

**Artist and Writers Statements:****Rita Wong**

I want to listen and learn how to give back, how to be in good relation with the rivers that give us life. Each time I flick on the electricity or turn on the computer, I am implicated in the hydro-electric dams that generate that energy that I rely on. I feel fraught, I feel a need to give back, somehow, to the places that I have benefitted from, unknowingly, unwittingly, and unwillingly. The destroyed habitat, the need to regenerate habitat. The survival and well-being of the rivers and the salmon is my well-being, our well-being. Without this, downward spiral. Without reverence for rivers – the mighty Columbia, Fraser, and Peace to name just a few – no humanity. I search for flows of co-existence, flows of salmon, flows of Indigenous peoples. Some of the voices I heed:

“Salmon are the icon of this place. They are valued as food, as a resource, and as a representation of the wildness and wilderness for which the Pacific Northwest is known. They shape our land use policies and power grid. Whether they realize it or not, every single person in the Northwest is a Wy-Kan-Ush-Pum. We are all Salmon People. Let us all work together to protect and restore salmon—this fish that unites us.” <http://www.critfc.org/salmon-culture/we-are-all-salmon-people/#>

“The Okanagan teach that anything displaced from all that it requires to survive in health will eventually perish. Unless place can be relearned, all other life forms will face displacement and then ruin.”

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/sharing-one-skin>

Shifting to a reciprocity paradigm: <http://www.syilx.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Syilx-Water-Perspectives-Valuing-siw%C9%ACk%CA%B7-Knowledge.pdf>

restitution, regeneration, language: [http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page\\_id=605](http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page_id=605)

these are my starting places

**Fred Wah**

I have been writing since the early 1960's, publishing first as a founding editor of *Tish* magazine in Vancouver in 1961. Though the majority of my publications have been books of poetry, I have also edited, written short fiction and criticism, and anchored my writing career through teaching literature and creative writing in colleges and universities. Since the early 1990's many of my projects have been collaborative with visual artists, photographers, and musicians. Thus, this opportunity to work with a group of artists focusing on the Columbia River is a welcome one. For this project I intend to contribute creative writing in response to the research, participate in exhibitions/events and help shape the research goals and outcomes.

**Nick Conbere**

In my creative practice, I investigate landscape, seen through the lens of personal experience and narrative, as a means to consider human/nature relationships. In my current project, *River Relations*, I am creating landscape images that interpret my experiences and observations along the Columbia River in relation to a range of historical images. Using drawing and printmaking approaches, I present layers of imagery built up into constructed environments. I seek intersections of culture and geography, and I aim to create a visualization of complex relationships and dense histories of chosen locations. Researching ecological and historic aspects of the Columbia River Basin is a way to strengthen the visual documentation. Intermixing imagery and information provides a way to create discordant and lyrical depictions of relationships between the natural and man-made worlds. The artwork I am producing ranges from smaller, collaborative prints done with photographer John Holmgren to larger, panoramic landscape drawings. Through this project and previous work, I have learned how drawn forms can imply parallels among various times and places, suggest patterns and relationships, and facilitate documentary, allegory and envisioned futures.

**John Holmgren**

My work explores connections to and experiences of place, landscape, environment, time and memory. Photography is my primary medium, and allows me to record and collect the visual images needed for my work. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest and having a father who was an educator, we traveled a lot during the summer, mostly in North America. These travels instilled in me a wanderlust, which draws me to explore the landscape from a visual and research point of view. Travel also helped create my interest in our connections to and interactions with the environment that sustains us.

I investigate how personal history and memory are tied to place, how time informs memory, and how visual representation can be used to communicate experience. John Berger suggests, “that photography is rather like memory; memory is normally embedded in an experience and photography has the ability to record these experiences”. I also use mixed media in my work to suggest the layering of information we compile within our experiences and our memories. The layering in much of my work is an attempt to bring the viewer into my own complicated experience of these places and suggest the complexity of how we come to know a place.

**Collaborative Work of John Holmgren and Nick Conbere**

Using art as a visual and narrative critical tool, our project investigates the presence and impact of hydro-electric dams on the Columbia River. We ask how aesthetic relationships can offer compelling ways to consider human constructions that alter natural forces, re-shaping the flow of a river. We are inspired by a variety of past works that interpret landscape and experience, and these range from 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticist landscape paintings to documentary photography to historic cartography. Through our collaborative documentation and interpretation, we will aim to explore parallels among various places and histories along the river, suggest patterns and relationships, and facilitate documentary, metaphor, and allegory in considering the presence of the dams.

**Genevieve Robertson**

Through a drawing-based interdisciplinary practice, I explore the matter under my feet and around my body: water, oil, mud, flora, fauna and mineral. Contextualized by the age of the anthropocene, I aim to acknowledge both the agency of elemental forces and their entanglement in human power relations. The space between politics and aesthetics is generative, and I aspire to make formally resolved images while grappling with unresolved issues of biodiversity loss, natural resource exploitation, and settler roles in decolonization. For the past two years, my work has been centered on an interest in rivers as both biologic and economic thoroughfares and elemental forces with agency. This work has brought me to the Athabasca River, the Fraser River, and now the Columbia River. With the Columbia River Relations project, my interests lie in gathering microscopic imagery of the water and exploring findings through drawing to expose toxicity and its effects on micro-invertebrates and fresh water ecologies. My other artistic research thread considers diverse imaging of the Columbia River, from satellite imagery of flooding to speculative hydrological modeling that predicts the effects of climate change. This visual research will be used to create a large-scale drawing installation.

**Emmy Willis**

As part of my work with River Relations, I will be creating a film of collected stories along the river – a documentary capturing a spectrum of perspectives from people living, working, creating along or near the Columbia Basin. I plan to begin the documentary at the Columbia Lake head and travel to its end at the river's emptying into the Pacific Ocean in Oregon. While the making of this film is motivated on my own part by environmental concerns of the impact of the Hydro-energy dams and the desire to share these concerns, I do not wish to insert my own voice into the work. I am more interested in the opinions of others and how, despite these voices living in different towns, cities, countries from each-other and belonging to different social/cultural/political backgrounds, how these voices form a network to create a collective whole.

**Research Assistants:****Zoe Kostuchuk**

In being a part of the River Relations Research Project and learning about the Columbia River, I have gained a large appreciation for salmon, and the abundance of nourishment that the river has provided to many for many centuries. Deriving from this appreciation, I have been working on two 5' by 6' paintings of the river, in honour of the river, that I hope will be a part of our exhibition at the Touchstones Gallery.

**Jesse Coons**

As a locus for differing interests across time, place, and culture, the Columbia River exists as a mythic entity within multiple, often competing, ideologies. By looking at its conceptual role within the various rhetorical and ideological systems that have surrounded it through history and into the present day, my goal in this project is to describe these permutations of the 'mythic' Columbia through a visual language rooted in a deconstruction of the conventions of history and mythology painting as they existed within the paradigm of Western academic art from the 16th-19th centuries.