



MONUMENTS OF POWER

Jennifer O'Keeffe Almond - MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS

Monuments of Power

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A THESIS SUPPORT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2019

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Forward

Travelling to the Peace River Valley from Vancouver, I saw firsthand the impact upon the land, from large mining enterprises leaving polluted rivers, streams, and lakes; the clear cutting of forests, and the introduction of industrial work camps disrupting the structure of communities with economic and social impacts resulting from a disproportionate change in regional gender ratio with the introduction of a mostly male, transient resource work-force.

This thesis support paper serves as but a brief investigation of the complex – and contentious – aspects created by authoritarian landscape architecture with respect to the Site C Dam in North Eastern BC. It is my hope that this project has added a little to the record of documentation regarding the Site C Dam. In the future, I look to further explore and create an analysis of structures of power and authority. In addition to paintings mentioned in this text, I have also been painting a series of gift portraits and landscapes of places at risk from the Site C Dam. I will be returning with these to the Peace River in 2019, to give them back to the people who have been fighting for the future.

Abstract

Landscape - as monument, propaganda and resource - has had a profound affect on the 21st century; from the art we create, to the food we ingest, the spaces we inhabit and the structures we impose on the world and ourselves. There is, however, another darker legacy of landscape architecture: the practice of reshaping an existing environment in order to adapt space to suit and at times subjugate humans for public and private interests. These interests, manifest themselves in our modern landscapes with earthworks, buildings and mega-projects heralding a history of colonial imperialism, oppression and war - all presented as 'progress' – signifying ultimate power over the land and containment of the natural world.

This thesis paper explores the way contemporary landscape is shaped and developed as a means of control: how landscape modification and mega projects are utilized by governments and corporations as not only monuments of power, but also as a means of regulating and controlling human interaction within place; investigating how regulation of landscape is not only used within a socio-economic structure but also on a subconscious level as a means of contemporary behavioral modification and the role of art as a means of commentary that resides within the boundaries of these constructed spaces.

This paper was written on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwítlh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Yvonne Tupper, Arlene and Ken Boon and Esther Pederson for their generosity and strength and for taking the time to share a little of their lives and stories of the Peace River.

Images

(Fig 1) Peace River. Valley, 2018. Photograph Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

(Fig 2) *On the Brink*. Oil on canvas, 2018. Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

(Fig 3) *Construction and Peace River sketches*. Silt, Saskatoon Berries and Rose hips, 2018.
Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

(Fig 4) Monument to Power: *WAC Bennet Dam*. Oil on canvas, 2019. Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

(Fig 5) *Site C work camp*. Oil on canvas, 2018. Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

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(Fig 7) *Bedrock Failure*. Oil on canvas, 2018. Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond

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Introduction: Subject Position and Methodology

Over the course of several years, I have been involved in organizing protests against BC Hydro's Site C Dam project. The Site C Dam is a proposed 60-metre high, 1,050m length dam on the Peace River on Treaty 8 territory in northeastern British Columbia (a 1,200 kilometer distance from Vancouver). This project if built, would create an 83 km Reservoir, submerging 78 First Nations heritage sites and is in violation of section (35) of the Constitution Act. Further, the project threatens to inundate critical habitat in North Eastern British Columbia's boreal Forest, of which the Peace River Valley is home to over 63 at risk species. The project also poses a threat to British Columbia's food security as the project is expected to decimate over 12,000 hectares of vital agricultural land. The energy proposed to be created through the Site C Dam is unnecessary, electricity demand in BC has been flat for over 14 years and we are currently exporting and selling our excess energy to the United States at below market rates. The government has made attempts to justify the Site C Dam through exaggerated claims of the energy needs of Vancouver, to providing for the power requirements for the LNG and Fracking industry and also suggesting that we could sell the energy produced by Site C for below-market value to Alberta in exchange for agreeing to their pipelines. At the same time BC Hydro has also been in the news for paying millions of dollars a year to independent private power producers not to produce electricity for British Columbia. It is also worth noting that this project is occurring at a time when many countries around the world have begun to move away from large scale hydroelectric dams due to the long term ecological destruction such ventures create.

While researching this paper, I attended the Rocky Mountain Fort Injunction Hearings, in addition to the Supreme Court Injunction hearings for a delay to Site C Dam construction. At these hearings, I documented events by sketching the court proceedings and taking notes of testimony and documents referenced by the court. In August 2018, I travelled up to the Peace River to meet with people who are facing ongoing civil action suits for blockading against BC Hydro at the Rocky Mountain Fort. This allowed me to gain a better understanding of the impacts of Site C and document changes through sketches and paintings.

My subject position during these experiences is not only as witness to a moment through the visual and written documentation of events, but as someone who has also been actively involved in organizing protests against the project. I situate myself and my work within a context of history painting as a genre and the role of the war artist in the creation of pictorial archive of an event, my position on this controversial project, has been influenced by my own personal history. My father is the son of William Wallace O’Keeffe, whose ranch was expropriated during the Bridge River Power Project 1958-59. He tried to rally the people of Minto against the project but ultimately failed. In addition, his brother Art O’Keeffe was a well-known union rep and the business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers who had been sentenced to four months in jail for his involvement in the wild cat strike at Lenkurt Electric plant in Burnaby B.C. in 1966. On the maternal side my grandfather Harry Almond was a regional district councillor on the Sunshine Coast. Before coming to Canada, he was involved in the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the Waitaki Valley in New Zealand. My position, has been deeply shaped and impacted by a personal family history of not only colonial

employment in the creation of hydroelectric dams, but also from those who have been displaced by them and those who have worked as representatives for the rights of people that supply the labour for such projects. As a descendant of such a legacy, I have a sense of the long-term implications these types of projects hold.

A Brief History of Hydroelectricity in British Columbia

In December 2014, the BC Liberal Provincial Government approved construction of the Site C Dam in British Columbia. However, the project's origins can be traced back to provincial energy project proposals of the 1950s and the Western Interconnection: a system of electrical networks that feed into the United States. These networks outlined by journalist Christopher Pollen in his text *The Peace in Peril: The Real Cost of the Site C Dam*, state that:

“This grid's tentacles reach across half of the total landmass of the United States and into Canada, bringing civilization to more than 50 million people from Northern British Columbia to the Texas border, and as far east as Nebraska.” (Pollen 24).

The project is a culmination of not only interconnected electrical power but also political influence between the United States and Canada. In 1964, an engineering, defence and intelligence corporation - Parsons Company - published a paper titled “*NAWAPA: North American Water and Power Alliance*,” by Roland P. Kelly, Technical Program manager of “The Ralph M. Parsons Company”. Essentially the paper estimated that NAWAPA could provide water to the continent (i.e.) the United States for 100 years. In the proposal, the project would divert approximately 85,110,120,000 cubic metres of water to the United States annually on the understanding that global warming was expected to change the climate dramatically in the agricultural regions of the United States, this plan can be found on a timeline list of projects on the company's website.

In *Water and Free Trade: The Mulroney Government's Agenda for Canada's Most*

Precious Resource, agrologist Wendy Holm discussed these core aspects:

“The NAWAPA plan proposed by Ralph Parsons Co. of Los Angeles envisaged building a large number of the world's biggest dams to trap the Yukon, Peace and Liard Rivers into a reservoir that would flood one-tenth of British Columbia to create a canal from Alaska to Washington State that would supply water through existing canals and pipelines to most areas of the continent.” (Holm 31)

It is worth noting that technology has changed significantly since then, to the point where it is possible to distribute the water without creation of a canal. More to the point, it is crucially vital to understand that once water is impounded behind a dam, it becomes a water commodity under the NAFTA Free Trade Agreement.

In his book, *The Peace in Peril: The Real Cost of the Site C Dam*, journalist Christopher Pollen further investigates the origins of the Peace Canyon, W.A.C. Bennett Dam and the Site C Dam on the Peace River. He traces these projects' origins to Nazi war collaborator, Axel Wenner-Gren, consulting with the Provincial Government in B.C.:

“The seed to develop the hydro resources of the Peace had been planted by a Swedish industrialist-tycoon named Axel Wenner-Gren in the years following World War II. Wenner-Gren made his vast fortune selling vacuum cleaners, shifted to arms dealing, and became even richer from selling weapons to both sides during the war. But by 1957, his complicity with the Germans was apparently forgiven. In that year he unveiled a grandiose scheme to “open up the BC north- including construction of an ultra-futuristic monorail system, hydro dams and pulp mills.” (Pollen 25)

After public backlash against the project, the plans were abandoned until they were revived and revised as a massive hydroelectric project under Premier W.A.C. Bennett in 1962. It is from Premier W.A.C. Bennett that we have the development of legacy monument Bennett Dam in North Eastern B.C. On Dec 16th, 2014, the BC Liberal Government approved Site C despite

considerable public opposition, including Amnesty International, the Suzuki Foundation, the Council of Canadians, Greenpeace, The Royal Society Canada and numerous other organizations and individuals.

On Dec 11th, 2017, the newly elected NDP Government declared they would not be cancelling the project despite election promises and public statements that their government would follow recommendations by the BC Utilities Commission. The West Moberly and Prophet River Nations are taking the Crown, Provincial and Federal Government to court for violation of Treaty 8 and their Constitutionally enshrined rights. In order to raise funds required to take on this Government and Crown Corporation, the Nun Wa Dee Stewardship Society created the Stake in Peace Campaign for the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations, whereby people can purchase a stake to raise funds to support the legal challenges against Site C.

Monuments of Power

Landscape architecture, the deliberate reshaping of the natural world, is more than botanical collections in civic parks or infrastructure projects of roads and bridges. Our modern landscapes owe their origins to a darker legacy of landscape architecture. Particularly a legacy of colonial imperialism, oppression and war. The continuation of such cultivation practices can be seen today in historical gardens such as those at Versailles and Kew Gardens, as detailed by ethnologist and anthropologist Lucile Brockway, in her text *Science and Colonial Expansion, the Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*, to the mass industrial projects we see today, such as the Site C Dam project in the Peace River Valley in Northern B.C (fig 1).



(Fig 1) *Peace River Valley*. 2018.

The origins of such restructuralization is an expression of colonialism that continues today,

where shaping nature is seen as a demonstration of man's hegemony over the land and containment of the natural world. Landscape architecture is the ultimate monument to corporate power; not only is the land being shaped and channeled for resource extraction but ironically, these 'created' landscapes then serve as fitting locations for museums commemorating the destruction from which they derived their foundations. For example, the W.A.C. Bennett Dam Visitor Centre in Hudson's Hope, recently opened a section of the exhibit about the negative impacts of the Bennett Dam. This new exhibit was featured in a CBC News Article by journalist Gavin Fisher, "BC Hydro acknowledges dark past of W.A.C. Bennett dam in new exhibit," Jun 15, 2016. In the article BC Hydro's deputy CEO Chris O'Riley states that "There's tremendous benefits that come from hydroelectricity in our province, and we all benefit from the prosperity that its brought, but there are impacts and there were certainly serious impacts when that dam was built in the 1960s. So we think it builds understanding to see that full picture, and it contributes to reconciliation." (Fisher,18) In the interview, Fisher asked Chief Roland Wilson of the West Moberly Nation of the Peace River Valley for comment regarding the deputy CEO's statement; Chief Wilson made it clear that the mistake was being repeated. "They are building Site C and doing it again." (Fisher 27).

While working on my MFA at Emily Carr University, my painting practice has become oriented around visually investigating the sociopolitical relationship between landscape architecture and art as a means to document the commodity landscape. In my thesis, I am exploring the relationship between art, the landscape economy and its accompanying social discourse. Anthropologist Lucile H. Brockway's book, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*, traces the legacy of colonialism and exploitation

involving various botanical collections around the world with relationship to how we shape and use land. After reading the text, I became interested in the implications of landscape intervention as an authoritarian tool to assert dominion not merely over the land, but over people living on the land. I am investigating the role of landscape architecture as both monument and propaganda, a theme I am exploring visually in my painting practice. My paintings examine the dichotomy between the natural and manufactured world, while exploring the psychology of space and the relationship between architectural barriers and people. An example of this is the aerial paintings of a landslide, which heighten the disjointed and displaced elements of the land, to the paintings documenting the changes and engineering of the Peace River Valley. This is particularly relevant with regard to corporate intervention today, where many contemporary landscape architectural forms are rooted in colonialism and developments in industrial warfare -a history of which is discussed by Stéphane Pinkas a specialist on the Gardens of Versailles in the book *Versailles The History of the Gardens and Their Sculptures*.

Essentially, the scale of the project required the relocation of entire villages and utilized a sophisticated system to move soil and create a system of drainage and water channeling based on construction techniques for cannon ramparts. The transformation of the swampy landscape and formal geometric design structure was utilized as an expression of the hegemonic rule of Louis XIV and the solidification of his power, displaying his colonial botanical collections while at the same time demonstrating his control over the natural world.

On the Brink (Fig 2), a large oil landscape painting I completed in spring 2018, depicts a prominent landscape at risk from the proposed Site C Dam in Northeastern B.C. The Site C Dam

is a controversial project, projected to be environmentally catastrophic for the landscape, flora, fauna and people of the Peace River Valley. Riddled with sociopolitical implications for the province and its inhabitants, the project reflects a fundamentally colonial impulse within the government and large corporations, in their exploitative use-oriented relationship with resource extraction. The Site C Dam project has become a motivating subject for much of my recent work.



(Fig 2) *On the Brink*. Oil Painting on Canvas. 2018.

Architecture, Art and Propaganda

In August 2018, I visited the W.A.C Bennett Dam Visitor Centre. The BC Hydro tour began by having participants watch a promotional video on hydroelectricity in British Columbia, replete with high definition soaring eagles and snowy peaked mountains. Afterwards, the tour made its way downstairs to an awaiting vehicle and we were taken into the depths of the Bennett Dam to view the internal mechanisms. During the tour, the guide made cursory statements regarding the construction of the Bennett Dam. With regard to Treaty Rights it was stated that while “Hydro had broken Treaty rights building the Peace Canyon and W.A.C. Bennett Dams, BC Hydro is now honouring the Treaty by acknowledging that they had violated it.”

This relationship between paradigms of power and public exhibition practices is explored by the scholar Carol Duncan in her text *Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums*, Duncan argues that to “control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community’s highest values and most authoritative truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within the community.” (Duncan, 8). Museums, like art and media, function as a means of creating public narrative, or more exactly, propaganda used for political aims.

Essentially, one can surmise through Duncan’s statement that by addressing the negative impacts of the WAC Bennett Dam and their placement within the context of a BC Hydro operated facility and museum setting offers the corporation greater control over their public image and narrative.

This narrative- includes press coverage that they are acknowledging their past as ‘reconciliation’, while at the same time as noted in Gavin Fisher’s article *BC Hydro acknowledges dark past of W.A.C. Bennett dam in new exhibit* BC Hydro CEO Chris O’Riley continues to insist “that Site C

is a different situation than the W.A.C. Bennett Dam.” (Fisher 33). With regard to Site C and BC Hydro, it is worth noting that BC Hydro has previously run afoul of the conditions set forth in the environmental assessment certificate and for acting in bad faith and violating rules for the protection of indigenous sites by contracting-out services while there are still ongoing legal proceedings regarding the violation of Treaty 8 rights.



(Fig 4) *Monument to Power: WAC Bennett Dam* oil painting. 2019

These issues are noted in the BC Government’s Site C Administrative Inspection report dated August 30th, 2017. There are many questions regarding BC Hydro and the contracting out of archaeological work to Golder Associates Ltd in the Peace River. During the summer of 2018, when I was in the Peace River region, several people whom I met questioned whether artifacts were being taken and held by Hydro from these sites and whether there was full disclosure to the Dene Za, West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations, whose ancestral grounds are being desecrated.

Dene Za/Neheweyin - Treaty 8 member, Yvonne Tupper is also being sued by BC Hydro for \$420 million dollars for protesting against Site C at the Rocky Mountain Fort in 2016, questioned the transparency and process regarding these 'archeological' findings, stating: "...over 77,000 artifacts found along BC Peace Riverbanks for BC Hydro's mega project- Site C, BC Hydro is currently withholding information that it may or not be my ancestors bones/tools and is not upholding any of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations of Canada."

During the Rocky Mountain Fort Injunction hearings which I attended in March, 2016, Hydro's legal representation argued that part of the need for the injunction against the protestors blockading was that it was preventing Hydro's contractors from conducting archaeological work in the area. In Lucy Lippard's *Undermining: A Wild Ride in Words and Images Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*, she discusses how the people of Ohkay Owingeh of the Jemez Mountains in New Mexico temporarily managed to protect their heritage sites by utilizing vehicular weight restrictions against the Copar Pumice Company owned by Robert Baker. "Ultimately that did not stop him any more than a 1999 Rio Arriba County gravel ordinance did. At the same time, he has cooperated with the local Petroglyph Project to record rock art - sometimes one step ahead of his bulldozers, but also displaying an apparent interest in long-term preservation and an eventual National Monument." (Lippard 26)

In this manner, corporate infrastructure today has become a commodity in itself, creating legacy monuments for politicians and people of status. To take things further, we may equally consider the implication of corporate art collections and the institutions created for the purposes of display. Both Lucy Lippard and Carole Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums*,

are exploring the role of display in relationship to public entity. One may also note an interesting parallel between BC Hydro's inclusion of the historical wrong committed by the construction of the W.A.C Bennett Dam and Enbridge's sponsorship of the 2010 Edward Burtynsky's show *Burtynsky: Oil* at the Art Gallery of Alberta as a means of controlling and addressing a public narrative. While I appreciate the work of Burtynsky, it is problematic that he accepted sponsorship from Enbridge for his exhibition. One would hope that since his work documents and visually critiques the implications of resource extraction on earth and humanity that he would distance himself from financial and professional connection to Enbridge. One could also question that by allowing sponsorship by Enbridge for the exhibition that the artist is also giving away some control regarding how their work is portrayed and presented to the public.

Dennis Hollier, Professor of French Literature, Thought and Culture at New York University, notes in his book *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*,

“Architecture, formerly the image of social order, now guarantees and even imposes this order. From being a simple symbol it has now become master. Architecture captures society in the trap of the image it offers, fixing it in the specular image it reflects back. Its locus is that of the imaginary understood at its most dictatorial, where the cement of faith confirms religions and kingdoms in their authority.” (Hollier 47).

Today, as in the past, art and land are used as a means of expressing status and power within society, serving as social indicators of an individual or establishment's authority.

Of interest here is the landscape intervention work of Peter von Tiesenhausen, an Alberta artist, who has used intellectual property law as a means of halting oil development on land in Alberta by utilizing sculpture and copyright law as a means to protect land from resource development, setting an intriguing precedent for art.

In Jill Mahoney's article in the *Globe and Mail*, 2002, *Can a piece of land also be a work of art?*

She discusses how Peter von Tiesenhausen used sculpture and copyright laws to slow down encroachment from the oil industry. Essentially Peter von Tiesenhausen is using his work to question corporate rights in relationship to human rights.

“... And why, he asks, should mineral rights supersede all other rights? (In Alberta, energy companies pay the province for the right to extract resources from the ground, leaving landowners with the topsoil. The industry usually pays property owners for the right of access.) What about balance, sustainability and diversity?” (Mahoney 42)

This legal case is interesting as it establishes a precedent for application in future art installations. Although, from my research regarding the case, it appears that much hinged on the fact that the artist held personal title to the land his work was situated on and therefore it was also dependent on the use of property law. Under circumstances or situations wherein people might invite an artist to make installations in response to corporate encroachment it would be problematic to use this as a means of halting resource extraction, as the artist would not have title to the land and would not be able to use precedents of property law in the same way in their case. My paintings explore the function of the medium itself as a visual archive and operate as a sociopolitical critique of British Columbia's exploitative resource economy, exposing the limitations and boundaries of both documentary and historical genre painting through the inescapable presence of the artist's hand. My representational landscape paintings function as a means of documentation - from my position as a witness - to examine and expose the violation and manipulation of the natural landscape by human interference.

In my most recent works, made during and after my visit to the Peace River Valley, I explored these themes through my choice of materials. In my sketches (Fig 3) of the Peace River which I worked on during the summer of 2018, I used silt from the Peace River in addition to foraged rosehips and saskatoon berries to give the paper a wash of colour. The pigment also oxidized

giving it a more purple appearance, overtop of this painted ground, I used ink to sketch out different locations.



(Fig 3) Construction sketches. Silt, Rose hips, Saskatoon Berries and ink on Paper, 2018.

The ways that architecture and space produce a subconscious and physical effect upon our experience is an avenue that I am exploring through painting. I am interested in the potential that exists to depict these spaces in a painting vocabulary while exploring the principles of defensive architecture¹. In my painting of the Site C work camp (Fig 5.) I began with a base ground mixed with foraged silt from the Peace River, sketching the Site C work camp out over top of the image while gradually adding layers of paint in thin glazes exposing the ground beneath. While working on this painting, I misaligned and duplicated the structures of the buildings leaving them as sketches to exacerbate a sense of an incomplete movement and shift within the landscape.

¹ Defensive Architecture i.e. Hostile Architecture: when a place or space is socially engineered through architectural barriers or by subconscious affect in order to prevent a space from being utilized or accessed in a manner contrary to the way intended by the owner.



(Fig 5) Site C work camp. Silt, Oil on Canvas, 2018.

In my aerial map paintings: *Shift* and *Bedrock Failure* (Fig 6-7) I abstracted views of aerial satellite images depicting the location of the recent landslide Sept, 2018 in Fort St. John near the Site C work camp. In these works, I started off with a base painting on a gesso ground mixed with dirt and clay from Protestors Point in the Peace River which I collected while up North in 2018. First using a polymer medium to stabilize the surface, I started using the medium as binder because the purely water based composition of the earlier sketches were extremely fragile.

Incorporating a resin binder helps to stabilize the surface and prevent oxidization, thus in a way preserving a little bit of DNA from the river. Essentially the base that forms the ground of the painting is made up of the earth from Peace River Valley.

I then layered displaced oil drawings of the landscape overtop. I did this in order to further a sense of shift and movement within the landscape and to depict transformation of the landscape through development. After the underpaintings were completed, I misaligned the images further, rotating recent satellite views as seen from Google Earth over the surface and

sketching these out to give an outline that furthers the sense of industrial displacement of the ground. This overlapping of satellite imagery is a visual manifestation of both my role as a ‘objective witness’ in my physical presence/act of witnessing critical historical events and documenting them, and my role as an artist and cultural producer, of abstracting and reframing visual information within a critical and aesthetic lens.



(Fig 6) *Shift*. Oil on Canvas. Jennifer O’Keeffe Almond, 2018.

Through such inquiry, I am examining and facilitating a space for discussion regarding the context and relevance of political commentary in art today within the realm of landscape as a genre. The evidence of human intervention within the landscape can be seen in the photographic works of Edward Burtynsky, whose landscape photography operates both as art and a means of documentation, capturing the manipulation of the land. His work functions in much the same way as landscape painting does, in works such as his tailings series by replicating a sense of material softness associated with British landscape painting while at the same time creating a

visual archive of moment. Curator Lori Pauli discusses the relevance of Burtynsky's photography in her essay "Seeing the Big Picture"; from the text, *Manufactured Landscapes the Photographs of Edward Burtynsky*, "Burtynsky is illustrating what he perceives as a disconnection between society and nature." (Pauli 15). Burtynsky highlights the excesses of the oil industry through his depiction and framing of photographs that reference the compositional elements of British Picturesque² painting as described by Pauli in her essay "Seeing the Big Picture". Essentially Burtynsky uses the framing of his camera lens in some of his works such as *Nickel Tailings #34*, to effectively reference elements of the picturesque aesthetic movement in Britain from material softness to the compositional framing of the photograph itself.

While these images utilise the familiar aesthetic principles of the picturesque movement, they are essentially uprooting the sensibilities through their representation of what can more accurately be described as industrial carnage from a picturesque sensibility. Framing and fragmentation are critical to Burtynsky's photographic practice, in his abstract framing, Burtynsky is effectively abstracting his representational subject matter through distortion and thereby aestheticizing it. By fragmenting – cropping - his subject matter, he dislocates his subjects from both their function and their linear place in time. This use of fragmentation and framing aestheticizes his subjects and abstracts form, creating a provocative and seductive quality in his photographic works.

Through the aestheticization of form and subject, my landscapes share this same seductive and beguiling quality, however, in my own work this is achieved through evocative gestural mark

² British Picturesque is a British aesthetic principle that traces its origins to 18th century Britain, the term 'picturesque', however, traces its origins to 16th century Italian art.

making and my colour palette, which is at times unexpected and disassociative. While in Burtynsky's work he dislocates his subject through fragmentation, in my own practice I endeavour to geographically and temporally locate my work through both my material choices and my depiction of subjects which are in progress i.e. landscapes experiencing a particular moment of change and development.



(Fig 7) *Bedrock Failure*. Oil on Canvas, 2018.

Landscape Architecture and Food Security

The people in the Peace River Valley are being forcibly evicted for a mega-project that will dramatically alter not only their ability to access food sources, but will also transform the region's climate. With Site C, there is no shortage of criticism of the economics of the project, which is being imposed – primarily– upon a reluctant and resistant³ public to benefit corporate interests. The project has been rejected twice in the past. In May 1983, the BCUC issued a 315-page report recommending the Province not go forward with the project. In the CBC editorial article *Site C dam: How we got here and what you need to know*, “The provincial government rejected the Site C dam proposal in 1982 and again in 1989 following B.C. Utilities Commission hearings⁴, deciding it didn't need the extra electricity. Plans for the fourth dam in the series, Site E, to be built near the B.C. – Alberta border were shelved during the 1982 hearing.”(CBC Editorial 29).

As with the monarchies of centuries past, it is a hierarchical and corporate approach to governance: ownership of the land and positionality of the divine right of kings that has been usurped by that

³ The West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations are taking the project to court for Treaty violations. In addition 14 Metis and First Nation Communities from Alberta (The northern half of Alberta is covered by Treaty 8) have formally requested that B.C. abandon the project due to downstream environmental impacts of Site C. The Royal Society of Canada published a letter March 24th, 2016. with more than 250 Canadian Scientists and Academics objecting to the project.

⁴ Site C Report: Utilities Commission Act S.B.C. 1980, c. 60 as amended in the matter of the application of British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority for an Energy Project Certificate for the Peace River Site C Project report and Recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor-In-Council.

of corporations. Corporations now have protections under the law granting ‘human rights’, thus putting these industrial entities in direct conflict with actual human rights. Linked to monument placement in landscape, is the economic trade of botanical products gleaned as a resource from new, colonial locales. In ethnologist Lucile H. Brockway’s *Science and Colonial Expansion, The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*, she discusses the role of botanical prospecting in relationship to population in the Colonies:

“(a) New food staples increased population on all continents, but with different results. An industrializing Europe was strengthened by a rising population. In spite of the new crops the old agrarian empires of Asia were strained by swollen populations, and much of their manpower, as well as that of the new world was harnessed to serve European ends. (b) Except for staple foods, the exchange of tropical plants between the two hemispheres was carried out predominantly by the Europeans under the plantation system, a system of commercial agriculture oriented toward export and based on a coerced or servile labour force.” (Brockway 36).

Essentially, the strategic imposition of forced cultivation of commercial non-indigenous crops under the plantation system served to further destabilize local populations while undermining historical farming practices based on experience and the nature of the land. In the case of Site C, not only are the people of Treaty 8 being violated through the human intervention of diverting the river, but the landscape itself is set to be flooded to such an extent that the local population will lose further access to hunting and fishing due to land loss and methyl-mercury contamination of the water. Additionally, there will be flooding of critical caribou breeding territory and the loss of vital agricultural land. These factors create a scenario in which people are being forced off their land to their detriment but to the favour of crown corporations and international companies.

This creates a cycle of displacement, forcing further reliance on the boom bust economics of the

oil industry and transient construction work. Here, we must also consider the use of temporary foreign workers –as an interesting parallel to the plantation system. In journalist Justine Hunters article “*BC Hydro is obscuring data on temporary foreign workers: NDP*” published in the *Globe and Mail*, Feb 22, 2016. In response to inquiries made by the New Democrat Party of B.C. regarding the use of temporary foreign workers, Hydro stated that they do not track or collect data from their contractors on the use of temporary foreign workers on Site C construction. According to a search of listed companies with Site C contracts in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database, of the 57 known Site C contractors to date, 32 are not from B.C. and 17 are internationally owned and managed. There have also been ongoing questions regarding the use of outsourced labour and temporary workers at the site in addition to safety, environmental mitigation plans and geotechnical concerns.

Author E.E Rich outlines in the text *The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, the labour practices common through colonial occupation:

“In the Colonies of exploitation (the far east) the minimum number of European administrators and traders have “colonized” by adapting the native population to the needs and customs of European trade. At the other extreme, in colonies of settlement” Europeans have themselves supplied the necessary labour.” (Rich 306).

In all these instances, oppression was rampant, colonizers utilizing ‘*divide et impera*’ techniques to further destabilize local populations, exploiting infighting and subterfuge so as to further disempower and disorder the existing cultures. In some situations this can be achieved through the offering of a benefit or gain to only a small portion of people, creating a destabilizing effect on the rest of the population who are more inclined towards acts of resistance. Often local populations under a plantation system are sublimated and forced to buy only from the company

at higher than market prices. This aspect will likely prove critical with Site C. As agricultural land able to feed an estimated one million people is being flooded, future generations will be forced to import their food from abroad – at greater cost – than if grown locally in the Peace River Valley. In the summer of 2018, Yvonne Tupper took me to visit the Twin Sisters Native Plants Nursery, a project that was started by the Saulneau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations as a restoration project to correct the destruction and lack of biodiversity that is left in the wake of the mining, oil and gas industries in Northern B.C. Essentially the project started in response to the monoculture replanting that occur after destruction of biologically diverse habitat thus creating further problems as the ecosystem has been restructured in an unnatural way. The Twin Sisters Native Plants Nursery was created to change this situation by preserving, collecting and growing plants that promote and preserve the importance and health of biodiversity during the restoration of disrupted landscapes.

In journalist Christopher Pollen’s text, *The Peace in Peril*, he discusses the implications of earlier dams in the Peace Region and how they affected not only migratory breeding territory for many species but weather and farming conditions with the WAC Bennett and Williston Reservoirs,

“Warmer water from the reservoir meant the reach between the dam and Taylor – about 100 kilometres downstream-would never again freeze completely over. Behind the 60 - storey-high (183-metre) dam walls is the Williston Reservoir, BC’s largest freshwater body, which engulfed over 1,770 square kilometres of land, lake and river. In its place was a four-armed man-made lake so colossal that Bennett famously bragged it would change the climate of the north.” (Pollen 26)

The proposed Site C Dam is on an even larger scale and is expected to cause an even greater climatic shift to the Peace River Valley and - if constructed - will forever change a vitally

important micro climate and migratory territory for many at-risk species and devastate farming. Essentially, the project is expected by farmers in the region to not only remove a significant portion of the Agricultural Land Reserve⁵, resulting in significant loss to the alluvial soil and land that contributes to the agricultural significance of the valley, but also to change weather and seasonal temperature to such an extent that frosts will begin earlier, while the summer and fall harvest will be detrimentally shortened, causing a shift in the type of crops that can be grown. Ben Parfitt writer and policy analyst for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives discusses the implications this loss will have on farming in his editorial, *Food security in BC? Don't count on it*:

“Media reports have referred to the potential loss of roughly 3,000 hectares of farmland. But that is not what is spelled out in documents filed by BC Hydro with a joint federal-provincial panel that reviewed the environmental impacts of the dam. As revealed by investigative reporter Sarah Cox, those documents show that up to 12,000 hectares of farmland could be at risk from the Site C hydroelectric project. A true accounting of the farmlands that will be lost due to the dam includes not just those lands that will immediately be flooded by the reservoir, but lands that subsequently erode or destabilize and collapse into the manmade lake, lands that are paved over when portions of the existing highway that will be flooded by the reservoir are rerouted, and other lands used to complete dam construction.” (Parfitt 57)

In addition, we must also consider the ongoing desertification of California's farmland and the impact of global warming on our food security. It is simply illogical to be flooding thousands of hectares of agricultural land in BC at a time when climate change poses a significant threat to our future sustenance, especially since much of the land remaining in Richmond's Agricultural Land Reserve is expected to become a casualty of rising sea levels.

⁵ An assembly of agricultural land in the Province of BC, created to preserve arable land from development. Land was selected based on quality and climate change in order to protect food security of future generations.

It is also worth noting that access to fresh affordable produce has become an expensive obstacle for many people Northern BC, and with future uncertainty and reliance on imports from drought-afflicted countries, supplies will dwindle further as prices continue to rise. The question must be asked: what will people do if they cannot afford the cost of imported food? Further, the logistics of shipping food from thousands of miles away to the far north is creating a greater ‘carbon footprint’ by flooding prime agricultural land essential for the future food security of B.C. Only 5% of the land in British Columbia is arable and the Peace River Valley represents an important section of the Agricultural Land Reserve due to its alluvial soil, natural micro climate and access to irrigation. These are outlined by professional agrologist and economist, Wendy Holm, in her report of May 1, 2014 for the *Joint Review Panel Report on Site C*. Economics is essentially being utilized as a means to disempower and subjugate people for corporate interests.

Wendy Holm further discusses in her article published Dec 7th, 2018, in the Georgia Straight *Out of sight, out of mind? Connecting the dots between Site C and Wood Buffalo National Park*, she discusses the impacts on food security by dams on the Peace River in relationship to the drying up of the Peace-Athabasca Delta:

“For communities dependent on hunting and fishing for their food security, the continued drying out of the PAD is devastating. Inuit, First Nations, and Métis adults across the north already experience five to six times higher levels of food insecurity than the average Canadian, according to a 2014 Health Canada report. A recent First Nations regional health survey from the Dene Nation in the Northwest Territories showed that 90 percent of the 824 respondents indicated that an adult in their household frequently either cut the size of their meals, skipped meals, were hungry but did not eat, or ate less than they felt they should due to a lack of money for food. Ottawa freely admits that Canada’s Nutrition North program has been an abject failure.” (Holm 32).

This situation is expected to become worse if further construction of the Site C Dam on the Peace River continues: there will be significant down river impacts of Site C, not just on the health of the environment but on the health of people and food security. Further, significant clear cutting of the Boreal Forest and deforestation will have a significant effect on aquatic life not only in the river but also in the ocean as the cycle of water carries and disperses vital nutrients from the forest floor to the delta and ocean.

Artist Robert Linsley discusses some of the problems surrounding depiction of landscape in the essay *Painting and the Social History of British Columbia* from the text *Vancouver Anthology*:

“But further, these “inner landscapes” are perhaps evidence of how powerful interests within the culture work in complex and indirect ways to block and forbid representations that could potentially display the actions of those interests for the scrutiny of the citizenry.” (Linsley 243).

The restrictions and issues surrounding such commentary are becoming more apparent as many of the rights and freedoms we have come to take for granted are gradually being eroded.

Many of the individuals and residents organizing against the Site C Dam project have been taken to court in ‘SLAPP-suits,’ limiting their ability to speak on the project. I have become increasingly interested in exploring commentary through painting and documenting changes to the landscape as the government continues to push the project forward. In the summer of 2018, I travelled up to the Peace River Valley to meet with people who are still facing ongoing lawsuits by BC Hydro for standing in opposition to Site C.

Many are being sued by Hydro for \$420 million in the civil courts for blockading against project construction at the Rocky Mountain Fort Blockade in 2016. Journalist Sarah Cox covered the treatment of people in the Peace River in her article, *Silencing Opposition of the Site C Dam*, published in Briar Patch Magazine Feb 26th, 2018. This article covers how individuals were also targeted in SLAPP suits by Hydro solely for the act of providing food to the protestors.

While up north, I learned how people are using architecture and working with nature in subversive fashion, encouraging nesting by endangered species within their homes and barns – specifically endangered swallows and bats - that are now dwelling in the walls and roofs of the buildings and fences. This means that in accordance with provincial wildlife protection laws BC Hydro must wait until the swallows and bats have moved out before they are allowed to begin demolition, and wildlife habitat on their farms and family homes which have recently been expropriated by Hydro – as of yet without compensation – in hopes that further delays will give more time for the Treaty 8 lawsuit to proceed.

In this manner residents are utilizing wildlife protection laws in an attempt to stall destruction similar to the situation that Lucy Lippard discusses in her book, *Undermining: A Wild Ride in Words and Images Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*, in relationship to the Ohkay Owingeh utilizing road restrictions to protect the land.

On Jan 19th 2019, The Council of Canadians published an article “UN committee calls for halt of Site C dam construction over indigenous rights violations,” detailing the UN Human

Commission investigation into Site C and what is at stake:

“BC Hydro’s Site C is a proposed 60-metre high, 1,050- metre-long earth-filled dam and hydroelectric generation station on the Peace River in Treaty 8 territory. It would create an 83- kilometre-long reservoir that will flood 15,985 acres of agricultural land, destroy traditional hunting and fishing areas, and submerge 78 Indigenous heritage sites, including burial grounds and places of cultural and spiritual significance.” (The Council of Canadians 6)

The Province and Federal Governments’ approval of the project is in violation of section (35) of the Constitution Act which enshrines Treaty 8 rights that are contingent on the Peace river not being disturbed.

In her essay “Seeing the Big Picture”, Lori Pauli argues that “It is a common assumption that earlier generations of Canadian artists were interested only in portraying the prestige untamed aspects of the Canadian landscape”. (Pauli 19-20) Pauli discusses how artists such as Charles Comfort worked depicting the industrial landscape. Comfort was commissioned to paint “Romance of the Nickel.” After reviewing the work, however, Inco – the company who commissioned the work –decided that the image that Comfort had crafted situated itself in an uncomfortable way, cultivating an image contrary to the representation that the company wanted to create for the public viewership.

Conclusion

Landscape architecture continues to function as a tool utilized by governments and corporations, to usurp the rights of people and restricting access – often by infringement of civil and human rights - to the land, as is the case with the Site C Dam. These artificially manufactured landscapes operate not only as monuments of power for the governments and people who facilitate their creation, but also help to further cement and demonstrate control over the natural world and conditioning the population to the power structure of corporate authority and culturally institutionalized colonialism.

Through my material practice and the works that I have created, I have documented changes to the landscape and the impacts of restructuralization on the land, within present context but also inviting dialogue with the past. My paintings explore the relationship of how land is utilized in a successive language of power and how it is shaped and manipulated by political intervention to create a subconscious impact shaping the ways in which people interact within space.

Landscape has been commodified and used throughout history by governments in order to develop public narrative and propaganda, the culmination of which has been that for the last century we have seen a shift towards the corporate landscape. Through my work I am investigating the relationship of landscape architecture and the deliberate reshaping of the natural world as an authoritarian tool.

My work explores the implications of how space is shaped today, documenting how structure and land is used to assert dominion not merely over the land, but over the people living on the land.

The connection between landscape architecture and food security, can be seen in the way we remove and regulate not only the life that exists in the reformation of place, but also in the lack of biodiversity and alien species we impose in our attempts to restore what has been disrupted. From plantations to botanical gardens and collections that demonstrate control from biological spoils of war to how imposed mega projects such as Site C effect our food security. We are at a point in time where our civilization has reached a crisis point when it comes to the long term implications of climate change. From structures that have been engineered to discourage protest, to architectural features and industrial interventions that function as a means to disempower and subjugate people in the name of politics. The development of such places by corporations and governments serve to conceive and shape an imposed and artificial reality around us, with spaces that exist to control, contain, and communicate 'ownership' of place.

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