

# RABBIT ISLAND

Nich Hance McElroy  
Elvia Wilk

Waboozaki:  
Suzanne Morrissette  
Dylan Miner  
Nicholas Brown  
Julie Nagam



08.18

09.28.2014 RABBIT ISLAND

2014 RESIDENCY EXHIBITION

# 2014 RESIDENCY



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**RABBIT ISLAND:  
2014 RESIDENCY EXHIBITION**

AUGUST 18 – SEPTEMBER 28, 2014

**DeVos Art Museum**

School of Art & Design  
Northern Michigan University

**Museum Director**

Melissa Matuscak  
[nmu.edu/devos](http://nmu.edu/devos)

**Artists**

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Elvia Wilk

*Waboozaki:*  
Suzanne Morrissette  
Dylan Miner  
Nicholas Brown  
Julie Nagam

**Graphic Design**

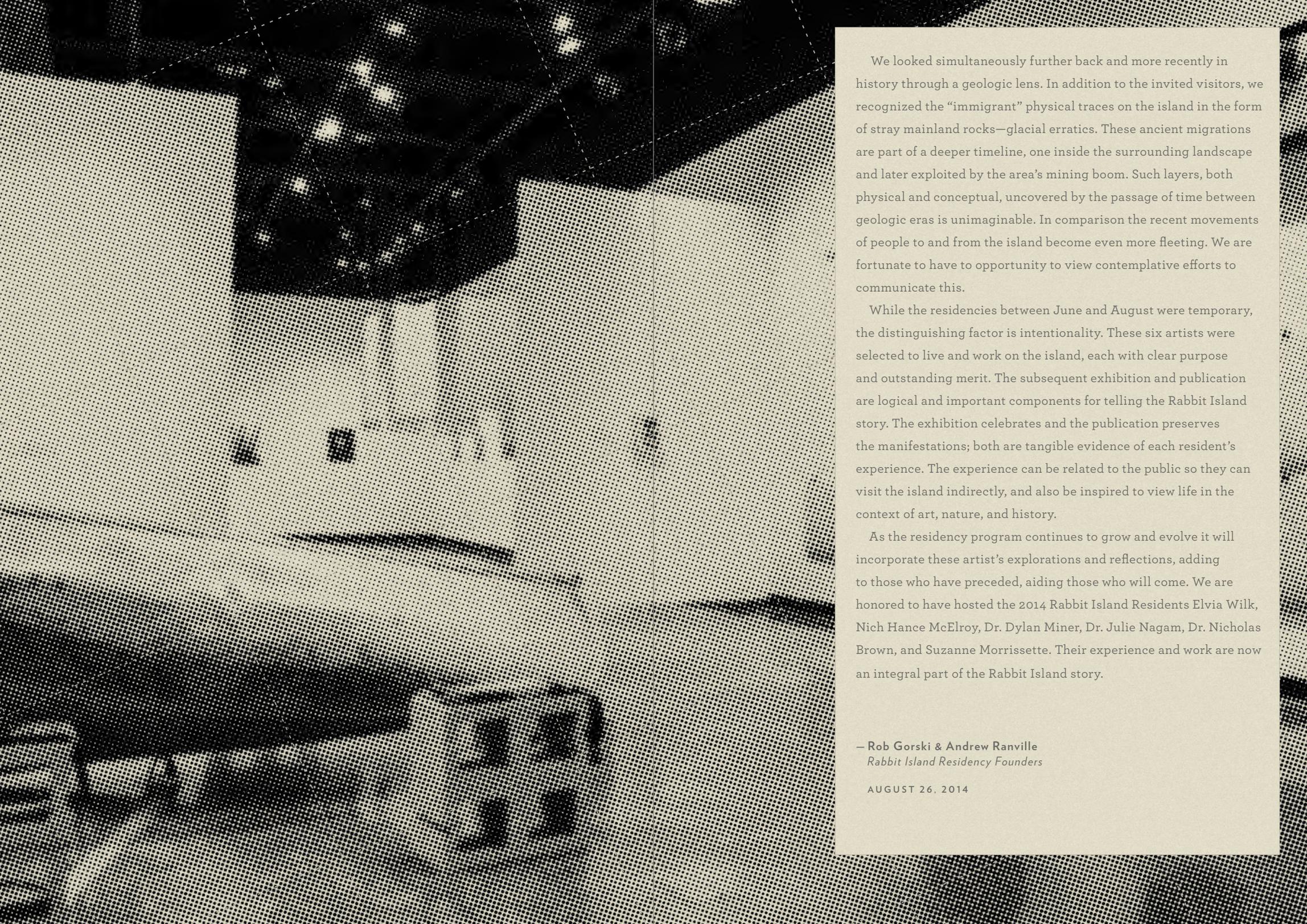
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# 2014 RESIDENCE EXHIBIT

At approximately 4:15pm on the 7th of June our first resident of 2014 landed on Rabbit Island. A week later the last pieces of ice in Lake Superior melted, a few miles south of the island at the terminus of Keweenaw Bay. The preceding winter broke several long-standing weather records and created new ones, stretching spring and providing fresh challenges in the midst of this isolated landscape. The trees on the island appeared thin and the buds at the end of each branch were slowed in their march. The water temperature registered just above freezing well into the month of June. Further, the harbor in Rabbit Bay was destroyed by shore ice only a month earlier.

This abnormal, impressive weather was only one element in our 2014 residency storyline, though notable enough to have perhaps “sped up the aging process”, per one resident. The weather eventually moved on, and by mid-August the water that surrounded the island was more refreshing than life threatening.

Not exclusive to the climate, movement was the subject of several resident’s research. Their proposals, much like their residencies, described the island as a point of destination, departure, and transience. We learned the Native American name of the island, Ni-aazhawaam-minis; a name that describes the island as a place of crossing, or one reached by boat or canoe. Whether a purposeful destination or stopover on a longer journey, the rich history of Native peoples on the island and surrounding land was given a thoughtful investigation. Three of this year’s residents being Indigenous, that history was considered in a contemporary artistic context, and added to.



We looked simultaneously further back and more recently in history through a geologic lens. In addition to the invited visitors, we recognized the “immigrant” physical traces on the island in the form of stray mainland rocks—glacial erratics. These ancient migrations are part of a deeper timeline, one inside the surrounding landscape and later exploited by the area’s mining boom. Such layers, both physical and conceptual, uncovered by the passage of time between geologic eras is unimaginable. In comparison the recent movements of people to and from the island become even more fleeting. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to view contemplative efforts to communicate this.

While the residencies between June and August were temporary, the distinguishing factor is intentionality. These six artists were selected to live and work on the island, each with clear purpose and outstanding merit. The subsequent exhibition and publication are logical and important components for telling the Rabbit Island story. The exhibition celebrates and the publication preserves the manifestations; both are tangible evidence of each resident’s experience. The experience can be related to the public so they can visit the island indirectly, and also be inspired to view life in the context of art, nature, and history.

As the residency program continues to grow and evolve it will incorporate these artist’s explorations and reflections, adding to those who have preceded, aiding those who will come. We are honored to have hosted the 2014 Rabbit Island Residents Elvia Wilk, Nich Hance McElroy, Dr. Dylan Miner, Dr. Julie Nagam, Dr. Nicholas Brown, and Suzanne Morrissette. Their experience and work are now an integral part of the Rabbit Island story.

— Rob Gorski & Andrew Ranville  
*Rabbit Island Residency Founders*

AUGUST 26, 2014



[nhmcelroy.com](http://nhmcelroy.com)

Nich Hance McElroy is a photographer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. During his time in residency, he focused on documenting the movements and migrations of people, nature and objects on and between the mainland and island. He also captured people, places and objects around the adjoining Rabbit Bay and Keweenaw areas.

# NICH HANCE

The movement of material to and from Rabbit Island is not solely driven by boats or wind, the wings of birds, or even the powerful action of waves on Lake Superior. On a different, much longer time-scale the island has been visited by a host of geologic migrants. Its shores are littered with black-ish rocks set amongst the native red-pink sandstone, carried there by ice, and gesturing toward a landscape in motion, rather than one fixed beneath the arrival and egress of travelers. The adjacent Keweenaw Peninsula was made famous by its own drifting mineralogy. Massive pieces of “float copper” were lifted, carried, and deposited by glaciers, mined and traded by the Ojibwe peoples, and later used to attract industry and capital to the region. This activity first made the Keweenaw prosperous, and has since left it in an extended period of self-reflection.

There is no simple answer to the question of what moves between Rabbit Island and its wider surroundings. Immaterial ideas are transmitted through cellular signals and solid stones have been carried there on massive sheets of ice. Cumulatively these objects tell a story of the island’s profound and undeniable connectedness to the history, culture, biology, and geology, which surrounds and defines it, rather than testifying to its relative isolation. These photographs are meditations on different aspects of that interconnectedness.

—Nich Hance McClroy



Untitled  
digital c-print, 2014



**Untitled**  
digital c-print, 2014  
(pages 011–014)



RABBIT ISLAND



4  
ESIDE  
XHIB



Elvia Wilk is a writer based in Berlin, Germany. Her work explores themes of isolation, connection and the relationship between physical and virtual space through essays and poems. The written pieces in the exhibition were designed in collaboration with designer Edwin Carter.

[elviapw.com](http://elviapw.com)

## The way that nature is defined is the negative space around which a culture forms itself

\* The way that nature is defined is the negative space around which a culture forms itself.

Today we continually try to erode the conceptual division between nature and culture. We realize that continuing to consider ourselves separate from the environment has made us feel we have the right to disregard it. Our fates are intertwined, and we can have no illusions about our impact.

At the same time, we know that the only way to preserve nature is to define it as such. We have to cordon it off from our influence if we are to stall human impact on it – on that which we assume would have existed without us. Paradoxically, reinforcing the theoretical interdependency of nature and culture demands reinforcement of their physical separation.

In 2008 the residents of the Alaskan island of Kivalina sued Exxon Mobile, eight other oil companies, 14 power companies, and one coal company for their roles in causing water pollution and rising sea levels – the effects of which will likely drive out the already marginalized native community on Kivalina from their homes in the next decade. This was the first environmental lawsuit ever filed by a “discreetly identifiable victim.” It’s only possible to pursue litigation on behalf of the environment if there exist a human plaintiff and defendant.

To care about humanity now necessarily includes caring about the environment. Humanitarianism implies environmentalism, and vice versa.

The governing body of the shrinking islands of the Maldives prefers to ask nicely rather than antagonize. The former president of the 28 islands in the Indian Ocean, which are similarly threatened by rising water levels, has made emotional appeals on American television shows, imploring the international community (especially those in rich western countries) to lower carbon emissions on behalf of the Maldives’ population before their homes submerge.

Efforts to preserve nature on behalf of people rely on determination of guilt: either litigious or emotional or both. (When is law ever unemotional?)

Some climate scientists have suggested that the Maldives' situation may not be as dire as it's been made to sound. But alarmism about rising sea levels has also had the positive economic effect of attracting foreign investment and development aid into the country. A booming tourism industry thrives in the meantime. This economic stimulus indirectly supports a repressive governmental regime. Human rights abuses crop up in the news alongside climate change reports.

Environmental alarmism, no matter how warranted, prompts us to consider the agendas on all sides, and to examine our priorities regarding human well-being in the short and long term.

\* The way that nature is defined is the negative space around which a culture forms itself.

Like so many brands of lifestyle politics, the rhetoric of environmentalism often appeals to the emotions of fear and guilt. Nature is framed as a powerful force beyond human comprehension that we must respect lest it destroy us. The gist of this story is "don't treat nature badly or 'she' will have her revenge." The aim is to reinforce the emotional sense that nature is more powerful than humans are, and that the proper response to natural forces (whatever they are) is respect, reverence, and ultimately fear. Determination of guilt naturally follows.

The Western obsession with the twin stories of paradise and disaster, the Eden and the Flood, romanticizes nature's power and therefore emphasizes our insignificance in the face of it. But at this point we are no longer insignificant. We have altered it beyond comprehension. In the Anthropocene, are the emotions of guilt and fear still appropriate or effective reactions at all?

There are several obvious reasons to rely on those emotional provocations. We might assume that it's because the only way to get people to "wake up" and stop driving their cars, subdividing land, flocking to cities, littering, etc. is to scare them into what will happen if they don't. The rising tides will envelop us all! If we aren't attuned to the possibilities in advance by confronting the wilderness and understanding its power, we won't be scared enough of the consequences to change our behavior.

This is in accordance with the theory that "awareness raising" is the first step to battling the primary threats to humanity: natural forces, physical health (body is another aspect of nature), armed conflict. Raising awareness usually includes raising money too. Change pours into little plexiglass containers at café counters and gets sent to the Maldives. Or somewhere.

Yet if nature is to be feared, it is also to be dominated. Provoking fear of the power of nature is precisely what gives credence to the ideology of its domination. If something is scary, what is the more human response: calm conversation or violent confrontation?

There may be a common denominator between the rhetoric of conservationists and those who exploit the environment for profit. Both instrumentalize the meaning of nature for their own ideological goals. Preservation and domination rely on the same myths of wilderness and fear that slot into and strengthen each other. This is mutually reinforcing, setting up a deadlocked dichotomy. Ideology produces counter-ideology. Defining nature is a de-facto ideological decision. And facts are distorted on all sides.

\* The way that nature is defined is the negative space around which a culture forms itself.

Like the water surrounding an island.

I spent eleven days on Rabbit Island in June 2014. Eventually nature expelled me: after six days of below-freezing temperatures and storms I decided I'd had enough. Instead of remaining on the island I boated back to the mainland and spent two weeks in the Copper Country on the Keweenaw Peninsula.

In this area, the former copper mining industry remains a central mark of cultural identity and heritage. The mines initially brought masses of European immigrants to that area in the second half of the nineteenth century, and despite the fact that the mining companies pulled out nearly fifty years ago, the history and mythology of the mines pervade.

Mining is one of the clearest examples of what it means to tear into nature and get what you need from it for economic gain. Alongside exploitation of the land, the mining industry in the Copper Country also exploited the people it employed, as evidenced by the long and contentious (violent) history of unionization efforts in the area. Again, when exploitation of nature and exploitation of people coincide, environmentalism and humanitarianism have similar goals.

Yet the copper industry is remembered primarily and accurately as a positive economic force. The influential Calumet and Hecla Mining Company was a particularly prosperous one, and when it pulled out in the late 60s, after 30 odd years of dilly-dallying and struggling with the unions, the area slid into a steep economic decline. This contrast sets up a powerful opposition between past and present: boom and bust.

Today, a nascent tourism industry on the Keweenaw dependent upon both nature and cultural heritage represents a potential new, long-term, sustainable economy. This would be an economy dependent on preservation, both of nature and culture.

Yet in the short term, neither a local museum or a national park has the employment power of the mining industry. And in a world of diminishing resources and escalating prices, the re-opening of the mines in the next century is probably inevitable. Positive memories of the mining industry due to its association with prosperity have created a dichotomy between

environmentalists – those who would reject re-opening the mines due to its deleterious environmental effects – and the working class, who want and need jobs now.

Preservationism becomes a class issue. Prioritizing it is a privilege, a tree-hugging thing.

Mining is necessarily a boom and bust situation. Resources are finite, and economies fluctuate. When it's no longer profitable to go to the trouble to mine the metal, or when it runs out completely, another bust will follow. In turn, this reality allows those without pressing economic needs to frame the working class as short-sighted.

According to a book I read at the Calumet historical archive, most Native American populations living on the Keweenaw Peninsula before the mining industry arrived were migratory, leaving the area in the winter when it became too harsh. These cultures saw no reason to endure the brutal seasons, whereas the mining settlements relied on consistent economic productivity – and therefore perpetuated the myth of “braving” the natural surroundings to dominate nature, literally to extract quantifiable value from it. (In comparison, tourism is a sissy, seasonal industry: it depends on weather rather than overcoming it.)

I don't say this to reinforce the classic assumption that native peoples “respect nature” as opposed to westerners who only want to exploit it. I want rather to reinforce the links between fear, domination, and industry, in order to support the hypothesis that guilt and fear are common denominators between the goals of preservation and domination.

\* The way that nature is defined is the negative space around which a culture forms itself.

My short stay on Rabbit Island was physically uncomfortable. I was extremely cold and very wet. At times I found the storms intimidating. Some noises from the forest were threatening. One bird call in particular gave me terrible dreams. These physical and psychological inconveniences did not instill in me a new reverence for nature's raw power: they made me wonder why I had assumed that inconvenience would pave the path towards understanding. I wondered what being uncomfortable has to do with understanding nature. I wondered if I should feel afraid of something.

Am I communing with nature on a beach vacation with a shower and a bed nearby, or am I only communing when cold, wet, and alone? It is only “natural” when it is inconvenient? Who decides what is convenience and what is necessity?

The weather to some extent affects my daily life in Berlin, where I live for most of the year. Like the winters on the Keweenaw Peninsula, Berlin winters are miserably dark and icy and cold. Everyone slips on the ice and gets the flu. But in Berlin I have a heated, four-walled apartment. If the

heating breaks in my building, I can go stay at my friend's house down the street. If I run out of money to pay my heating bill, I can ask my flatmate for help or take a handout from my parents.

The difference between my time on Rabbit Island and my daily life was not the power of nature, it was lack of infrastructure. To put myself alone on an island with no infrastructure and no social network was a privileged choice; I spent many resources to get there (an airplane trip is not only expensive but abhorrent in terms of environmental impact) and to enter a situation artificially constructed to be difficult.

Varying levels of “convenience” have been employed on the island over time. Once there was a pump installed to pull drinking water from the lake. Later it was deemed unnecessary and removed. Its removal was no less artificial than its construction.

For me, lucky as I am, living for a very short time without running water or adequate protection from the elements was a human choice, informed by a cultural circumstance that suggests that discomfort is the way to a greater understanding of nature's Power. I suspect that this belief stems from the fact that many of us feel guilty for not being afraid of nature at all.

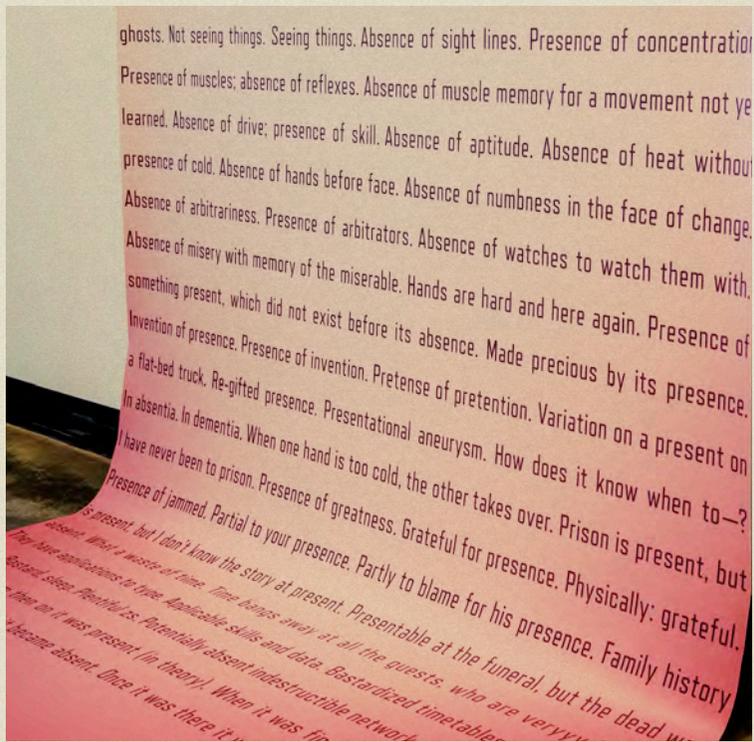
Yet the desire to put oneself in an extreme circumstance implies the parallel desire to dominate or overcome it, perpetuating a cycle of fear, guilt, and exploitation. I was able to see myself as a part of this cycle.

Climate change is certainly making our environmental realities increasingly extreme, and we in the wealthy world can't become strangers – via our comforts – to what serious weather conditions will mean for everyone's existence. Awareness of what is in store is a vital step towards making changes, which will have to be drastic. But the nature of this awareness is important: awareness isn't just a yes-or-no thing.

Confrontation with the elements raised my awareness of my own inherited cultural beliefs more than of my specific natural surroundings. The nature of my awareness arrived as I examined the peculiar and potent mixture of guilt and triumph that I was feeling, in which I recognized an awfully Anthropocentric view towards nature.

This awareness was reached when I returned to the mainland, while I was sitting in a warm bathtub in a pleasant room, watching the storm rage outside the windows.

–Elvia Wilk



**Presence**

2014

4' x 7'.

Vinyl material.

Time, moves. Spider on the keyboard. Absence hits absence hits absence. Negative's absence clangs loudly in the face of presence. When is the absence of a person who is present the presence of a person who is absent? Today we are gathered very grateful for time's absence. When we were younger, time was present. Time-stretched-elastic. Summer camp was the death of time and a camel's back and a needle's eye. Now time moves absent-mindedly; its mechanical reproducer is vitally flawed. A shutter clicks and the negative cliché of that positively singular experience is made before the thumb even hits the spacebar. 00 mistakes / 00 absences. Absence of lateness. Absence of pain. Absence of lover. Presence of memories. Absence of ghosts. Not seeing things. Seeing things. Absence of sight lines. Presence of concentration. Presence of muscles; absence of reflexes. Absence of muscle memory for a movement not yet learned. Absence of drive; presence of skill. Absence of aptitude. Absence of heat without presence of cold. Absence of hands before face. Absence of numbness in the face of change. Absence of arbitrariness. Presence of arbitrators. Absence of watches to watch them with. Absence of misery with memory of the miserable. Hands are hard and here again. Presence of something present, which did not exist before its absence. Made precious by its presence. Invention of presence. Presence of invention. Pretense of pretention. Variation on a present on a flat-bed truck. Re-gifted presence. Presentational aneurysm. How does it know when to—? In absentia. In dementia. When one hand is too cold, the other takes over. Prison is present, but I have never been to prison. Presence of greatness. Grateful for presence. Physically: grateful. Presence of jammed. Partial to your presence. Partly to blame for his presence. Family history is present, but I don't know the story at present. Presentable at the funeral, but the dead was absent. What a waste of time. Time bangs away at all the guests, who are veryyy busyyy. They have applications to type. Applicable skills and data. Bastardized timetables and 00 hours of zzz. Bastard, sleep. Plentiful zs. Potentially absent indestructible network. It was not invented until 1969; from then on it was present (in theory). When it was finally put into practice the concept that preceded it became absent. Once it was there it went missing.



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**Waiting**  
 2014

Individual flags  
 36" x 72".  
 Vinyl Material.

JULIE  
NAGAM  
WABOOZAKI  
SUZANNE  
MORRISSETTE  
DYLAN  
MINER  
NICHOLAS  
BROWN

Waboozaki consists of four inter-disciplinary artists, writers and curators: Dr. Dylan Miner (Métis, East Lansing, Michigan), Dr. Julie Nagam (Anishinaabekwe-Métis, Toronto, Ontario, Canada), Dr. Nicholas Brown (Iowa City, Iowa), and Suzanne Morrisette (Cree-Métis, Toronto, Ontario, Canada). During their residency the artists spent time working on individual projects as well as collectively remapping the island from indigenous perspectives.

# DYLAN MINER

Dr. Dylan A.T. Miner (Métis) is a border-crossing artist, activist, historian, curator, and professor working throughout Turtle Island. Currently, Miner is Associate Professor in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State University, where he coordinates a new Indigenous Contemporary Art Initiative and is adjunct curator of Indigenous Art at the MSU Museum. He was awarded an Artist Leadership Fellowship from the National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian).

[dylanminer.com](http://dylanminer.com)



## 'Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, a Provisional Place for Crossing Over'

Before spending time on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis (Rabbit Island), I needed to know more about the island and its larger role within Indigenous ontologies in the Great Lakes. Working as part of a temporary collective known as Waboozaki, we proposed a project that would investigate the island and Lake Superior in relation to Indigenous notions of placemaking and mapping. Alongside one non-Native and two Indigenous artists, none of whom call the Keweenaw Peninsula home, I had no idea how our working process would develop, let alone what our final projects would be. The beauty of being artists, of course, is located in the speculative and provisional ways that we may both investigate the past and imagine the future. As an Indigenous artist, I am particularly interested in thinking about the intimate relationship between the past and the future. Moreover, what role does art play in this process?

Initially, I was particularly interested in investigating archeological maps of Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous settlements, trails, and sacred sites. After all, most Indigenous people understand place not as locations on a map or through cartography but, instead, by movements through space and long-term relationships with the land. Julie Nagam's powerful work on the jiimaan or canoe as a form of Indigenous methodology helped me frame my own Indigenous relationship to islands, land, rivers, and lakes.

In preparation for the residency, I spent countless hours in the Michigan Historical Center, looking at various maps of the Great Lakes and, particularly, the Upper Peninsula. But, land has a spirit and a history; it is not a blank canvas or place emptied of meaning and use. So, trying to understand Ni-aazhawa'am-minis purely from settler-colonial maps archived by the State of Michigan was a difficult and disembodied experience. I needed something more embodied, lived, and shared.

Nonetheless, before I began working from and about Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, I needed to listen to the island and her spirit. Living in the Lower Peninsula, I was forced to begin to understand Ni-aazhawa'am-minis via archival and ancestral memory. As a group, some of us in Waboozaki engaged in conversations with other Anishinaabeg whose ancestors named this island, and contrary to the popular mythology, continue to live in and use this area. We engaged in archival research looking at various maps: from those made by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to those mapping the Lac Vieux Desert-L'Anse Trail Corridor, an Anishinaabeg trail connecting the Keweenaw Bay with the present-day Wisconsin (see Nicholas Brown's work in the exhibition).

As I studied Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, I was reminded that even though my Indigenous and voyageur ancestors likely passed through this territory, I am still an interloper on the island and in the Keweenaw peninsula, as are all of the members Waboozaki. Even so, I wanted to understand the land (aki or aakiing), knowing that my relationship with this place was only temporary or provisional. I would only momentarily speak to, with, and from Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. As a Métis with aboriginal roots across the Great Lakes, prairies, and subarctic, my ancestors frequently traveled across the continent, intimately interacting with local geographies, ecologies, and communities. I see my presence on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis as one that continues this longer tradition of Indigenous migration and movement, one where water travel via a jiimaan or boat is crucial. The reserve and reservation systems are about disabling Indigenous movements across the land. Migratory Indigenous traditions counter the ways that both U.S. American and Canadian governments have harshly reduced the ability of Indigenous peoples to move and harvest in traditional ways. But, historically, acquiescence was not the only possibility. For instance, my family fought against the Americans during the War of 1812 and against the English (soon to be Canadians) at the Métis anticolonial insurrection known as the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816. My great-uncle served as Cuthbert Grant's spokesperson and, as Pierre Falcon writes, the first ambassador of the Métis Nation. He was arrested and later acquitted for the murder of more than twenty settler Canadians, including Governor Robert Semple. Similarly, Anishinaabeg communities across the Great Lakes resisted U.S., British, and Canadian hegemony and their desires to fix Indigenous society to small parcels of land. My work on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis needed to reflect this desire for survivance, as Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor calls the ways that Indigenous societies both survive and resist.

However, Indigenous relationships to settler-colonialism are complex and, at times, complicated. My own family, for instance, was involved in the mapping of Anishinaabewaki or Indigenous lands around the Great Lakes, leading to their subsequent appropriation by the British crown. Because my Métis ancestors maintained an intimate knowledge of the Great Lakes watershed and its various river systems, they were employed by British naval officer and hydrographic surveyor Henry Woolsey Bayfield to assist in his survey of the Great Lakes. In turn, they became complicit in surveying and mapping the lakes, eventually leading to Anishinaabeg lands being usurped by settler colonial nation-states. With this historical context and my ancestral ambivalence (including armed resistance and complicity), doing a residency on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis was both a healing and challenging situation. My stay on the island was not simply a respite from the day-to-day machinations of contemporary life, as many artists' residencies are commonly presented. It was about knowing the island, its spirit, and conversing with the various animate and inanimate beings on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis and the waters around the island.



To understand and work from Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, I needed to both investigate the island and its ecology, without dismissing a critical understanding of settler colonialism in the cross-border Great Lakes region. This is especially crucial in that islands are central within the epistemology of Anishinaabeg and Métis people of the Great Lakes. Islands do not hold the same nostalgia and lure that they evoke within many settlers and their descendents, but are nonetheless fundamental to Indigenous ways of the being in the region. As we know, the Anishinaabeg creation story tells how Muskrat created our contemporary world when, after a great flood, dove to the bottom of the lake to get a small handful of earth. He placed this silt on the back of Turtle and, losing his life in the process, Muskrat created the landmass we now call North America. It is for this reason that many Indigenous people refer to this continent as Turtle Island.

In addition to the role of islands in the creation story, islands also play a central role in telling how Indigenous people got to the Great Lakes, having migrated here a long-time ago from the place where the sun rises. In this story, there are seven important stopping points, four of which are islands: turtle-shaped island just south of Montreal, Manitoulin Island, Spirit Island, and Madeline Island. Islands are not isolated spaces removed from the day-to-day activities of larger society, rather islands exist in relation to what happens on the main land and to the stories we tell. There are sacred islands, often those with Manitou in their name (there are at least two islands in Lake Michigan and another in Lake Superior named Manitou Island, not to mention Manitoulin Island), but others are utilitarian.

It is important to note that my family was living on Bootaagani-minis (Drummond Island) with other Anishinaabeg and Métis people when the Treaty of Ghent forced dozens of families to relocate across Lake Huron's Georgian Bay. Following the War of 1812, the United States and Britain established a geopolitical border separating British North America from the United States (both colonial fictions from my vantage point). The border crossed between Bootaagani-minis (Drummond Island) and Cockburn Island, violently affecting my family. It continues to impact the way that my parents, siblings, children, and I relate to the Great Lakes and, particularly, to the islands. We were banished from an island, becoming a displaced people. As descendents of the Métis Nation, although living on the U.S.-side of the international border, we have complicated relationships on the United States and Canada. Although I carry a U.S. passport, I see myself as a citizen of the Métis Nation.

#### NEED TITLE

And any other info,  
2014

For my ancestors, islands were functional. They had (and have) use. They weren't solely places for recreation; they weren't all sacred. They were used for fishing or for the sugar bush, for hunting or brief stops while in transit. Some islands are sacred and hold spiritual meaning, while others have more utilitarian functions. Islands were not isolated from the everyday activities that existed on the mainland or simply recreational vacation-spots. In fact, their names often help us understand their historical function and the status they played. Before there was Rabbit Island, it was known as Traverse Island. Before that, the Anishinaabeg called (and call) this island Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. Although I am only a learner of Anishinaabemowin, when I see this word, I translate it as Ni = my/our, aazhawaam = cross to by boat, minis = island. That is, 'the island we cross to by boat.'

While doing research for my residency, I posed this concept to some fluent speakers and language teachers via Facebook. Alphonse Pitawanakwat shared that Ni-aazhawa'am-minis means 'an island you have to bypass to go to the other side...zhaazhoowaach aazhoowiing jiigabiik e ni zhaang.' Margaret Noodin replied: 'Enya - nasap nd'enendam! I read it as Our Crossing Island.' Janis Fairbanks noted that 'I read the meaning as posted on the map the same as Margaret Noodin. What I see in Alphonse Pitawanakwat's reply is that he gave you an alternate translation and meaning.' Finally, Mesheki Giizhig (Mike Zimmerman) responded that 'aazhawa'am is a verb describing crossing in a boat/canoe, aadawaa'am is to travel with someone in a boat/canoe.'

The beauty of the Anishinaabemowin language, and its use in naming specific places, is that it is descriptive and can help us understand the function, topography, ecology, and geography of that place. Fluent speakers can poetically understand multiple significations from a single word. What I took away from this discussion is that within local naming systems, Ni-aazhawa'am-minis was seen as a point to stop at when crossing the Keweenaw Bay. It was, historically, only a temporary stopping point. For me, my time on the island as an artist-in-residence paralleled its usage since time immemorial. It was an artistic crossing point; it was part of a larger migration story.

While I spent just under two weeks on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, I used the island as a reason to have conversations with elders and language speakers, as well as investigate local history and ecology. Although I hadn't even visited the island yet, Ni-aazhawa'am-minis had already become the locus of conversations and knowledge sharing. It helped me cross over some complex issues and thoughts. It became a crossing point for many things.

But naming, just like history, is a complex and multilayered system. Most people no longer call this place Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. Those living on Rabbit Bay near Lahti Creek call it Rabbit Island, while many maps use the name Traverse Island. As a structure, settler-colonialism legitimizes the process by which immigrants re-name, re-claim, and re-write history. Their claims to ownership often come through the process of (re)naming, and, in turn,

overwriting Indigenous stories and relationships to place. When places do retain their original names, the words are often stripped of their original meaning and, in turn, rendered mute. As Waboozaki worked on our projects individually and together, I became acutely aware of the politics of naming and claiming, processes that Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith places within her well-known 'Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects.'

We could say that mapping, and placing names on a map, is a palimpsest with each new name obscuring and uncovering the past. However, even with each new pen stroke, the previous writing is not fully erased. Newly created layers cannot entirely obscure the layers underneath. This is the nature of history and, particularly, the nature of settler-colonialism, the process by which non-Indigenous people move into a place and stake claims to ownership. Part and parcel to this process, as people move into places they either learn the names of a place in an act of sharing and solidarity or, using the logic of settler-colonialism, create new names for a place. What is interesting about Rabbit Island is that it does both; it uses the local name for the island, but only the recent name. In many ways, Traverse Island seems like a fairly adept translation of Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. To traverse is to cross over. But how Ni-aazhawa'am-minis became Traverse Island and then Rabbit Island (probably with some Finnish names in there, as well) is a narrative I do not fully know. And this not knowing is significant. We do not always understand structural changes that happen around us; we may be unintentionally complicit in them, without even knowing the roles we play. As Marx writes, 'Men [and women] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.'

So, I arrived on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis knowing the complex and complicated history of the Great Lakes, both of the places and of its names. In knowing this, I landed on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis needing to listen to the spirit of the island and of the flora and fauna that inhabit it. All places have spirit, but only some of us know how to listen and communicate with the land. This type of land-based collaboration is a long-term project, one that cannot happen over the course of an artists' residency (or a single life-time or within a few generations). Although the island is just a crossing point, it takes many generations to understand Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. Gratefully, while visiting the island I was assisted in my learning by eagles and loons, birch, maple, and spruce. These plants and animals spoke to me and I listened, as best as I could. With the help of these various beings, I worked on multiple projects on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, including an ongoing project where I collect and interact with herbal medicines ('Michif-Michin'). Although 'Michif-Michin' is not included in the exhibition at the DeVos Art Museum, this ongoing project helped me understand the island and its local ecology. Although I never met her, my great-grandmother was an herbalist known for her salves

and, through this ongoing artist's project, I work to speak to her and to the plants.

For the Rabbit Island residency exhibition, I created two new works and include a project I created/performed for a 2014 exhibition in Ontario curated by Srimoyee Mitra. Each of these three works gestures towards Indigenous migration and relationships to place, particularly in the Great Lakes. They engage notions of learning and relearning, storytelling and knowledge, history and its absence. The latter, 'Gikinawaabi (Learning to Listen)' is a smashed canoe that incorporates multiple audio tracks, performance, and sculptural elements. It deals with cross-border Indigenous issues, the role of learning through listening, observing, and working. The new works, exhibited for the first time at the DeVos Art Museum, interrogate issues of migration and movement, as well as allude to the 1842 Treaty of La Pointe, which ceded Ni-aazhawa'am-minis and lands in the Lake Superior watershed. Using two-channel video, photographs, and sculpture, these works call attention to the island, migration, and the various 'crossing-over points' in history.

While briefly living and working on Ni-aazhawa'am-minis, I listened to many stories; I learned that the spirit of the island is strong, but that this story is often (metaphorically) obscured under layers-and-layers of sandstone, glacial sediment, mosses, lichens, and settler-colonial history. Through these particular artworks and the process of creating them, I imagine that my time on the island, and particularly my work in the DeVos Art Museum, illuminates a narrative in which Rabbit Island is still known as Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. And it is still used to cross over.

—Dylan Miner



#### NEED TITLE

And any other ino,  
2014

IsThereA.com

Dr. Nicholas Brown is an artist, writer, and activist based in Iowa City. He teaches in the American Indian and Native Studies Program at the University of Iowa. Nicholas received a PhD from the Department of Landscape Architecture and the American Indian Studies program (2013) and also a MFA from the School of Art and Design (2006) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

## Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur

The Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur is a hypothetical extension of the L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail from its northern terminus at the head of Keweenaw Bay near L'Anse to Rabbit Island, a place known to the Anishinaabe as Ni-aazhawa'am-minis. The spur connects the island, both literally and figuratively, to the historic L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail, which ran approximately 80 miles from Kakiweonianing (L'Anse) on the shores of Lake Superior to Ketegitigaaning (Lac Vieux Desert) at the headwaters of the Wisconsin River. Linking the island to the trail affirms already existing relations—challenging Rabbit Island's status as remote and isolated—while also emphasizing its contemporary position within enduring and evolving indigenous geographies.

In use for over a thousand years, until the early 1940s, the trail served as a vital link between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds. Archaeological evidence from the Late Woodland and Mississippian periods, for example, suggests that Oneota peoples from southern Wisconsin utilized the corridor to access Lake Superior.<sup>1</sup> Although the trail is no longer visible, having been reclaimed by the thick forest, it was an integral part of "a larger regional transportation network" centered on Lac Vieux Desert, which is strategically positioned near the headwaters of not only the Wisconsin River but also the Ontonagon, Montreal, and Menominee Rivers.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the 1650s, the trail was used extensively for over three centuries by the Anishinaabe, European explorers, fur traders, missionaries, surveyors, miners, loggers, and settlers. The trail first appeared on maps following A.B. Gray's mineral survey (1845-46), William A. Burt's range and township survey (1847), and the General Land Office survey (1849-53).

1. Anthony Godfrey, "Ethnographic Report on the Historical, Cultural, and Traditional Use of The Lac Vieux Desert to L'Anse Trail," U.S. West Research, Inc., 2395 East Fisher Lane, Salt Lake City, Utah (November 12, 2002), 14.
2. Richard J. Vanden Heuvel, "Cultural Resources Reconnaissance and Evaluation of the Lac Vieux Desert-L'Anse Trail, Ottawa National Forest" (Bloomington, IN: Soil Systems, Inc., 1980).

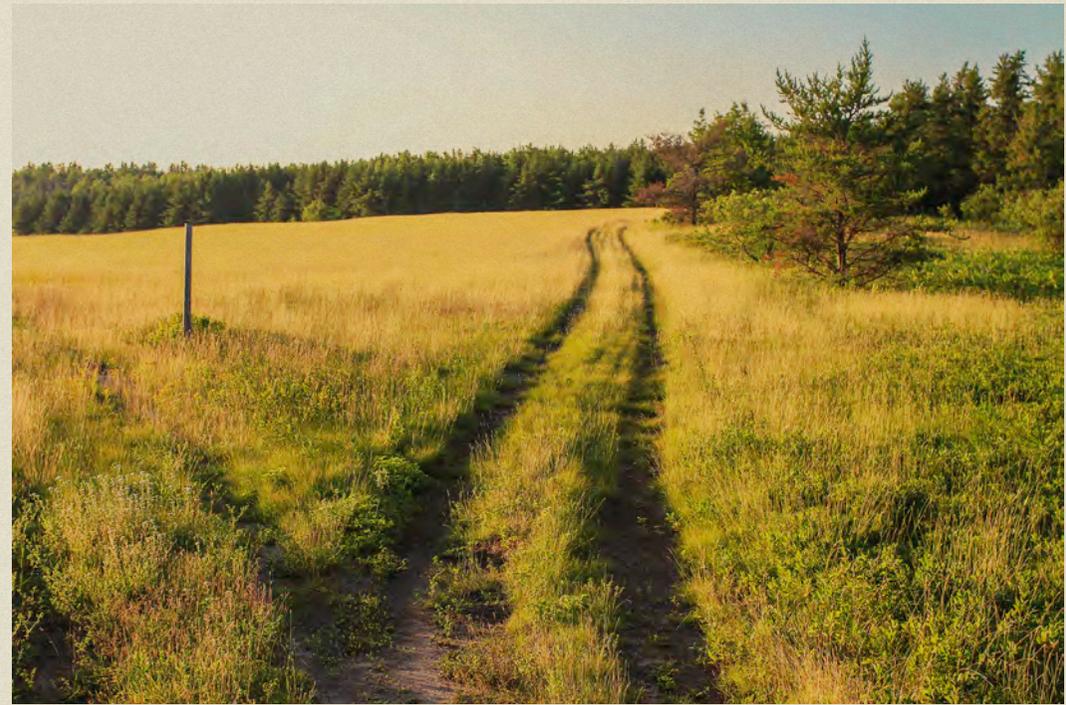
In addition to using the trail for hunting, gathering, trapping, and fishing, the Anishinaabe at Lac Vieux Desert followed the path to gain access to treaty-related government services, annuity payments, and allotment payments at L'Anse. In the late 1930s, as use waned, the Forest Service considered developing the trail in order to promote heritage tourism in the region. In 1938, Sulo Highhill, an employee of Ottawa National Forest, declared, "This trail will be brushed and cleaned of slash and made to appear as nearly like the red man's original trail as possible, even to the method of crossing streams. No doubt it will attract to this region many people interested in Indian lore."<sup>3</sup> In 1984 the Michigan Historical Commission added the trail to the State Register of Historical Sites and two years later a historical marker was erected at the Bishop Baraga Shrine, near the northern terminus of the trail.<sup>4</sup> Today the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community are working with the U.S. Forest Service (Ottawa National Forest) and the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission to identify and preserve the trail corridor.<sup>5</sup> The goal is not to create a new destination for tourists but rather to protect an old cultural landscape of enduring significance to the Anishinaabe, particularly the Lac Vieux Desert Ojibwe.

The title of this piece, Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur, has several meanings. Ni-aazhawa'am-minis is the Anishinaabemowin name for Traverse (Rabbit) Island, which translates to "crossing over the bay island." Spur can be interpreted in two ways. As a noun, spur describes "an angular projection, offshoot, or branch extending out beyond or away from a main body or formation." In this case, the Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur is an offshoot of the L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail. As a verb, to spur means to incite to action or to stimulate. In this more active sense, the Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur can be understood as a call to enlarge Rabbit Island's social, historical, and geographical context, and thus to expand what is possible to do both on and off the island. How Rabbit Island is framed affects the kind of work that can be produced as part of the larger project. Currently, it is framed in a manner that inflates the island's isolation and disavows its colonial past and present, which unnecessarily restricts the project's potential. While the island itself may never have been subdivided, the emerging narrative remains resolutely detached from other histories that envelop the island and from the larger social context within which the island is embedded.<sup>6</sup>

3. Godfrey, "Ethnographic Report," 60.

4. Dave Mataczynski, "Difficult pathway leads to trail recognition," *The L'Anse Sentinel* (January 30, 1985).

5. USDA Forest Service, Ottawa National Forest, "Lac Vieux Desert - L'Anse Trail Corridor Plan, Memorandum of Understanding" (2010)..



Northern terminus of the L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail,  
2014

6. Perhaps decolonization is the elusive antonym for subdivision. Rob Gorski, "There Is No Antonym For Subdivision," *No Island is A Man* (Marquette, MI: The DeVos Art Museum, 2012).



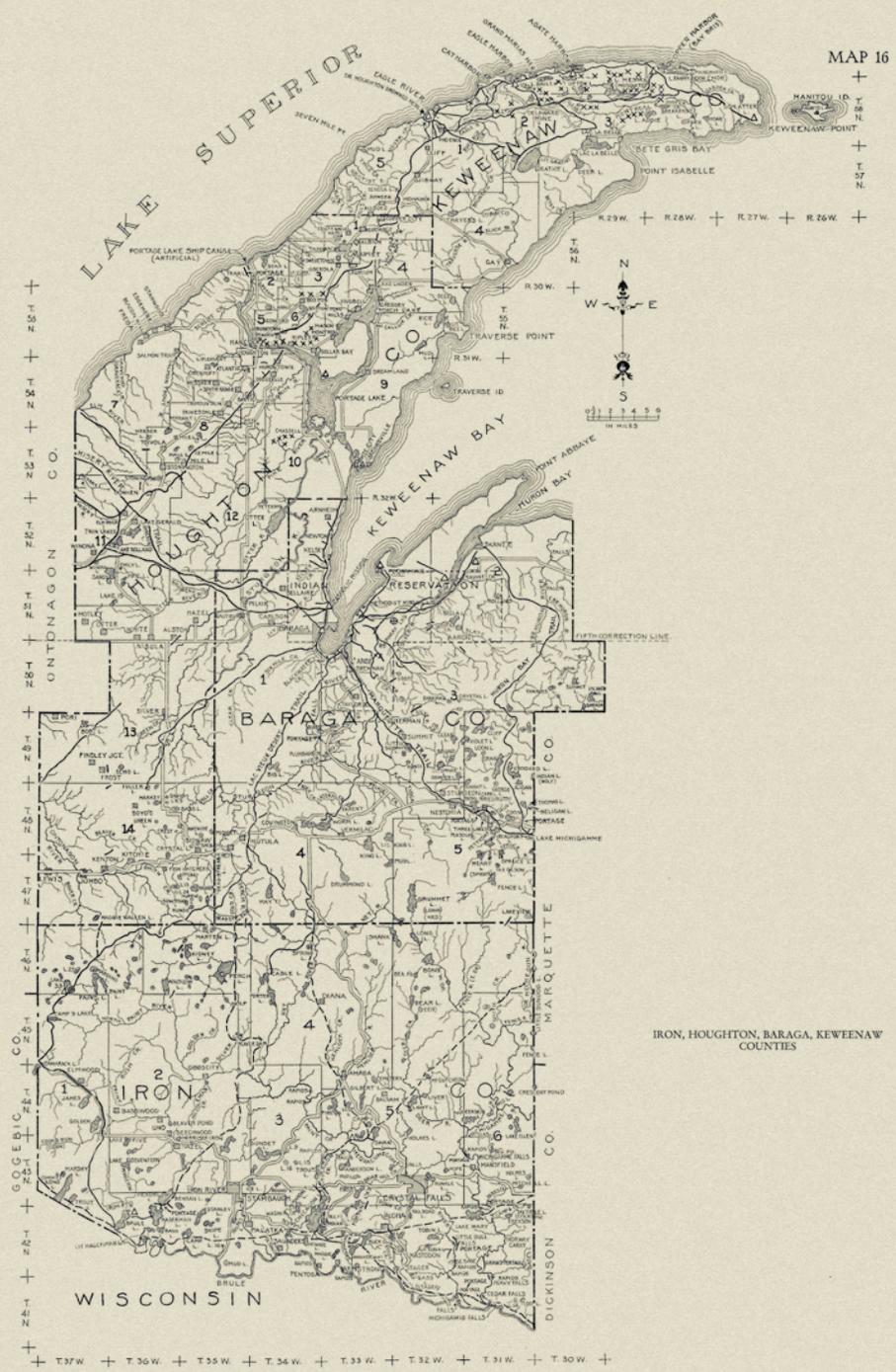
Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur,  
2014

RABBIT ISLAND

Contrary to Nadim Julien Samman's assertion in *No Island is A Man* that "post-colonial negotiations with other people do not seem to be the most obvious function of the [Rabbit Island] project" in part because there are no "remnants of the Chippewa who once fished Lake Superior," the Ni-aazhawa'am-minis Spur insists that we see the Anishinaabe who fish Lake Superior today.<sup>7</sup> It also asks that we engage the L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail in something other than the past tense. In other words, this project invites us to consider how the corridor functions in present. How have indigenous relations to the land, once cultivated partly by movement along the trail, endured and evolved over the centuries? Although modes of travel have clearly changed, the corridor still facilitates exchange between Keweenaw Bay, Lac Vieux Desert, and beyond.

The fact that this exchange encompasses Rabbit Island is evidenced by the 2010 conservation easement, which identifies the island as an important source of lake trout eggs for the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community. "Traverse Island is a currently undeveloped (though previously homesteaded) rocky outcrop of Precambrian Jacobsville sandstone and glacial outwash, an exposed portion of a shoal that runs from Louis Point that forms Little Traverse Bay to the north southerly through the Island," the easement notes. "This shoal supports a productive fishery noted in particular for the Traverse strain of lake trout that spawn on the reefs associated with the property. This easement will serve to protect the viability of these ecologically important reefs, which serve as one source of lake trout eggs for the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community of Ojibwa, by substantially limiting development on nearly 1.8 miles of shoreline on the island and the associated potential for nutrient loading into the surrounding waters."

7. Nadim Julien Samman writes, "On Rabbit Island there are no Lilliputians, Brobdingnags or Houyhnhnms to encounter, let alone any remnants of the Chippewa who once fished Lake Superior, so post-colonial negotiations with other people do not seem to be the most obvious function of the project." Nadim Julien Samman, "Future Islands," *No Island is A Man* (Marquette, MI: DeVos Art Museum, 2012), 26.



Wilbert B. Hinsdale,  
 Archaeological Atlas of Michigan  
 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1931).

Given the historical significance of the L'Anse - Lac Vieux Desert Trail, the centrality of Great Lakes' islands in the Anishinaabe migration story, and the continuing Anishinaabe presence in the region, Ni-aazhawa'am-minis (Rabbit Island) is in fact uniquely positioned to be a site for postcolonial negotiation. Only when stripped of its context does the island (and the project) become "a utopian attempt to colonize our imaginations," and a terra nullius or blank slate for artists to perpetually rediscover and reinterpret.<sup>8</sup> An expanded frame makes untenable the claim that Rabbit Island is imbued with "a frontier spirit informed by the idea that wilderness is civilization."<sup>9</sup>

Instead, we might consider Epeli Hau'ofa's framework for understanding the distinctive regional identity of Oceania, which counters the physical and psychological isolation implicit in colonial representations of the Pacific Islands. "There is a world of difference," he argues, "between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands.' The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power. Focusing in this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships."<sup>10</sup> Alternately, we might conceive of Rabbit Island as a watery "third space of sovereignty," a term offered by Kevin Bruyneel to "provide the vocabulary that both captures and helps to constitute a viable, increasingly sought-after location of indigenous postcolonial political autonomy that refuses the choices set out by the settler-society."<sup>11</sup>

Welcome to Ni-aazhawa'am-minis!

— Nicholas A. Brown

8. "Comprising just 90 acres of undeveloped land surrounded by 31,700 square miles of water in Lake Superior, Rabbit Island is a utopian attempt to colonize our imaginations." Samman, "Future Islands," 25.  
 9. Rabbit Island: Works & Research 2010-2013 (Marquette, MI: DeVos Art Museum, 2013), 26.  
 10. Epeli Hau'ofa, We Are the Ocean: Selected Works (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 31.  
 11. Kevin Bruyneel, The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 218.

[suzannemorrisette.com](http://suzannemorrisette.com)

## Score for Bottom of a Lake (Transition), I, II, III

Single channel video, 2014

(pages 00-00)

In this series I used two contact microphones to create three stereo audio recordings to imagine the sound that water makes as it flows over rocks underwater. I was interested in finding a method that would allow me to “comb” the bottom of the water for these sounds.

To do this I created microphones using piezo discs, which record audio vibrations and tactile noise. These simple microphones were encased in plastic bottles filled with olive oil and dragged from the two sides of a boat using long cable cords. Each microphone hit the bottom of the lake at different intervals and speeds and this created two independent and concurrent tracks reflected here in a single stereo recording.

Though very much abstract, these recording describe the formal qualities — size, contour, surface, negative space, etc. — of the lake in a way that is similar to way that a photograph can tell us about other qualities such as color, shape, and distance. For instance, in the recording long periods of single tone usually mean that the microphones were being dragged over a large flat rock surface whereas short sharp noises refer to microphone jumping off smaller stones. Sometimes a microphone would get snagged or come out of the water and these events are also reflected in the recording.

For this exhibition each audio track has been paired with video taken from the boat around the island to illustrate the surface that created these audio scores.

—Suzanne Morrisette



## In Residence on Rabbit Island: Reflections on the Politics of Remote Wilderness

— Suzanne Morrisette

I believe that it was our shared interests in Indigenous histories of place and mapping that brought Nick Brown, Dylan Miner, Julie Nagam and myself together on Rabbit Island. My own interest in the residency piqued after learning about Dr. Rob Gorski's recent purchase of the 91-acre island. I didn't know that you could buy an island anymore? Off Craigslist no less, a few clicks away from the posting for free firewood.

My familiarity with Lake Superior comes from time spent along the north shore in Canada over the past five summers and from the two years that I lived and worked in Thunder Bay, a small city located on Anishinaabe territory in the province of Ontario. There is a place on Rabbit Island that looks out in the direction of Canada, though it is much too far away to actually see. A small hand-painted placard marks this point with the image of a red maple leaf.

I worried a lot before and during the residency about the politics surrounding the island. In my work I am deeply invested in the ways that colonial narratives render Indigenous people and interests absent or insignificant in relation to land. The problematic of this place seemed to be compounded by what I would characterize as the promotion of an idealized notion of wilderness. On August 7, 2013 The New York Times published an article about the island outlining the history of the property with a particular emphasis on the space as remote and untouched. A short excerpt from this article reads,

He [Dr. Gorski] couldn't have found more virgin territory: aside from the remnants of a late 19th-century fishing shack, and ashes from the locals who have long come here to cook out and swim, the island bears no sign of human habitation.

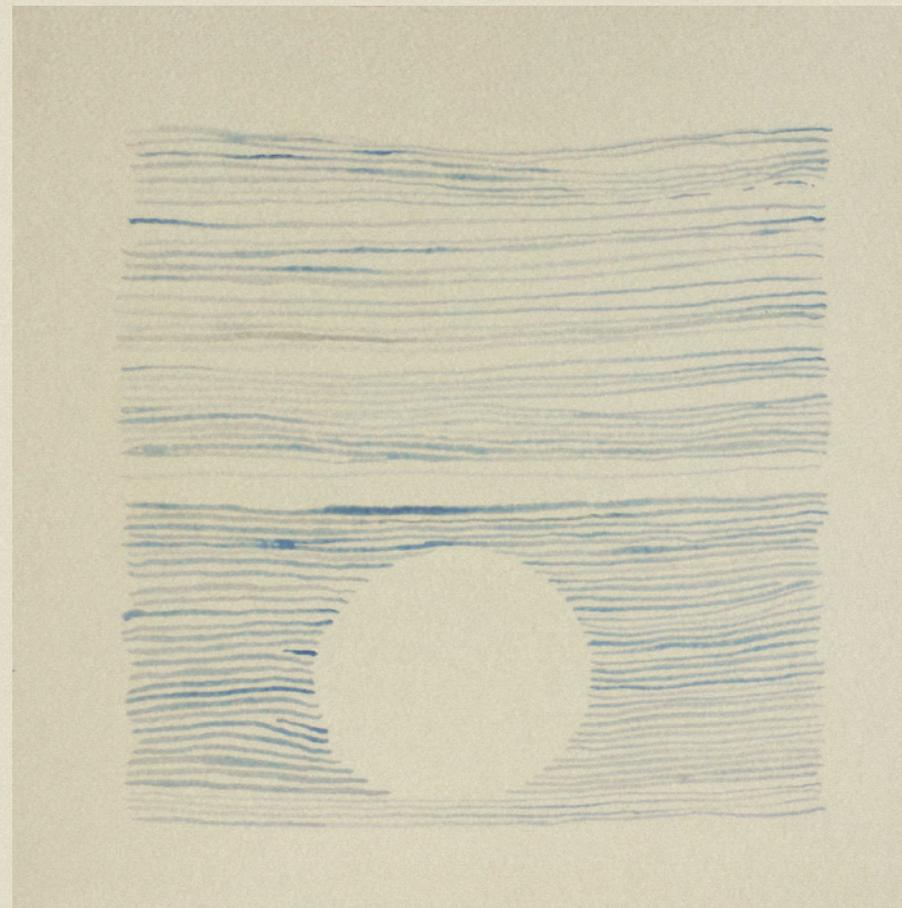
Setting aside the author's colloquial reference to "virgin territory," which both renders the land feminine, sexualized and therefore ripe for exploitation, I am concerned about the possibility for narratives such as this to further erase and dispossess Indigenous people of this land and history. Don't get me wrong, I think that what Dr. Gorski

has done to create opportunities for artists and protect the land from development through conservation are both laudable projects. However, I am cautious that through these initiatives there remains the possibility for forgetting that the act of owning land in this sense belongs to a Western logic of place characterized in large part by a disregard for Indigenous histories in the land. Art historian and academic Richard William Hill has written about this condition by drawing upon the work of 16th c. social contract theorist John Locke. He writes that,

[Locke's] appeal to labour and private property became the central justification of North American colonization. It was the Indian's failure to farm and have private property that seemed to be the problem, and this was mentioned repeatedly, even in regards to Indigenous nations like the Haudenosaune (Iroquois) or the Cherokee, which actually had farming cultures.

This emphasis on property and the virginal history of the island needs to be considered in the context of Western thought, as well as from Indigenous perspectives, if we are to better understand the affect that colonial processes have had, and continue to have, upon these relationships to place. In addition, it seems important to note that the act of surveying ascribes new meaning onto spaces that has the potential to forget previous knowledge.

One example of this can be found within the name of the island itself. While significant for many, the name Rabbit Island is not the original name for this land. Interestingly, as Nick pointed out to us in his research, the island can be found listed as Traverse Island. He further noted that The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission lists an Anishinaabe name for this island: Ni-aazhawaam-minis. As Dylan mentions in his essay about the research that he conducted before coming to the island, this term reflects an additional knowledge of the island and the ways that it has been used. After consulting with several Anishinaabemowin speakers and teachers to translate this name into to English Dylan describes how Ni-aazhawaam-minis refers to a place where you cross or travel to by canoe or boat. This research reveals that although new trails may be carved out of the landscape, the history of Indigenous presence on the island cannot be ignored especially when it is evidenced directly within the Anishinaabemowin name.



**NEED TITLE**

2014

I don't know anyone who doesn't participate in the idea of property in some way, though I know many who reject the concept and recognize other ways of living on the land. Before leaving for the residency I was having a conversation with my friend Eugenia in Toronto about some of these concerns when she made an important observation. We had been discussing the idea of wilderness and remote spaces frequented by backpackers, adventure seekers, and campers alike where one is expected to abide by the code: "leave no trace." Understandably yes, it is absolutely important we do not make a mess in the woods. I am not sure that we should be leaving garbage anywhere for that matter. However, Eugenia recognized the possibility to read the adage as a double entendre for our time in residence: History also functions as a trace, and as an Indigenous person I am familiar with the backwards idea that my history has not left a mark. The idea of the island as wilderness persists in place of the concept of the island as a likely stopping over place for Indigenous peoples. This revision attests to the prevalence of Western rhetoric that continues to subjugate and colonize forms of Indigenous knowledge.

This is not to say that camping or being outdoors is in and of itself a bad thing. Admittedly, I love camping and I have a trunk full of outdoor rock climbing gear ready to go should opportunity arise. What I mean to suggest is that the reasons that we spend time in places such as Rabbit Island might also belong to a certain kind of fiction where masculine, rugged, individuals conquer and dominate by working the land, and surviving against all odds. It was kind of cold and rainy when we were on the island, so I guess our persistence and survival represents a kind of victory in this view. My biggest fear was that as Indigenous artists and academics on this residency we would somehow be seen to legitimize this fiction. After all, it isn't big feat considering that Indigenous people have been doing this for much longer than gets imagined in ways as sophisticated as, if not more than, those that we used.

From our collaborative exchange on the island we were able to create a variety of different responses that situated the island as a place of intersecting histories and ideologies. Along with my fellow collaborators I came to the island having researched and prepared a project to execute while in residence. From my collaborator Nick I learned a great deal about the historical division of land in the area, and traditional land-use by Indigenous people of the region. Through conversations with Dylan I learned about the 1842 Treaty of La Pointe, which he commemorates in one of the works included in this residency exhibition. I continue to have conversations with Julie about our independent and ongoing research on colonial narratives that obscure or erase different forms of Indigenous knowledge about place.

While on the island I began working on a new series, titled score for bottom of a lake (translation), which responded to the landscape using audio and video technologies. With the assistance of the other residents I gathered audio recordings on the lake using two contact microphones that would allow me to "comb" the bottom of the water for sound. In concept, these recordings were intended to read the contours of the lake much like the way that water flows over and between rocks. It allowed me to isolate parts of the topography and to translate this through a form of mediated technology into a song. This was not a way to map or re-map the terrain. Rather, it was a method that I chose to work with and develop in order to read and interact with the place. Three videos with audio components from this series, along with several watercolour sketches are included in this exhibition.

I am grateful for the opportunity to research and develop this project and to work alongside the other artists. At the same time I recognize that my knowledge of the area was and remains limited. Our presence on the island did not remedy or rectify the absence or erasure of histories, and I do not believe this is what we set out to accomplish. We were only working within a small part of what I see as a much larger problem of perception deeply embedded in an ongoing colonial project.

In my understanding it was by our collaborative exchange that we were able to come together and ask questions about the ways spaces are imagined and put to use. In my own work I was constantly led to question: What do I gain from this experience by way of this place? How and for what purpose am I able to use this experience in a way that is respectful and responsive to the location?

These questions were further emphasized for me while driving home to Toronto at the end of the residency. Driving east on Highway 28 towards Sault Ste. Marie I passed through Hiawatha National Forest. Here I saw road-side signage accompanied by the tag-line: "Land of Many Uses." I had seen it on my way to the Upper Peninsula, though it was not until this moment that I thought much of it. The sign encapsulated my former worries and concerns about our project and put them into context. It reminded me that the places that we live, farm, and recreate upon are often defined by the way that we use the land. Colonial history has used the land in ways that skew and erase different forms of knowledge across Indigenous territories and these narratives may become perpetuated in ways that are both intentional and unintentional. While in residence we were also using the land, though it would seem to me that our objective was different in our aim to critically question these processes.

ocadu.ca

Dr. Julie Nagam is an Assistant Professor at OCAD University in the Indigenous Visual Culture program and the Faculty of Liberal Arts Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies. Nagam's research interests include a (re)mapping of the colonial state through creative interventions within concepts of native space.

# JULIE NAGAM

RESIDENCY  
EXHIBITION

## stones tell stories too

In this installation I was interested in exploring the traces of the land to divulge the ontology of the land, which contains memory, knowledge and living histories. I wanted to reveal that the stones of the island and the great lake bare witness to relationships with the human and non-human creatures for thousands of years.

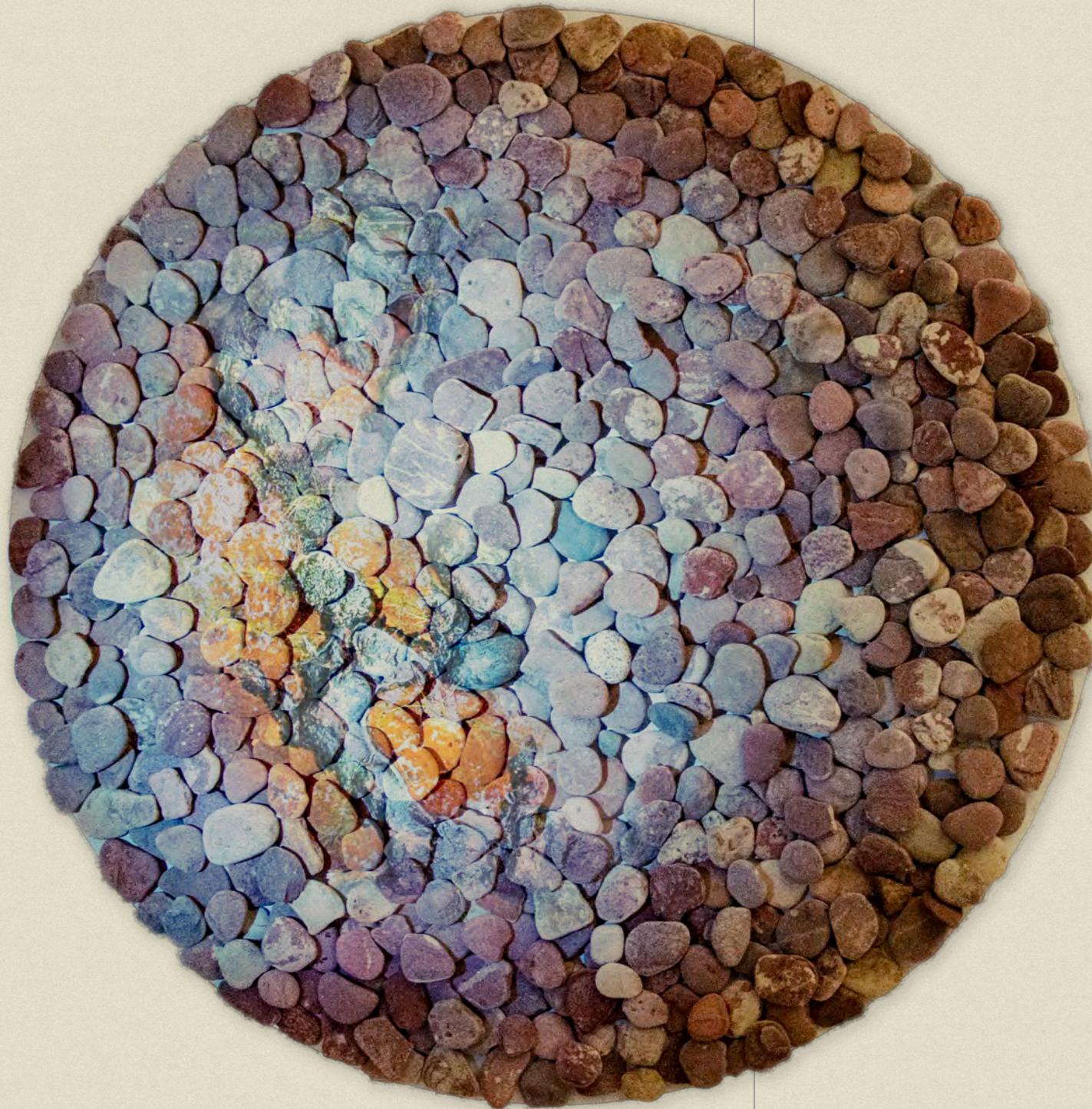
The stones narrate their own truths and worldviews and I have focused on the elements and their relations to the land. For example, how the water and the stones are extremely intimate in their transactions. I was drawn to the memories each stone would carry and what kind of story it might communicate with the various elements of the landscape and its inhabitants.

— Julie Nagam

**stones tell stories too,**  
Single channel video, 2014  
4 minutes, 19 seconds

*Video Stills.*  
(Opposit Page)





**stones tell stories too,**  
Single channel video, 2014  
4 minutes, 19 seconds.

*Video projected directly  
onto rock installation.  
(Photographed directly  
above installation)*

14  
RESIDENCY  
EXHIBITION

RABBIT  
ISLAND

## RABBIT ISLAND RESIDENCY

Founded by Robert Gorski & Andrew Ranville in 2010, the Rabbit Island Residency is a platform to investigate, expand, and challenge creative practices in a remote environment. By living and working on Rabbit Island residents engage directly with the landscape, responding to notions of conservation, ecology, sustainability, and resilience. With a frontier spirit informed by the idea that wilderness is civilization, the residency reflects on the insights provided by the hundreds of years of settlement and division of land. The island—itself an unsettled and undivided space—enables residents to present commentary on these ideas, creating interpretations and even solutions. The Rabbit Island Residency is currently working to become a registered non-profit 501(c)(3).

### Rabbit Island Residency Program Board of Directors

DR. ROBERT GORSKI	Rabbit Island Residency Co-Founder
ANDREW RANVILLE	Rabbit Island Residency Co-Founder Lead Artist
MELISSA MATUSCAK	Director & Curator DeVos Art Museum

## DEVOS ART MUSEUM

The DeVos Art Museum, founded in 1975, is located on the campus of Northern Michigan University. The museum is part of the School of Art and Design and serves as a regional art museum for the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The mission of the DeVos Art Museum is to provide the University and local communities the opportunity to experience original works of art and to foster educational opportunities for all audiences through exhibitions, programs and publications. Through the vast academic resources at Northern Michigan University, the museum aims to become an artistic learning laboratory for NMU, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and the Upper Midwest region.

PRINTED IN CONJUNCTION  
WITH THE EXHIBITION:

**RABBIT ISLAND:  
2014 RESIDENCY EXHIBITION**

AUGUST 18 – SEPTEMBER 28, 2014



**DEVOSART  
MUSEUM**

[nmu.edu/devos](http://nmu.edu/devos)

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