

Grove: a study

By

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Abstract

Two photographs, audio, an embroidered textile, and a series of photograms to form a multi-media installation that records my intensive study of a small stand of trees located in Southern Manitoba. Each artwork denotes an individualised materiality and associated process that present a different interpretation of this prairie grove. The photographs and audio document the sights and sounds that I perceived on-site at the grove, while the embroidery and photograms depict my ruminative sewing process as I attempt to translate my experience of that place. When viewed together, the artworks form various complementary and an evolving depiction that allude to my reflections as I analyse my relationship with the grove while simultaneously commenting on how I perceive, record, remember and interact with this grove and the greater Canadian landscape.

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Introduction

An 8x10 photograph, a mural-sized print, a 5.5-meter hand-embroidered textile, a collection of photograms, and an ambient audio track, together these four artworks compose *Grove: a study* that documents my examination of a non-descript prairie grove located in southern Manitoba. The installation is the final project of a collection of artworks produced over the last two years that reflect my physical, social, and psychological relationship with the places where I have dwelt and where I currently live. I am a first-generation Canadian who, throughout my lifetime has repeatedly relocated. I was born in North Vancouver but also have lived in Montréal and Iqaluit, and I currently call Winnipeg home. This narrative of migration continues in my broader family history; both my parents were displaced from their places of birth in Eastern Germany in the aftermath of WWII and eventually immigrated to Vancouver as adults. Like many recent North American settlers my personal and family history of migration has altered how I interact with the places where I currently reside. Marion Arnold refers to her viewpoint as the 'diasporic condition': a unique perspective that holds "experiential and embodied knowledge" that enables a unique analysis of "past and present...here and there, now and then."¹ This statement alludes to the peculiar ability imparted to individuals such as myself who have lived in multiple places to be simultaneously present in two separate places: to be cognisant of two separate temporal or spatial milieux and to acknowledge the unique ontological perspective that different places embody. In my personal context, my multi-perspective mindset compels me to locate myself, to seek out, and determine how I perceive and associate with my newly adopted province of Manitoba.

Early on in my research, I created artworks that examined ideas of uprootedness, comfort, and loss related to my frequent relocations. My *Mnemonic Coat* — a semi-functional garment that stores earth that I collected from former home landscapes — was the principal outcome. I also revisited traditional European needlework and began to use pulled-work embroidery technique both as a cultural identifier of my European heritage and

1. Marion Arnold, "On Reflection: Spatial and Metaphoric Encounters with Home and Land, Here and There, Now and Then," in *Home/Land: Women Citizenship, Photographies*, eds. Marion Arnold and Marsha Meskimmon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2016), 239.

as a contemplative tool that I could use to muse upon my relationship with personally significant places. I also conducted gardening experiments and field research to observe Manitoba's flora in the hope that the acquired knowledge would help me adapt to my new home. It is through the creation of these initial artworks that *Grove: a study* arises. The individual artworks that comprise this installation articulate an element of prolonged contemplation both in myself as I create these artworks, and in the viewers as they explore the installation. Specifically, the mural photograph and the audio enlisted extended visual study and engaged listening, and the embroidered textile and photograms emphasise my laborious sewing process in which I continuously revisit the original documentation. As a newcomer to Manitoba during the era of Reconciliation and re-envisioning of relations between Indigenous and Settler peoples, it was particularly important that I ponder my positionality within this landscape. With these thoughts in mind, I set out by car and on foot to search for landscapes that intuitively called to me: places that invited me to sit and listen and ponder.

Grove: a study is multifaceted and can elicit numerous interpretations. As such, in the following statement, I will only focus on the themes most pertinent to my initial intent, the process I undertook in creating the artworks, and how the project is positioned within the broader context of Canadian landscape art.

A Note on Method

My research combines studio-based investigations that result in the creation of various artworks and a contextual review that comprises a study of literature, theories, exhibitions, and artists' practices that provide a theoretical base for my artworks. My artistic production primarily occurs in a studio context, but I also venture into local gardens and naturalized areas to study and document these locations. Fabrics, threads, photographs and audio compose my primary materials; I choose these particular media for their mnemonic capabilities and their symbolic references to everyday activities. The art objects I produce derive from an autobiographical stance; they present my reflections, sentiments, and lived

experiences. Autobiography's reflexivity provides me an intuitive approach that promotes self-discovery,² thus helping me comprehend how I am connected to the landscape.

I also purposely employ media with a phenomenological sensibility. Phenomenology examines how first-hand perceptions of our immediate environment inform our consciousness.³ Heidegger argues that the majority of everyday actions are conducted unconsciously, and it is only through attentive interrogation of these actions that individuals become aware of their importance.⁴ My artworks purposefully re-enact everyday gestures: quotidian actions such as sewing, documenting, and recollecting, all in an attempt to understand how these seemingly insignificant activities symbolize more profound philosophical questions and psychological needs. By addressing these actions' symbolic foundations, I illuminate why I am drawn to and how I am connected to this place. In *Grove: a study* I am observing, I am listening, I am sewing, I am translating: it is through these actions that I cultivate a contemplative environment that allows me to ponder the grove's personal significance, which in turn helps me socially locate myself in the landscape.

2. Olivia E. Espín, and Andre L. Dottolo, *Gendered Journeys: Migration, and Feminist Psychology*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 12

3. Frédérique de Vignemont, "Bodily Awareness," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 7, 2015. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bodily-awareness/>

4. Michael Wheeler, "Heidegger," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 12, 2011. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>

This Place



Mural Photograph (from Grove: a study), 2020, ink-jet print, 204cm x 246cm.

The small stand of trees is located on the one and a half kilometres interpretative trail that offers the only public access onto the Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Reserve situated in the proximity of Gardenington and Tolstoi, close to the Minnesota border. The nature reserve is located on Treaty 1 and encompasses the traditional territory of the Očeti Šakowin (Sioux), the Anishinabewaki, and Métis;⁵ all of whom were displaced by Settlers

5. *Native-land.ca*, Native Land digital, created 2015, <https://native-land.ca>.

arriving from Bokavina in Western Ukraine in 1896.⁶ The land on which the nature reserve is located remained uncultivated as these settler-farmers deemed the rocky soil and wetlands as unsuitable for farming, and instead used its woodlands as a source of lumber and fuel. In 1989, a collection of conservation societies, including the Manitoba's Naturalist Society and the Critical Wildlife Habitat became aware of this two thousand hectare zone, and, believing it to be the last remaining parcel of Tall Grass Prairie located in Manitoba, decided to enclose it with the intent of preservation.⁷ The Tall Grass Prairie formally covered the North American Continent ranging from Lake Winnipeg down to Texas. Now, the Manitoba portion accounts for only one percent of the ecosystem's former size and is the only Canadian component of a greater system of Tall Grass Prairie Reserves that are dotted throughout the United States' Mid-West.⁸ As I was inspired to seek out Manitoba's natural settings as a milieu to promote introspection to understand better my connection to my new home landscape, the knowledge of an undisturbed naturalised landscape proved irresistible. Thus, I set out and drove the one and a half hours south of Winnipeg in search of this prairie.

In recent years, the social sciences — influenced by Indigenous and decolonization methodologies — have begun to study place with a renewed judicious interest. Critical place inquiry stresses that place can no longer be understood as a superficial and static geographical point, and instead, must be conceived as a culturally contextualized entity imbued with an idiomatic historical, social, spiritual significance.⁹ Therefore, when analysing a location, its cultural and political particularities must be accounted for, paying consideration to how the unique positionality of the place's occupants or researchers influence its ontological interpretation. With these concepts in mind, if I wish to study this prairie grove and analyse its personal significance, I must understand how its socio-political singularities intersect with my individual identity — that of female white-1st generation

8. *Manitoba's Tall Grass Prairie Reserve*, "Nature North: Manitoba's Online Nature Magazine" updated summer 2017, <http://www.naturenorth.com/summer/wildlife/wildF.html>.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Eve Tuck and Marcia Mackenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), Chap. 1, EBSCOhost.

settler — and how these particular characteristics inform my comprehension of, and relationship with the grove.¹⁰

My Original Intentions

Grove: a study stems from both my personal need to learn more about my newly adopted province combined with the understanding that with Reconciliation and a revisiting of Indigenous and Settler relations, it is pertinent that I — a landscape artist — physically, socially and psychologically situate myself within the landscape. To proceed with this endeavor, I was concurrently inspired from my European father's personal practice of returning and wandering through nature for introspection and repose, as well as by Robin Wall Kimmerer's Anishinaabe practice of attentive observation of flora, fauna and other natural phenomena with the understanding that these entities function as legitimate teachers who offer a unique insight.¹¹ Hence, I concluded to wander the Manitoban landscape in search for naturalised landscapes that invited me to stop and listen.

As I sat in the various settings that I visited, time dissipated as slowly all my sensory faculties were awoken. Surely my eyes were activated, but equally so, were my sense of hearing and touch. Being aware of how our physiological senses dictate how we perceive and construct our ontological understandings,¹² I realised that if I wanted to broaden my concept of the Canadian landscape, I needed to expand my portrayals beyond the visuality that photography provided me. Therefore, when I arrive on location, in addition to preparing my camera, I would set-up my audio recorder, then sit, listen and contemplate. After an undetermined amount of time, I would take a portrait of the particular place, pack up and leave. Later, when I wished to revisit my moment in situ, I would listen

10. Eve Tuck and Marcia Mackenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), Chap. 2, EBSCOhost.

11. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*, (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 47.

12. David Howes, "Sensory Basket Weaving 101" in *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, ed. Sandra Alföldy (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 218.

to the audio, observe my photograph, and I began to sew. As I sewed, it was as if my hands became a physiological recording device that documented my attempt to relive and preserve my experience. To analyse my embodied study articulated through my sewing process, I would stop and document my stitching progression with a photogram; hoping that by translating the image into a new medium, it would allow me to view my depiction with a renewed perspective. Ultimately, through the sedulous acts of sewing and photogram documentation, I begin to interrogate my comprehension of this grove, and why it intrigues and compels such a concentrated study.

The installation's critical undertones are not initially apparent upon viewing the work, yet when taken into context of who the artist is, and the imagery depicted, the work demands a closer social-political reading. An individual's concept of the landscape is shaped their personal epistemology and ontology,¹³ and, from the conventional European viewpoint, land is a passive object to be manipulated to meet the needs of the individual or society as a whole.¹⁴ I wish to disturb this notion, and instead wish to highlight the grove's idiosyncratic personality. As I employ a multi-media approach that encompasses photography, audio, and embroidery, I emphasis the multiple perspectives and conceptual capacities to depict, interpret and relate to the grove. Each medium highlight different elements of the scene; the photographs depict reversal of shadow and light, the audio provides a temporal document, the pulled thread embroidery exemplifies my engaged contemplation, the photograms re-articulate my sewing process. It is through multiple processes that I attentively listen, observe, and record to the subtle details of this small stand of trees. It is through my engaged reflection that I not only learn about this environment but begin to understand how I am, how my European settler cultural biases alter my comprehension and connection to this place. In all, I see the installation as a methodological rehearsal, a forerunner for future artistic projects. *Grove: a study* allows for the development of techniques and aesthetics that prompts deep contemplation, which is

13. Eve Tuck and Marcia Mackenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), Chap.1, EBSCOhost.

14. Raffaele Milani and Nicole G. Albert, "La signification contemporaine du paysage européen," in *Diogenè* 233-234, no. 1 (2011):105.

paramount for the critical thinking skills required to forge complex emotions and novel approaches. Ultimately, the project becomes a template that hones the introspective abilities that are necessary for inter-cultural practices. It marks the emergence of new artistic approaches that opens a new trajectory for my creative practice and the exploration of artworks that incorporate inter-cultural dialogues and community-engaged projects.

On Process and Translation



Original Photograph from Grove: a study, 2019, silver gelatin print, 20.32cm x 25.4cm.

The modes of production I employ in my creative practice are of central importance. When I work, I am engrossed in making the artworks: either in the methodical motions

involved in large format photography or in the introspective act of sewing. It is my physical and psychological involvement with the artworks during their production, where my interest lies. In other words, I am interested in the process of Do-ing, and as such, my practice aligns with Process art. Process blends Minimalism's repetitive approach with unusual media and production methods, and, emphasises a formal and conceptual link between the artworks' material qualities and its modes of production.¹⁵ Tacita Dean is renowned for the use of process-based methods. Dean states, "Mediums need to find their own pace, it's like a poem, not prose."¹⁶ She exemplifies her statement in her blackboard drawings such as *The Roaring Forties: Seven Boards in Seven Days (Board 2)*.¹⁷ Here Dean enlists the blackboard's erasability to develop an over-drawing technique that allows the medium's intrinsic qualities to invoke the creative approach, format, and viscosity of the work. In my creative practice I keep Dean's quote in mind, and, remain conscious of my medium's unique characteristics and commission it to inform my techniques.

For example, in *Grove: a study*'s photographic component, I draw from photography's apparent objectivity to create the illusion of unbiased documentation. For the initial 8x10 photograph, I purposely chose to employ the analogue paper-negative that produced an indexical record of the grove. Charles Sanders Peirce, the 19th-century philosopher-scientist, describes analogue photography as an index: stating that negative image formed on the celluloid film is analogous to a fingerprint, a mark left by the light as it touched the film membrane.¹⁸ Contrarily to digital photographic process — which enacts a sequence of information transfers that result in loss of detail — my photo-negative

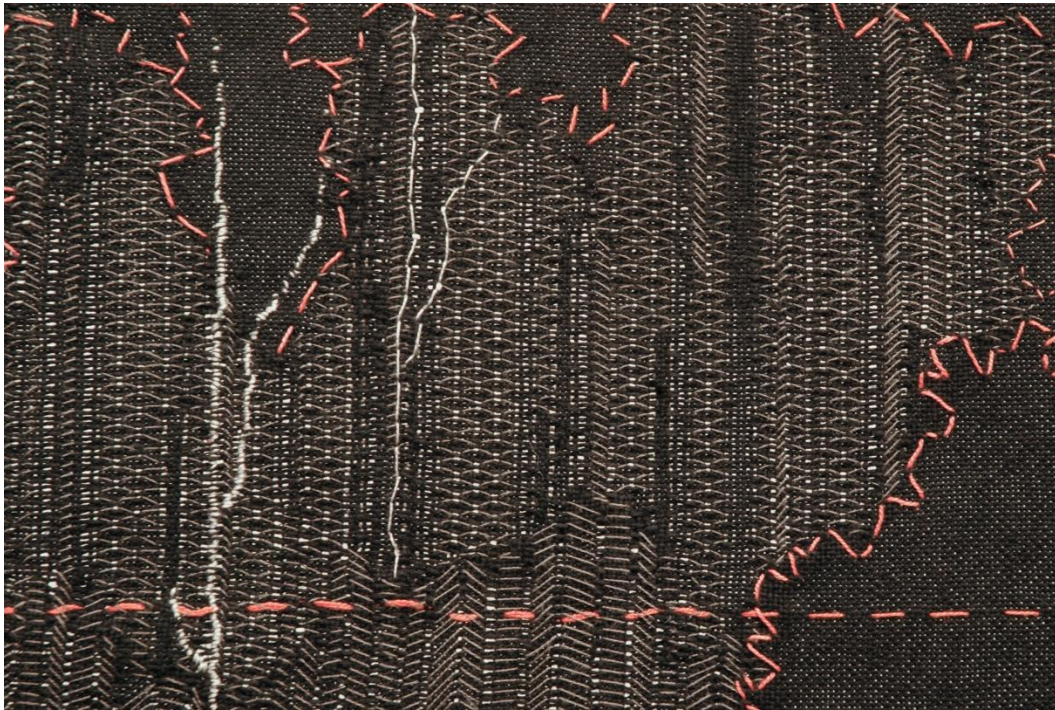
¹⁵ "An Introduction to Process Art (Or, how Minimalism Went from Pretty to Gritty)," *ARTspace: Art 101*, last modified Oct 28, 2013. https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/art_market_process_art-51778.

¹⁶ Tacita Dean quoted by Rosaline Krauss "Rosaline Krauss on Tacita Deans 'Film'," *Tate Talks*, posted on Youtube, August 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCU9CV7BAAk&t=1562s>.

¹⁷ Tacita Dean, *The Roaring Forties: Seven Boards in Seven Days (Board 2)*, 1997. Firth Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris. Web. August 7, 2020. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/cinematic-drawing-in-a-digital-age>

¹⁸ Rosaline Krauss, "Rosaline Krauss on Tacita Dean's 'Film'," *Tate Talks*, posted on Youtube, August 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCU9CV7BAAk&t=1562s>.

technique circumvents successive translations. To produce my initial photograph, I placed a sheet of light-sensitive paper, not film, into an 8x10 field camera, and directly exposed the paper to the light that reflected off the scene. The image produced on the photographic paper is simultaneously a negative and a print; it is also a direct indexical response of the light transmitted from the landscape. The audio also lends an objective quality: it is a direct temporal and sensorial document that records my time with the grove.

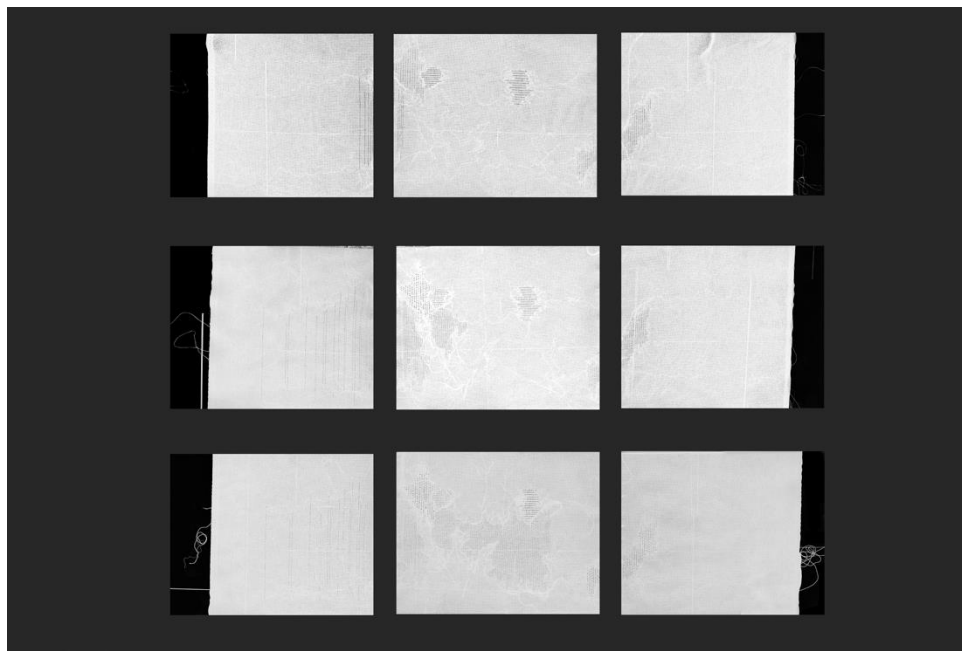


Embroidery from Grove: a study (detail), 2020, textile and thread, 518cm x 68cm.

The textile and photograms present a more subjective recording of the prairie grove. As previously mentioned, when I wished to revisit my experiences in this place, I would view the image, I would listen to the audio and begin to sew. I have always been intuitively drawn to sewing, even as a young child. A mentor mentioned that my affinity to hand-stitching as my "blood memory," an epigenetic skill inherited by my ancestors.¹⁹ During my

19. Anonymous professional artist, in conversation with author, June 2019.

summer research, I rediscovered my paternal grandmother's hand-stitched handkerchiefs and was inspired to learn the Central European pull-work embroidery technique. As I studied these stitches, I realised they represented a meditative tool through which I can subconsciously return to the grove. As Esther Leslie states in reference to Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller*, "the best listeners are the ones who have forgotten themselves, and while their half-unconscious minds are engaged in pot-throwing, spinning or weaving, their bodies are seized by the gentle rhythm of the work, the stories they hear forego and existence on paper, imprinting themselves into the listener's fancy...It mirrors more of processing and reconstituting experiences. It imitates how experiences pass into and out of memory."²⁰



Photograms from Grove: a study (detail), 2020, ink-jet prints, 152cm x40 (per row).

20. Esther Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft," in *The Craft Reader*, ed Glenn Adamson, (New York: Berg Publishers: 2010), 387.

In regards to the installation's photograms, they document the progression of my pulled-work embroidery. After each sewing session, I would transport my hand-stitched fabric into the darkroom, lay it directly on top of light-sensitive paper, expose it, and develop the paper in a photochemical bath. Here my embroidery functions like an analogue negative: it becomes a blueprint for a new photographic image. Visually, the photograms resemble a bird's eye view depicting a distanced perspective that highlights information previously obscured. As previously discussed, my pull-work embroideries blend the information recorded in the photograph and audio with my personal recollections of the grove. Yet, the photograms invert the image, now bringing to light the support stitching, missing threads, and other details previously obscured. These photograms lay the translative program bare: they speak of how information is preserved, transformed, and lost. Walter Benjamin presents several arguments in regards to translations. Firstly, that reproductions cannot duplicate an artwork's vital essence, instead only reconstituting its information. Secondly, since these translations are filtered through an individual's perspective, they are inherently subjective, and only representing the author's interpretation. My embroidery and photograms personify his statements. These artworks only recreate a semblance of the prairie grove: the outline of the bushes and trees remain recognizable, but the details and textures are rendered into a system of geometric points. Furthermore, as my photograms combine a systematic grid formed by the fabric's weave with organic imagery created by the loose threads, they comment on the nuanced nature of the recording processes: elucidating how records are simultaneously subjective and objective, highlighting the nuances between coordinated acts and the accidental.

Walter Benjamin also argues that touch functioned as a marker of authenticity, that to "touch the world is to know the world."²¹ Therefore, does Benjamin infer that my sewing functions as a more truthful document of my experience? Merleau-Ponty discusses how Cezanne's perpetual painting studies manifest his attempts to understand how our eyes

21. Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft", 387.

perceive our environments.²² In a similar vein, I employ these various mediums and artistic techniques — the indexical photograph, the contemplative textile, the photograms, or is it the time-documenting audio — to examine which mode best preserves my experience of place. It is important to note, even though the artworks were made in a particular order, this does not infer that the later produced textile and photograms are the project's end product. Alternatively, they present my repetitive act of revisiting and recollecting that I undertook as I attempt to understand why this stand of trees intrigues me. The photographs, the audio, the embroidery and photograms produce separate records, some as indexical documents others as interpretive translation, when viewed together in an installation format they pose the question of what constitutes an authentic record of my experience. When these artworks are viewed together as an installation, they complement each other. One artwork does not dominate the other: instead, they speak in tandem, continually referencing and commenting on different elements, together creating a meditative re-envisioning of a place.

On Slowness

Slow observation, either through sight, sound, or touch, forms the core of my installation. All my choices of media denote a decelerated sensibility. The inversed visual aesthetic of the paper- negative photograph, the ambient audio, the tactility of the embroidery, and the repetitiveness of the photograms, all promote an attentive disposition both in myself during their production and in the viewer as they interact with the artworks. For example, the 8x10 silver gelatin print's and the mural photograph's unusual rendering forces the viewer to look intensively and analyse. Similarly, the audio's undulating sound of the wind evokes a pared-down mode of listening. Lastly, as the textile abstracts, the photograph into a pattern of minute geometric stitches and as the photograms reveal the evolution of my sewing process, they both solicit the viewer to mentally decelerate and observe the image attentively.

22. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Cezanne's Doubt," in *Sense et Non-sense*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 12.

Many intellectuals stress the importance of prolonged reflection as a necessary precursor for personal insight. Socrates states that fast intellectual processes only form a shallow "illusion of knowledge" that would undermine the in-depth comprehension required for critical analysis and the development of complex emotions.²³ The concept that languid approaches encourage deep thinking is also a central denominator in theories of slow pedagogy. Slow pedagogy, is an educational method with roots to the Slow Movement. Gaining popularity during the turn of the Millennium, it advocates for a downshift in the pace of contemporary life in hopes of reducing isolation, distractions, and a lack of satisfaction. Slow pedagogy purposefully uses prolonged processes of planning, trying, re-trying, contemplation, and dialogue to promote the critical inquiry essential for successful learning.²⁴ Imported into a creative arts context, slow pedagogy attests that the more measured the methods of production and longer viewer linger in observation, the more rigorous the resulting introspection. In simpler words, it is through these prolonged reflexive exercises that new ideas emerge.²⁵ I adopt slow pedagogy not as a method of instruction but as an approach that promotes contemplation and self-discovery. The rhythmic and repetitive hands-on techniques of my creative process promote an embodied sapience, the slowness personified in my analogue photographic techniques, lengthy audio, and laborious sewing, all allow me to elongate my engagement with these artworks thus permitting me to further ponder their symbolism.

Tacita Dean's film series *Portraits* is an excellent methodological exploration of slowness and slow seeing as a tool for reflection. In her *Portrait* (2016), Dean's films famous cultural figures, such as Marcio Merz, Edward Parker, Michael Hamburg, Merce Cunningham, David Hockney, and presents them in humanistic terms. She calmly films her

23. Maryann Wolf, interviewed by Jess Shane. *Ideas: Internal Hard Drive: What's lost when we forget to remember (alternate title: Memory breakdown: How technology is taking hold of our ability to remember)*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation CBC Radio, September 6, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/memory-breakdown-how-technology-is-taking-hold-of-our-ability-to-remember-1.4812872>.

24. Peter A. Shaw, Bob Cole and Jennifer L. Russel "19: Determining our own tempos: exploring Slow Pedagogy, Curriculum, Assessment, and Professional Development," *To Improve the Academy* 32.1 (2013): 322.

25. Peter A. Shaw, 322.

sitters performing everyday tasks, such as sitting, eating, smoking, walking, and, as her camera registers these individuals quotidian movements she "search(es) for an instant, or instances, in which the fiction that their figures have become breaks apart, and reveals something of their lives."²⁶ She portrays these celebrities separate from their achievements and presents them as everyday people. Dean film's attentive sensibility invites the viewer to decelerate their thinking and ponder these famous individuals intimately: Dean encourages the viewer to think deeply and view these individuals empathically.

Similar to how Dean uses a slowed approach to help foster feelings of empathy towards her film's sitters, I also employ multiple media that amplify a slowed approach to allow an extended contemplation that aids in my endeavor to learn about the grove and my positionality in regards to it. Similarly, I also use slowed and multiple articulations of time to emphasize the complexity of this initially characterless prairie grove. Initially, my multi-media installation's use of analogue and handmade technique may be read as a rejection of contemporary technology. However, I reference slowness and analogue technologies not as a ludic with an anti-technological stance that harkens for nostalgia for a pre-industrial or slower-paced society, but to as a mechanism to explore the multiple experiential understandings of time.²⁷ Henri Bergson argues that time is a qualitative construct. He prescribes the term *la durée* (duration), asserting that time should not be understood in a quantitatively as in the length of a line, but as experiential sensation, as felt through the action tracing one's finger along this line.²⁸ As such, my individual artworks should not be understood as representations of time, but as experiences of time. In the mural photograph, the leaves are blurred, depicting their movement during the twelve seconds long exposure. My audio, inasmuch as it is a temporal record of my time in situ, it also replays my auditory experience of this grove. My hand embroidery and complementary photograms

26. Juan Gaitán, "Tacita Dean's Portraits," in *Tacita Dean: Landscapes, Portrait, Still Life*, edited by Alexandra Harris, Alan Hollinghurst, and Ali Smith, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery, 2018), 130.

27. Lutz, P. Koepnick, "Open Shutter Photography and the Art of Slow Seeing," in *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) 44, EBSCOhost.

28. Leonard Lawlor and Valentine Moulard, "Henri Bergson," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 18, 2004. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Henri-Bergson/>

personify my need to re-engage with this grove, hoping that the reflective milieu produced through laborious sewing and resulting remunerations insight me to ponder this place's personal significance.

What am I Doing Here?



Grove: a study (installation view) 2020.

A question arises, why am I intuitively drawn to this place, what was I searching for? As a white settler seeking out places of untouched wilderness, am I not re-enacting the trope of the Canadian landscape artist wandering through nature for inspiration? The Group

of Seven went into the wilderness with the agenda to develop a uniquely Canadian painting tradition unsullied by European influences.²⁹ Yet, their paintings only represented their personal constructs of Canada's hinterland: the British white protestant male settler's understanding of the Canadian landscape as a romanticised rugged landscape devoid of habitation awaiting their discovery.³⁰ Through their pictorial explorations, they canonised the image of Canada's landscapes and cemented the artistic tradition of an urban-Canadian artist returning to the wilderness for creative solace. I do not deny that I follow this landscape tradition, and I concede that my identity as a white settler provides me with an 'anonymity' that facilitates my access to the grove. Yet, I argue that my intentions and the artworks that I produce align more with the works by the post-modern Canadian landscape artists as Joyce Wieland, who used conceptual art tactics to analyse and disrupt the conservative conventions laid out by the Group of Seven.³¹

For instance, in *109 views*,³² Wieland sewed together 109 individual quilts depicting a simplistic Canadian landscape to comment on how the Group of Seven framed and streamlined the Canadian landscape image, thus, ultimately constricting the Land's persona from one of the pluralities into shallow stereotypes. I also use multiplicity in my installation to deny a simplistic portrayal of the landscape. Particularly apparent in my photogram series, the repetitive abundance of prints ask for prolonged viewer engagement that denies a quick consumeristic viewing often associated with the Group of Seven. In a broader vein, my installation's general reiterative format and use of multiple media and various processes ask for the viewer to query the complexity of this seemingly simple prairie grove and subtly disturbs the European-settler perception of the Canadian landscape as a static object, and begin to behold it as a complex and unique entity deserving of intensive interrogation.

29. Roald, Nasgaard, "The Mystic North," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Canadian Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 251.

30. John O'Brian, "Wild Art History," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Canadian Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 22.

31. Johanne Sloan, "Contemporary Landscape Art: Joyce Wieland and Michael Snow," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Canadian Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 73.

32 Joyce Wieland, *109 Views*, 1970–71, quilted cloth assemblage, 256.5 x 802.6 cm, York University, Toronto. Accessed August 7th, 2020. <https://aci-iac.ca/art-books/joyce-wieland/style-and-technique>

Perhaps my use of numerous artworks and inquisitive processes marks a questioning into my Eurocentric understandings of the Land and demonstrates my initial exploration of alternative modes of conceiving, experiencing, and being. If so, the endeavor of unpicking my cultural biases is ongoing, and the in-process aesthetic presented in hanging threads, and empty zones of the textile and the evolving motif of my photograms demark the unfolding nature of my inquiry.

Yet, critiquing the conventions of Canadian and European landscape art was not central to my agenda; thus, the question continues, what am I really doing here at this grove? Perchance I am drawn to this stand of trees by some form of biophilic pull; a subconscious calling reconnects with nature, a psychological need compounded by the knowledge of the grove's rarity. Is it not true that the more fleeting and fragile the subject, the stronger the urge to preserve it becomes. One intension of *Grove: a study* is to repeatedly record my perceptions of the small stand of trees as an exercise to preserve and analyse my embodied experience. Can I draw a relationship between my want to preserve my experience and the reality that this place itself is a nature preserve? Then again, I have always sought and found comfort in trees. The installation does re-enact the European Romantic conventions of returning to nature for spiritual and artistic provocation. The well-established tradition holds roots easily dating back two millennia. European Celts visited oak groves, bogs, and lakes to perform ceremonies, and Christian monks often sought the remoteness of nature to help them spiritually retune.³³ In the art-historical context, the 19th century Romantics revisited the concept in force. David Caspar Friederich's paintings such as *Monk by the Sea*³⁴ features a figure re-enacting a nature seeking urge in the hope of communing with entities greater than himself. Then again, is this figure truly reconnecting with nature, or is this nature-inspired introspective exercises only in service of fulfilling his personal psychological needs? Here I must ponder what underlining psychological need is my endeavor satisfying. Marion Arnold

33. Simon Schama, "Der Holzweg: The Track Through the Woods" in *Landscape and Memory*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.: 1996), 75-143.

34. Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, c. 1809, oil on canvas, 43" x 67 1/2" / 110 x 171.5 cm (Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) accessed August 7th, 2020, <https://www.smb.museum/en/whats-new/detail/new-publication-on-the-restoration-of-caspar-david-friedrichs-monk-by-the-sea-and-abbey-in-the-oakwood/>

states, "I reflect on the meaning of my experience, here-and-now, and its capacity to stimulate memories of then and there."³⁵ With her words in mind, perhaps my repetitive revisiting of this grove re-enacts my wish to revisit other places from my past. Being a semi-nomadic individual, whose home locale is in constant flux, perhaps by repetitive revisiting and translative depictions of this grove, highlights a more profound psychological need perpetuated by my borderline nomadic lifestyle. Rosi Braidotti refers to the notion of "Nomadic remembering," stating that it "is like a constant quest for temporary moments when a balance can be sustained before the forces dissolve again and move on."³⁶ Hence, when I formed a tentative connection this prairie grove, do my acts of translation and transposition merely serve my wish to preserve this sense of connection? In all, I don't intend for *Grove: a study* to address a particular issue. Instead, I intend for the installation to provide a milieu in which to ponder upon the various themes circumnavigate this grove.

With Hindsight

It is evident that *Grove: a study* project has broadened beyond its initial intentions, now touching upon wider social and philosophical questions. Remembering that the creation of the installation was an introspective exercise to help me analyse my physical, socially, and psychological relationship with the Manitoban landscape, this project ultimately served a personal need. Yet, my personal need to understand my relationship with the places I live mirrors a broader social desire. In today's contemporary society marked migrations and globalization, understanding one's situationality in regards to places one inhabits has become a common quest. Ellie Epp states that "if the original contact with the land... is our cognitive base, then sanity, cognitive virtue, has to do with building correctly on that base."³⁷ In regards to her words, *Grove: a study*'s use of repetitive documentation that systematically studies my intuitive processes provides me with such an avenue in which to

35. Marion Arnold, 241.

36. Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions. On Nomadic Ethics*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006), 168, quoted in Marion Arnold, "On Reflection: Spatial and Metaphoric Encounters with Home and Land, Here and There, Now and Then," in *Home/Land: Women Citizenship, Photographies*, eds. Marion Arnold and Marsha Meskimmon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2016), 245.

37. Ellie Epp, "Leaving the Land: Perceptions and Fantasy," in *Land, Relationship and Community — A symposium*, ed. Bill Jefferies, (North Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 1998), 18.

gather insight into how my personal beliefs and modes of being affect the manner I perceive and interact with my environment, and ultimately helps me form a more salubrious relationships with this landscape.

NB: A link to further documentation, including audio is available on janineannettelittmann.com

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