

Labour is the Body; Time is the Bridge

By

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Abstract

The artist's own, female, Métis body reclaims space, history, and family stories that focus on a direct matriarchal line of five women. By embodying a creative interpretation of their physical labour, through slow conscious work, or by considering the body as a form of measurement and an open channel of communication, their life stories become a point of expressing and repairing lost homelands. The artist takes process-heavy and repetitive techniques, both as time-based approaches, and translates them into a physical experience of honouring the lives of those women.

Material culture is an all-encompassing term to describe the interrelationship between people and objects and how those objects are subsequently imbued with cultural meaning. It is through the use of everyday items such as blankets, tea towels, chairs, or worn clothing, that cultural identities are often seen and enacted. This offers an important perspective on how we communicate our lived experiences.

My process begins with archives, and the subsequent transmission into the arena of a contemporary creative practice, representing the continued relevance that material culture has on our daily lives. This positioning demonstrates the present effects of these histories and narratives upon the descendants of the original makers. Despite this, the vast majority of material culture objects, housed within museums and archives, are collected and preserved within cabinets and drawers. While not on display, the voice of these works is limited in their scope due to their isolation and unreachable locations. The limited accessibility to archives has meant that the knowledge contained in these archived objects has been inaccessible to families, individuals and communities for generations.

My artwork is a re-imagining and new vision for archival information which is non-institutional, matrilineal minded and built from experiential relationships between the artist and user. I further conceive of this version of the archive of being inclusive of family stories, kin experiences and family tree lineage research. Countless years of research undertaken by relatives, community members, and myself, is accumulated within these works and thesis. It is rare that any government document, line of provenance, or scrip application can truly encapsulate the lives and experiences of the people and material culture they represent. Rather, the nuanced transmission and relational immediacy of storytelling as an agent of archiving information carries a more immediate and culturally significant need. It also proposes a lack of

non-linear associations related to the knowledge carried by these items. Non-linear, in this context, refers to the continuous transmission of history and story via material culture and oral traditions. Where, through handling, exploring and close looking, the untold story of the stitches, linings, creases and fading can be recognized as a voice of its own, continuously speaking. This voice pierces through the constraints of time to make connection to family, specifically the women makers, available via these material objects.

Home Lines



Boyer family photograph. Mary LaRocque and Louis Boyer centred

My relations arrived at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in the early 1800's. Since this time, the Boyers, LaRocques, McDougalls, Lespérences and Grenons have left and

returned to this land in various and significant ways. My own return to this junction has initiated a deep connectivity with my heritage and my family history within my art practice. I feel a responsibility to project towards the future, with one hand crossing the most insurmountable divide; time.

My Father and Auntie began telling me stories about my great grandmother, Mary Rosalie LaRocque, from a very young age. The retelling of stories, based at the farm in the Souris Valley, captured my imagination and revolved around the tenacity, strength of will, and care that exuded from my great grandmother. These stories projected me into a journey, in adulthood, where I sought to know more about other female relatives. Therefore, I have given special consideration to a matrilineal line of five women in my family: beginning with my great grandmother Mary LaRocque, Emilie McDougall, Rosalie Lespérance, Marguerite Grenon, and Nowananikkwee. Through my research, I continuously ran into dead ends or sparse information about these women who were as fundamental as Mary to their communities. Ample archival information and personal written accounts of my male relatives were comparably easy to find. This led me to create a new type of platform to honour the lives of these women, through a contemporary art practice.

This body of work and exhibition revolves around the lives of Mary, Emilie, Rosalie, Marguerite and Nowananikkwee and their prominence in the social, political and economic fabric within their Métis communities, their role within intimate family spaces and my newly established relationship with them.

Restoring and acknowledging this lineage network is a place to locate myself and is championed by the relationship of my body, as living cultural memory, to the specificity of relevant places to my family. The strong physical and psychic association of the five women to the Red River, St. Boniface, the municipality of Taché, St. Norbert, and St. Francois Xavier, areas where I have visited or now live and walk, is a reminder of the powerful connection of place and movement to the relationship with ancestors. Residual physical labour remains entrenched in the land and it resonates and reverberates with the experiences of these five women. It is this embedded labour that pleads to be acknowledged. The invaluable physical labour that Indigenous women provided, that went unseen, is something that Métis artist and scholar, Sherry Farrell Racette, discusses at length in her writing, including her essay titled “Nimble Fingers and Strong Backs: First Nations and Métis Women in Fur Trade and Rural Economies”. Farrell Racette writes that “from the fur trade to the twentieth century, aspects of Euro-Canadian economies have been dependent on a pool of female Aboriginal laborers” (149). From her archival research, Farrell Racette provides examples of both diarists and Elders’ accounts of Indigenous women being hired for physical labour then returning home to tend to their families, homes and to sew or mend clothing (156, 157). This glaring omission of Indigenous women’s labour within their communities has contributed to the continued invisibility of their historical contributions (Farrell Racette 149). The handmade clothes and mended holes were continued work after hours and offer a tangible record of the overall labour forgotten to history and time. I feel a particular void exists between me and my female kin, that is accentuated by this lack of historical acknowledgment.

Stephen Horne's essay "Embodying Subjectivity" provides an analysis of labour intensive art practices as they relate to remembering, the role of the body and a spiritual sense of "wholeness" (38, 39). Within my art practice hand stitching, work with multiples, and repetitive processes, unite various mediums and express concepts found in Horne's writing. The slow conscious labour of beadwork, or hand stitching, becomes the driving force behind the experience of honouring the memories of the five women. Not only are the actions of these techniques repetitive, but they are also intrinsically connected to the body's experience while working. This creative labour, enacted by me, is in direct association with the quieted narratives of my female kin. In this way, the experiences of my own Métis body are a conduit for broader historical narratives, while the essential work of physically re-encountering this history creates opportunity to further transmit forgotten or quieted knowledge and information.

The women of my family continue to have a voice through me and a role in the shifting understanding of Métis history, politics, social relations and creative industries today. This work is a reintroduction to a cultural homeland and a rekindling of ideas around family, homebuilding, community connections and kinship: a strategy of understanding personal narratives next to historical ones.

Bangs from Scratch



Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Emilie, Mary (detail). 2017

Cotton tea towel, seed beads, fir wooden wall hooks.

This is the space that I choose to meet Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary. At the intersection of family recipes, kitchen time, and care are sensory connections that can be made across the boundaries of time. The taste of home is rounded out by memories of my dad making Aunty Lucy's recipe for bangs in our own kitchen. Aunty Lucy's bangs are soft, sweet but salted, squared fry bread with slits in the center, and her instructions are sacred; they

are a place to learn not to rush, to work with what you have and to care for those around you. The space of the kitchen is where my family, gathers, sits, eats, drinks, and visits.

The art work *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary* uses hand beaded floral imagery on woven gridded tea towels. Varying shades of white beads, shifting between visible, and invisible on the surface of the fabric, form the basis of the illusion on the white cotton. The set of five tea towels, one for each woman, casually hang at an angle from fabric hoops on fir wall hooks and are installed at various heights and distances from one another. The grids on the tea towels vary from long stretching rectangular lines to a single squared grid towel design.

As source material, I begin with functional objects in the home. The widely accessible platform of material culture carries a strong connection and impact on our daily experiences of culture and self. I see the space of material culture as being the ideal stage to develop discourse around the historically quiet knowledge of women's lives and creative practices. The impact of altering home objects, such as tea towels, now overwhelmingly mass produced, brings attention to the heightened perception of the emotional space that they occupy. The incorporation of beadwork contradicts the mundanity of daily routine that typically allows tea towels to recede from awareness.

The beaded floral imagery on each tea towel reflects the lives and individuality of these five women. The content that informs the designs is sourced from archives, family stories, genealogy work and translated into a "flower language" (Dubin 11). In these organic networks symbolic of relationships and growth, connectivity and nature are intrinsically linked. Floral

beadwork, a categorically feminine form associated with embellishment, operates as a device that expresses the persistence and strength in cultural practices (Dubin 14). The nature of the designs inhabits the realm of the decorative in a way that disputes the term and confronts it. Janis Jefferies, a feminist craft historian and artist, observes in her essay “Pattern, Patterning” that “the taste for the decorative was pathologised as feminine, as embellishment, as style, as frivolous, as excessive and was therefore constantly repressed within the rhetorical devices of Modernism” (7).

The use of decorative devices within the series *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs* does not comply with typical societal norms, in that they rather confront and intersect with predominant dialogues of land claim, political dissent, and Métis resistance. The selected grid is indicative of the various methods of land division that each generation would have contended with. Seen as a pattern, the formal visual qualities of this system of land division (long skinny rectangles) bridge the gap between land and objecthood expanding the platform to experience place. The formal properties of a river lot, imbued within objects associated with femininity, such as tea towels, resonate as a recognizable system that not only speaks to patterns of behaviour but also to the embodiment of routine and repetition in daily life. The association of these floral designs, and this recognizable form of a river lot, inhabit concepts more closely related with *Détournement*. A French word utilized by the Situationist International and again used by Lois S. Dubin when describing the “deflection of institutional symbols of authority and power back upon themselves by means of extracting them from their habitual associations and reassigning them to entirely new purposes” (14). In her book, *Trading Identities*, Ruth B. Phillips further writes: “by adapting floral designs, aboriginal people used the conventions of the dominant culture to express in a muted way their dissenting point of view” (Phillips 196).

Therefore, despite the near invisibility of the beaded floral designs, there is a poignant interruption in the grid of the tea towel and ultimately the rigid framework and colonial narratives complicit with land ownership and division.

This notion of femininity “interrupting” the landscape in important moments of personal and social reclamation can also be seen in a series of staged images by Amalie Atkins, titled, *Summoning*. The women in Atkins’ works stand isolated in an empty prairie field, all dressed in the same belted red jumper, mustard yellow turtleneck and white headband. The collective of women simultaneously appears ingrained in the gold hues natural to a prairie palette yet stand conspicuously vertical within the landscape. The unwavering stance of these women and their power to disarm the intense horizontal orientation of the prairies, positions their presence as a force of empowerment (Borsa 33). The location could be almost anywhere on the plains and presents an opportunity to imagine our own selves in this place. In this narrative the viewer is provided enough ambiguous space to imagine the relationship between these women and the land. Atkins creates opportunity to envisage multiple experiences within the frame of her photograph. This echoes similar implications within my work, where a group of women is commemorated in relation to land based discourses.

Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs aims to establish relationships with passed ancestors, within the intimate space of the kitchen. The beaded designs have come to represent the lives and experiences of my relatives and are charged with the personal intimacy of knowing each name. The permeation of lineage into the botanical form, presents the tangible knowledge attained through this line of inquiry. The women that I have committed to representing and the nature of the stitching labour of beadwork, as an activity that each woman would have likely undertaken,

brings me closer to them as living relatives. As I go through the physical motions, the power of these shared set of actions help to elucidate the terms of building new relationships with Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie and Mary. In this way, repetitive actions are an essential component in the process of remembering as it expresses time, intimacy, and a relational connection to ancestors. Therein, by connecting contemporary actions (of hand making objects in the home) to the history of that process, a confluence of timelines is created through a shared process of repetitive acts. My art practice draws invaluable connections to this by considering the original practitioners of these art forms in relation to my own body, carrying out the similar creative processes.

A Monument, A Body



La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin. Fir. 2017

When the notion of land and home meet, complex dualities of positive and negative experiences can exist. Both can be sites of familial cultural erasure, displacement as well as a space of comfort, safety and protection, inclusive of all the various degrees in between. The scrip era of settler land claims is a tumultuous time in Canada, especially between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. This point in history is a starting place to consider some of the resulting intricacies of current cultural and social relations and is present as context underlining my work. During this era, numerous members of my family were registering for scrip, relocating from their original homes along the Red River and attempting to work within the new constraints of a government legislated system of land ownership. Michel Hogue's book, *Metis and the Medicine Line*, illustrates the subtle, but deliberate "shift from mercantile capitalism to agrarian capitalism and from trade-based to a land-based form of colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth century" (6). These new negotiations of space were duplicated at the regional level, where local governmental authorities were enacting similar principles of land survey, division and sales. The event of *La Barrière* occurred on November 1st, 1869, at what is now St. Norbert, when a group of concerned Métis blocked the passage of Canadian government officials on their way to negotiate the absorption of the lands of Manitoba into the North-West Territories (The Province of Manitoba, Sports, Culture and Heritage). The McDougall house, now located at this site, currently stands as a heritage building and as part of a monument to the event of *La Barrière*. Originally erected in the municipality of Taché, the story of this house begins with its construction by the hands of the surrounding community, an expert axeman, and family and relatives (City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee).

Rosalie Lespérance, born August 13th 1838, married Duncan McDougall (Jr.) at St. Francois Xavier in 1858. Birth records of their 12 children indicate that they lived back and forth between St. Francois Xavier and St. Boniface from 1858 to 1874 followed by the relocation to the municipality of Taché. Many of the members of the new community around Taché, my family included, had previously found employment as voyageurs, hunters or traders, but were now adapting to life as farmers (Société historique de Saint-Boniface).

The artwork, *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* shares part of the original name of the area: originally known as la Petite-Pointe-des-Chênes, later renamed Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and then finally re-named Taché (Société historique de Saint-Boniface). Rather than oak, fir, is the foundation of the work and the vehicle to consider Métis house construction methods as a metaphor of community strength, and the persistence of personal family narratives.

The McDougall house now stands at its new site in St. Norbert as a prime example of a style of Métis house construction, using the dovetail joint. The dovetail joint, as a woodworking technique, is at the pinnacle of tensile strength, making it very difficult to pull apart. The innate strength can be noted due to the lack of metal fasteners used to keep these houses together. The enduring presence of this style of house still dotting the prairie landscape demonstrates the actual and very literal strength of the dovetail joint. Further, these houses were often assembled with the help of relatives or neighbours in the surrounding area (City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee). Therefore, this steadfast visibility can be imagined as a variation on the monument, wherein it celebrates the communal nature of its construction which denotes durability and vitality. Standing at 68” tall and approximately 20” wide, the cascading series of dovetail joint blocks, forms a corner. The dimensions of the work are exacted from my own

female Métis body, and offer a placeholder for Indigeneity within the gallery space. Using this scale as a starting point, the measurements of the piece employ much of the same techniques that Duane Linklater utilizes to disarm the institutional structures in his work *Untitled Problem*.

The presence of Linklater's body exists as both measurement and as the catalyst for disarming the power of colonial framework in galleries and museum spaces. In similar ways to the methods employed by Linklater, *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* can be seen to lay uncertainty at the foot of a mixed vernacular between interior spaces, the body, and the language of construction and larger monuments. Linklater uses his height as the scale for the series of powder coated steel beams that suspend, or stand upon, found materials that are hidden within the walls of our constructed urban environments (Gerges). This piece, as part of a larger exhibition *From Our Hands*, is an intergenerational exhibition also featuring the fur trimmed mitts, beaded moccasins and mukluks of Ethel Linklater, Duane Linklater's grandmother, which originally exhibited in *From Our Hands: an exhibition of native hand crafts* (Gerges). These works, borrowed from the Thunder Bay Art gallery, are a reminder of the barriers to accessing Indigenous-made material culture, even by the family of the maker. In this case, Linklater "sees this as an opportunity for him to be a sort of inter-institutional conduit, to exercise his agency within the system and negotiate with it to suit his objectives" (Gerges). *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* establishes a marker and witness to the reclamation of familial knowledge, through the use of the female Métis body as guiding measurement and presence within institutional establishments.

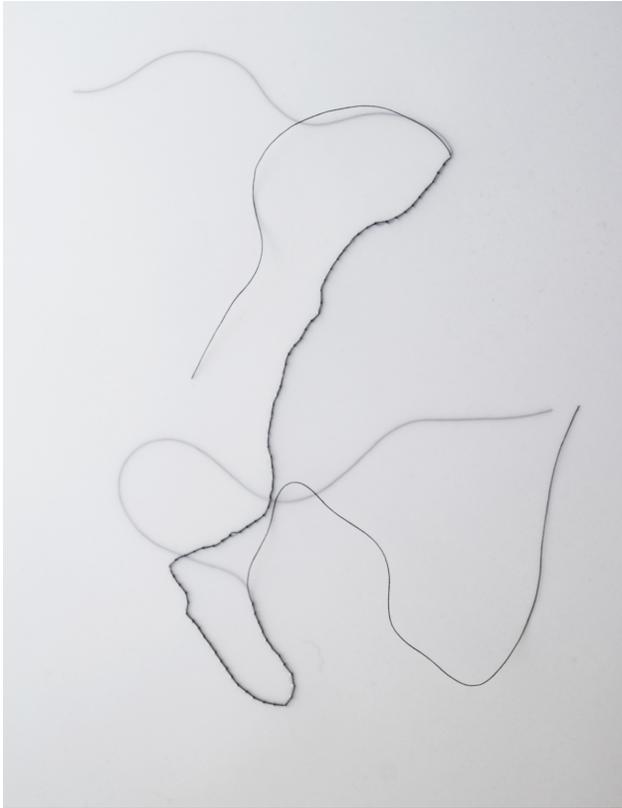
The role of the Métis home within this dialogue has historically been a meeting ground, where the interiority of home space has an expansive definition. My exploration of this space has

come to include a variety of interpretations, including: literal familial houses, metaphorical notions of the house as a bodily vessel, and the social and political experiences that have historically occurred in such places. The function of the home in this array of considerations elevates the invaluable role of femininity, and womanhood within these spheres, where otherwise, they are less considered or ignored. *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin*, stands as a monument, in scale, scope and meaning, much in the same way that the McDougall house stands today. The tall, thin form of the dovetail joints exemplifies the unwavering cultural fortitude found embedded in community support and making practices.

Métis architectural researchers David Fortin and Jason Surkan turn to David Burley's 1980 research into Métis home structures in their essay "Towards an Architecture of Métis Resistance". David Burley describes the unique aspects of Métis architecture that amalgamate European elements with Indigenous perspectives: "The Métis adopted the [Georgian, or Euro-Canadian] façade but not the interior...the symbolic message of the Métis house front masks the reality of Métis cultural values...This built environment reflects openness, informality, lack of rigidly defined structure, and continuity with the landscape" (qtd. in Fortin and Surkan). The openness that Burley describes, and that Fortin and Surkan explores in detail, is duplicated in the vast imagined space that *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* includes and delineates. The multi-use possibilities of the main floor in the McDougall house, and other homes of Métis construction, allowed for utilitarian use of space: "The large room could easily transform from a dining or living space into a gathering space or dance floor, facilitating cultural events and everyday practices" (Fortin and Surkan). The corner is constructed as a single point from which the viewer either imagines the resulting walls or accepts the uncertainty of not knowing where ownership and delineation occurs. The

establishment of multi-use possibilities for the space surrounding *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* duplicates the pre-existing canon of the Métis home. Extending out from the ends of the work, on the floor, are clear dotted vinyl lines demarcating space in front of the sculpture. The perimeters of the installation of *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* encapsulates *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs* and suggests interiority while also summoning semiology closely associated with mapping. The dotted line exists as a confluence of many analogous symbols: the stitch, a path on a map, architectural planning space, and sewing patterns. This simultaneous overlay reflects the complexities of imbuing home and land with the heavy burden of cultural placeholding. While feminine labour practices establish invaluable conditions to the creation of spaces, establishment of worldviews, and future conditions. The surrounding partially delineated space of the installation marks out the existence of future social and political uses. Upon entering the personal space of the work, the viewer is also entering into the private conversation of cultural experiences.

Mending a Diaspora



Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains.
Performance documentation. 2018.



Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains.
Boot liner, cotton yarn. 2018

My family's relationship to the forty-ninth parallel is complex and seemingly ever-transformative, as I continue to learn more about the social and political circumstances of its establishment. Mary LaRocque and her husband Louis Boyer were both born in areas adjacent to the border in Leroy, North Dakota, and Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan respectively. Both were born only a few years after the North American Boundary Commission completed their work of plotting, mapping, and marking the forty-ninth parallel in 1874 (Hogue 1). Hogue's writing clearly demonstrates that despite a gradual implementation of the new regulations, the continued movement of the Métis, and other Indigenous groups, across borders were "...an obvious

reminder of pre-existing territorialities and sovereignties that new national borders such as the forty-ninth parallel sought to overwrite” (6). Although physical borders were now in place, Indigenous populations were focusing on different divisions, those according to kinship, which represented an insurgence to the new social and political boundaries that were altering their lives and livelihood (Hogue 4, 5).

Mary and Louis’s lives brought them back and forth across the forty-ninth parallel, mimicking the historical precedent of fluid Métis homemaking strategies that predates borders. The final move was in the dead of winter: Mary and her mother Emilie McDougall singlehandedly carted a family of 6 young children from Dunseith, North Dakota, to their new home in the Souris Valley, Saskatchewan, approximately 250 km away, where Louis was waiting for them. The Souris Valley was to be a new Métis community, similar to the ones that previous generations had relocated from. Those places -- The Red River Settlement, Turtle Mountain, St. Boniface, and Taché -- were all home to my family, and, under varying circumstances, they were displaced from them all.

At its core, *Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains* is about stitching back together all of the dissident bits and bobs that are left behind when a collective people are displaced from their homelands. These are not literal objects left behind but the parts of us that stay behind because of our intimate connections to places. Those metaphorical remnants are a tether, a psychic umbilical cord, inexplicably drawing us to sites, places and lands that are part of a genetic inheritance.

Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains is a Performance and Installation of hand stitched, dark grey tags, laser cut from boot-liner. The origin of these shapes is from surveyors’

chains used to measure land, with specific contextual consideration to the demarcation of River lots. The repeating series of five tags (originally metal) appear incrementally along one of these chains, measuring every 12 ft, for a full distance of 60 ft. The complete number of tags in the artwork reaches 4,225, equal to the full square measurement of an average River lot. The repeated series of five shapes is brought together by a seemingly continuous thread of the same colour, in a methodologically similar manner to beadwork. Rather than beads, boot-liner introduces principles of Indigenous mobility as important to the foundation of how we view the narrative of land division and sales.

The near invisibility of the threads holding the entire length of chain together ushers in the quieted labour of women's work, with the hand being paramount in imagining how these fabric shapes came together. It is clear that these tags are not strung through the obvious holes available in the original design, rather, the more secure manner of fastening, is also the most difficult. This reflects the nature of reparative actions, against colonial frameworks, in the world around us. The humble act of mending and power of repetitive actions, creates channels to re-establish a relationship to place and its history. The repetition of stitching thousands of fabric tags together becomes meditative and simultaneously embodies the measurement of time, closeness, distance, labour, value and care.

The work of Maria Hupfield, a member of Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario (Hupfield), incorporates replicated Indigenous material culture such as canoes, gauntlets, bandolier bags, and capes, made from industrial felt, into performance. These duplicated handmade items hold moments of identical resemblance to their original counterparts, while also offering moments of unusual dissimilarity. The original use of these items is implemented through performance -

gauntlets are worn on the hands, bandolier bags are worn across the chest, even felt canoes are portaged across spaces –the uncanny simulacrum that is offered in place of the original consumes the viewers’ attention. The softness of normally hard objects or the complete discolouration and material transformation become indicators of Hupfields handmade process.

Sometimes occurring outdoors, but often inside the space of the gallery, Hupfield activates these items by wearing them either through live performance or in video installed in the gallery. Jingle cones often adorn the objects in Hupfields work such as *Jingle Spiral* and *Jingle Boots* in which the sound of her movement is an additional component that acknowledges the long history of cultural objects being unused, unheard and unseen. Hupfield uses her body in movement as a way to activate these objects, to demonstrate their uses and to present Indigenous led alternatives to a model of museology. In similar ways, the performance of *Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains* describes an alternative story of surveyors chain, where the impact and history is experienced and reclaimed by the body of Métis descendants.

The performance of *Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains* begins as a line reaching from the edge of the Red River into the School of Art gallery space, where the final installation of the work will remain. Harboring a perceived goal to carve out a marker or a path that describes unseen divisions of land that remain below this urban infrastructure. These invisible boundaries remain embedded in the consciousness of Métis and are evidence of our sovereignty. As a path the work indicates Indigenous mobility that I, enact through performance, and that my ancestors mutually employed.

The action of gathering up the chain is the crux of the performance. Through numerous moves and relocations Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie and Mary, took up this

important action to re-establish new homes, either by choice or in the face of displacement. Wearing a plain cobalt blue dress, a colour reminiscent of the Métis flag, I begin the process of collecting the fabric chain at the River. Along the path, where the continuous length of chain may have been severed, mending is undertaken on site to preserve the integrity of connectivity. The careful process of gathering, picking off leaves, stitching and walking to the destined end point in the gallery, becomes more arduous as the mass of chains accumulates ever larger around my body. Wound and carried on my shoulder, across my chest, the full scale of a River lot becomes apparent as the complete represented dimensions are loaded onto my comparatively small frame. This method to carry the work is derived from the utilitarian need to transport a large amount of material using only the body. Developing as a burden, the complete length overwhelms what my body can comfortably handle, drawing parallels to the frequent relocation that my family experienced at the hands of this very unit of measurement.

The work *Do Undo Redo* by Karen Trask, a performance piece using a previous 2008 sculpture *Où Vont Les Mots* activates urban space in a manner that similarly reminds viewers of the unseen forces at work in our daily lives. The essential need for languages in order to communicate with one another, can be forgotten or dismissed when it operates in such fundamental ways. The sculptural work, made from hand spun dictionaries, create a continuous paper thread. Despite the ubiquitous nature of dictionaries, the form becomes obscured through Trask's process of creating the work.

The trailing line of spun paper following Trask's performance and footsteps is important in marking out the inevitable repetitive processes of her actions: wherever she walks she must return and undo the labour of that process. The duality of doing and undoing is imperative to the

preservation of the sculptural work *Où Vont Les Mots* which is tethered to the established form of the ball of thread. It is only through “undoing” that the nature of the sculpture *Où Vont Les Mots* is transformed and revealed as it unravels across an urban landscape, only to be reassembled collaboratively with viewers and passers-by. The interactivity of the unraveling ball of paper thread is a reminder of the importance of viewer presence in the development of performative actions. By contrast the presence of *Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains* is at times a nuisance, bystanders need to step over it, it blocks doorways and winds across roadways. Actions that mirrors the historical reticence and denial of Indigenous land usage rights and mobility, seen rather as a cumbersome obstacle to National priorities and interests.

The ephemeral quality of performance not only resists object-based commerciality, and by association, its valuation, but it also establishes viewers as witnesses to the moment. This statement on value shares similar framing devices as the invisible labour that this body of work is predicated on. Where the invisible labour of women in society and throughout history, is undervalued in our collective consciousness. The impermanency of the performance demonstrates that moments of tangibility are needed in the reparation of previously under-represented female labour. There is no photographic documentation of the performance available with the installed work, the visibility of my body in performance is relegated to the collective memory of the viewers, making presence an important counterweight to the concepts in the work. Therefore, this piece carries two sets of essential actions: first, by bringing all of the small pieces back together privately, through the arduous labour of hand stitching; and secondly the physicality of publicly gathering up the equivalent dimensions of a river lot to be carried and re-homed.

As an expansive recognition of my body as a vessel for the continued transmission of generations of stories, *Mend on Wednesday: Gathering 4,225 Chains* rests as an exhausted heap installed in the gallery space. The final placement for the installation is inside the home space that *La-Petite-Pointe-de-Sapin* plots out. Despite actions of erasure to Métis claims, my family found and created new opportunities for home that has led me to consider and revere the exertion needed to relocate entire family systems. The efforts to keep communities in tact through multiple moves across, sometimes great distances, were maintained by matrilineal kin connections. The resilience of my family network is held together by those matrilineal forces, inclusive of my family's own set of matriarchs, who exist at the foundation of my thesis work. It is their language of closeness and care that is the measure of home that I choose to honour.

To Repay Her Devotion



Mary LaRocque

At the core of this work is the female Métis body reclaiming space, history, and family stories. Process-heavy, repetitive, labour techniques take the experience of time, and translate it into a new physical experience of memory, honouring a line of women in my family. By taking on the physicality of their labour, through slow conscious work, or by considering my body as a form of measurement, I reclaim their stories as a point of expressing the impact of their lives.

The intimacy that is employed to honour Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, and Mary, through actions associated with care, establishes a new relational connection to women that I have never met. By engaging with institutions such as museums and archives in a manner that activates objects and offers an alternative history through subtle signals of use and process, the hand of the original artist and my hand meet through a shared process. My vision for dismantling the stagnancy associated with those institutions, project the importance of matrilineal experiential relationships between makers that exist outside of linear timelines. The consideration of the places that these women have traveled, lived and called home, reflect the importance of routine and processes that create familiarity. In this way, repetition becomes useful in rebuilding a sense of homeland outside of the structure of house and land as property. The juxtaposition of home space is therefore at the foundation for conversations about the problematic history of land ownership – as it specifically relates to the Métis.

In a book, marking her 100th birthday, Mary chronicles her life's journey in humble terms. This document has formed the basis of my research on multiple occasions throughout this thesis and artwork. Its importance lies in the autobiographical nature of the accounts and it is the closest thing I have to a direct conversation with passed relatives. The dedication to this book reads:

This book was written for Grandma Mary Boyer's 100th Birthday celebration. It is a tribute to her. Grandma has dedicated a life time of love to her family and it is intended that this book will repay her devotion to us.

The contents of this book are the first known documentation of the Boyer history. Each autobiography is written to preserve our heritage and memories. Our children and grandchildren will benefit and understand where they came from. They will learn what their ancestors endured so that the next generation might exist.

To our parents and grandparents we say Thank you for life love and a strong sense of direction about what is right and wrong in life (Boyer and Boyer).

The sentiment of this dedication is echoed throughout this artistic body of work. I recognize the importance of story, family roots, history and the intertwined existence with place and home. These forces are fundamental to my art practice that bears witness to the new generation that Mary believed would benefit from hearing her story. The devotion to our personal and cultural narratives reflects a deep seeded sense of pride which is the vehicle that continues to carry this knowledge onwards.

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