

River Relations is a confluence of creative insight. The result of a group of interdisciplinary artists plumbing the depths of a common source of inspiration: The Columbia River. Artists are uniquely qualified to present complex issues and from many related angles the river is viewed and interpreted: conceptually, historically, microscopically, academically, poetically, politically ... through diverse perspectives but a unified cause. Water is a substance bound by confines both natural and imposed, it absorbs and dissipates and carries us along by forces beautiful, necessary and often destructive. ***River Relations*** reminds us of the proximity and importance of a resource that is easily taken for granted, and by honouring the sum of its parts we see ourselves reflected and our collective actions refracted.

There is an interesting legacy of environmental issues being flushed out by artistic views, particularly in the form of groups and/or collectives. The *Facing North* — Coyotes Artist Collective exhibition (2013) showcased a group of landscape, environmental artists and writers from Alberta, B.C. and the Northwest Territories; Metabolic Studio, Los Angeles; Creative Catalyst & The Bodhi Collective, Toronto – to name a few. “Art is a space for collaborative dreaming. If we want social change to be contagious, then we should create art so that it can have ripple effects that are so big they are immeasurable,” said artist and activist Farrah-Marie Miranda, speaking at the Creative Catalyst Symposium, a two-day conference organized by Ryerson spin-off Madeleine Co., and sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the same organization which funded the ***River Relations*** project. The combination of art and scientific investigation is an effective means to deliver complex academic information into symbolic and expressive visual language.

Fred Wah and Rita Wong’s poem installation hangs in the room, asking viewers to re-imagine the wonder of what lurks beneath and above tranquil blue. The vibrancy of Zoe Kostuchuk’s water awaiting salmon diptych gives a sense of depth, despair and abstract beauty, whilst Emmy Willis’s video documentary offers a more studied approach to sites seen at a modern pace. The farthest wall is festooned with Genevieve Robertson’s *Study for a Lost Shoreline*; part offering and lament but also an intricate response to the beauty inherent in small things writ large. Interspersed throughout are the layered and scientific studies which combine John Holmgren’s photographic lens with Nick Conbere’s intricate interventions. The result of the whole has the sort of ripple effect that Ms. Miranda speaks of – we feel a part of something vast and yet intimate and essential.

Arin Fay, Curator