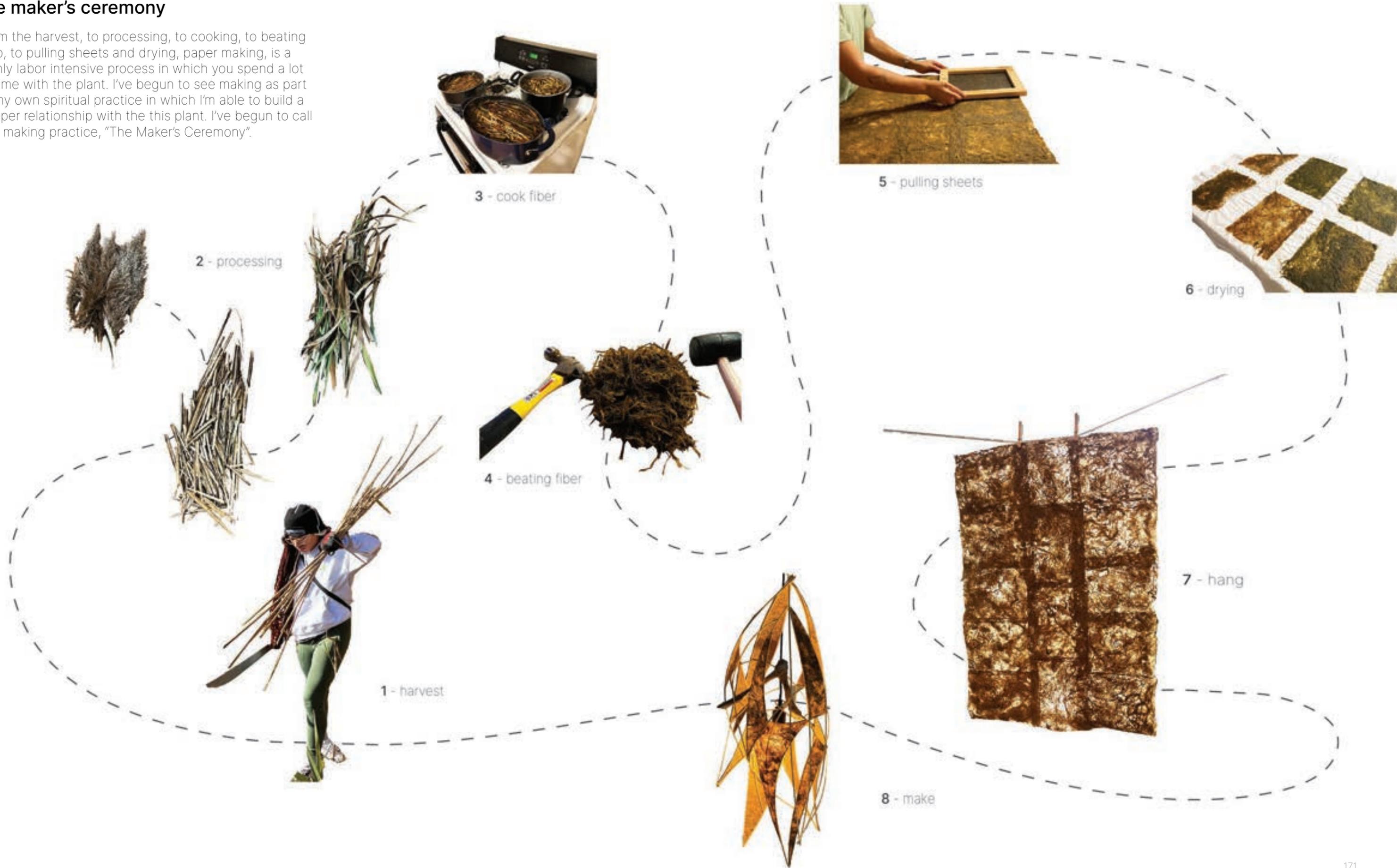


**“phragmite paper drying”,** hand made paper

As part of my reframing process I've begun incorporating paper making with Phragmite into my practice.

## the maker's ceremony

From the harvest, to processing, to cooking, to beating pulp, to pulling sheets and drying, paper making, is a highly labor intensive process in which you spend a lot of time with the plant. I've begun to see making as part of my own spiritual practice in which I'm able to build a deeper relationship with the this plant. I've begun to call this making practice, "The Maker's Ceremony".



**the maker's ceremony** | 2.12.2024

To make is to feel  
To reframe  
To heal  
To reconnect to something found deep inside  
And in your golden rays  
we shed a new light on the world around us  
And uncover it's unseen beauties  
Hidden to the naked eye

IMAGE: "phragmite paper lamp", handmade phragmite paper, basket cord, drift wood







## SEASON OF RESURRECTION | celebrating the light

Characterized by celebration, gratitude and joy, the community has grown to not only find comfort in shaping this new evolved world, but is able to celebrate the fruits of it. The season begins with the Festival of Resurrection which celebrates the recovery of the marsh following the March healing ceremony. This celebration carries on throughout the duration of the entire season.

During this time gifts are exchanged and Phragmite lanterns are hung to light up the harvest rooms for celebration. The light is both symbolic of new life, and the illumination of the world you've come to embrace, thrive in and celebrate. During this time another burning ritual is held, however instead of prayers of mourning, prayers of gratitude and joy are expressed.

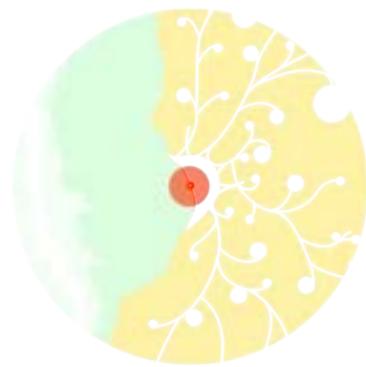
**TIMEFRAME:** Occurs following the recovery of the marsh in mid summer.

season of resurrection, model





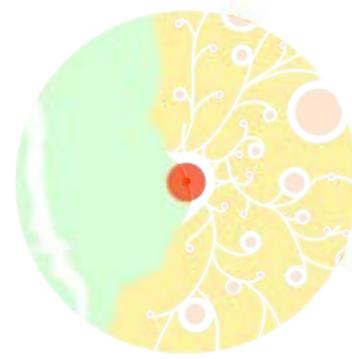
SEASON OF RESURRECTION



MARSH RECOVERY



RESURRECTION



FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

MARSH RESURRECTION

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



season of resurrection, model

This season is characterized by lush greens as the Spartina and Phragmites new growth really takes a hold, and begin to immerse the landscape. This is a moment full of life, joy and celebration. The harvest rooms now become spaces of gathering and the sharing of good energy with the new life of the season..



### witnessing resurrection

Entering the late spring, I was able to witness the return of the *Spartina patens*. I am still struck by the stark contrast between the lush greens of the new *Spartina* growth, and the amber waves of *Phragmite*. These two species continue to play on one another throughout the seasons in a beautiful dance.

"witnessing resurrection", digital photograph





## SEASON OF REMEMBRANCE | a dance in between

The final stage is the Season of Remembrance. This stage is the culmination of the healing cycle and is characterized by an important transition from celebration, into deep reflection where we recall that new abundance we found would not be possible without loss. On every full moon during this season, Phragmite lanterns are hung from the branches of The Ghost Forest. The illumination of the Ghost Forest, is a reminder of the root of this new found abundance, which is loss. A ritual flux dance is held, in which participants walk the line between the phragmite and the spartina recognizing the duality of joy and loss, old and new, light and dark.

During this ritual procession, participants start and end at the flux altar, which marks the pivot point or ecotone between the two worlds. The dance between the two, recognizes the impermanence of our world and the necessity to shift with the flux of ecosystem change in order to survive and thrive. Although this cycle has reached its completion, we will inevitably have to move through this cycle again. Even within the month's after we carved into the phragmite we've already begun to witness its regrowth. As it grows it will eventually fill and erase the spaces we've become so intimate with. That is the nature of the Season of Remembrance. In embracing the loss, we commence the cycle once again.

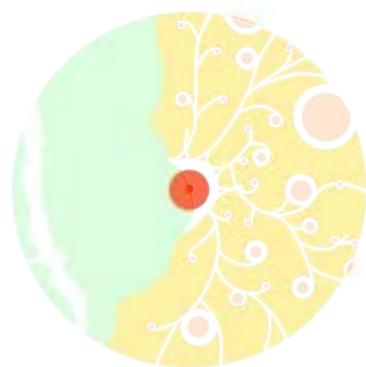
### TIMEFRAME:

This season begins at the transition point between new growth of the Phragmite, and the stage of translocation (when the plant sends nutrients to its rhizomes and prepares for dormancy).

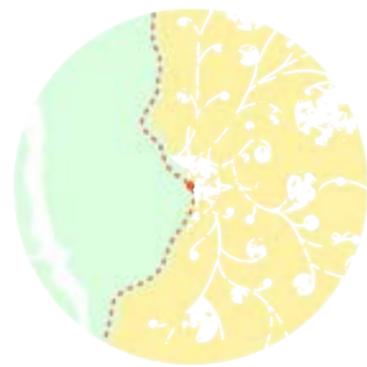
season of remembrance, model



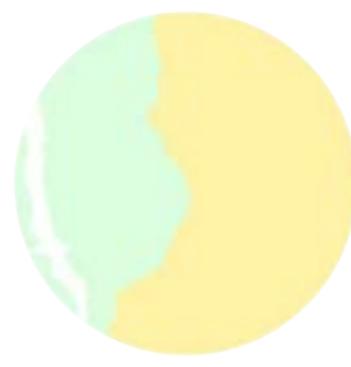
SEASON OF REMEMBRANCE



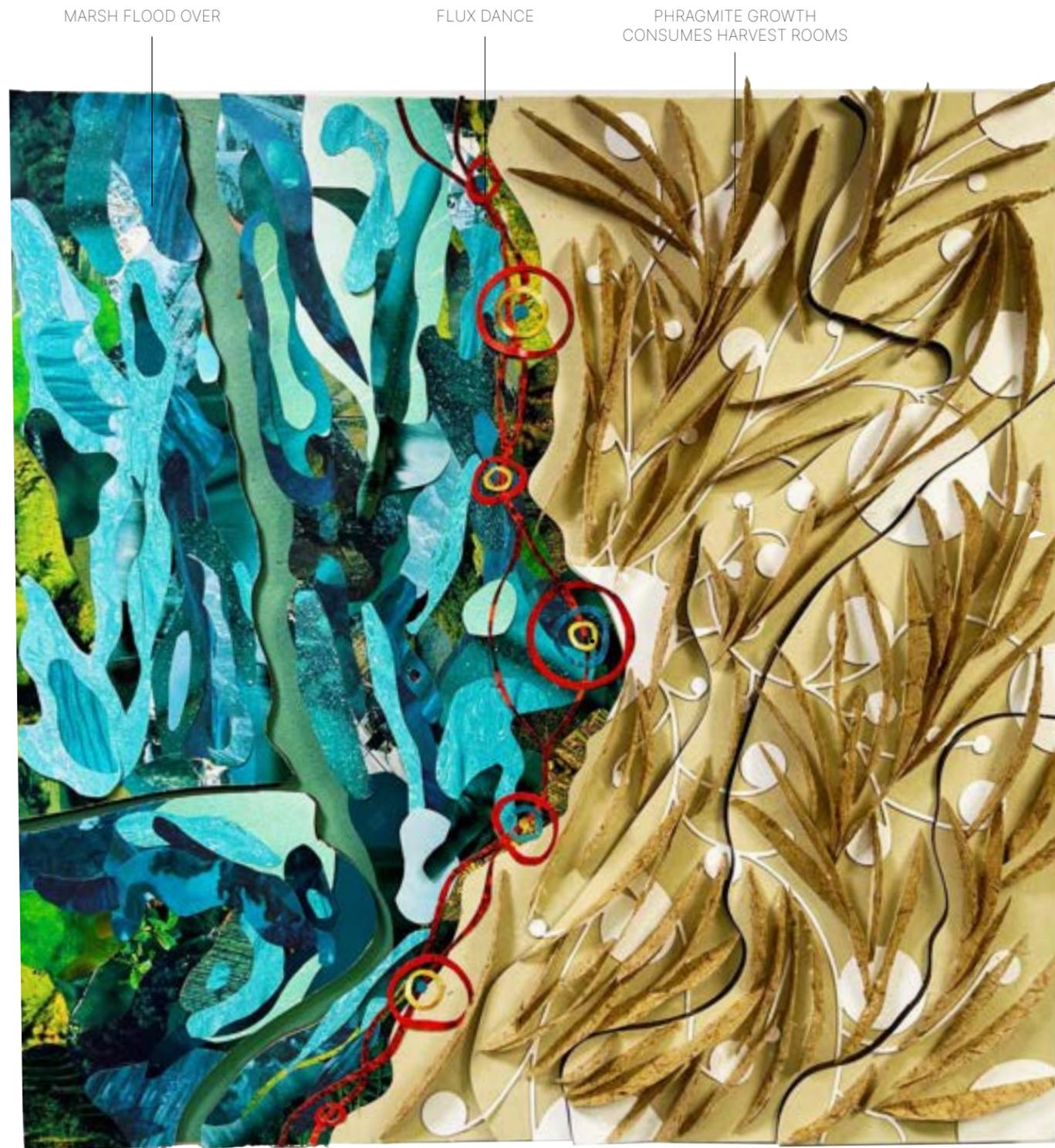
FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



FLUX DANCE



RELEASE



During the flux dance participants move along the dynamic line that runs along the Phragmite and Spartina. From wind, to wave action, to spring and neap tides, to soil erosion and flooding, walking the line at this becomes a space to witness moments of flux between these two zones.

season of remembrance, model

**FLUX DANCE** | a dance in between

To walk this dynamic line, we witness transition between the Phragmites and soartina first hand and the chaos of entangled within it. Through this practice we will learn to understand, observe, and move with these shifts in our environment. This is a unifying A that will bring together the Phragmites and Spartina and the tidal flow.



### **closing the loop**

During my visits each week, I continue to witness the new growth of the Phragmite as it fills in the gaps of what was cleared before. Though I've come to know, and love moving through the corridors of Phragmite, there comes a time to let go and embrace its new evolution. Soon the space we've come to know will be wiped away, signaling the beginning of a new journey into the cycle.

**new growth**, digital photograph





v\_reflections



## X | 5.7.2024

I'm exhausted, but my final review went very well. I feel like I was working down to the wire, but it paid off. Even though I was exhausted, it was so nice to have everyone gather to celebrate the work I've been producing throughout the year! By this point it was almost second nature to speak about it. There were quite a few critics, I think I counted ten in total which was a lot. Quite a few of my classmates and friends came by to support as well.

Some notable comments:

The critics were quite excited about the diversity of making processes I incorporated in my work from hand collage, to charcoal sketching, to paper making, to photography, to video, to writing, to lamp making, to woodworking, to hot casted glass etc. They were quite enthusiastic about my ability to integrate my artistic practice into my work as a means to explore and gain clarity throughout the process of this thesis journey. The audience had definitely appreciated the analog models (which was a relief just knowing how much time and energy I spent on them. They felt it really spoke to the down to earth spiritual nature of the work which would have not nearly been as effective with computer renderings. One critic had mentioned the representation style and small thumbnail sketches lended this to potentially being transformed into a graphic novel, which made me excited.

My whole process was highly reflective and personal and In the end I think that made the work much more rich for the critics to engage in. I was asked quite a few questions about the work, including who the audience was as it was so personal. I responded that I feel ritual and the culture behind ritual I feel should be for everyone. Although we have done it for millenia, we've lost sight of the necessity of the spiritual realm to adapt to the difficulties of loss and change. My thesis was attempting to shift culture in the direction of ritual.

This didn't really come up until I read the feedback from my secondary, but I think one of the biggest questions that came from this review was whether or not it was considered a design thesis? Some argued it was more of a personal artistic journey which is completely ok with me, but I question whether or not this lens should be excluded or included within the field of landscape design? I myself have always thought of landscape design as an artistic practice, and now I see it as a spiritual one too.

But is there a line between the two or should there be rather? I've always felt that landscape was what each individual made of it. Whether or not they wanted to abide by the current status quo.

IMAGE: "final review", digital photograph

**XI** | 5.14.2024

I just had my final thesis meeting. A sort of post reflection on my final review. It was brief, but we discussed some very important points to think about as I spend the next few weeks tying everything up.

One major point we discussed was the idea that my project in reality is several projects under an umbrella. We broke it up into two primary components however. On one side we have my own personal artistic and spiritual journey where I am exploring myself as a means to build a deeper relationship with Phragmites and our natural world. On the other, is the sort of synthesis of this introspective work as a means to create a framework in which communal space shaping ritual becomes a vehicle for healing through ecological grief in the wake of ecosystem change and climate catastrophe. These are two components which support each other, but can be presented in different ways depending on the audience. The primary critique my advisor made of my final presentation, which to an extent confused the critics, was that I seemed to mix both of these projects into one. There wasn't a hard line between my personal spiritual journey, and that of the thesis which was the development of this more accessible framework of ritual.

I think this was a good point to come away with from the discussion, as it could be a life's work really figuring out how the best avenue to communicate this work. As we are always told it will never truly be finished, but I'm happy with where I've ventured to so far. At least for myself, I really feel this process really opened so much for me and I'm truly grateful to everyone who's supported me along the way.

I spoke with my grandmother this weekend, who has always been such a powerful artistic influence in my life. She told me not to forget about the work that I've completed during my time here! Hold on to it tight! RISD has been such a wonderful space to plant the seeds and lay the groundwork for questions which I may ponder for the rest of my life. The true test will be to continue to give it life after I graduate.

My advisor told me that life will shift you in any which way, and it can be difficult to balance a personal practice with the million other things life will throw at you, but if you truly care about it, you will find space for it. One major piece of advice they gave was not to rush or force it. These things take time and patience, this work takes time, thought and patience. At the moment this work is still very raw, there's all sorts of questions and holes which remain. Such is the nature of the thesis as a result of exploring so many different veins of richness over this past year. I will definitely keep the moments of this past year close to my heart. Although it's surely down the line, one day I would like to refine this work into a book.

This journey is one of a lifetime, one I will remember forever.



"phragmites II", charcoal sketch 3.24.2024

## XII | FINAL REFLECTIONS

To conclude this work seems like an overwhelming task, as I feel it's opened up so many doors with unanswered questions. I guess that means I worked really hard.

To me, my thesis questioned the scope of landscape design and whether or not the tools of our profession can be leveraged to create and shape culture. I received pushback in the sense that some did not see my work as necessarily falling into the scope of a landscape designer's. Maybe not for the conventional firm's work, but I believe my thesis has broadened the scope for what a practice in landscape can be. Not solely for the creation of space which can function as a reflection of culture or a space which facilitates it, but one which makes it.

My explorations with Phragmites moved so much farther than just a reframe of the invasive species or learning to adapt to change. A New Grounding is asking for an entire cultural upheaval of the way we relate with our environment. Through my explorations, this golden reed had become a symbol of loss and renewal, a testament to human resilience, a call to action to acknowledge the pain in our hearts in our current climate reality, and the catalyst to take the steps as a community to grieve together with the land as our guide. I did not design space per se, but I began creating a philosophy of living and relationship with our evolving world which then had spatial implications. My reflection on our current relationship with the environment drove the creation or design of a new culture, the philosophies of this new culture inspired the ritual, the ritual then became the vehicle for shaping the landscape, and the cycle continues.

My thesis findings are important because they were a test of what our field could be. An extension beyond the conventional. One that has spatial implications which fall at the intersection of many schools of thought from the spiritual, to the poetic, to the artistic, to the political, to the theoretical, to the emotional, and of course the ecological.

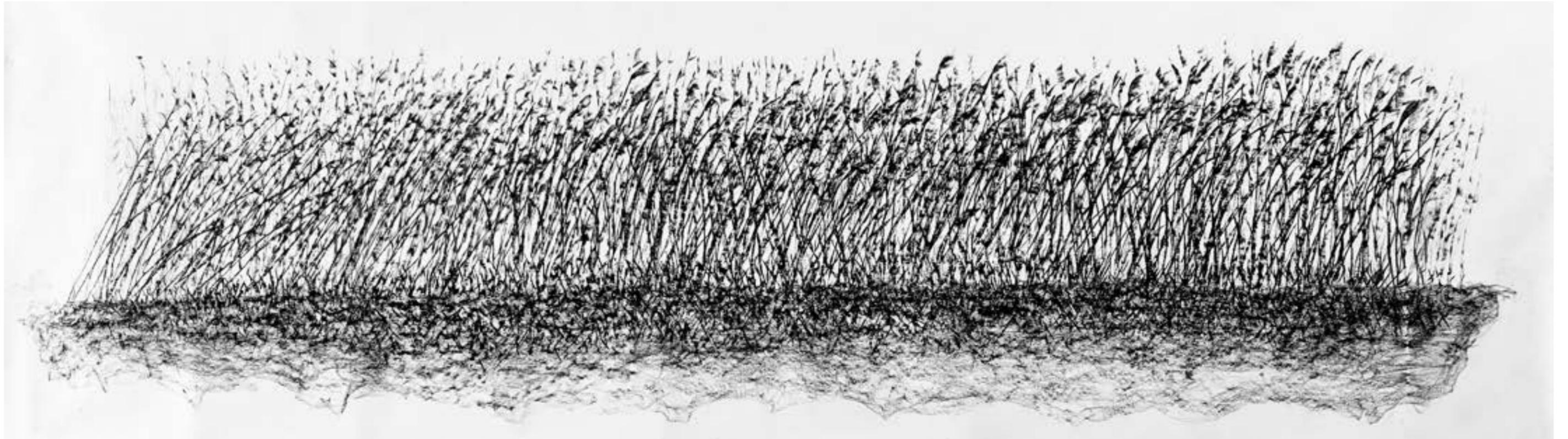
Whether or not it's considered a landscape design thesis, I feel this journey of a process has opened up so much in terms of my own values, questions and processes of inquiry as an artist and designer. As my advisor said, Phragmites is just the gateway, this year has been just a gateway to life's work. Looking ahead I wonder how my thesis will continue to manifest itself throughout my life. And with that I'd like to make a promise to myself. That wherever life takes me, I will never lose sight of this work, I will never lose sight of the spark of passion which ignites my drive to create, and if I do, to stay true to find what does.

Thesis is a gift.



"phragmites", charcoal sketch 2.11.2024

- ISAMU 5.16.2024



"phragmite wave", charcoal drawing 12.11.2023

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