

BROAD



HOME

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BROAD is grateful to operate on the unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Sel̓ilwítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

This acknowledgment is a reminder of the discriminatory, genocidal, colonial practices and ideologies that have had a lasting legacy for Indigenous Peoples and their land.

NICOLE JOHNSTON AND YUKI XU

Eslhá7an

Nicole Johnston is a visual artist and member of the Squamish Nation. She was born and raised on the ancestral territory, Eslhá7an—also recognized as North Vancouver. Growing up, the idea of home has continuously changed with her life's tides of historical realizations and understanding. Ancestral dance, ceremonies, and member gatherings have matured her knowledge in ways that directly connect to her practice as an artist. Her childhood friend, Yuki Xu, is a Chinese-Canadian designer who lives and works in New York City. Fascinated with re-interpreting memories and rituals, Yuki utilizes a breadth of mediums to understand space by means of the body.

Their collaborative project “Eslhá7an” was conceived during a temporal period, which elapsed during the height of the pandemic. Yuki's unexpected opportunity of being at home for an extended period of time pushed her to build a renewed relationship with Vancouver. This project, which was first proposed for a class assignment, granted her the chance to reorient and relearn herself back to her childhood landscape with Nicole Johnston.



612. Indians in Camp at Mission

Q3E.H.5

DSQ 73Y



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**“IN MOBILIZING, WE
FIND OTHERS LIKE US,
AND, IN SO DOING, WE
FIND OURSELVES.”**

- LEGACY RUSSEL



When in-person classes were interrupted by Covid-19 in the spring of 2020, I moved back “home” to Vancouver. I was born anew as an immigrant. The pandemic granted me an unexpected chance to uncover the land that I had been taught to claim as home.

Hoping to refamiliarize myself with the neighborhood of my parents’ house, I looked to examine local history, tracing relationships between lands and bodies. I passed my driver’s test and chased along the highway arteries lacing the slender North Shore of Burrard Inlet. Cruising past each highway exit and reading road signs written in Skwxwú7mesh, I became a bystander to infrastructural violence: reciting a language for which no jurisdiction applies, blue and white adhesive plastic coatings shroud the matricide of this unceded territory’s mother tongue.

To transcribe a strictly oral First Nations language for English comprehension, it demands for a new alphabetical order. My friend Nicole, a member of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation, lives in the village of Eslhá7an (located at exit 17 on the Trans-Canada Highway), grew up proudly chanting the silence of the 7 in the

name of her home. To articulate a glottal stop, you must stop the airflow by pressing your vocal cords together, build up pressure from the lungs, and then release the vocal cords with an audible burst.

Nicole invited me over to her house for the first time in December of 2020. The houses on the reserve are lined up in one long succession, and parallel to the houses, lies a train track. Nicole informed me that the trains, run by Canadian National (CN) Railway company, often remain idle on the track for long hours for maintenance, often for more than 18-20 hours at a time. When idling, the trains make horrid, deafening rumbling and whistling noises that residents of Eslhá7an have described as being 10 times that of a muscle car revving up. For months, despite the residents’ attempts in good faith to meet with CN representatives in an attempt to solve these deeply distressing complications, CN has not been responsive nor communicative to their requests.

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English scurried across oceans, plodding continental distances. I never considered this language to be my own. I do not hate it or love it. How I came to know it was incidental. Like English, I was also whisked across the ocean as a child, fenced in by my parents against the cabin window of an airplane branded with a bright red maple leaf.

English is a vehicle, transmitting ideas of nationhood. It glides past provinces, declaring jurisdictions for its speech. It pilots a national narrative, given official federal status to overwrite pasts that are threatened.

I had to brace myself for this new language on my first day of fifth grade. I wasn’t just taught to speak English, but what to say. At the same time, I didn’t understand how 26 letters could

hold room for everything I had to say. Back in Hangzhou, when I read and wrote Zhōngwén in school, composing each character felt like painting a new picture, rather than reproductions of the same alphabet.

On my first day of college, and on many more days thereafter, I’d get asked by my professors, “Where are you from?”

I’d strike up the confidence to say, “Vancouver, Canada”, and my confidence wavers more and more year after year.



The infrastructural fragmentation of Eslhá7an is a testament to the violence of the Expropriation Act (1985), a legislation enabling the Canadian government to expropriate parcels of reserve land without the consent of the Indian band and without providing compensation, for the purpose of public utilities rights-of-way such as railways, transmission lines, and highways. Occupying a population density of 2,304/km², the Eslhá7an community manifests as the aftermath of the fierce reductions of reservation lands in the province of BC, a procedure first begun by Lieutenant Governor Joseph Trutch in the 1860s. Trutch had redacted what he deemed excess land from many of the province's reserves under the belief that European settlers would make better use of it—an ethnocentric ideology that defined “productive use” as resource extraction and linear advancement of capitalist gains.

The reserve system was, on a fundamental level, a government-sanctioned displacement of First Nations peoples. At the Governor's stroke of a pen, reserves divided up not only lands, but families, houses and clans that had hunted and gathered together for long generations were abruptly and arbitrarily joined up with other families and houses, disrupting social networks and long-established kinship systems—a intrusion and destruction of an ancient and sacred ecology. The construction of houses on reserve, which were sponsored by the government as per Crown's responsibility for its “Indian dependencies”, were designed and constructed with the Western nuclear family unit in mind and could not accommodate larger, more extensive Aboriginal families, which presented an erasure of the traditional longhouse anatomy. Often shoddily built on a small government budget, housing became yet another foreign and divisive experience imposed upon reserves.



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Ecology, a natural order of which bodies and land are so intrinsically linked together, were uprooted and divided. Using the medium of photography and collage, I attempt to make transparent the infrastructural violence that takes place in Eslhá7an. Through the juxtaposition and framing of structures that take shape in their linearity and horizontality, I aim to place totem poles and utility columns, longhouses and train carriages, glass panels and wood planks—in conversation and in opposition to one another—in delineation and in dissection of the syntax and the grammatical structuring of the architecture in site, of which had violently

rendered bodies out of site/sight. In sharing our lived experiences, at times, both Nicole and I have felt poorly versed when asked about the specificities of our cultures' customs and rituals. Growing up in a white-dominant high school, without the opportunity to be fully immersed in our tribes, we learned to assume caricatural forms under the Othering gaze—a less complicated, easily digestible version of us. Pedagogies set up by institutional learning spaces and snippy digital infographics made for viral circulation may often render us unrecognizable even to ourselves, excluding us by the binary of our duality turned dichotomy.

“NICOLE SHOWS ME PHOTOS OF DEER SKINS THAT A SQUAMISH HIDE-TANNER FLESHED, AND IN TURN, I SHED MY OWN SKINS.”

Histories and tragedies can be reshaped through putting care into the hands of other folks. I looked to paint stories instead of printing them; recalling that as a child, I traced each Chinese logogram like an illustration—a nascent performance of selfhood and heritage.

Nearly one hundred years ago, Dr. Leonhard Adam published an essay detailing the stylistic and symbolic parallels between Pacific Northwest Coast art and ancient Chinese art from the Zhou dynasty (c. 1046-256 BC). The parallelism does not entail historical connection, as the two are separated by a chronological distance of 3,000 years; however, there are many stunning representational formulaic similarities. Works from both regions are constructed from a number of highly stylized, recurring animal body parts, which are conjoined to form figures and symbols.

In the symmetrying and doubling of bodies, there emerges a profundity greater than words: “representing not what [we] see, but what [we] know to exist”. Today, we are the result of random linguistic amalgamations stabilized into reproducible forms; once upon a time, we were a language who read exactly as it was pronounced, with nothing separating our oral and written forms.

Nicole shows me photos of deer skins that a Squamish hide-tanner fleshed, and in turn, I shed my own skins. We are both descendants of European imperialism, its subjugation of people and extraction of land. We are of that infrastructure fragmentation, a language used to violate and spoken to survive. Sharing a table with Nicole emancipated us. You could say that we found self-expression through compromised lineages, and together, we reached liberation in loss.

