

Joyce Majiski

Artists Statement

Llama Project

Stemming from the research I did with Alice Angus for *Topographies and Tales*, I have continued to look at the parallels between human and animal migrations. As a contrast to the instinct driven wildlife migrations, I am interested in the reasons people connect to place and landscape and the factors that affect our freedom of movement. In my series of work entitled “Transmigrations”, the imagery fell into either an animal-centric or human-centric category.

I have a passion for wild lands and wilderness. We live in a very human centrist world and sometimes forget that we share this globe with other living creatures. Many species migrate long distances each year, oblivious to political borders, although they may be affected by them. When humans manipulate the landscape for our own purposes — agriculture, resource extraction, urbanification and roads it affects the wildlife in profound ways. Cities grow and loss of wilderness habitat is happening worldwide. The landscape is altered and migratory markers are disappearing. Oil companies create toxic ponds where warning signs are posted but wildlife can't read. Climate changes are affecting many arctic species and habitats, notably polar bear numbers are declining as are caribou. What happens when these animals are all gone? Will bio-diversity be lost from our lexicon?

What will our identity be based on? What will our sense of place encompass? Canadian landscapes, our notions of wilderness and nature— how will these be defined as we enter the next century? Will the next generation ever climb trees, see Canadian mammals in the wild? What is really at stake in terms of the future of the planet and quality of life for the next generation?

In northern Canada, resource extraction development, mainly oil drilling in Alaska's national Wildlife Refuge is threatening the Porcupine Caribou herd. The G'witchin people of the region rely on the animals of this migrating caribou herd for food each year. The impacts of development such as roads and pipelines as well as infrastructure and sustained human presence in the fragile north become irreversible and long-term. Development models and examples of climate change are also indicative of changes throughout the circumpolar north. The environmental changes impact local and regional territories while globalization impacts all species, (humans included) and all environments. Food resources are unevenly distributed. Economies are based on conflict and resource extraction.

There are connections between Canada and Mexico that extend beyond the natural north/south paths of animal migration routes. Canadian companies have extended into Mexico for resources and labour. There are commonalities and differences between the two countries: oppression, rootlessness, economic struggle, political and government intervention and social upheaval. I am most interested in Chiapas and Oaxaca because of their ongoing rich artistic traditions and

prevalence of indigenous culture. The tension that has arisen from the grassroots indigenous movements makes it a dynamic both politically and artistically.

As a response to world events, my experiences while traveling overseas and close contact with several refugees in Whitehorse who were waiting for the Immigration process, I have become more concerned with looking at how migrants are affected by migration policies, government rules and bureaucracy — cheap labour, free trade, and movement across borders. There is a world of mistrust pulling apart humanity instead of a drawing together. In the process of making my art, I hope to find ways to address these questions.

My Proposal for the LLAMA Project

The artwork I will be creating for this project will encompass a few elements. Part of the work I make will be in collaboration with Haruko Okano. Together we will create cast paper tracks and a series of prayer wheels. Imagery for the prayer wheels will be drawn from endangered species and spaces worldwide and be interactive so that individuals can take rubbings (on paper or fabric) and send out their own “prayers” to the earth. Haruko, a senior artist from Vancouver engages similar ideologies and environmental concerns in her work.

During this project I also plan to gather sound recordings that have to do with sense of place and connection to landscape from both Mexican and Canadian perspectives. These will be gathered during workshops and discussions during both residencies and will be used as a sound installation to accompany the prayer wheels. I will also create a series of free downloadable e-books that will be available on-line. These books will serve to document the process and discussions during our residencies.