



cc [Glusabe] Come and talk

turning my gaze I see her
suspended in the night sky
swollen and red
cycling on to a new beginning...

if you walk upon contains my footprints:
if breathe contains my breath ~ Sherry Mitchell

"Mar-dar-mes-kun-tea"
[Darmariscotta River's original name
when you hear the language
you also hear
history, medicine,
social graces, conversation,
and a sense of humor] ~ Sherry Mitchell

"We are of this land, Penahwapskek, the place where white rocks come out of the water" ~ Sherry Mitchell

We must trace
Back to the source
~ Carol Dand

we walked an old path along the river
with Moon and view and Hawks rising
I likened the physical act of our walk to everyday steps... wish

that our Miss Kall-Tea
"When you learn the language of the Mississippi River is a lifetime name,
you also learn
history, medicine,
social graces, conversation,
and a sense of humor"
~Mississippis

here white rocks come out of the water" ~ Sherry Mitchell

view and Hawks rising
everyday steps... wish i

could outwalk you / Demanding to be fed, relieved, watered, rested
Fighting every step of the way to / Walk away the pain we feel
~Carol Dana

there is no English
word flows so in tune
as it swirls through the
that grow the River
On the Banks
Mississippis



Sophie Welch

Deep Historical Perspectives in Archeology

Final Project

May 16, 2020

Creative Statement

Purpose: The goal of my painting is to visually synthesize some of the Penobscot poetry from Dawnland Voices--to depict a significant archeological site in Maine (Whaleback Shell Midden) along with visual cues and quotes from Penobscot poetry and stories which signal ancient histories and continued presence and resistance of Indigenous peoples. The quotes center around forming and reclaiming identity through assertions of Indigenous knowledge, and values of interconnectedness. In this way, there is a conversation between the archeological record (shell remains and midden site) with Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions (through poetry, prose stories).

Painting Process: Through all of this, I am grappling with depicting land from the place I too call my home, but that has been home to Penobscot people and other Wabanaki peoples for thousands of years. Additionally, I must continuously acknowledge my own part in benefiting from settler colonial structures, which have enacted violence, genocide, and cultural destruction for centuries. I also wanted to avoid appropriating Indigenous culture and using symbols in ways that furthered nonnative romanticizing about what it means to be Native American. So, I tried to stay close to the texts, letting the quotes and photographs of Whaleback Shell Midden inform my images directly. When I added certain things to the image, such as suggestions of footsteps or an

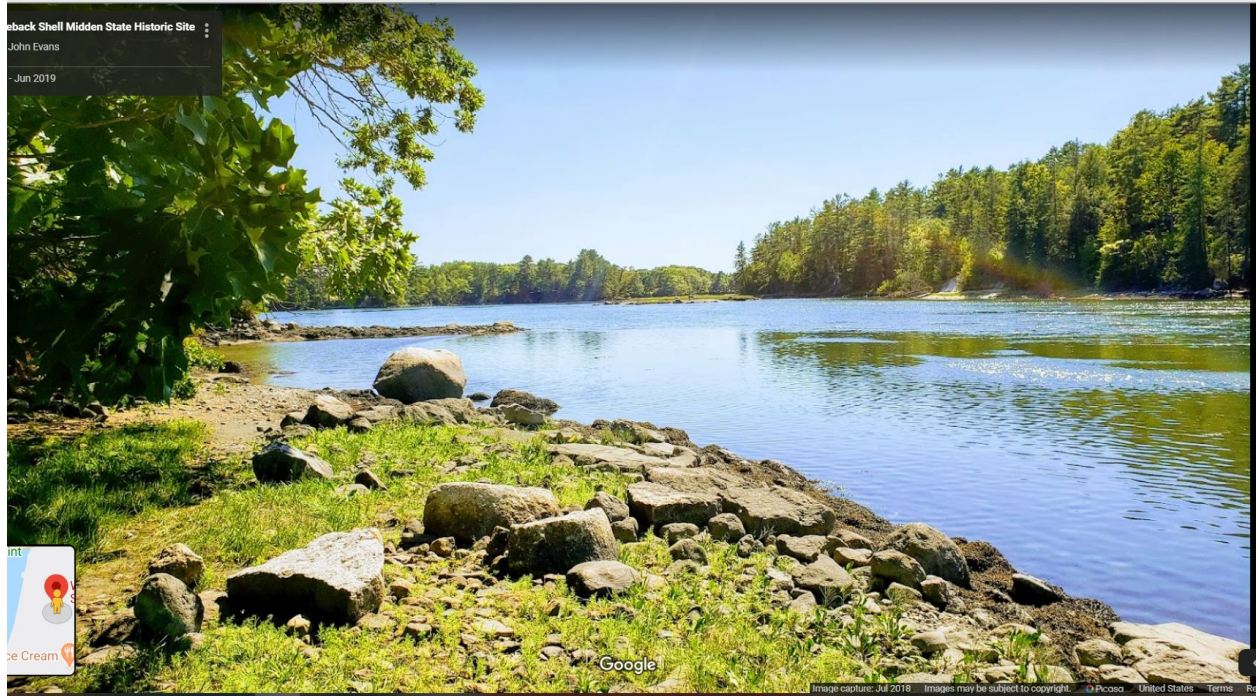
animal like the muskrat, it was because I found these things/themes significantly touched upon in the poetry, and felt they applied to the idea of identity, culture, resistance and Indigenous knowledge. For example, I used a quote from Carol Dana's poem, "We're Like Moss on the Rock" which questions erasure: "Will we forever be erased? No, it is here in our footsteps we must trace/Back to the source" (226) and interwove these words along the path in my painting. Footsteps are both a literal and metaphorical connection to those who came before, I joined descriptions of the power of native language from Sspsis with an image of the muskrat, from her poem describing the beauty of the Passamaquoddy word for the animal "Gew huz". Sspsis, writes, "Gewh huz, there is no English equivalent, For the word flows so in tune with the river, as it swirls through the rushes that grow on the banks" (220).

Before starting to paint, I spent several days researching poetry and oral traditions. To begin painting, I first viewed several images of the Whaleback Shell Midden site via Google Maps. The photographs which I eventually chose to use as references are included in this document. The first is a landscape shot of the site, featuring the shoreline, reed grasses, and Darmariscotta River. The second image is a closeup shoreline where shell midden remains are clearly evident—I chose to include this image in a small rectangle off to the side of the painted landscape. I wanted to combine these two images so that the larger physical landscape can be seen, but the "archeological evidence" of ancient Indigenous peoples is also featured. The painting of the landscape is the physical site, and what people see as they walk through. The quotes, however, which weave their way through rocks, along tree branches, and into the sky, are the Indigenous voices which are present, have been present, and bring up significant knowledge and questions in relation to the archeological findings. Throughout painting, I tried to keep in

mind my motivations for this project, rather than resorting to simply creating an image. I paused during the initial phases to say a brief land acknowledgement.

A note on Whaleback Shell Midden and Excavations: Much of the shell middens at Whaleback were excavated and destroyed in the 1800s, used for chicken feed. This was made possible by the Harvard Peabody Museum: “Although the elimination of the heap had initially spread panic among Putnam’s circles, Peabody’s collaboration with the Damariscotta Shell and Fertilizer Company...spared the museum the expense of shell removal” (Kuiken 5). The site is now an open park, and seems to have small markers indicating the historical significance of the area (based on images from google photos). I also appreciated another quote from Kuiken’s piece regarding the uniqueness of shell mounds and the ways in which they reject a linear time model: “The shells’ high levels of alkalinity slow down the process of organic decay and preserve the matter lodged within the piles...shell heaps...make present in what other geological formations disappears through decay, or what in historiographic discourses vanishes under a unifying pull toward a coherent, rectilinear narrative” (92).

Poetry and Selected Quotes: Most of the selected poetry includes “We” and “I” statements, which center around cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous history. The Penobscot poets I focused on the most include: Carol Dana, Sherry Mitchell, and Ssipsis, whose works can all be found in the Penobscot section of *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing From New England*, edited by Siobhan Senior.



Bibliography

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Ssipsis. "Gewh Huz." *Dawnland Voices: an Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England*, by Jaime Battiste and Siobhan Senier, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2014, (pp. 220-221).

What follows is a collection of the quotes I used in thinking about and creating the painting:

People

Rhonda Frey

Link to Abbe Museum:

<https://www.abbemuseum.org/blog/2011/03/rhonda-frey-gift-remembered.html>

<https://www.abbemuseum.org/>

Joseph Nicolar

Molly Spotted Elk

Places

Whaleback Midden:

<https://www.coastalrivers.org/trail/whaleback-shell-midden-state-historic-site/>

<https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/its-not-just-garbage-identifying-ceremony-and-cosmology-in-shell-middens/>

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/discover_history_explore_nature/history/whaleback/index.shtml

Vesna Kuiken's article "Idiorrhhythmic Regionality, or How to Live Together in Sarah Orne Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs"

"The shells' high levels of alkalinity slow down the process of organic decay and preserve the matter lodged within the piles--vestiges of natural, prehistoric, and Native American life accumulated over a millennium--curiously longer than under ordinary circumstances" (91).

"Shell heaps...make present what in other geological formations disappears through decay, or what in historiographic discourses vanishes under a unifying pull toward a coherent, rectilinear narrative. In this way they bring visibly together diverse eras and distances" (92).

Penobscot River

Quotes: "The past is present. Time is like the ripples from a canoe as it moves through the water. The ripples are constant and present."

" Jamie Bissonette Lewey, Abenaki

Oral Traditions

Gluscabe--"He came and taught us how to live. He strove to create a balance in what was. He sometimes appears as a trickster himself. He interacted with the animals and gave us the dog. He derived most of his teachings from his grandmother Woodchuck. In many of these tales you can

find what our values are through Glusgabe's adventures. It is said that he will return if you call on him. One way to do that is to build a fire by the water" (Dawnland Voices Page 200 Carol Dana).

Referred to as "Klose-kur-beh" by Joseph Nicolar

P 146 references oyster shells and Darmariscotta River. "Mar-dar-mes-kun-tea" is the original name of the river. Oysters= "Mardes-sus-suk".

"For most of the Nation's existence, the river served as a source of food and water as well as a highway that connected the many villages along its banks while giving access to hunting grounds in the north and the ocean and clam banks to the south. **Literally, the word Penobscot means 'the rocky place' or 'the descending rocky ledge' and refers to a ten-mile succession of treacherous rapids and waterfalls that once marked the river from present-day Old Town to Bangor, Maine**". (1) Intro to Joseph Nicolar

"Archeological studies have found evidence of human habitation in Maine dating back about eleven thousand years, perhaps more. Penobscot tribal traditions hint at an early presence, before the last continental glacier entirely receded, when cold weather dominated and mammoths and mastodons still roamed North America." (2)

"The division of labor gradually coalesced around relatively fixed gender roles, with males and females taking on different--albeit equally crucial--responsibilities. Hunting, fishing, warfare, and the fabrication of canoes and implements of warfare were responsibilities of men, while women wove basswood or birch-bark mats and baskets, attended to cooking, child care, and the preparation of skins and clothing, and together with the children, gathered plant materials for food and medicine." (3).

Clan membership was patrilineal

"Despite many cultural differences between these tribes, their traditional stories generally taught them that the plants and animals were their helpers and companions, just as the people, in the ir turn, were to act as kin and companions to the living world around them" (4)

"Many in the Penobscot Nation still revere Maine's tallest mountain, Mount Katahdin, as the place where Earth mother reaches to the sky, a place of enduring sacred power and beauty" (4-5).

"By the 1580s, mysterious illnesses were being reported by bands of Micmacs (also an Eastern Algonquian speaking people) in Nova Scotia." (5).

*****"No one agrees with every one of these writings. They belong to the authors" (201).

The first Mother of the People Sacrifices herself, becoming Corn

"She told the man after he had slain her, to get twisted branches of the small trees and tie the branches around her neck and drag her body to a large open space of land and to drag it all over the open space, and when the flesh was worn away to the bones turn it and wear away the other

side, and after he had dragged her body all over the land to bury her bones in the middle of it and then come away, and in seven moons to go and gather all he found on the land...My bones you can not eat, but you can burn it, and it will bring peace to you and your children” (Nicolar 136)

Images of Pollution from Ssipsis’ poem:

Footsteps: **Carol Dana**-- “Will we forever be erased? No, it is here in our **footsteps** we must trace/Back to the source.” (p226) From “We’re Like the Moss on the Rock”
TREE ROOTS “Here our tree roots grow/Strong and deep”(From Caribou Lake Winter).

“I walked an old path along the river/With moon and view and hawks rising/I likened the physical act of our walk to the spiritual act of everyday steps” (229). (From A Walk to Ktadhin)
“Wish I could outwalk you/Demanding to be fed, relieved, watered, rested/Fighting every step of the way to/Walk away the pain we feel” (230). (From A Walk to Ktadhin)

Sherry Mitchell: “We are of this land, Penahwapskek, the place where the white rocks come out of the water”

“The land that you place your feet upon contains my **footprints**; the air that you breathe contains my breath” (239).

“Many of [our people] have lost their way, blinded by generational wounds that have been ingrained into the public psyche, deafened by the sounds of justifiable homicide and historical references to a people ‘destined to be conquered’. (239).

“The warrior of today may look different from those listed in the history books, but their mission remains intact: to serve and protect their people and to ensure the survival of generations yet to come. It is this mission, this responsibility, that you must never forget” (240).

Sky Woman “Turning my gaze I see her/suspended in the night sky/swollen and red, eminent/cycling on toward a new beginning....I feel myself spiraling/cycling on toward a new beginning” (241).

Ssipsis:”When you learn the language you also learn history, medicine, social graces, conversation, and a sense of humor” (221) (from **Gewh Huz**)

“I have been convinced that the language is music and the speakers sing their words. At the end of this chapter, I have set the recipe for muskrat stew on music paper”.

“Gewh huz, there is no English equivalent, for the word flows so in tune with the river as it swirls through the rushes that grow on the banks” (220).