AS WE HOLD SPACE, TOGETHER:
CHEROKEE POTTERY AND OUR ENDURING PRESENCE

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A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

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LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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Dedication

These thoughts, labour, & art production are for:

My mom, Sandy, who is my biggest supporter & the greatest mom & friend

In memory of my Pops, Marcy C. Tiger—I miss you so much!

My lovely, crazy, brilliant children Jordan & Lula

My favourite scholar, best friend, & husband Paul McKenzie-Jones

My ancestors & community

Abstract

This dissertation considers earthwork mounds and the contemporary history of Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma pottery and its production both as land(scape) and an expression of our relationships to land and place. My work is an embodied inquiry of these the relationships between physical Indigenous land and concepts of place specificity as expressed through and imbued in pottery and ancient earthworks. Within this work I also argue that the creation of ancient pottery exemplifies the ways in which our ancestors utilized technological-ecological knowledge and transferred this knowledge to successive generations. My work is guided by my adherence to a critical Indigenous citational practice. It is my position that Indigenous art history must make 'place' an imperative part of our narratives and discourse about art and makers as a means of countering mainstream narratives about us.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude to Dr. Jason Laurendeau for standing with me during both the challenging and triumphant times—your support made all the difference! Also, I'm incredibly grateful to my committee members, Dr. Jackson Leween Two Bears and Dr. Michelle McGeough for being so generous with their knowledge, expertise, and care. I extend this gratitude to former committee member Dr. Kirsten Buick, whose contributions changed the direction of this dissertation. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Liisa-Rávná Finbog for stepping in as my external examiner, bringing her Sami perspectives to my defence. Lastly, I extend my deep appreciation to Dr. Carly Adams for agreeing to chair my defence, making the whole process run smoothly and with kindness. Thank you all!

Wado to Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell and her student, my steadfast mentor, Lisa Rutherford, for their art, creativity, inspiration and guidance, before, during, and beyond this project. There is no end to our future! Thank you to the Cherokee Arts Center, Jane Osti, Roy Boney, and countless other friends and scholars who deserve acknowledgement for their unwavering support. Wado!

Thank you to my PhD/candidate friends for sharing resources and our mutual support, including Drs. Michelle Lanteri, Alicia Harris, Kimberly Minor, Migueltzinta Solis, Gloria Bell, and Nayan Velaskar. It was important to be supported by people on this same journey. Immense gratitude to Dr. Harley Morman, one of my cohort members who extended his support, excellent friendship, and editorial skills to this dissertation—I cannot imagine a better editor!

Finally, to my family Paul, Jordan and Lula, and my mom Sandy. They witnessed my frustrations, elations, and tears throughout this process, and it was them that kept me grounded and able to see my way forward. Wado/Mvto. I love you so much!

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Chapter 1/ Holding Space: An Indigenous Methodological Process

> *To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about. –Edward Said*[1]

> *I am Indigenous body talking about this. I come to this moment by doing my part and carrying the history of those earlier Indigenous bodies who have done the work of carrying this to me. And now it is my turn to carry this to those Future Ancestors. –Peter Morin*[2]

I begin this dissertation by providing an overview of the trajectory of my work as a whole. In Chapter One, I emphasize the barriers faced by Indigenous artists and our continued presence despite continued glaring colonial erasures. I also discuss at length my methodological approach to this work, such as how I came to deploy Indigenous refusal as an embodied act within my work, one that refuses Indigenous absences, reclaims Cherokee kin, community, and our pottery/land as my archive. I elucidate how western methods hindered my progress, and how turning to similar Indigenous post-secondary experiences has enabled me to cite my human and non-human relatives and find my archives within my community. In this work, I am reclaiming land and place in the context of Cherokee pottery. Chapter Two demonstrates the depths of my ancestors' relationships to land and place. It also introduces the reader to my relative, Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell, the one who reawakened our Cherokee pottery customary practice. Her work has enabled pottery to flourish and expand in my community. Finally, Chapter Three, organized

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1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 78.

2. Peter Morin (Tahltan), "There are No Metaphors: A Proposal for Dreaming Indigenous Philosophies into Studio Arts Education," In *Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada,* eds. Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton. (Routledge, 2023), 230.

as a photo journal, expansively encapsulating my journey into learning the practice of Cherokee pottery and the resultant work that I created for this creative project.

"In the 2023 publication, *White Sight: Visual Politics and Practices of Whiteness*, Nicholas Mirzoeff alludes to the field of art history as the study of representations of whiteness, a conglomeration of ideologies undergirded by colonial, imperial, and racial violences."[3] I would further that assessment by acknowledging that the field of Indigenous art history was created for white scholars by white scholars within deeply imbedded structures of whiteness, and remained primarily under their control until quite recently. They created barriers so that Indigenous Peoples had no control over their own contributions to the art world, and this includes artists and scholars alike.[4] One of the few early, turn of the 20th century, Indigenous artists who was able to exert even a modicum of control over her professional life was Winnebago artist Angel de Cora (1871-1919). When she was hired to teach the first art classes at Carlisle Indian Industrial (residential boarding) School, she made her own demands that she "shall not be expected to teach in the white man's way, but shall be given complete liberty to develop the art of [her] own race and to apply this, as far as possible to various forms of art, industries and crafts."[5] And although she made demands of the Secretary of the Interior in that instance, she worked within the system, experiencing many barriers as a younger woman who was barred from fulfilling her studies in music, ultimately being provided an opportunity to learn painting instead.

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3. Yvonne Tiger and Noah Mapes (Ojibwe), "Call for Papers: Unsettling Methodologies of Indigenous Art History," College Art Association, 2024). https://enfilade18thc.com/2023/08/14/call-for-papers-caa-2024-chicago/.

4. Murray White, "Alex Janvier comes full circle with National Gallery retrospective," *Toronto Star*, published November 26, 2016; updated July 10, 2024. https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visual-arts/alex-janvier-comes-full-circle-with-national-gallery-retrospective/article_c697b423-b9b4-5a91-bc4c-9bb74e38cd53.html.

[5] Natalie Curtis, "An American Indian Artist, " *The Outlook*, January 14, 1920. Courtesy of Hampton University Archives.

Another example of an artist who had considerable barriers that changed his early life and career is the late Alex Janvier (Denesuline, Cold Lake First Nations) who, as a young man, was accepted to the London County Council UK, only to be denied a passport, impeding his dream.[6] Then, according to an article in the *Ottawa Sun*,

> *as a young student [Janvier] had hoped to study at the Ontario College of Art and Design, but a decision by the Indian agent on his home reserve in northern Alberta denied him that dream and he studied at the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary instead. Recently, OCAD awarded Janvier an honorary degree correcting that original indignity*.[7]

Intentional barriers that were put in place by colonizers to control First Nations Peoples changed the trajectory of this artist's life. And while his life could have been very different than what it was, it is only though his fortitude, cultural grounding, and talent that he was able to propel him to do tremendously important things in his life, such as painting the *Morning Star* on the dome of the Canadian Museum of History in 1993. Although he achieved success despite the barriers, he was an exceptional artist, and we will never know what his life would have looked like in a different context, one in which Indigenous artists were supported instead of denied.

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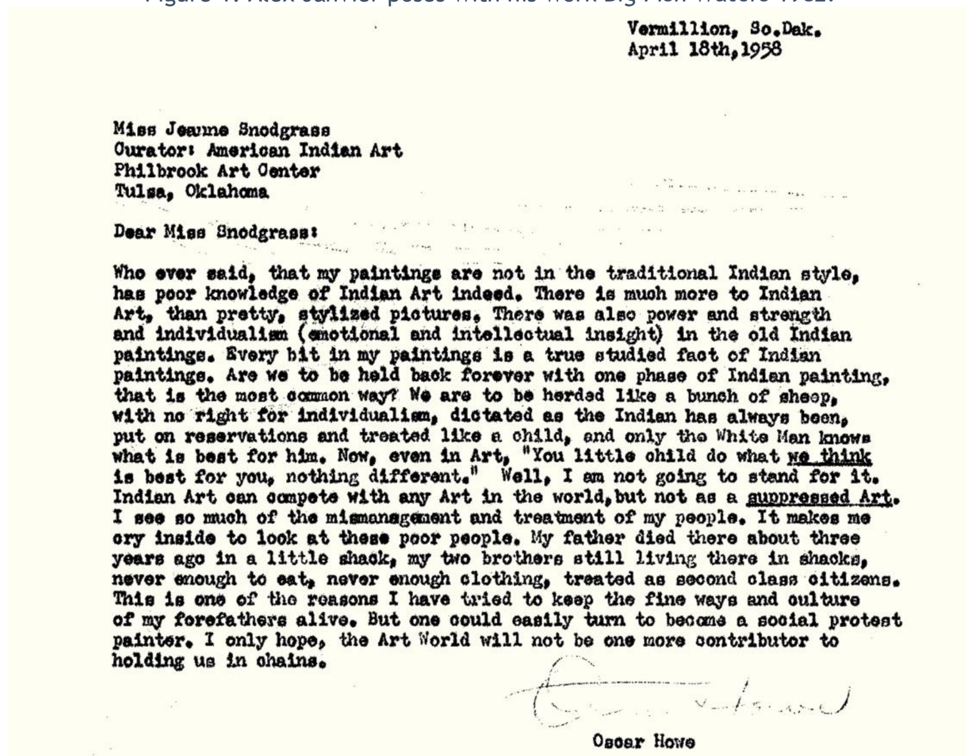
6. "Alex Janvier," *Petroglyphs to Pixels*, accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.petroglyphstopixels.com/alex-janvier/.

7. Peter Robb, "Indigenous artist Alex Janvier's work on display at the National Gallery." *Ottawa Citizen*, November 21, 2016. https://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/local-arts/indigenous-artist-alex-janviers-work-on-display-at-the-national-gallery .

Figure 1. Alex Janvier poses with his work *Big Fish Waters 1982*.[8]



Vermillion, So.Dak.
April 18th,1958

Miss Jeanne Snodgrass
Curator: American Indian Art
Philbrook Art Center
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Miss Snodgrass:

Who ever said, that my paintings are not in the traditional Indian style, has poor knowledge of Indian Art indeed. There is much more to Indian Art, than pretty, stylized pictures. There was also power and strength and individualism (emotional and intellectual insight) in the old Indian paintings. Every bit in my paintings is a true studied fact of Indian paintings. Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting, that is the most common way? We are to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated as the Indian has always been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him. Now, even in Art, "You little child do what we think is best for you, nothing different." Well, I am not going to stand for it. Indian Art can compete with any Art in the world, but not as a suppressed Art. I see so much of the mismanagement and treatment of my people. It makes me cry inside to look at these poor people. My father died there about three years ago in a little shack, my two brothers still living there in shacks, never enough to eat, never enough clothing, treated as second class citizens. This is one of the reasons I have tried to keep the fine ways and culture of my forefathers alive. But one could easily turn to become a social protest painter. I only hope, the Art World will not be one more contributor to holding us in chains.

Oscar Howe

Figure 2. Letter from Oscar Howe to curator Snodgrass at Philbrook Art Center.[9]

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[8] From article, https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visual-arts/alex-janvier-comes-full-circle-with-national-gallery-retrospective/article_c697b423-b9b4-5a91-bc4c-9bb74e38cd53.html

[9] Oscar Howe to Jean Snodgrass, April 18, 1958, in "What is – ? Oscar Howe's Letter to Philbrook Art Center" *No Business Magazine* 1. https://nobusinessmagazine.com/What-is. Accessed May 1, 2022.

I would also like to add one more artist to this discussion: the Yanktonai Dakota artist Oscar Howe (1915-1983), whose art was rejected from Philbrook Art Center's American Indian Art show for not meeting their estimation of 'traditional Indian art'. In his letter responding to Philbrook's rejection, he calls out this white curator's "suppression" of art and infantilization of Indigenous Peoples. I continue to be grateful for Oscar Howe's fortitude and strength to stand up to his oppressors. Howe went on to become one of the earliest Native American modernist painters, moving our art forward, helping to break us out of this 'traditional' Indian art paradigm that was acceptable because it was marketable to white collectors.

These early forms of refusal and protest by Indigenous artists were foundational and paved the way for other Indigenous artists to break boundaries and expand the expectations of Indigenous art. Much of this work happened within the last 50 years, including the research and early pottery work of my relative Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell, who is the subject of Chapter Two. It is the voices of these artists, speaking to or being written about by non-Indigenous scholars, that are the basis from so many of my early research projects. My resources throughout my second master's degree were anthropological books and early contemporary exhibition catalogues. This is where one found Indigenous artists reflecting on their practices and exhibitions. These writings, and a few of my courses, are what inspired to me think about how Indigenous students, scholars, and Peoples perceived this work differently, from within community and culture.

The move of Indigenous art histories from white control to ours, wherein our histories are now held in our hands, is still fairly recent and, of course, not complete, and resulting from our need to speak about our arts from our own perspectives. I think heather ahtone states it aptly here,

> *It has been my privilege to live during a period in which so many Indigenous thinkers are drawing upon their specific cultures to manifest methodologies*

that speak specifically to the arts made within their cultures and communities. Witnessing the emergence of a self-determined Indigenous art history canon has been gratifying.[10]

heather ahtone was my graduate school instructor and is my contemporary, so it is within my post-secondary educational lifetime that Indigenous scholarly contributions have loosened the grip of settler scholarly books, such as those by Jackson Rushing, Aldona Jonaitis, Ruth Phillips, and Janet Catherine Berlo. These books were once considered THE books to assign in Indigenous art history classes, and for many non-Indigenous instructors of Indigenous arts, they probably remain so. And while we continue to make headway in contributing articles, exhibition catalogues, and a few textbooks on Indigenous arts and artists by Indigenous scholars, there continues to be the need to break down barriers. For me and in my work this barrier breaking needs to happen in academia and comes in the form my research methodology, more specifically, my citational practice.

The use of an Indigenous citational practice of my own devising for my personal academic use is one that centers Indigenous methodologies, epistemologies, and scholarship. Western academic methodologies have been the perennial problem throughout my graduate studies wherein I constantly questioned: how do I apply western methods to an Indigenous project in a way that would further my inquiries, and was it even possible? For me, this has been a recurring issue. In every methods course that I was required to take in university, I felt like I expected to feed into an extractive settler colonial project instead of an Indigenous one—and to some degree, I still feel this way. Only one of these methods classes, and I have taken it four times throughout my education, addressed Indigenous methods and that was at Smith College,

[10] heather ahtone (Chickasaw), "Shifting the Paradigm of Art History," In *Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada,* eds. Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton. (Routledge, 2023), 42.

my undergraduate alma mater. Throughout my education, even my presence was still considered an absence in relation what was being taught.[11] My needs were never considered.

Ultimately, I understood that the reason for my uneasiness is that western academic methods could not explain and support my research and writing practice while allowing me to stay true to my culturally Tsalagi, academic, and intellectual self. At this point, I turn to Sara Ahmed who, in so many situations, has had similar experiences in academe. In her blog, she writes:

> *We are not just talking about citation within academic contexts. We are talking about what I think of as screening techniques: how certain bodies take up spaces by screening out the existence of others. If you are screened out (by virtue of the body you have) then you simply do not even appear or register to others. You might even have to become insistent, wave your arms, even shout, just to appear. And then of course how you appear (as being insistent) means you still tend not to be heard…. When we think this question "who appears?" we are asked a question about how spaces are occupied by certain bodies who get so used to their occupation that they don't even notice it. They are comfortable, like a body that sinks into a chair that has received its shape over time. To question who appears is to become the cause of discomfort. It is almost as if we have a duty not to notice who turns up and who doesn't. Just noticing can get in the way of an occupation of space.*[12]

In my presentations, I often speak about taking up space and holding space—many conscious Indigenous scholars do because it matters. The spaces that I occupied, in my early education and into my graduate degrees, in my profession, simply do not register with the people in front of the room. I did not 'appear' to them, and my educational knowledge and progress suffered.

[11] Considering these experiences of my own, I do ask my students if there is anything specifically that they would like me to spend more time on. If it is information that will help them in their research or degree program, I want to help. I want them to be seen and present in my classes.

[12] Sara Ahmed. (2013, September 11). "Making feminist points." *Feministkilljoys*. http://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/.

As the Creator would have it, I was accepted into the 2022 Momus fellowship, and it presented me with the opportunity to heavily engage with Māori, Samoan, and Sami Indigenous scholarship—it changed everything for me! It also altered the reading I was doing for my methods section. As I began to reach out in purely Indigenous directions, I realized that many other Indigenous theorists, thinkers, and scholars had also experienced similar struggles in these colonial institutions, and suddenly, I no longer felt alone. I felt validated and vindicated! I also realized I needed Cherokee grounding in all my work.

My process is practical, ethical, and generative; my intent is to shed light on the barriers and to break past them. My methodological processes reside in Indigenous refusal, which guides us towards ways to dismantle barriers by disengaging from Western traditional citational practices of citing from 'within the canon'. My work is to encourage other Indigenous students and scholars to cite from within our own knowledge bases (communities), to cite our non-human relatives, as well as our materiality, often gathered on the land and water. I am going to step back a moment and address the shifts and changes in this dissertation process, as it informs the rest of my present work. Originally, this research began as an interrogation of the representation of Indigenous lands as depicted in late 19th and early 20th century landscape paintings of the lands now and then known as the US and Canada. These paintings were created to 'sell' the idea of terra nullius, to commemorate the settlement of a 'Nation', and establish an idealized (often, male gendered) form of national identity necessary to penetrate, conquer, and colonize this (read as female) virginal land, as well as colonized Indigenous lands. As Indigenous art historians, we know that these vast canvases that hang on the walls of major museums around the world, displaying images of rich, pristine lands across this continent, were doing what white institutions continue to do to this day: erasing the history, presence, and relevance of Indigenous Peoples

upon their own lands, all in the service of claiming and reclaiming those lands and right to govern them.

During my research, I visited archives, art galleries, and museums in both the US and Canada searching for signs of acknowledgement or even gratitude for the Indigenous Peoples who helped these artists trek through Indigenous lands and to the sights that inspired their paintings. My efforts were futile and infuriating, as this acknowledgement did not exist. This 'uninhabited land' that motivated white artists to seek out, or contrive, picturesque vistas and hold them captive on canvas or in photographs was and continues to be the established homelands of millions of Indigenous Peoples, people who continue to work in reciprocity with nature to establish their own varied and unique understandings of nationhood and relationality. As I delved further into this research, it felt as if I were in an endless argument with dead white men! And, I was, and I am grateful that I recognized it. Fortunately for me and my research, more important ideas pervaded my thoughts, such as an understanding that land is pottery, and, as asserted by Dr. Kirsten Pai Buick in one of my dissertation committee meetings, pottery is land. Land is foundational to the creation of pottery, a place-based expression of cultural identity, and it stands in stark refusal to be obliterated by all the ways that white institutions and society attempt to erase global Indigeneity.

Gathering my Thoughts

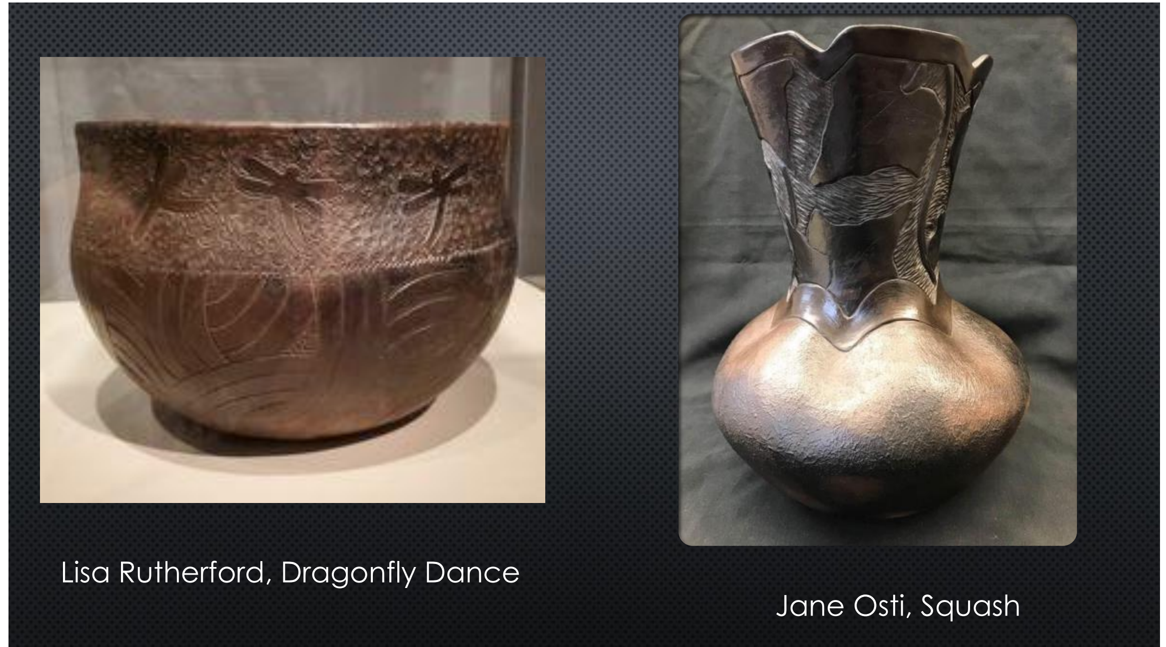

Figure 3. Cherokee Pottery by artists and Cherokee National Treasures Lisa Rutherford and Jane Osti. Reproduced with permission from the artists.

One way that Indigenous erasure has been furthered in art was through landscape, creating vast open vistas that supported the myth of open, untamed, land free for settlement. As Aniyvwiya, Mvskoke, Seminole woman and scholar, I have embarked upon a path of refusing to be erased from my histories and the erasure of my relationship to my lands and water. As a scholar and educator, I refuse to contribute to the erasure and further invisiblizing of other Indigenous Peoples, or to participate in this hegemonic system as it is, with built-in barriers devised to see the failure and alienation of Indigenous students, scholars, and artists. In my analysis and in my culture, pottery was, and is, not *just* land, but also a reflection of enduring Indigenous relationalities to land, water, Peoples, and place. Rather than the still, empty vistas of western landscape, pottery is a vibrant representation of what the land brings to us and how we understand and relate to place. In this chapter, I will explain the positions through which I analyze the histories that I address in my dissertation, and how I narrate the process of beginning my Cherokee pottery practice; I further clarify my positionality.

Broadly speaking, the objective of my dissertation is to push all scholars and artists – Indigenous and non-Indigenous-, to rethink Cherokee pottery, not just as artistic craft, but as processes of reconnection to ancestors, customary practices, and expressions of love and kinship to/with the land. In this, I am contributing to recent scholarship by Indigenous scholars who are reestablishing relationality and kinship to place, such as *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future*, by Patty Krawec with foreword by Nick Estes, *Land as Relation: Teaching and Learning through Place, People, and Practices* by Margaret Kress, Kahente Horn-Miller, and the dissertation by my colleague Dr. Alicia Harris (Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes), "Homescapes: Indigenous Land Art and Public Memory." In her words, her work "serves as an intervention to the established discourse on…Art."[13] I hope that my words support the work of Indigenous artists and their past, current, and forthcoming exhibitions, such as the work I did this past year which has supported the art of Diné artist Dakota Mace, Jeffrey Gibson (Cherokee/Mississippi Choctaw), Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Metis/Cree) and Tanya Lukin Linklater (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq). It is also my intention to Indigenize white institutional discourse of elevating Indigenous voices and scholarship, and creating spaces that I/we can hold for the many generations.[14] For the context of this dissertation, which is land (and water), it is worth briefly examining the intentionality embedded in within the landscape painting of at least one of these artists, before turning to the significance of land and clay to my ancestors, my People, and me.

Throughout this dissertation, I highlight the importance of Indigenous art historical presence within established discourses that continue to marginalize Indigenous contributions to

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[13] Alicia Lynn Harris (Assiniboine), "Homescapes: Indigenous Land Art and Public Memory," (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 2020).

[14] I will further address Indigenization later in this chapter.

the field. First, I must address how I can activate my Tsalagi refusal to adhere to western/white academic citational practices by citing land, fire, and water, as well as Indigenous artists and scholars.

I have a few academic dreams, some unspoken, one achieved. For example, it was my dream to teach a course full of Indigenous students/artists who were as invested in our histories as I am. I accomplished this, and it was everything of which I dreamt. It has long been my unspoken dream to write an essay that only cites Indigenous scholars, art, and artists. In this academic endeavor, I step ever closer to realizing my dream by arguing that as an Indigenous student working on an Indigenous project that engages an intentional Indigenous citational practices of my own creation, and inspired by a few Indigenous scholars, as the basis of my work. The choice to work on the methodological process of an Indigenous citational practice is an ethical one that incorporates community and advances other Indigenous scholars and scholarship. The complexity of this argument is the inquiry being addressed within this chapter.

Figure 4. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY. The American Wing: History, Landscape, and National Identity, 1850–75, Gallery 760.

Absence of Indigenous Presence

During the past several years, amid fellowships, residencies, COVID-19, and teaching first as a sessional instructor and now as a tenure track assistant professor, I took advantage of the places I found myself in by visiting galleries, museums, artist talks, and studios visits, and archives. During my visit to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in October 2021, I visited Gallery 760 of the American Wing – History, Landscape, and National Identity, 1850–75, and found myself surrounded by the enormity of landscape canvases presenting idealized forms of American nationhood (Figure 4).[15] Having just given Andrew Jackson's pristine bust the benefit of my middle finger for all of his atrocities against Native Americans, especially my People, I was having a long sardonic, Indigenous gaze at Albert Bierstadt's (German-born, American settler) massive painting (73 ½ x 120 ¾ in.), *The Rocky Mountains – Lander's Peak*, 1863 (Figure 5). The text for this painting reads, in part:

> *This and other popular canvases by…Bierstadt shaped the visual identity of the American West in the United States and abroad. Painted in New York after Bierstadt's return from these travels, this work advertised the landscape as a frontier destined to be claimed by White settlers, according to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. This belief that Americans were the divinely ordained "masters" of the continent systematically ignored with dire consequences the presence of Indigenous populations, such as the Shoshone peoples depicted in the picture's foreground.*[16]

As I stood there with a wry smile on my face, undoubtedly shaking my head in disdain, a white man rounded the corner into the gallery, making an abrupt halt in front of the Bierstadt. He looked at me and said, in complete awe, "Isn't he amazing!" to which I retorted, "No, he isn't." The man just looked at me incredulously, and I know he wanted to say something else, but I cut

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[15] If you would like to engage with Indigenous perspectives on this and other pieces of art, here is the link: "Native Perspectives," The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Last modified September 11, 2019. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/the-american-wing/native-perspectives.

[16] Here is the link to the painting and the text: "The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak," The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed January 3, 2024. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10154.

him off: “Do not engage with me.” I walked away knowing I undoubtedly killed some of his white man’s joy when I (Indigenously) refused to be subjected to it.[17] I felt satisfied, like I struck one for the Indigenous team! But I remained angered by these celebrated images of Indigenous genocide and erasure because although the ‘Shoshone’ are represented in Bierstadt’s composite painting of a landscape that did not actually exist as painted, they, too, became figments of his imagination.

The Shoshone, who know themselves as the Newe, are pictured in an idyllic encampment with dead animals spread around after the successful killing of a bear, all on land named after an expedition leader, Frederick W. Lander. I am certain that this land and the peak have their own names. These Newe Peoples’ faces are intentionally imperceptible, but of course they are—in this painting they are they are fauna, not humans of this land. I truly felt the absences of Indigenous North American representation within these immense American, Canadian, and European generated landscape paintings of the American West and the Canadian bush. In this specific grand gallery, I felt alone and angry. Genocide will do that to a Tsalagi girl.

[17] When I say I kill his joy, I hope you think of this in the Sara Ahmed way of killing joy, which intersects with race, gender, class, institution. See, Sara Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*, Penguin Books, 2023.

Figure 5. Albert Bierstadt's (German-born, American settler) (73 ½ x 120 ¾ in.), The Rocky Mountains Lander's Peak, 1863. Public domain.[18]

[18] "The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed January 3, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10154.2

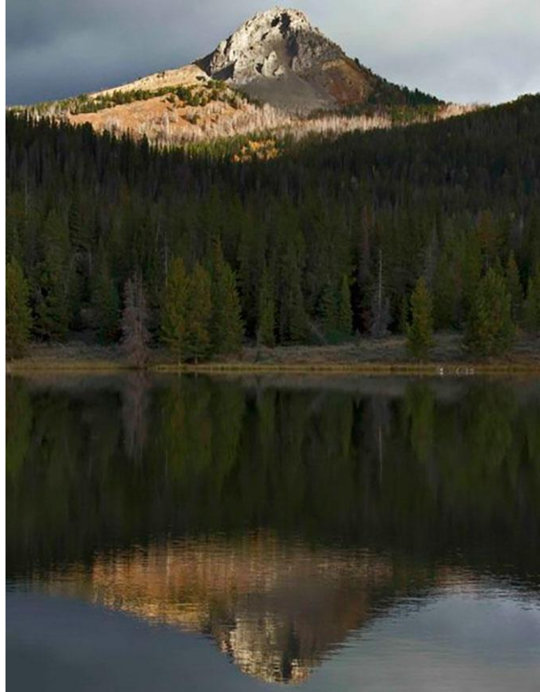

Figure 6. "Contemporary photographer Dave Bell's view of Lander Peak in the Wyoming Range makes an interesting contrast with Bierstadt's treatment of a mountain of the same name."[19]

The absence of Indigenous presence extends beyond these immense canvases, as this glaring omission is also apparent within some the Canadian Group of Seven (active from 1920 to 1933), whose artists' personal papers I spent a week examining in 2022. The artistic production of these artists depended heavily upon them exploring deep into the bush, a journey that was nearly impossible without a local guide, and probably an Indigenous one. In these archival materials there is no acknowledgment by these settler-colonizer artists that the land they captured in paint was (and remains) Indigenous land, nor was there any acknowledgement that Indigenous knowledge was necessary to navigate these lands.[20]

[19] Maria Wimmer, "Albert Bierstadt: Landscapes of the American West," Wyoming Historical Society Encyclopedia. Published November 8, 2014. https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/albert-bierstadt-landscapes-american-west.

[20] Trip to the National Gallery of Canada, March 2022.

With that omission in mind, I will briefly refer to a book I teach in my Indigenous Women course, *I Am a Damn Savage; What Have You Done to My Country?*, by An Antane Kapesh (Innu, 1926-2004), published in 1976.[21] In her personal, honest, and boldly written autobiography, Kapesh writes about when the foreigners (white men) came to Innu land, as told by her father-in-law based on the stories of his grandfather. According to her, white men would not leave their boats because the Innu refused to take them into the bush. The only white men living around the Innu where two priests. To make a long story about her husband's great grandfather's discovery of iron ore in 1860s or 70s short, this discovery did eventually draw white men out of their boats. And the promises they made – none of which could be achieved without the aid and instruction of Innu – were enough to induce some Innu to take them to the source in the bush. In 1970, the town of Schefferville, Quebec/Innu Territory, celebrated the 100th year since the "discovery" of iron ore by the white priest, not the Innu who knew about it long before. Indeed, with this story in mind, and so many like it, it became clear to me that the most important aspect of Indigenous Peoples for white people, in life as in art, was their complete absence even when their presence was both necessary and as clear as day, to me at least.

With this painful truth of erasure in mind, and this writing as my focal point, I realized that western methods (white words and white expectations) were useless in the construction of my project. I had to turn the corner. As an Indigenous scholar, it is important to me not to replicate Indigenous absence and reify settler colonial ideals and constructs. Instead, I have chosen to consciously refuse to meet white academic expectations that required me to prove my acquired knowledge by regurgitating the thoughts of long dead white male art historians about

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[21] An Antane Kapesh (Innu) and Sarah Henzi, *I Am a Damn Savage; What Have You Done to My Country? / Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu; Tanite nene etutamin nitassi?* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2020).

dead white artists. I decided that a framework of refusal, decolonization, and Indigenization would support my work and insist on my presence as a Tsalagi scholar within the academy.

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss my Indigenous-based methodological and citational practice. The Indigenous scholars, artists, and allies that are cited in my work were included based on their contributions and commitment to their Indigenization and furtherance of Indigenous scholarship. I consider this an ethical choice on my part, and these decisions take my mind back to the Venice Biennale 2024, where I had the honour of attending Kapwani Kiwanga's symposium on her art installation, *Trinket*, in the Canadian Pavillion. At her symposium, Kiwanga's invited speakers were the scholars whose research she utilized for her installation. It was an act of generosity and reciprocity, and it made the clear statement that she trusted their scholarship. Who we include in our scholarship matters.

During my time researching archival materials from the Group of Seven members, as previously discussed, I became uneasy as I realized I had spent a considerable amount of time reading about white people and drowning in white scholarship—for an Indigenous project! Their 2-D canvases flattened my land and my relationship with it. This situation did not sit well with me, but I felt that I was in too deep to back away, even though the thought had occurred to me. Upon further reflection, I realized that this apprehension was not a new sensation. Throughout my graduate studies, I have found the task of locating and articulating a methodological approach for my study to be particularly challenging, even halting my progress for long periods of time. I believe I have found clarity, as I discuss momentarily. Before entering into the discussion of my Indigenous-specific academic methodological approach, I will briefly discuss how I ground my work in my Tsalagi culture.

Indigenizing My Academic Project

Part of my continuing effort to honour who I am as a Tsalagi woman in a PhD program has been to learn from other Indigenous scholars along the way. Academically, my dissertation is positioned in both history and art history, specifically within the sub-fields of Native American, Indigenous, American, and Canadian histories and art histories. As a Tsalagi person, I believe it needs to be stated that whatever I produce academically or even artistically does not necessary mean it is automatically Indigenized. Indigenization is an intentional process. I am committed to utilizing Indigenous methodologies and methods which I see as an additional step towards centring Indigenous scholarship and perspectives. Queen's University's Office of Indigenous Initiatives describes Indigenization as:

> the re-doing or reaffirming of education to include Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, feeling and being. It involves elevating the voices of Indigenous peoples, elevating traditional, and cultural knowledge, and intentional inclusion of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning to form and create pedagogical approaches.[22]

Indigenization emphasizes the importance that should be placed upon Indigenous voices, presence, and epistemologies. It is the only way in which we (Indigenous Peoples) will gain ground in our move towards elevating our scholarship, being included within the curriculum, and having our voices matter in decision making.

As stated, Indigenization is a process, an on-going one, filled with intentional decision making. One of the ways in which I have chosen to further Indigenization is to ground my work in my community through the study and creation of customary and contemporary Cherokee Pottery.

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[22] "Decolonizing and Indigenizing," Queen's University. Accessed May 14, 2024. https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/decolonizing-and-indigenizing/defintions.

A significant facet of my work is to reassert the importance of land and water to Indigenous Peoples and our ways of knowing, thus highlighting the problems presented by white peoples' renditions of our lands that exclude or minimize Indigenous Peoples' presence and the marks my/our ancestors left on those lands. In this section, I introduce the way in which I intend to anchor my dissertation in my community, which is through the methods and practice of traditional Cherokee pottery. Personally, I am drawn to this artistic practice because it was my aunt and Cherokee National Treasure Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell (October 16, 1926 – March 3, 2012) who revived the practice in Oklahoma and became the primary educator of these customary and contemporary methods.[23] Anna Belle is a woman I love, my life mentor, and we spoke numerous times about her work as a potter and the labour-intensive aspects of this practice. When I think about my dissertation (generally, not necessarily specific to the subject) in relation to pottery, I intuitively and practically know how to join these thoughts and sections together. I am building something important with all of the work my fingers have done typing these words, but also shaping clay, literally shaping lands, histories, memory, theory, and method.

Firstly, and most importantly to my work, is the understanding that to create pottery as Anna Belle did, you must dig your clay and clean it—pottery is made directly from our land.[24] These pots made of land and water are functional and life-sustaining, and they are also pieces of aesthetic beauty that carry our touch within their structures, our stories on their surface, and the memories of our warms hands in their bodies. When I examine landscape paintings, I see Indigenous lands with medicine and other useful plants upon it. All these sentient beings sustain

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[23] For clarification, Anna Belle was my 3rd cousin on my maternal side, but in our ways, she was my aunt.

[24] Although some of our Cherokee potters buy their clay, some still go out together and dig their own clay.

life, as does the land which was (and is) a holder of knowledge, and a place of learning. As asserted by Dr. Kirsten Pai Buick in one of my dissertation committee meetings, pottery is landscape.

Secondly, in the making of pottery, getting to the end with an intact pot is not a guarantee. Within the multiple steps required to make a pot in which we are asking this chunk of earth to yield to our will, failure is completely possible—the earth can refuse your pressure, but it can also succumb to your intentions. I relate this sense of uncertainty to my PhD experience—maybe graduate school, in general. My journey has been filled with trepidation and pit falls, as well as successes. So often I have had to recycle my clay, so to speak, and try again. As Dr. Michelle McGeough stated in our committee meeting, pottery holds the memory of our touch, and, similarly, I carry the memory of my academic experiences with me. As it is with so many potters, I am learning my own way of producing successful pots, as I have learned to navigate these western academic institutions.

Lastly, to finish a pot and make it strong, you expose it to fire. Surviving the fire and heat is the true test of a well-made pot. Fire is central to all of my cultures. For both Dr. Jackson Two-Bears and myself, fire is medicine. A successful pot that survives the fire carries its pristine messages engraved into its surface. These messages are from our ancestors as we use their tools, iconography, and their means of creation. My pots represent a future that my ancestors dreamt about and prayed for. My dissertation will carry in the messages from my ancestors that live within me, as they support and guide me in my work and the directions in which I will go. As a Tsalagi woman, I was taught about the land and water by Tsalagi women, my grandma Virginia (Feather) Revas and Aunt Anna Belle, and I will continue to honour them.

The most important reading that reshaped the direction in my writing of this dissertation is, "Calling Forth Our Pasts, Citing Our Futures—An Envisioning of a Kaupapa Māori Citational

Practice," by Māori scholars Hana Burgess, Dr. Donna Cormack, and Dr. Papaarangi Reid.[25] I was introduced to this scholarship during the MOMUS Fellowship, and upon reading this essay and learning to the academic struggles of (then) Māori doctoral students from Aotearoa, Oceania, I realized that our collective dilemma is at once an ethical issue as well as a practical one. I understood that within all of us there is an ethical and intentional place that guides us to conclude that settler-colonial scholarship will not help further the words, work, and futures of Indigenous scholars.

In their essay, the aforementioned Māori scholars wrote, "We research and teach to contribute to futures where, through Māori ways of being, knowing, and doing, our people can be well."[26] This statement resonated with me because my research began as an examination and admonishment of Indigenous erasure, invisibility, and absence in an effort to halt that cycle. My research continues to be concerned with these issues, so it is important to acknowledge this violence, if I am going to recentre and reassert Indigeneity as my focal point. As such, my consciousness of Indigenous elimination from art, land, and a multitude of other spaces, sparked my refusal to accept any more violence, and this extends to the scholars and theorists I choose to include in my work, as I cannot allow these colonizers to guide my thoughts. I refuse to run the risk of reprivileging or reifying settler-colonial ideas about race, identity, and exclusion over Indigenous understanding(s) of resilience, resurgence, and survivance. To me, this is an ethical issue—to privilege white scholarship in an analysis of Indigenous erasure would subvert the

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[25] Hana Burgess (Māori), Donna Cormack (Māori), and Papaarangi Reid (Māori), "Calling Forth Our Pasts, Citing Our Futures—An Envisioning of a Kaupapa Maori Citational Practice." In *MAI Journal* 10, no. 1. (2021). DOI: 10.20507/*MAIJournal*.2021.10.1.8. Hana Burgess Hana Burgess (Ngāpuhi, Te Roroa, Te Ātihaunui a Pāpārangi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) (she/her) is a PhD Candidate at the University of Auckland, Donna Cormack (Kai Tahu, Kāti Māmoe) is an Associate Professor at the University of Auckland, and Papaarangi Reid (Te Rarawa iwi) is a full professor at the University of Auckland.

[26] Burgess, Cormack, & Reid, "Calling Forth," 57.

analysis and argument I am making, especially if the privilege is designed to meet and adhere to western academic institutional requirements.

The practical issue that I face in this dissertation is that there are simply not enough Indigenous scholars in my area of study to academically support my research. There is value in scholarship written by allies who work in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, such as Patrick Wolfe, K. Wayne Yang, and Gabe Yanacki. It is important for me to state that I have found more critical and supportive analysis from the works of BIPOC scholars in my area of study. As I move forward in my work, ensuring the centrality of Indigeneity over the non-Indigenous scholars included within my work is an honour that I undertake as my responsibility. As a Cherokee scholar, it is my goal to intentionally uplift global Indigenous scholarship and the voices of our community members.

Refusal as Method

'Refusal' is one of the most important methodological approaches deployed by a handful of significant Indigenous scholars, such as Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk), Eve Tuck (Unangax̂), and Glen Coulthard (Yellowknife Dene), as well as the above-mentioned Māori scholars. Simpson writes:

> [Refusal] emerged in my own writing and through observation of Kahnawà:ke action but also through the words of people. I would hear, "enough is enough", "it's not us it's them", and—in a commentary on the international border—"the white man put that there, not us". The people of Kahnawà:ke used every opportunity to remind each other, and especially non-native people, that this is our land, that there are other political orders and possibilities.[27]

[27] Audra Simpson, "The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of 'Refusal': Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia," In *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017), 21. https://doi.org/ggmk9j21

In "The ruse of consent and the anatomy of 'refusal': cases from indigenous North America and Australia," she approaches refusal as "an option for producing and maintaining alternative structures of thought."[28] Although in this article, Simpson is using refusal in relation to the politics of tribal recognition, it is imperative to reiterate, for the purposes of this dissertation, that refusal opens the door to other "options" beyond western academic methods and citational practices. Indeed, for me, Indigenous citational practices, as discussed by Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, are acts of Indigenization and a central point for refusal in this dissertation.

Why does citational practice matter to me? How does an Indigenized citational practice differ from what students are generally taught within the academy? From my own experiences as a student, from college through three graduate degrees, the white scholars in front of the classroom did not discuss the importance of Indigenous methodologies or citational practices, centring instead on their own, white, peers and western methodologies.[29] If ethnographic methods or work within Indigenous communities was addressed, we were told we had to subject our projects to the institutional review boards (IRB) before moving forward. This was the extent of our discussions.

As a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma, I took issue with the IRB process. While these review boards were ostensibly set up with the intention of protecting Indigenous

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[28] Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk), "The Ruse of Consent and the Anatomy of 'Refusal': Cases from Indigenous North America and Australia," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 19. DOI: 10.1080/13688790.2017.1334283

[29] In my history master's degree, my methods course was combined with the history of science course, team taught by two professors who loathed each other. Our methods were so divergent that we never actually had productive conversations, especially not about Indigenous methodologies. And then the professors got into a shouting match, something that had been teetering the entire semester. The students jumped in, and that pretty much ended a truly hellish semester. Needless to say, I learned very little. My art history methods and theory courses were very traditional, introducing us to all the German and Italian scholars. We did not extend beyond Panofsky, and there was no conversation about Indigenous scholars. At the University of Lethbridge, my methods course was taught by social science instructors who could not aid me in the direction of humanities.

Peoples from dangerous medical procedures by western institutions and extractive non-Indigenous academic practices —it created a problematic and prejudiced process wherein western academic institutions position themselves not only as gatekeepers of acceptable interactions with Indigenous Peoples, but also as the judges of the academic 'validity' of the knowledge shared by Indigenous Peoples. Worst still, was the fact that these institutional gatekeepers insisted, and still insist, that Indigenous scholars require their permission to academically engage in our own communities and with our own Elders. As such, conversations about Indigenous methods and epistemologies were institutionally, intellectually, and academically marginalized because experiences relayed from within ones' own community were not considered expert knowledge by the institutionally appointed (usually non-Indigenous) experts on Indigenous knowledge and ethical interactions with Indigenous knowledge-keepers. As such, there was no 'valid' or institutionally legible way to cite our knowledge keepers except within stringent guidelines created through a lens of Indigenous 'naivety.' In short, institutional ethics guidelines reflect too clearly the violent and extractive attitude of "Indians as wards/children" that has dominated federal/Indigenous relationships since the colonial era. To quote Hana Burgess:

> *Questions began to arise around how I would cite my ideas in a way that honestly reflected the theoretical formations of my PhD. How would I cite my friends? How would I cite the whenua? The fire? How would I cite my tüpuna? It became more and more explicit that institutional conventions and expectations around citational practice would not allow me to be myself. I refused to reduce myself to fit into the intellectual genealogies of white men. I decided to take a sovereign stance.*[30]

These scholars' moments of reflection within their PhD work are analogous to many moments I have had in my own, but it is their articulation of it as a moment of refusal that empowered their

[30] Burgess, Cormack, & Reid, "Calling Forth," 60.

work and mine. Fire is literally at the centre of my culture, so their question of how to cite fire was mine as well. How do I cite the fire? I cite the fire through my experiences and in my own voice, and that of my ancestors. For me, this is one of the most generative moments within my readings. How do I cite the fire? I just simple cite the fire:

fire (*atsila*): balance (with water), 139–40; controlled wildland burns, 138–40; Creator (*Unetlvnv*) gift, 36–37, 39–42, 43, 151, 193; getting of, 39–40, 40*fig.*, 41–42, 43–44, 92, 133, 169, 220, 235; raccoon (*kvtli*), 92; Water Spider (*Kananesgi Amayi*) story, 39–40, 40*fig.*, 41–42, 43–44, 133, 235; weather forces, 164; wildland firefighters, 136–40; wood types, 185

Figure 7. Index from: *Cherokee Earth Dwellers: Stories and Teachings of the Natural World*

What does this quote have to do with the scholars I choose to cite within this dissertation? Indigenous scholars, globally, are making conscious choices about who they cite within their articles and manuscripts. And in doing so, they are making choices "to refuse to fit into the intellectual genealogies of white men," and finding other ways to cite community.[31] One such scholar is Dr. Liisa-Rávná Finbog, a Sámi archaeologist and museologist, who speaks

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[31] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Calling Forth," 60.

passionately about our ‘archives of invisibility’ and the importance of citing our cultural sources of knowledge:

> *In most Indigenous communities…the spoken word – alongside aesthetics and bodily practices – is how knowledge has been kept and transferred between generations. Indigenous archives and libraries – our sources of knowledge – are as such not necessarily founded on books and written works. These archives of [perceived] invisibility may be challenging to work with when we [who are Indigenous] write critically. Not because we ourselves struggle with them, but while Indigenous practices of record keeping – our archives of invisibility – are valued and honored in our own communities, the sad reality is that they are not always valued equally in non-Indigenous contexts.*[32]

Speaking from her own PhD candidacy battles of refusal, Dr. Finbog discussed the issues that Indigenous scholars encounter in their academic citational practices as a result of ‘unintended or purposeful absence’ from within the archives. According to Finbog, not all collections of knowledge were intended for the archive, so, if an Indigenous scholar attempts to cite from within their community, their citations do not satisfy the gatekeepers’ ‘acceptable citation requirements.’ Most often, the community-based knowledge keepers they are citing lack the academic credentials to pass the bar set by those gatekeepers. Not only does this result in an institutional dismissal of Indigenous ways of knowing, but, just as importantly, it jeopardizes the success of Indigenous students.

In an effort to assist current students, Dr. Finbog directed us to Lorisia MacLeod’s “More Than Personal Communication: Templates for Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge

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[32] Liisa-Rávná Finbog (Sámi), session leader, “Momus Emerging Critics Residency, Southern Summer/Northern Winter Schedule and Syllabus,” MOMUS, March 2022. See, Liisa-Rávná Finbog, “It Speaks to You: Making Kin of People, Duodji And Stories In Sámi Museums,” PhD Diss., (University of Oslo, 2020.) or the now published PhD, Liisa-Ravna Finbog, *It Speaks to You: Making Kin of People, Duodji, And Stories in Sámi Museums* (New York: DIO Press, 2023).

Keepers."[33] MacLeod states in her introduction, "This project in part sprouted from the frustration I felt during my undergraduate degree when I saw anthropologists who were trying to do culturally connected and respectful work limited by how they could cite unrecorded oral teachings. At that time, I complained about the unequal treatment of Indigenous knowledges but was not in a position to recommend changes until I completed my Masters of Library and Information Studies."[34] MacLeod's statement reinforces two issues faced by Indigenous students and scholars: it highlights the lack of equal and inclusive citational practices, as well as a lack of institutional power afforded to those WITHOUT academic credentials. Considering that in Canada in 2016, 2.1% of Indigenous women had earned Masters degrees and 0.2% had earned doctorate degrees, compared to 6.3% and 0.8% respectively for non-Indigenous women. Indigenous men were similarly underrepresented, with 1.3% having an earned Masters and 0.2% an earned doctorate, compared to 5.9% and 1.1% respectively for non-Indigenous men. These data highlight how few Indigenous Peoples have the particular institutionally recognized credentials to effect meaningful change even from within colonial institutions.[35] Additionally, MacLeod addresses the fact that APA and MLA include templates for citing Indigenous Peoples, but they are inadequate: "If APA and MLA can have multiple editions, it seems only fair that the first attempts to integrate a standard for Elders and Knowledge Keepers be given the same courtesy to evolve and be refined through use."[36] Simplistic forms of citation that do not require

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[33] Lorisia MacLeod (James Smith Cree Nation), "More Than Personal Communication: Templates for Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers." *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 1-2. https://doi.org/10.18357/kula.135.

[34] MacLeod, "More than Personal Communication," 1.

[35] Statistics Canada, "Insights on Canadian Society: The achievements, experiences and labour market outcomes of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women with bachelor's degrees or higher," by Paula Arriagada. 75-006-x. (October 20, 2021). https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00009-eng.htm.

[36] MacLeod, "More Than Personal Communication," 2.

tribal affiliation, community leadership, and where they are located are over-simplified, watered-down, and less interested in the keeper of knowledge than the knowledge itself. It is extractive, and MacLeod refused to participate in a system that did not honour Indigenous Elders and knowledge.

The intricacies of Indigenous citational practice matter to my project because my readings in this direction have unearthed absences, invisibility, and abject frustration by fellow Indigenous scholars. And to some degree, it feels as if we are suffering alone when the truth is, we are not alone; it is the institution that is isolating us—remember, 0.2%. For me, this isolation was exacerbated during COVID when our traditional way of in-person conferencing and the exchanging of ideas came to a halt. All this, topped off by the academic norms/requirement of 'academic objectivity', the removal of ourselves and our voices from our projects, which has been brow beaten into me since I first entered college, left me alone and with the feeling that my positionality did not matter to my work. My identity and community are the reason I do the work that I do! But, thankfully, in more recent years, this fake objectivity has been forcefully challenged, and we know that in Indigenous projects, our place and voices do matter, maybe more than ever. As Māori scholar, and recent ancestor, Moana Jackson stated in a keynote address, "to be objective is actually to divorce yourself from those to whom you belong, it is to divorce yourself from the land which has shaped you."[37] Molding my dissertation around acts of refusal binds me to my ancestors, to my homeland, and to my People, such as the Cherokee women who, in 1818, reminded the Cherokee Council that "we claim the right of the soil" in their petition against further cessions of Cherokee land to the US government.[38]

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[37] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Calling Forth," 61.

[38] Jace Weaver and Laura Adams Weaver. *Red Clay, 1835: Cherokee Removal and the Meaning of Sovereignty*. First edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, 126

Thus far, I have demonstrated the multiple ways in which other Indigenous scholars are refusing to accept continued acts of marginalization and erasure in exchange for validating Indigenous epistemologies. These acts remind me of Simpson's recognition of Indigenous refusal in political theory:

> It emerged in my own writing and through observation of Kahnawà:ke action but also through the words of people. I would hear, 'enough is enough'…and – in a commentary on the international border – 'the white man put that there, not us'. The people of Kahnawà:ke used every opportunity to remind each other, and especially non-native people, that this is our land.[39]

Her People refused to accept the impositions placed upon them; they had options, including the option to say no. By choosing the scholars one wants to include and have support their work, scholars we include within our text, that uphold our principles, and form the structure of Indigenous bibliographies, these are ethical choices we make and upon which we base our research. According to Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Moana Jackson suggests that research that does not seek to transform is not ethical."[40] My project, and the aforementioned Indigenous scholars, seeks to transform within an ethical Indigenous framework. It is intentional.

As such, one ethical choice I have made for the good of my writing practice and commitment to Indigenous scholarship is to consciously exclude scholars who participate in colonial gatekeeping and the denigration of Indigenous arts workers and, especially, artists. This decision falls in line with the ethics of Moana Jackson and the arguments made by Burgess, Cormack, and Reid who state, "Who, how, and why we cite must heal damaged and disrupted relationships, and certainly not re-entrench such imbalances."[41] As such, I refuse to further acts

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[39] Audra Simpson, "The Ruse of Consent," 21.

[40] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Calling Forth," 63.

[41] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Calling Forth," 64.

of harm simply because these bad actors are in positions of power. Burgess, Cormack, and Reid put this question to us about who we include in our scholarship: “We ask ourselves, would we invite them [these scholars] and their ideologies into our home?”[42] I, for one, would not.

The same question must be asked of the artistic renditions of landscape I introduced you to earlier in this chapter—would I invite these painted Indigenous removals into my home? Would I deliberately display depictions of my/our removal on my walls? The answer here, too, is no. Thus, the politics of refusal infuse my research and methodological approaches.

Decolonialism

Before Indigenization and ‘refusal’ entered my academic lexicon, the most powerful weapon I had in my war chest to fight against settler-colonialism and to battle invisibility was Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi, Māori) formative book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* originally published in 1999, now in its third iteration. The enduring necessity for this book speaks for itself. In her introduction, Smith states, “This book identifies research as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other.”[43] The ’site of struggle’ to which Smith refers continues to be fraught, and though we have made significant inroads, the battle wages on. To put it plainly, colonial narratives about Indigenous Peoples consist of thick layers of big White lies. In her book, Smith acknowledges that there is much work to be done in dismantling this structure of white power: “This is a book which attempts to do something more than deconstructing Western scholarship simply by our own retelling, or by sharing Indigenous

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[42] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, “Calling Forth,” 63.

[43] Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori), *Decolonizing Methodologies—Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012) 2.

horror stories about research. In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent."[44] For my dissertation, the larger intent of which she speaks is in bypassing white scholarship and non-Indigenous understandings of the North American landscape by unsettling that gaze and asserting/inserting Indigenous presence(s). As Eve Tuck and KW Yang argue in their article "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," "Decolonization offers a different perspective to human and civil rights-based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an 'and'. It is an elsewhere."[45] In my work, the 'elsewhere' is by placing us back in our landscape, re-connecting us to the land, and connecting land to pottery, out of the 'nowhere' to which white scholars consigned us.

My Tsalagi ageya positionality is important to my methods, and I recognize myself as what Dr. Smith would refer to as being both an "insider" and an "outsider."[46] By virtue of being an Indigenous woman whose life is informed by my cultural communities and customs, I am an "insider." As a PhD student who is conducting research for an academic project, I am an "outsider" who approaches Indigenous art and artists as the object of my research, though I prefer to think of them as relatives and kin.[47] As an Indigenous student within a colonial institution, seeking to elevate Indigenous theories and methodologies, I am an "outsider" who is working hard for the "insiders."

Within my work, decolonization coupled with refusal becomes emboldened to do more than deconstruct. As Smith says, "To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve 'what we were

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[44] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 3.

[45] Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K.Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 36.

[46] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15.

[47] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 16.

and remake ourselves'. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope." [48] Refusal allows us space for recovery and reclamation—it is generative and embodied. It allows for an examination of and, possibly liberation from, the impact of colonialism and imperialism of Indigenous art, the control and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, and the constructions of political power that sustain colonialism and extract from Indigenous communities.

When talking about Indigenous Studies and decolonization efforts within the field, Frantz Fanon and Glen Coulthard are two scholar-activists quite often discussed in connection with each other. Fanon's books, *Black Skin, White Masks* (hereafter, *BSWM*) and *The Wretched of the Earth*, remain central to scholars working in the areas of anticolonial and decolonial thought. They were also foundational in Coulthard's PhD dissertation and have remained essential to his arguments on the federal processes of recognition of First Nations Peoples by the Canadian government and issues of decolonization.

Frantz Fanon's work unravels the complexities of decolonial theory from a non-Indigenous, yet still marginalized, perspective. In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he expands on Hegel's master/slave narrative on power structures to include the settler-colonial state.[49] According to Fanon, colonized (or from my view, assimilated) people keep colonization in place by being what or who they are told to be by the settler-colonial state. I believe that in this way, for really complicated (abduction) and violent (residential school systems) reasons (trauma), some Indigenous Peoples participate/d in their own elimination (often

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[48] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 4.

[49] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

subconsciously).[50] Decolonial theory is key in helping us see destructive narratives that need to be destroyed even within our own communities.

According to Coulthard, it is Fanon's critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that enables Fanon's theory to be applied to his own work.[51] In his book*, Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (hereafter, *RSWM*), he writes that,

> *Fanon's analysis suggests that in contexts where colonial rule is not reproduced though force alone, the maintenance of settler-state hegemony requires the production of what he liked to call 'colonized subjects': namely, the production of the specific modes of colonial thought, desire, and behavior that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued domination. In Fanon's work, recognition is not posited as a source of freedom and dignity for the colonized, but rather as the field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained. It is this "form of recognition," Fanon suggests, "that Hegel never described."*[52]

Subsequently, this is also the form of recognition that I set out to interrogate in *RSWM.*

Fanon argues that the terms of recognition are set by the master in Hegel's master/slave dialectics, and over time slaves attach themselves to these "master-sanctioned forms of recognition, and that this attachment is essential in maintaining the economic and political structure of master/slave (colonizer/colonized) relations themselves."[53] Early representations of Indigenous land are visual representation(s) of those transactions of maintaining the colonizer/colonized relationship. Failing to 'refuse' to recognize these false representations of Indigenous land is tantamount to ceding the self to the relational narrative Fanon pushed against.

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[50] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 2008).

[51] Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknife Dene)*, Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 16.

[52] Coulthard, *Red Skin*, 16-17.

[53] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," in *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 439.

In this dissertation, I will assert that my ancestors have been manipulating the land since time immemorial. Any assertion that these lands were pristine, Edenic, and virginal is false, and I cannot recognize these master narratives.

Fanon's work on the identity of colonized people is largely concerned with the colonized mind. Colonized identity is a direct result of the colonizer's control over the lives, death, or future of the colonized person. This way of thinking about identity, and, indeed, recognition can be equally applied to Indigenous people, as Coulthard has shown in his work on the rejection of colonial forms of recognition as a call for Indigenous sovereignty, free from colonial power and definition. Somewhat ironically, it was my own ancestors petition before the US Supreme Court as a sovereign independent nation in 1892 that led to the processes by which modern forms of colonial recognition—that Coulthard argues against -were established as law in the United States and borrowed by other nations such as Canada in subsequent years. Speaking as a Cherokee woman in who refusal is inherited blood knowledge, I know that many Indigenous People live and work in white society. Many of us put on that mask in society just to get through the day, but at home or in community, we are our Other—probably our true selves. In regards to negotiating with the nation-state, this hegemony is still setting the terms of Indigenous self-determination. Refusing those terms must include asserting self-determination through how we are represented and by whom, through how our relationship with the land and water is represented, and by whom. Decolonizing ideas of land means not just pointing out our absence in images of it, but also reasserting our presence, past, present, and future.

The work of scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people from Minjerribah) examines these relationships of between Indigenous Peoples and power and land ownership with colonizers and the Crown. Moreton-Robinson writes in her book, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty:*

> *In the Australian context, the sense of belonging, home, and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject—colonizer/migrant—is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law. It is a sense of belonging derived from ownership as understood within the logic of capital, and it mobilizes the legend of the pioneer, "the battler," in its self-legitimization. Against this stands the Indigenous sense of belonging, home, and place in its incommensurable difference*.[54]

In this sense, place and belonging, which are inherent to the Indigenous Peoples of the land, are at odds with the laws and policies established by colonizers/settlers. As stated in the beginning of this essay, my decision to include non-Indigenous scholars who are Indigenous allies is a practical decision based on the merits and contributions of their work. Patrick Wolfe's (settler-ally), "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," is an important decolonial theory article that fluidly explains settler-colonial power dynamics and how they exerted force on the lives of Indigenous Peoples from a multitude of directions.[55] In his article, Wolfe focuses on two important elements of settler-colonialism's efforts to eliminate the Natives: "the logic of elimination" and "genocide." Wolfe asserts that "settler-colonialism destroys to replace," and he lists some of the means of this destruction, or elimination: "individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as…boarding schools."[56] The idea that colonization 'destroys to replace' is what Tuck, Yang, and Smith refer to as that from which we, Indigenous Peoples, are recovering our story and histories. My work, which refuses to accept Indigenous absence and invisibility, is the embodiment of what Wolfe describes in his short discussion of Australia.

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[54] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

[55] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," in *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006).

[56] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388.

According to Wolfe, and in the pattern of all settler-colonial take-overs, Australia, founded in 1901, eliminated the Aboriginal Peoples from the land for white settlement and imperial land grabbing. And like the pre-Revolutionary history of America where white men dressed up as 'savage Indians' and went to Boston Harbor to throw some tea in the water, Australia also felt that it had to maintain some form of Aboriginal presences to establish their independence. For Australia, this entailed borrowing, both past and present, of Aboriginal motifs to maintain "an Indigenous aura" about the land. Wolfe writes, "Australian public buildings and official symbolism, along with the national airlines, film industry ["Crocodile Dundee"], sports teams and the like, are distinguished by the ostentatious borrowing of Aboriginal motifs."[57] Aboriginal aesthetics were widely exploited to create a unique national identity.[58] Yes, this should be read as, "Look at us! We are different from you (England) because we have natives here to exploit!" Not ironically, at that same, the U.S. was also expounding on the virtues of the Indian as a natural designer. At this point it must be stated that actual Indigenous or Aboriginal Peoples were unimportant to these (non-)Indigenous performance. Both settler-colonial nations used Indian-play to express their 'unique' identities and declare their independence from England while simultaneously robbing Indigenous Peoples of their identities. This appropriation of identities and of land, as well as the erasure of Indigenous Peoples, are the subjects of my dissertation.

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of my dissertation, my work examines the absence of Indigenous Peoples from North American their narratives and re-asserts our presence. My work

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[57] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 389.

[58] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 389.

is an act of refusal, in that I am refusing to allow Indigenous Peoples to remain absent, and I am reclaiming that land from the white imagination and placing into the context of Cherokee pottery. To write a dissertation is to work within the structure of a white institution in a "community of practice that is focused upon the propagation and promulgation of (settler colonial) knowledge."[59] To fight against this tradition of regurgitating and re-validating white knowledge, I am making space for Indigenous scholars, engaging with present day Indigenous scholars, community members, and, personally, seeking wisdom from my community's past and present. As Burgess, Cormack, and Reid state, "To 'cite' is to call forth. In citing, we are calling forth past and future generations."[60] I am calling forth my ancestor, my present community, and future kin to make this work happen.

Central to this paper is my decision to engage in an ethical citational practice with a goal of citing mainly Indigenous scholars relevant to my research. My process is practical, ethical, and generative. My refusal to engage in the traditional practice of citing from 'within the canon' is multi-faceted, decolonial, and Indigenizing. To use refusal as method is empowering, and thanks to other Indigenous scholars such as Audra Simpson, I know have the option to refuse to play by 'the rules of academia.' My intended reclaiming of Indigenous land from the white gaze and white imaginations, and affirming that land is pottery, is an exercise of intellectual and cultural self-determination and an act of my sovereignty.

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[59] Tuck and Yang, *Place in Research*, 232.

[60] Burgess, Cormack, and Reid, "Calling Forth," 61.

Chapter 2/ We are Returning as Land: Understanding Place through Ancient Earthworks and Pottery

***Warning:** Burial and Funerary objects shown and discussed in this chapter.

> *To me, this is what coming into wisdom…looks like – it takes place in the context of family, community, and relations. It lacks overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, aki, is both context and process.*
> *–Leeann Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation"*[61]

> *What he's [Basso] doing isn't right. It's not good. He seems to be in a hurry. Why is he in a hurry? It's disrespectful. Our ancestors made this name. They made it just as it is. They made it for a reason.* They spoke it first, a long time ago*! [emphasis his] He's repeating the speech of our ancestors. He doesn't know that. Tell him he's repeating the speech of our ancestors! –Keith Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places*[62]

Before there were humans, there were animals and insects who occupied a small swath of land surrounded by water. This small island remained afloat because it was suspended to the sky with cords in the four directions. Over time, it became clear that the space was too small for all of the beings, so they needed to find a solution. Upon consulting the very wise beaver, each animal used their own personal skill to find an answer, but each animal failed to find a sustainable solution. Finally, the smallest of them came forward to help, but the other animals laughed at the little water beetle. How could this tiny creature do something even the largest and strongest of others could not achieve? The beetle dove deep into the water, deeper than even the turtle could go, and she returned with a little ball of mud. This mud gave the animals hope. And, with additional trips to the bottom, and the help of the giant buzzard who dried the mud with his

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[61] Leeann Betasamosake Simpson (Mississauga Nishnaabeg), "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014), 7.

[62] Keith H Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996), 10.

expansive wings, and inadvertently created the mountain ranges, our Cherokee homeland was formed. One day, we will return to the water.[63] My Tsalagi People are People of the water and People of the land. Land has sustained our lives since time immemorial. We have not forgotten this gift, nor have we forgotten that our new homelands were created by the trials and errors of our relatives and their technological ecological knowledge.

During this process of dissertating, I was discussing my research topic with a former colleague who made a fruitful observation. He said to me, "Digging clay for pottery is seen as engaging with the Ancestors. It is a gathering [of ancestors]. Breaking old pottery and using it to make new pots is a continuation of memory."[64] So, to gather clay to produce pottery is, also, to gather with our ancestors. This Indigenized understanding of the world is powerful and moving, and it aligns with my own worldview. It also supports the direction in which I will be moving in this chapter.

In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between actual, physical, Indigenous land, concepts of place as expressed through and imbued in pottery, as well as ancient earthworks, from my perspective as a descendant of ancestral mound builders. In this analysis, the land is the landscape, an active, engaged, and living place, not one of Albert Bierstadt's euphoric lies on canvas. For this conversation, I will lean into Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie's argument that, "it is the *structure* [emphasis theirs] of settler colonialism that has reduced human relationships to land to relationships to property, making property ownership the primary vehicle to civil rights in most settler colonial nation-states. … The remaking of land and bodies [slaves] into property

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[63] This story is a summarization of how we, Cherokee People, know that our homeland came to be. The retelling is, undoubtedly, based on the stories collected by James Mooney.

[64] Paraphrasing of a private conversation, June 2022.

is necessary for settlement onto other people's land."[65] I will present an overview of the earthworks of my ancestors—our mounds. This discussion is important as these mounds, such as the Kituwah Mound, encapsulates our beginnings, our being, and belonging to that place as Tsalagi people. It is also within some of these sites that shards of our ancient pottery were found, furthering our understanding of this ancient, artistic practice from the view of our ancestors.

Vital to this chapter is my examination of the holistic nature of Cherokee pottery, the customary practice that was revivified by my aunt, and how it binds us to our 200-year old homelands now in Oklahoma (for citizens of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma for those of us whose ancestors were removed and survived that genocidal march—The Trail of Tears. Cherokee pottery is landscape, it is land, and it is memory. This leads me to my overarching question: How do earthwork mounds and Indigenous pottery expand our connection to place, help us understand technological ecological knowledge, and maintain memory of land as place and in kinship?

Ancient Earthworks: Ancestral Mounds

Before the time of humans, as we know from our water beetle story, my non-human relatives have been building upon the land, creating mass, manipulating it for survival. Other Indigenous Peoples and my ancient ancestors continued this process of the manoeuvring of earth for their own purposes. My ancestors were doing the calculations to construct lasting monuments to who they were. One example was the Adena people, a Mound Building culture (c.1,000 BCE – 300 BCE) who lived in the area we know now as Ohio River Valley. They built complex mounds, many of which have survived into today. Like all earthwork mounds still standing, their

[65] Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 65.

specific purposes are unknown; however, based on archeological and tribal research, internal markings found within the mounds, and content seen through ground penetrating radar (or through excavation), indicate they were sacred spaces built for various ceremonial uses. The Adena people created conical mounds which held charnel houses. The mounds were used over and over for burial purposes with additions being made on top of the previous mounds. These additions were created over hundreds of years, signifying that the mounds were places of continual use for many generations of the people of that area.

Figure 7. Aerial view of Serpent Mound (Google)[66]

Following the Adena people were the Hopewell mound builders (c.300 BCE – 700 CE) whose mounds continue to be important sites. One of the most significant mounds from this period, if not slightly before depending on dating techniques, is the Serpent Mound (above, figure 7). This effigy mound is 1,348 feet long, with seven undulations and a tail that lays in a coil-shape. It was carbon-dated to 321 BCE. It was in a continuous state of building for over 1200 years, meaning that this site was a place of importance for centuries of the Indigenous

[66] "Serpent Mound State Memorial," Visitors Bureau of Highland County, https://www.visithighlandcounty.com/eat-shop-play/serpent-mound-state-memorial.

Peoples who inhabited the area. The Serpent Mound was not a burial mound, although it is surrounded by the conical burial mounds of the Adena People. According to Cherokee artist and art scholar America Meredith's article, "Ohio's Ancient Earthworks," "The Serpent Mound is believed to be a calendar, with the undulation aligning toward points on the horizon corresponding to significant lunar events, as well as solar events such as solstice and equinox sunrises. [It is a] corpus of astronomic knowledge."[67] This mound, which provided knowledge about the natural world, was also a site of trade and gathering, though not much else is known about the mound itself. These mounds are significant to my dissertation precisely because they demonstrate that place and the physical transformation of land, the shifting of massive amounts of soil, has mattered to my people since time immemorial.

They also demonstrate the technical knowledge involved in this sustained building by many generations who continually built this mound to serve a specific purpose—to honour our connection to the solar system, the shifting of sunlight and changes of the moon. As agricultural people all this ecological knowledge guided their lives. For my work, I find the mounds significant precisely because they demonstrate that place and the physical transformation of land, and honouring what is above us has mattered to my people since time immemorial.

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[67] America Meredith (Cherokee), "Ohio's Ancient Earthworks," *First American Art Magazine* no. 5 (Winter 2014), 56–59.

Figure 8. Kituwah Mound.[68]

My Tsalagi ancestors were the builders of the Kituwah Mound (figure 8) which is located on our original homelands in today's North Carolina. This mound is our mother land, and we are tied to this land, the soil, and the place. In the centre of the mound lives our eternal fire and the remains of my ancestors. It is our collective birthplace, and a living ceremonial site. For us, it signifies 10,000+ years of our beginning, being, and continued belonging to a place from which most of my people, the Cherokee, were violently, forcibly, and genocidally removed in the 1830s. The ones who did remain behind by hiding and surviving in the mountains are known today as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (hereafter, EBCI), and they continue to use and protect this site for all of us. Through the continued use of this ceremonial site, it remains active

[68] Image from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kituwa#/media/File:Kittuwa-mound-cherokee-nc1.jpg. Photo by Brian Stansberry: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/.

and alive. It has always remained sacred to us. I cannot overstate the importance of this connection to place. Even in the aftermath of our removal and resurgence as two separate and new Cherokee nations located in northeastern Oklahoma, The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (my nation) and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, the Kituwah Mound remains our mother. It is land that calls us home.

It is important to include here that this land was recently made into trust land by the federal government, and ownership put into in the hands of my People. Although the land is now "owned" (finally) by our kin, the EBCI, ownership by the Cherokee does in come in in the sense of white 'private' property ownership, but collectively, as a People. Removal and dispossession did not end this relationship to place or the kinship connections between my People and those who remained. My Nation returns to our original homelands to celebrate, to hold council with, and to participate in ceremony with, our relatives. When I think of this belonging, I think about how it relates to Simpson's lessons of the sugar bush in "Land as Pedagogy." She writes about Kwezens' (the young girl who collected the sap) place in their community "as escap[ing] the rigidity of colonial gender binaries by having influence and agency within her family, *while physically disrupting settler colonial commodification and ownership of the land through the implicit assumption that she is supposed to be there*."[69] [emphasis mine] Like Kwezens, we belong, have always belonged, to this site, to the People who protect it, and have never relinquished that belonging regardless of who held the deed or title. This land is ours and we belong to it.

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[69] Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 8.

Pottery, Land, and Memory

> *For those who advocate osteological examination of native Hawaiian remains, I say the following. Osteology begins at home. Study the bones of your ancestors first, before touching ours. –Edward Halealoha Ayau*[70]

To more closely tie my educational journey and my dissertation to my community, I am intellectually and emotionally processing it through the lens of place-based, customary Cherokee pottery making. In this sense, the 'place' is northeastern Oklahoma, and the potters are women I knew, know, and care for; they are my kin and my family. Unexpectedly, the inclusion of pottery became the focal point for my understanding of land. In the process, I answered a calling to understand pottery, itself.

As with the making of pottery, my educational journey has been full of learning moments, a considerable amount of processing, generative failures, and successes. But most importantly, this part of my life always feels supported from within my personal life by the knowledge, guidance, and presence of my ancestors, especially my matriarchs and grandfathers, my sister and ancestor Jennifer, and my Pops (my dad, who passed in 2015). It has also been sustained by the love, care, and generosity of my living family. If I bring the knowledge and fire (so to speak) that is so necessary in the creation of pottery, they bring the necessary patience, love, and support.

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[70] Edward Halealoha Ayau (Hawaiian), "Rooted in Native Soil," *Federal Archaeology* 7 no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1995): 30–33.

Figure 9. 5a.6 Adena Pottery.[71] [72]

Before moving forward in this discussion of pottery, it is imperative for me to acknowledge that the study of and revival of traditional Tsalagi pottery making comes at the

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[71] Text in image: "The Early Woodland cultures of the entire Ohio Valley region made similar pottery. They all produced wide-mouthed jars or bowls with thick walls, flat bases, and sometimes with heavy lug handles. They also all mixed crushed stone, or grit, with the clay to prevent cracking (a process known to contemporary potters as *tempering*). The type of stone varied, perhaps depending on what was most available. For example, Adena potters in central Ohio used igneous rock such as granite; those in Kentucky used limestone. Some Early Woodland groups preferred vessels with smooth outside surfaces. Others roughened their pots by rolling a stick covered with a twisted fiber cord across the vessels before firing. This cordmarking process may have helped to bind the coils of clay together or may have made the pots easier to grasp. Most of the Adena pottery of southern Ohio is plain while some of the pottery of northern Ohio is cordmarked. Image Number: FOCase39.

"At first glance, most Early Woodland pottery appears crude, the product of unskilled craftswomen. This is especially so when compared with the finer pottery made late in the Early Woodland period. However, some archaeologists feel that the large, coarse, Early Woodland pottery may have been purposely made that way because each pot was used only once for boiling the oil from nuts and seeds. Thus, there was no need to sort out the finer pieces of ground stone temper or to make the walls thin and delicate." Catalog Number: A 3336/000093_1.

[72] "5a.6 Adena Pottery," *Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change*, Ohio History Connection. Accessed June 13, 2025. https://resources.ohiohistory.org/omeka/items/show/469.

great expensive of being exposed to burial and funerary objects—items that were most often come by through the excavation and looting of the tombs and burial chambers which were held within mounds. Be it through direct exposure, or through imagery, these exposures can do irreparable harm of both a physical and spiritual nature, if one is not prepared for the exposure. This situation is at the forefront of my mind due to a recent and unfortunate experience I had at my fall fellowship.

I accepted the fellowship as means of furthering my art historical education and training in the examination and handling of collected ancient objects. During our residency, several disastrous, and wholly avoidable, incidents occurred, the effects of which are hung onto me for months, precipitating the need for this paragraph. Firstly, I was handed a Mimbres bowl, only to be told after it was in my hands that it was a burial object. So many of the collected objects from the Mimbres culture included their kill bowls, funerary objects created specifically to accompany the dead in their burial chambers.[73] I was shaken to my core. Shortly thereafter, I was taken to examine the object I chose to research; it was a Caddoan pot from between 700 and 1200 CE. Our faculty 'expert' was there to assist me in my deep-looking, and it was during that time that I asked him about the likely origins of the pot beyond its collection provenance. He told me it was most likely a funerary object excavated from the Moundsville (AL) mounds complex.[74] I felt an inner crisis and the injury of something within me that is deeply spiritual and cultural. I was given not warning that the object was a funerary one. Lastly, as if the previous experiences were

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[73] To further understand these and other Mimbres objects, with the understanding the objects are burial items see:

Harry J. Shafer, "Some Thoughts about Mimbres Pottery and Mortuary Customs," Chapter 5 in *Making 'Meaning': Precolumbian Archaeology, Art History, and the Legacy of Terence Grieder*, edited by James Farmer. University of Houston, 2022. https://doi.org/10.52713/KWTQ9486.

[74] Moundville Archaeological Park, University of Alabama Museums, https://moundville.museums.ua.edu/.

not enough, we were presented a table of pre-colonial objects that, as it turned out, included objects that could only have come from of the bodies of ancestors.

Although I did not come away from this fellowship with quite the experience I envisioned, having refused to reengage with the pot, this is a reminder from our ancestors that they were present, and their sacred ways remain essential to our futures. It also forced me to research practices and protocols for the protection of future participants of this fellowship. In lieu of presenting on my research object, I chose to present my findings as a means of mitigating their failure to protect me and my fellow Indigenous scholars. My research came in the form of internet searches and conversations with Terry Snoball, NAGPRA expert at the CRC in Suitland, Maryland, and with my mentor and kin, Lisa Rutherford, a Tsalagi master potter. Both Snoball and Rutherford talked about the ways in which institutions, as holders of funerary and sacred objects, should also assist Indigenous Peoples in caring for themselves when they enter those spaces and encounter these objects.

For institutions, it is important that they create intentional spaces for Indigenous Peoples to prepare themselves when entering and exiting their collections. Institutions must clearly inform museum patrons and scholars that sacred and funerary items, as well as human remains (hair, included), are present in the institution's holdings through clear and visible signage. As a matter of self-care, we, Indigenous Peoples, should also be careful in the reproduction of pottery iconography and designs in any form, be it on our own pots, in drawing, or photography. Objects that were placed with the dead were there for a reason. It was no one's right to disturb them; however, as these ancestors now reside in museum vaults and on display shelves, we can visit them, examine them to learn our ancestors' cultural and innovative ways, provided it is done the right way: with clear informed consent.

Returning to the discussion of pottery, the identification of pottery from within and around our sacred mounds, as previously discussed, is another indicator of our belonging to place.[75] These pots belonged to and served a purpose to the Peoples of that region. They also exemplify the knowledge held by the Adenea people. One of the discoveries is the knowledge that the Adena People, for example, added granite to their pots as temper and fired them as part of their creation process (see figure 9). While this pottery is not exactly like the pieces we expect from the master potters and ceramicists of today, the Adena's understanding that this earthen material needed the addition of temper and fire to achieve a successful, substantial pot is indictive of a complex system of knowledge. In a conversation about this pottery with Dr. Jolene Rickard, she referred to the ancient production process as the "scientific method." According to Dr. Rickard, our ancestors were scientists engaged in the processes of testing and experimentation.[76] Indeed, our ancestors were involved in discovering of and compilation of traditional ecological knowledge since time immemorial. The oldest of artifacts solidify this assertion, and the earliest pottery is indictive of this.

According to Dr. Fikret Berkes, a Turkish-Canadian ecologist who is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Manitoba's Natural Resources Institute, "Traditional ecological knowledge (or TEK) may be defined as 'a cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and

[75] The looting, theft, and excavation of mounds in the name of both greed and science has led to the discovery of ancient pottery and its shards.

[76] Private and mentoring conversation with Dr. Jolene Rickard during the Otsego Native American Art History Fellowship, Cooperstown, NY, Oct 2022.

with their environment.'"[77] [78] The transmission of pottery-making knowledge to successive generations is an example of TEK in that is has been sustained, uninterrupted for some nations, throughout the changes, reorganizing, and transformations tribal nations have endured over thousands of years. I believe that for my Oklahoma ancestors and kin, some of this knowledge went dormant during our removal from our original homeland in the southeast during and after our forced march on the Trail of Tears. I believe this to be true because it was only within the last 50+ years that my aunt revived the practice.

Many years ago, I was having a conversation with a Kiowa knowledge keeper about songs, and I told him my belief that some of them were *lost* during the period of the dance bans in the United States (1883-1934). He stopped me there and told me, and I paraphrase, "No, those songs were not lost. They just went away until the right person arrives, and the songs will return to them." He then told me the story of a young boy who brought back a very old song that some of the elders recognized, but had not heard for decades. This lesson is one I will never forget and have applied it to my own cultural understanding. I believe that my aunt, and Cherokee National Treasure (1982), Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell, was just such a person who was entrusted by our ancestors to bring back the traditional making of Cherokee pottery and to revive our knowledge and ways.

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[77] Fikret Berkes, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge." In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, edited by B.R. Taylor. (London & New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005): 1. I appreciated his succinct and clear definition of TEK. Other sources have it imbedded in narrative which is also important, but not necessarily as clear.

[78] Another examination of TEK can be found in Amber Adam's (Lower Mohawk of Six Nations at Grand River) narrative examination of Haudenosaunee's remembrance of earth's creation. See, Amber Meadow Adams, "Yotsi'tsishon and the Language of the Seed in the Haudenosaunee Story of Earth's Creation." In *English Language Notes* 58, no. 1 (2020): 111-131. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/758833.

anna mitchell

October 26, 1926
Jay, Oklahoma

My husband always wanted a clay pipe, like Sequoyah. And one day, I said to Bob, "I'll make you one." Little did I know there was more to it than making mud pies. So, I went down to make these pipes. It was dry summer. My kids rode their bikes up and down the dip—a ten-foot hole. I went down there and there was this clay. So, I started playing with it and trying to make pots. And that day, I put them in the sun and went back to the house and left them. I was working. The next day I came home—the pots, the pipes, they were all cracked. I thought, "My ancestors used to make pottery. I wonder what it looked like. And that started the whole thing."

For me, it was seeking out designs of anything from the Southeast—what we were about, what our ancestors' legacy would have been to us as a people because you wonder about the design. You get into this thing of, "Is it really Cherokee or is it this tribe or is it that tribe?"

What I found out (about) being a potter was I couldn't find anybody to ask to show me how to make pottery like the Cherokees or even what the designs were. Once I got into clay, well, then, I started wondering how our ancestors used to make pottery, wondered what it looked like. I never intended to get into pottery. Then, when I did, I didn't have any designs or anything to look to.

Figure 10. Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell (1926–2012)[79]

Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell was the first person to introduce me to Cherokee pottery making. That was many years ago, when I was in my early twenties and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History was the holder and exhibitor of all things 'Indian,' and by which point she had been conducting research for over 20 years. She told me that what began her quest was a casual comment from her husband Bob; he said he'd like to have a Cherokee pipe like Sequoyah had. This particular pipe is pictured in almost every painting of Sequoyah. Anna Belle and Bob's land held a site for clay digging, and it was with this earthen material that Anna Belle

[79] Shawna Morton Cain (Cherokee), "Anna Mitchell," *Cherokee National Treasures in their Own Words*, edited by Shawna Morton Cain and Pamela Jumper Thurman. (Tahlequah, OK: Cherokee Nation, 2017), 94–95 & 268–69.

first attempted to create a pipe. But these attempts at making a pipe led to frustration, many failures, and, ultimately, a practical need to learn how to make the pottery of our ancestors. The immediate barrier Anna Belle faced was that there was no one in our nation who knew how to make one, let alone make pottery in the ways of our ancestors. Our Cherokee traditional knowledge for pottery making had remained in the East with our kin.

According to Anna Belle, relaying her humble beginnings as a potter many years later, "I knew Cherokees hadn't really done pottery since the removal. There wasn't anyone doing it or [any] people who knew how to do it, but I thought surely it could be done again."[80] Indeed, it was an important form of cultural expression and continuity that stayed behind on our long and forced march, the Trail of Tears. Her small, yet significant moments of not knowing, but trying anyway, signifies the beginning of Anna Belle's path of study towards reviving our pottery practice, one that took her a lifetime. It was a path that would reforge our nation's relationship to our ancestor and in kinship with our land. It also took her away from home to many museums and numerous archives across the country. Anna Belle had long career as a potter and she accumulated many accolades, including being a Smithsonian Fellow, but I think what speaks the most about her is the legacy what she left behind for our Nation and future generations of Cherokee citizens: her Cherokee pottery-making students.

The Cherokee Nation has recognized four women as Cherokee National Treasures for pottery, including Anna Belle (1982). These other three women were Anna Belle's students, and they include Jane Osti (2005), Anna Belle's daughter Victoria Mitchell Vazquez (2012), and Lisa Rutherford (2018). (It is not lost on me that it took 23 years to recognize another Cherokee

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[80] Will Chavez (Cherokee), "Cherokee National Treasure Anna Belle Mitchell Dies," *Cherokee Phoenix*. March 6, 2012. https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/news/cherokee-national-treasure-anna-belle-mitchell-dies/article_26301ecb-1f87-5821-8296-588d116fb73d.html.

potter as a Cherokee National Treasure.) Vazquez is now a council woman for our nation. Osti and Rutherford continue to produce and elevate this art form through their participation in juried shows and art markets. Every year, their work demonstrates a shift in the complexity of their work, as well as a return to our cultural ways of creating. As a result of Anna Belle's teaching and transmission of knowledge, one can easily find images and videos of these women and their work. It is a far cry from the dearth of knowledge available to Anna Belle in the 1960s.

To bring this discussion back to the land, the clay, and water, I have a deep appreciation for the work by Anna Belle's student, Crystal Hanna. She stands out to me as one who highlights and centers the places from which her clay comes, and to me, this tells a story about our forced removal and forced march from our original lands to our new homeland in Indian Territory. For example, for one pot, Crystal used clay from Georgia and Oklahoma, the land of our original homelands and our new one. Both clays hold the memories of our removal, our arrival, and our suffering, as well as our survival. Undoubtedly to me, Crystal's touch imbues her clay with the memories of her ancestors, and the knowledge of her instructor, and all the work that Anna Belle put into learning this art form.

In a similar manner, Lisa Rutherford tells people who are interested in her pots about the dug clay she uses.[81] The places that she and these other potters dig from are places imbued with deep meaning and are full of memories. These wood-fired pots, themselves, become more complex and complete Tsalagi vessels as a result of all the knowledge and techniques that are put into making them—we are fortunate to have them back in our Nation. Anna Belle once said, "I believe without art you don't have culture and without culture you don't have art. I want students

[81] As opposed to commercial clay which she uses, as well.

to learn the [Cherokee] culture when I am teaching them. I insist they learn it. They all have."[82] The revival of our Tsalagi pottery is as much an act of sovereignty, as it is about the preservation of culture and knowledge. It keeps us close to our ancestors and our lands, the places from which our clay comes.

The Cherokee are not the only ones whose pottery is imbued with memory and for whom 'place' matters. Another artist who pays attention to 'place' through the collection of his clay is traditional ceramicist, Jared Tso (Diné).[83] Jared is a fourth-generation ceramicist who recently earned his MFA from the University of New Mexico. According to one interview, "Tso says that he has harvested clay from fifteen Southwest locations and that, 'the clays are all different, they all fire and handle the flame differently.'"[84] Such differences represent the embodiment of the myriad Indigenous peoples/cultures that inhabit(ed) those locations and called those places home, as reflected in his comment that, "There are so many reasons I've fallen in love with clay, whether it be to feel close to my grandparents, my father, my partner, or daughter. I embrace the process." Clay is land, and pottery is landscape that carries messages from our ancestors and memories of place into our futures. The revival and continuation of these artistic and cultural practices disrupts genocide. It is an insistence on life, and future generations.

As I was thinking about the emotive nature of clay, I came across an exhibition by Rose B. Simpson, *Legacies*, which was on exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art-Boston. Simpson is a ceramicist/mixed media artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. In an

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[82] Chavez, "Cherokee National Treasure."

[83] Will Riding In (Pawnee/Santa Ana Pueblo), "Work in Progress with Jared Tso," Arizona Studio Visit in *Southwest Contemporary*, published February 15, 2022. https://southwestcontemporary.com/work-in-progress-with-jared-tso/.

[84] Riding In, "Work in Progress."

interview with the exhibition's curator, the first question put to her was about her relationship with clay. Coming from a multi-generational family of potters and ceramicists and growing up surrounded by other potters in her Pueblo, she spoke about the smell of the Pueblo in the early mornings, on calm days, when everyone is firing their pots. The smell of burning dried cow patties. In the interview, Simpson spoke about clay as being about place, and that when it is dug, it remains "in its living form, and we are collaborating on its existence in that moment."[85] Collaborating. The process of making is as much about the skill of the artist, as it is the will of the material. I think it is beautiful to think of this as a collaboration. She also says, in reference to the eleven sculptures standing in the museum, that they will "eventually…transform back into dust."[86] All of these pieces originated from the land, by digging through living matter, and they will, one day, return.

I believe Anna Belle, and the others who bring back and carry on our ways, to be reflected in the words of Leanne Simpson in "Land as Pedagogy" when discussing the knowledge of the sugar bush. The return of Indigenous knowledge of the land cannot not be assumed to "take place in pre-colonial times because Nishnaabeg conceptualizations of time and space present an on-going intervention to linear thinking - this story happens in various incarnations all over our territory every year in March when the Nishnaabeg return to the sugar bush." For us, this is the same with the digging of clay and the firing of pottery. It has always happened, and it will continue to happen when the ancestors deem it is time for it to happen.

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[85] Rose B. Simpson (Tewa Pueblo) and Jeffrey De Blois, "The Artist's Voice: Rose B. Simpson," Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art. Published September 28, 2022, YouTube, 50:02. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTdv0MwiZN8.

[86] Simpson and De Blois, "The Artist's Voice."

How I've Come to Understand a Sense of Place

Place. Family. Land. As a military child born and raised in Germany, I always knew where home was: it was a small Indian house in the northeastern Oklahoma. When we turned off the highway onto the dirt road, I knew I was home! It was my maternal grandma's house in the woods, woods I knew well. It was the creek in which we played, bathed, and caught our dinner. It was where I learned to garden, to burn off the underbrush around the house, and was taught the names of all the animals in Cherokee. And it was where all the older women spoke our language, and the place where my great-great grandparents and each successive generation were/are buried and will be buried. The smells, the sounds of the birds and animals, the trees and flowers, the lands all around me were known to me. I missed them when I left them. They remain part of me.

As part of the Cultural, Social, and Political Thought program, I took a course in Ethnographic Methods in which we studied place and culture through the scholarship of the dead and/or white male scholars of the field, as well as some more recent scholarship. To me, ethnography has always felt both invasive and highly extractive, and I always felt that I needed to hide from it or be shielded from it. In Indigenous art history and history, ethnography leads us back to the time of salvage anthropology and where 'culture as creator' meant that the one form of 'traditional Indian art' (flat studio style) was the only acceptable form. As an Indigenous person, I believe that ethnographic studies are quite often dehumanizing, decontextualizing and have led to distrust of academic research within Indigenous communities. It is another reason why we need more Indigenous scholars to work from within, setting the record straight, and allowing the voices of our peoples to be heard, unfettered and unfiltered. In this course, I appreciated the study of place and community, as I felt that it was relevant to the direction my research was taking. It pointed me towards other scholars.

One example of a critical reading that came from my research in this course is Dr. Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and Marcia McKenzie's book, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods,* and their work on "Critical Place Inquiry" (CPI, hereafter) is one example of what happens when Indigenous scholars study Indigeneity.[87] I confess that this book was a little out of my depth in that it is written for social sciences scholars, but I found their discussions on, and strong advocacy for, the importance of place in Indigenous research and scholarship compelling, nonetheless. Within the authors stated principles of CPI, I found four tenets to be particularly pertinent to my work:

1) Recognizes that disparate realities determine not only how place is experienced but also how it is understood and practiced in turn (e.g. in relation to culture, geography, gender, race, sexuality, age, or other identifications and experiences);
2) Addresses spatialized and place-based processes of colonization and settler colonization, and works against their further erasure or neutralization;
3) Extends beyond considerations of the social to more deeply consider land itself and its nonhuman inhabitants and characteristics as they determine and manifest place;
4) Aims to further generative and critical politics of places through such conceptualizations/practices and via a relational ethics of accountability to people and place.[88]

Tuck and McKenzie recognize that, "Place is the setting for social rootedness and landscape continuity."[89] This affirmation that Indigenous Peoples' relationship to place, even in the face of diaspora and displacement, is critical but, all too often, ignored in the analyses of Indigenous art, both past and present. This scholarship necessitates the need to make discussions of place a customary part of our analysis and narratives of Indigenous art in the future. Even in

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[87] Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods,* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[88] Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research,*19.

[89] Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research,* 20.

my opening to this section, I, a Cherokee raised far from home, knew place to be specific, as Tuck and McKenzie state, "Place matters and place is always specific."[90]

One of the white ethnographer-ally scholars whose work is important to understanding Indigenous Peoples and place is Keith Basso (1940-2013) and his book, *Wisdom Sits in Place—Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache.* This book remains a powerful narrative in understanding how central and specific place is for the Western Apache nation.[91] Basso spent most of his life studying the Western Apache and their way of speaking about the land.

Part of Basso's work focuses on the community-owned stories that are associated with place-names that are imbued in the land. Basso demonstrates how deeply the Western Apache language and culture is dependent physically and symbolically upon the land. Reflecting on the Western Apache's relationship to the land, I thought of Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who stated that for the Nishnaabeg, their education and lessons come to them through the land.[92] Keith Basso's book demonstrates this about the Western Apache. This book is a valuable contribution to my understanding of 'place,' and has helped me think about land, landscape, and place from the perspective of other Indigenous Peoples.

In his book, Basso included the work of settler scholar Paul Radin the Winnebago of Nebraska to demonstrate that other Indigenous cultures besides the Apache attached importance to place-names and made deeply engrained connections between land and language.[93] This example furthers Basso's own findings that place-names demonstrate how symbols and

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[90] Tuck and McKenzie, *Place in Research,* 21.

[91] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996).

[92] Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 19.

[93] Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, softcover edition, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990). Originally published in 1923.

meanings are socially constructed, and have cultural context within communities that are sustained because they are such a vital part of everyday reality—they sustain cultural norms. He also demonstrates that these constructed meanings are dependent upon language, also within the context of this specific community, their precise geographic location, and their social practices. All of these elements of the construction of place-names are dependent upon a 'place' that is active, engaged, and alive, essentials argued for by Tuck and McKenzie and demonstrated into this dissertation through earthen works and pottery.

To refer back to the title of this section on how I came to understand place, I consider Tuck and McKenzie's tenet, to "recognizes that disparate realities determine not only how place is experienced but also how it is understood and practiced in turn."[94] As an Army brat, someone who moved often and sought permanence in little, we brats experienced home uniquely. I know that I experienced my grandma's home in a way that only I could; the land remains part of my everyday life in a practical way, as well as spiritual. In thinking of this sense of place for myself, I consider Vine Deloria Jr.'s (Dakota) understanding of place in *God Is Red*,

> *[Indigenous] religious traditions [are] taken directly from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life. Context is therefore all-important for both the practice and understanding of reality. The places where revelations were experienced were remembered and set aside as locations where, through rituals and ceremonials, the people could once again communicate with the spirits.*[95]

For me, this location, my grandma's house, is a remembered place where, even when I am far away, I find solace in memories, in actions (learning to care for the land), and in prayers on that land. I dream of it. How does this relate to TEK? Berkes wrote, "Some traditional knowledge may include elements, such as the religious dimensions of the environment, which do

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[94] Tuck and McKenzie, 19.

[95] Vine Deloria, Jr. *God Is Red*, 3rd Edition, (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing 2003), 65-66.

not make sense to science. For example, many of the Dene (Athapascan) peoples of the North American subarctic consider that some non-living parts of the environment (including rivers and mountains), as well as all living beings, have spirit." [96] In learning how to garden, as generations of my family did, and care for the land as kin, place is both experience and practice, as per Tuck and Mckenzie. I contend that this applies to my ancestors as mound builders, as well as my pottery-making aunt and kin. In the 1980s, Basso lamented on the thinness of scholarship in the area of how places and spaces are perceived and experienced by communities:

> *Human attachments to places, as various and diverse as the places to which they attach, remain, in their way, an enigma. …Yet ethnographic inquiry into cultural constructions of geographical realities is at best weakly developed. Willing enough to investigate the material and organizational means by which whole communities fashion workable adaptions to the physical environment, ethnographers have been notably less inclined to examine the elaborate arrays of conceptual and expressive instruments—ideas, beliefs, stories, songs—with which community members produce and display coherent understandings of it.*[97]

In his usual eloquent turn of phrase, he clearly lays out his indictment of others in his field. 40 years later, we are still experiencing a dearth in the consideration of place-based knowledge, experience, and our relationships to it as Indigenous Peoples. This highlights the need for Indigenous scholars to be able to reify and amplify the importance of place within our communities and cultures.

Conclusion

This chapter was written to illustrate the importance of place to my Peoples, all of them, as well as to other Indigenous Peoples. Our traditional ways are lived upon our land and will continue into the future. Our histories, our stories, our origins are all instilled in our land

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[96] Berkes, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge," 4.

[97] Basso, *Wisdom Sits,* 106.

because, like our mounds and our pottery, they all carry our memories, and those of our ancestors. More importantly, however, is the need to make the kinship between land and Indigenous art production part of an on-going conversation. My hope is that my continued research will contribute to the rich and important conversations other Indigenous scholars are generating about art and place. In order to do this, we must first enrich these discussions by our Indigenous relationships to place, and how that relates to place-based art practices. In this way, conversations about place are intentional.

For my research examining Indigenous understandings of landscape as art, land, and place, I think found pottery shards as "durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imaging them."[98] And I deeply think about how imperative it is for us to make place/our land central in our discussion of art as a reminder that to exclude it is to embrace a future in which we do not retain our land, not even in our memories. To this end, consider Leanne Simpson's words about Kwezens:

> *[Kwezens's] existence as a hub of intelligent Nishnaabeg relationality may be threatened by land theft, environmental contamination, residential schools and state run education, and colonial gender violence, but Kwezens is there anyway, making maple sugar as she always has done, in a loving compassionate reality, propelling us to re-create the circumstances within which this story and Nishnaabewin takes place. Propelling us to rebel against the permanence of settler colonial reality and not just "dream alternative realities" but to create them, on the ground in the physical world, in spite of being occupied. If we accept colonial permanence, then our rebellion can only take place within settler colonial thought and reality; we become too willing to sacrifice the context that creates and produces cultural workers like Kwezens.*[99]

If we exclude our land/place, we begin to accept a settler-colonial permanence. If we accept removal, we lose the context in which our customary arts are created, or returned to us, as

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[98] Basso, *Wisdom Sits*, 7.

[99] Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 8.

in the work by Anna Belle and her students. We lose our connection to our ancestors. No. We cannot accept another removal. To retain the memories that are imbued in the pots that were made by our ancestors, we must hold fast to our connections to our kin, our land and our water.

Chapter 3/ ᎦᎵᏉᎩ *

Figure 11. Wood firing pottery. Photo courtesy of Lisa Rutherford.

“In an open fire, just starting to glow. I leave them in until they glow, or until it gets too hot to get close enough to add more wood. I let it burn out and remove them when they are cool.” –Quote and photo from Lisa Rutherford, Cherokee National Treasure—Pottery[101]

I would like to begin this final chapter with another story about who we are as Cherokee Peoples, and how we became so. It is, again, a story that connects us to our non-human relatives

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* ga-li-quo-gi

[101] Personal conversation with Lisa Rutherford via Facebook Messenger, January 9, 2023.

who were and continue to be such an integral part of who we became as Aniyvwiya. Without their guidance, who would we be?

> Didanisisgi *is the Cherokee word for mud dauber, a type of wasp that builds its nest from mud. According to Cherokee legend, the mud dauber taught the Cherokee how to make pottery. As the legend goes, a kindhearted girl was carrying a bark bucket to fill with water at the spring when she noticed a mud dauber struggling to get out, its wings wet and stuck in the mud. The little girl was scared of being stung but used a stick to help the little dauber get out safely.*
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> *As she continued on with her water, she tripped and out flew the bucket, which took her so long to make, and it smashed into many pieces on the ground. She heard the buzzing of the mud dauber she helped nearby, who then stopped to help her. He said, "Don't feel so badly. I will teach you something useful. I will teach you to make pottery so you can teach your people." He then went on to take pieces of clay from the bank until he had enough to make a small pot. He molded and shaped the clay and taught the girl how to make, stamp, and fire pottery so it could hold water. The girl rushed home to teach her people, and according to the legend, the Cherokee have been making pottery ever since.*[102]

In the fall of 2022, after working on this dissertation, I conducted research that dramatically shifted my argument and direction towards pottery and away from landscape paintings. It was a vital change for both me and my work, but it brought with it different layers of complexity. It was then that realized that I was ill-at-ease with writing about pottery without having actually made a pot, in earnest. As a child I loved to be outside, so I have, of course, played in the dirt and mud. I remember sitting on our stoop making mudpies at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma when I was 4 or 5, spending all my time outside in the woods or in grandma's garden, or walking the forest trails in Germany as a teenager. My relationship with land is a lifelong commitment. As an adult, I shifted that play into tending to three large gardens and caring for the nearly 40 plants in my house.

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[102] "Celebrate Cherokee Pottery at the Didanisisgi Pottery Festival," Published March 21, 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20220814104009/https://live.visitcherokeenc.com/blog/entry/learn-cherokee-pottery-history-from-acclaimed-artists-at-the-didanisisgi-po/.

In 2019, my family returned to Oklahoma for a visit, during which we spent a day with my Cherokee pottery mentor Lisa Rutherford in the Cherokee Nation Arts Center playing around with clay and casually learning how to make daksi. We were not there to 'learn,' as much as we were there to visit with our dear friend, but I thought it was good for us to get our hands dirty. So, in 2022, when my dissertation work changed, and I experienced this overwhelming and embodied need to deeply understand the process of Cherokee pottery making, I knew I had to go home. I needed my hands to be in the clay and my mind to understand each step of the process. But, why? Simply put, I could not truly write about Anna Belle, her students, and the deep relationality of creating pots without first learning the process myself. Without this additional step, my written work would feel uninformed, speculative, and not very Tsalagi.

Now, addressing this lack of depth sounds somewhat obvious, but as an Indigenous art historian, I write and lecture about many different visual, material, and physical art forms that I, myself, neither partake in, nor fully understand the process of. So, why was this different? It is undoubtedly because my connection to this art form is so deeply linked to my relationship with Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell and her students, my mentors—friends who became family many years ago. But it is also deeply related to me as Cherokee woman and my relationships with that land and water. It is layered, embodied, and enriched by memory, then re-activated as knowledge.

My resolve to learn Cherokee pottery as a practice is also related to the history I have taught for two decades—the colonization of these lands, and more specifically, that and the removal of my People from our original homelands. As I have stated at least once to every group of students that I have taught over the years, it is astonishing, truly amazing, that I am standing here in front of this classroom, or anywhere, for that matter. Since the arrival of colonizers in both the southwest and the southeast, encountering my ancestors very early on, my ancestors

became the 10% or less survivors of genocide after genocide—that is many 10%'s (keeping in mind that I am Cherokee, Mvskoke, and Seminole, descendants of Mississippian Peoples, as well as so many ancestors before that—so, there are many levels of survival going on throughout my ancestral lines).

My Cherokee people first encountered colonizer Hernando de Soto in 1540 in our southern homelands. Over one hundred years later, and after having had some trade and other dealings with colonizers, as well as the passing of disease to my Peoples, the 1700s brought insurmountable change. Trade and political contact with colonizers disrupted our Tsalagi customary ways of life, depleted and interrupted our labour, foodways, and our lands; thus, began the rapid and steady changes that would lead to the Trail of Tears, and our forced removal to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Our lives, customs, and knowledge were transformed by interference from colonizers and genocide, as so much and so many was/were left behind and along those trails. For me, learning our pottery practice at home (and writing about it) with my Tsalagi Peoples is me enacting our sovereign right to be Tsalagi and to activate our future. It is how I honour my ancestors by helping to keeping this customary practice vibrant and in a continuous cycle of making. It maintains this survival that so many of my ancestors accomplished; this is me achieving my "10%" legacy.

This chapter of my dissertation is organized in a way that was inspired by the Cherokee Channel's production, "Anna Mitchell: Grandmother of Cherokee Pottery."[103] This short film about Anna Belle is organized into eleven sections which correlates to each of the eleven steps she followed in her pottery making process. In the film, Anne Belle physically demonstrates each step while telling her story of becoming the person who brought our pottery back to us.

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[103] Andrew Sikora (Cherokee), "Anna Mitchell: Grandmother of Cherokee Pottery," Produced by Cherokee Media Ltd., 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRiXFsgGyO4.

Interspersed throughout the film is archival footage of a younger Anna Belle making pots which historicizes her journey and provided a beautiful parallel with her as an Elder. For my chapter, I have chosen to keep this relationship to the steps of pottery making, but not as exacting as Anna Belle. In my work on this chapter, it is a meditation on my experience with Lisa in relation to what it means to 'go home.' For this chapter, I chose to stop at the number seven which is an significant number to my People. Seven is the number of points in the star that represents our nation, it references the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters, that figures in our stories, we have seven clans, and we recognize seven directions as we position ourselves on the earth, to name a few references. For this reason, seven sections with photos felt appropriate and representative of what I am writing about and of whom I am referencing in my writing.

I also drew inspiration from the *Sakahan* photo essay, "The View from Here," by Inuk photographer Jimmy Manning in which he photographs and writes about his homeland of Kinngait.[104] These seemingly mundane annotations to these truly striking photographs, primarily of the land, water, and its hues of blue, build a narrative around the importance of daily life, activities, observing the weather, and the people of Kinngait, including the consequences of the climate crisis. The use of a photo essay style narrative brings a more personal contextualization to his story that, at its essence, is really just a story about the importance of being in relation to home and within community. For me, and this chapter, my photographs and their narratives are also a story about home, as well as a documentation of my learning process and the intricacies that fueled this innate desire to become one more Aniyvwiya who maintains this customary practice. It is also about embodied relationships to land and water, to weather, and to community. In the pictures that follow, the images themselves may appear to be insignificant, but it is the

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[104] Jimmy Manning (Inuk), "The View from Here," in *Sakahan* edited by Greg Hill, Candice Hopkins, and Christine Lalonde. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, (2013).

commentary which brings to life the legacy and import of the actions being captured that encapsulate what it means to be a Cherokee pottery maker and Aniyvwiya. Tsitsalagi.

ᏌᏊ / 1. Where this began, again…in our new homelands

Figure 12. Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell. Photo from Visit Cherokee Nation.[105]

Previously in this dissertation, I recounted the story of how Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell came to return Cherokee pottery to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and then fulfilled her obligation to transfer this knowledge to others through teaching. In this way, much of her life was in service to our nation and to the many generations who continue to be born as Cherokee People and come to know the importance of our pottery. Her quest began with a seemingly simple request from her husband, Bob: I want a pipe like Sequoyah always has in his paintings.

[105] Visit Cherokee Nation [@visitcherokeenation], Archival photo of Mitchell making coils in 1993, *Instagram*, September 5, 2024. https://www.instagram.com/p/C_iby5Jqk8O/.

She quickly realized this request was not simple, as her initial pipes made from the clay pit on their land quickly failed, sparking her determination to understand why they failed and how to make them functionally successful. She would come to find that the secret to success came from understanding how to create pottery from dug clay and the basics of pottery making (which is arguably different than working with commercially processed bodies), something that she accomplished and surpassed as she furthered this knowledge during her decades of learning. In Figure 12, Anna Belle is expertly demonstrating pottery making, as she lays the initial layers of handmade coils that will become the walls of her pot. If you look to the left of the photo, you see a pot that is already begun, as she sometimes worked on two pots at a time as there are points at which pots much be put down to 'set up.' These pictures and recordings of her making process create a precious archive of her mastery of this material, as well as her relationship to it.

This picture allows us to experience a deeper understanding of Anna Belle, as it gives us a glimpse of who she was as a Cherokee National Treasure. Standing there, with expert hands guiding the formation of this pot, Anna Belle has a map of Indigenous leaders and lands on the wall behind her, we consider her interest the multitudes of Indigenous Peoples across this land and our histories. Standing there in her turtleneck shirt with the darkening Oklahoma sky peeking in through the door window behind her, I understand this to be fall or winter. The tree, bare of foliage, confirms this. And next to her, just on the edge of the photo, you see the tools that she will reach for once she finishes building this pot, positioning these coils. The wedged paddle will help her thin out her pot walls, making it grow taller, and the rock might be used to burnish this post once it dries. These are the tools that, undoubtedly, have helped her make hundreds of pots during her lifetimes, tools that were found, handmade, or given. Some that now reside in the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center.

This picture is also about memory. My memories of this beautiful relative with loving and strong hands, hands I've held, and hands that have held me and my children. (I can hear her voice, feel her warmth.) And the way these hands knew how to roll those coils on that canvas beneath the pot, to feel the thinness of the pot walls with her fingertips, and to determine the clay's dryness, telling her when to add more water, or not. The earthen body in her hands hold the memories of her warmth, the pressure as it is applied, and conversations between her and whoever else is in the room as she builds these pots. In this way, the numerous pipes and pots Anna Belle created over her lifetime hold the stories of her life from the time she began learning this art form. They remember her breath, her voice, her touch. They are her autobiography made of land and water.

ᏔᎵ / 2. Where this began since the earth began…

Figure 13. Dug clay from the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center after I pulverized some of it. March 2023.[106]

The process of creating a pot has different entry points for many makers, but for many Indigenous customary makers, they begin by digging their own clay. During my research at the Canadian Museum of History in 2023, I remember seeing pictures of one of the most utilized clay sites in our original Cherokee homelands in North Carolina, one used by many generations of makers. I recall thinking about what it would have been like to be able to dig there with my kinfolks, to be in conversation while we did the work. These clay pit sites are precious and protected places, especially when the clay proves to be of good quality. It is understandable that these sites would be protected from encroachment and exploitation, especially if one has taken the time to treat this site with care and to be in relation with it. In Oklahoma, far away from this

[106] This and all subsequent photographs by Yvonne Tiger unless otherwise specified.

southeastern site, geographically, historically, and even a little bit culturally, and our access to pottery making knowledge, Anna Belle was fortunate enough to have clay on the land of her home. It was this clay that, with the help of her husband Bob, she dug, processed, and used to make her pipes and pots. It is the clay she experimented with in her early stages of learning, a curiosity that compelled her to study, research, and to make.

As for the dug clay shown in the picture above (figure 13) it is from the site of the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center in Vinita, Oklahoma. As the story goes, when the land was struck in preparation for building, Anna Belle's daughter, Victoria realized that the site was full of pristine clay. Victoria hired a dump truck, had it loaded with the clay, and hauled off to a site on her property. This clay has been shared amongst Anna Belle's students. It is this clay that Lisa had me pulverize by hand in the same way that Anna Belle began processing her clay. With stone in hand, I pounded this clay until it began to flake away, then I ground it further until it was fine enough to take the water we added.

The image above of the 'Anna Belle clay', as I think of it, is what I processed and have since created from, made slip from. It is treasured by me. Processing the dried clay was slow, methodical, and cathartic which gave me time to think about everything I was doing, and time to talk to Anna Belle. I asked for her guidance daily; I still do when I am building pots. The sound was rhythmic and unique, and I considered that it was the sound of generations of Cherokee Peoples who, too, would have processed their clay in similar ways. It is a sound I hear in my body and feel in my hands, as stone hits clay, and pieces fall away onto the canvas with a crumbling sound. I would scoop up the pieces in my hand to feel for those that needed further processing. The sound is repetitive, but different each time.

While I was doing this task, I set up my phone to record me, so that I could return to this sound and process. So that I could see what this looked like and remember this moment. Artist

and musician Steve Bates separated the sound from the video and sent it to me. I processed it though an app so that I could see the sound and reverberations. This is the sound of processing dried clay:

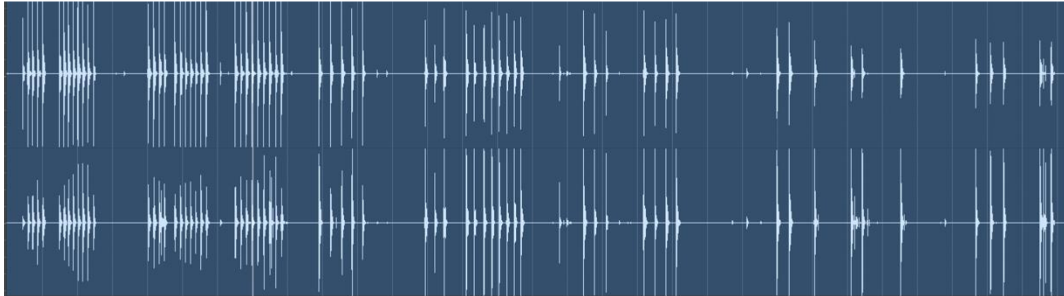

Figure 14. The physicality of sound and clay.

This pristine clay (figure 15, below) contained a fair amount of sand, so we did not need further process it or to add a temper, just water. As Lisa and I mixed it by hand, and we were very excited by its consistency and useability. It turned into a lovely, meaningful, and natural body of clay. It was also emotional since this clay came from the land upon which now stands the monument to the importance and legacy of what Anna Belle returned to our people: Pottery.

Creating this body of clay through this natural process inspired me to think differently about dug and commercial clays, to more deeply consider the water that I use to create pots, and the places in which I create pottery when I am so far from home. I have previously considered the relationship between making and place, as ‘place’ on this continent is always and firstly Indigenous, then primarily colonized and ‘settled.’ But these places are also often storied by the original inhabitants, which is something to consider in my understanding of clay as a vessel for holding memories, giving the process of making a more complex contemplation. I do not think it is always necessary to know these stories but consider that this land has both history and memory. This also goes along with the places in which clay is, or can be, gathered. Clay is a living material that is affected by all of the life that surrounds it. Potters remove the clay from the land and its relationships, then asks it to take on a different form. It then becomes part of this

process of carrying on our customary practices. From my perspective, this action requires a kind of reciprocity. In this way, I think if one digs their own clay, it is important to indicate that it is dug clay. I am not suggesting that anyone gives away the precise location from which they dig due to issues of protecting the site, but an acknowledgement that this earthen was living this separate life before it became a pot. Additionally, from my assertion that clay carries and holds memory, these sites from which clay comes might be important historically and culturally, emphasising our deeper connections and relationship to our land.

These thoughts about clay are related to my desire to use certain waters to more consciously connect the pottery to both the land and the water. I have very specific plans for all of these ideas going into the future. For me, living so far from home, I understand that gathering in the wild comes with responsibilities to the peoples whose land I am living on. I have to tap into my understanding of commercial clay bodies as living matter for which my choice water can mitigate this commercial aspect—to bring 'place' to the body.

Figure 15. Processing clay from the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center. March 2023.

While I was in studio with Lisa in 2023, learning with her, I worked with commercial clay bodies, as we were unable to gather from the land due to the weather. Extreme rainfall fell before I returned home to Oklahoma—spring in Oklahoma can be unpredictable. Lisa and I will be gathering together in summer 2025.

ᏦᎢ / 3. ᎦᏚᎩ (Gadugi)[107]

Figure 16. Lisa Rutherford and Yvonne Tiger making pottery, together and in community. March 2023.

ᎦᏚᎩ/Gadugi is an important word within my nation, The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and when I think of gadugi, I think of community. It is a word that is constantly in use within my nation; it means "we all work together," for the betterment of our community. Our beloved Chief Wilma Mankiller used this word often within her speeches because, as a leader, she activated gadugi in her actions both for the nation and the local communities, and inspired gadugi in our people through her words. She knew how to bring people together to do the hard work necessary for the communities to thrive. She also demonstrated that it was not always easy, as our first and only female chief who endured the negativity of doubters, but she proved that it was always worth the labour. I hold this word close to me as I work outside of my community and as I work in other Indigenous communities, and on the lands of other Indigenous Peoples. For me, gadugi holds me close to home, it roots me to community.

[107] This discussion of gadugi was built around a short presentation I gave in Venice, Italy, June 2024 as part of Jeffrey Gibson's exhibition at the Venice Biennale.

Community is at the heart of gadugi, and this is why gadugi is important to me. I was born and raised primarily away from my community, away from 'home,' but I was always a person of community. Home was/is always in Northeastern Oklahoma. I spent all my young life as the only Indigenous person in every room I was in away from home, the only aniyvwiya in the room. I never wanted to be the only one, so I had to remind myself that I am a person who is part of my community and homelands, no matter how far away I was, or am. During my summer visits to my maternal Tsalagi grandma, I learned the importance of the land, how to grow on it, and how to sustain those relationships. I knew the woods as a playmate, a space in which I always felt safe exploring and learning, as I created connections with the plants, earth, and waters around me. I carry those lessons with me, always.

When I undertook learning our Tsalagi pottery practice, I did it at home with my people in my community. I am a woman who is part of my community, who learns from other Tsalagi people. All the people, and there were several, who came into the learning space of the Cherokee Arts Center, the place where pottery making and other arts happen, brought with them words of encouragement, laughter, and even lessons. For example, during a break I walked to the nearby creek, learned the Cherokee names of plants, was taught about some of the edible and non-edible ones, heard how this particular creek became toxic by city run-off, making the plants and non-human life inedible for us, and then we picked (and ate) flowers for the making of jam in the arts center.

Passing on this kind of knowledge, in relation with one another, in kinship, is Gadugi. We enacted gadugi as we actively supported each other in the Cherokee Arts Center, as we all did our work together and separately. I have maintained these relationships, and I have become part of the Cherokee arts community. It takes the whole community to maintain our relationships, so that we can continue to thrive, and this is something that we, as Aniyvwiya,

understand. It is how we survived the Trail of Tears and the establishment of a new homeland far from our original one and our relatives. It is why ᎠᏂᏴᏫᏯ (Aniyvwiya) withstood, continue to withstand, many kinds of colonial violence, together, to see our nation and people, and our pottery practise, prosper today, by embodying the spirit of gadugi.

ᏅᎩ / 4. Getting it wrong and getting it kind of right

Figure 17. Making pottery at the Cherokee Nation Arts Centre, March 2023. Photo by Yvonne and Sandy Tiger.

Figure 18. Making pottery at the Cherokee Nation Arts Centre, March 2023. Photo by Yvonne and Sandy Tiger.

On learning. I was nervous to learn to make these pots, afraid that I would not be able to do this kind of creating, as I have never seen myself as a creative person. The pots of Anna Belle,

Jane Osti, and Lisa Rutherford are pieces of art, defying gravity, telling Cherokee stories, and moving beyond the simplicity of a pot into sophisticated works of art, imbued with Tsalagi thoughts and dreams. I thought I would never come close to making anything of that caliber—I still haven't, and I am ok with that for now. Over the years, I had taken two courses in the Art Center, but they were not quite like this. I was anxious, and a little afraid of disappointing Anna Belle. Plus, I have only been in western institutions my entire life, except those summers with my grandma, during which learning was very hands-on, land and water based. Upon further reflection, I think I had not given this time of learning from my grandma enough credence, even though I use these skills constantly.

Whether it was with my family at my grandma's house, or just me and my grandma together as my family PCS'ed (U.S. Army acronym: permanent change of station) to a new city, I learned about the land and creeks around me. The land and creeks both fed us, but not without effort on our end and the knowledge of how to gather and/or catch without harming future growth. Learning how to accept what the land provided for us in a way that cared for our non-human relatives is how my people have been able to thrive since time immemorial. This generationally transferred knowledge sustained us in our vast original homelands for as long as lived there, and it continued to feed us as we were forced to abandon our homelands and had to learn how to live on these new lands, one-thousand miles away from home.[108]

As a child, my grandma and other relatives, including my mom, aunts, and cousins, taught me how to catch the ᏥᏍᏌᏛᎾ, an important traditional food. Those were the best days, when the whole family would gather at and in the creek. Someone would be cooking hot dogs on

[108] The Trail of Tears actually stretched 5,043 miles, as there were different routes with some of them very circuitous routes that went north then southwesterly.

the old charcoal grill or on stick in a fire, while the rest of us were in the water. The kids would play around and get chased away from where the adults were catching ᏥᏍᏆᏯᎾ. Eventually, us kids would turn our attention to catching ᏥᏍᏆᏯᎾ, as well. Learning came with painful lessons, as little fingers would inevitably get pinched and a child would run through the creek loudly crying with ᏥᏍᏆᏯᎾ attached to their little finger. We were also taught to never catch the usti ones or the pregnant ones, or they would not be able to complete their life cycles and replete their populations. We always put the pregnant ones safely back under her rock. These were life lessons, never to be dismissed.

I was also taught about foods that can only be found or gathered at certain times of the year either due to their growth cycle, or because they become bitter or poisonous as they mature.[109] For example, ᏒᎩ ᎢᎾᎨ ᎡᎯ (svgi inage ehi) is gathered in late winter and it is a time of celebration and community feasting. It is truly one of the best times of the year! People who hold the knowledge of where to gather keep those sites protected through secrecy for a number of reasons, including the fact that over-harvesting will deplete regrowth. As this is a seasonal food that becomes in high demand, protective measures matter. Another reason for the secrecy of gathering places is that for some people, this can be one of the ways in which people earn money for their families. ᏒᎩ ᎢᎾᎨ ᎡᎯ has become more difficult to find, so people with traditional knowledge go deeply into the woods to gather. They, then, clean and process this food and sell it to families for private use, or to churches and community centers for the huge community dinners. These food ways are traditional means of survival that can be sustained without western intervention, but it is also a way of life that has been disrupted by colonization—going to the

[109] While I am writing about specifically about foods, some of these plants can be used for other purposes, such as in healing practices. Many of our plants have a multitude of uses.

grocery store is easier and faster, right. Maintaining this knowledge and passing it on is important. Besides, all of that, these foods are delicious and ground us to our People and to place.

In my lifetime, I have gathered of these both foods and many others, from the water and the land, being careful to mind my grandma's lessons. I love these foods, so as a young Tsalagi person, I understood why we needed to use care and reciprocity if we were going to be able to eat in these ways. Likewise, what I learned from Lisa during our lessons is that pottery is very similar in that it too requires gratitude and reciprocity, and I learned from her in the same ways that I learned from my grandma—I watched her, I listened, I asked questions, I sometimes failed, and then, I began, again, all the while knowing that this is knowledge and relationality that, too, must be maintained.

Figure 19. I was getting ready to drive back to Jay (home) and noticed all the clay still on my hands. It made me giggle, as it simultaneously filled my soul. These hands that have gathered, grown, raised, loved, held the hands of others, and built. March 2023.

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ᎣᏍᎩ / 5. Transformation

Figure 20. Three wet pots set out to dry.

Figure 21. Three pots in various stages of drying.

It was astounding to watch a chunk of clay become pots in my hands. From the handful I cut away from the body, then wedged on the canvas, slamming it onto the surface as I turned it over and over. I rolled part of that clay flat onto the canvas, then cut it into the circular bottom of my pot. Feeling the clay gather the warmth from my hands, I created a ball large enough to eventually create a substantial coil. I began rolling the ball on the canvas until it began to

elongate. Lisa looked over and said, “Use your palms to create the coil, not your fingers.” That was more difficult and involved the movement of my entire arms instead of just my forearms, but I came to realize I had more control over the coil and the pressure applied.

As I began laying the coils on top of each other, I ensured they adhered to each other by adding little markings between the layers. With each layer, I had to stop, make the coil, then apply it while also making sure my clay body and my pot did not dry out. Your mind, eyes, and hands are constantly engaged throughout the process. I would stop and watch Lisa work. In the time is took me to create the small start to my pot, Lisa had already made a large beautiful one. It was incredible to watch her skilled hands move as she worked. As my pot grew taller, I had to learn the lesson of what making your clay too wet can do. My clay began to splay out as my pot grew wider and eventually became more of a bowl. I decided to just go with it. It was a lesson I had to learn.

I worked on my second pot with this first lesson in mind. As it grew taller, I regarded it as an experiment to understanding what I needed to do and change to make it grow upright instead of letting it widen out. In this practice, we do not use pottery wheels. I have watched numerous videos of pottery making since I began my practice, and was in awe of how the wheel seems to make the manipulation of clay look so easy—I know it is not as easy as these practiced hands made it look. I had to consider that in my early stages of learning, all of my senses were important to my practice, as is my personal understanding of clay. I understand clay to be land—because it is physical land whether it is a commercial body, or dug directly from the land, it is all earthen materials. I know the clay feels my warmth, hears my words, and knows my intentions. Clay holds the memories of how it is touched and asked to change from a chunk of material into a pot. This transformation is not a change from its original state as land, but in the shape of land. And that transformation is profound.

ᏑᏓᎵ / 6. Patience and waiting means time to visit Anna Belle

Figure 22. Pictures of Yvonne Tiger with images of Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell in the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center, March 2023.

During my week with Lisa, she gave me the day; the pots had to dry, and she had work to catch up on. She told me to go see Anna Belle. It was a very rainy and chilly day. My mom, who is my travel partner, was not feeling well, so I undertook the trip to Vinita from Jay, solo. As I drove, I thought about the days we spent in Tahlequah with Lisa, including beginning our days with the hour drive there in the morning and the drive back in the late afternoon.

The drive to Tahlequah is one of my favourite drives in the world; it has been since I was a very little girl. Driving down the small highway that is surrounded by fields and animals with the familiar turn offs, many roads that I had not taken since my grandma, now passed, was a much younger woman. She was the Indian hospital community van driver. We would get up in the dark, breakfast packed in a plastic bread bag, and drive off to pick up Cherokee people from all over the area, from small towns that sit way off the highway on dirt roads. We took them to the hospital, stayed there all day (which is a whole different set of stories and memories), then returned home in the late afternoons. In the mornings, I would fill up a large aluminum tub with water to warm up in sun all day, so I could have a nice soak when we returned home. As I drive down the highway, there are so many roads that I no longer recall where they all go, and a few that I do. The road to Tahlequah and back to Jay is a road I know well.

As you head down the steep and windy road, OK-10, you eventually come to follow the Illinois River. Mom and I often recall the chicken truck that went off the road and down the hill many years ago—there were chickens everywhere! There are always animals and birds in the fields, mostly familiar, but there are some new species that have moved in and are creating havoc in the area. The trees had just begun to blossom or were just on the verge of it depending on how much light that they receive. The light hits the ground unevenly in this area. The hue of the red buds is so familiar and comforting, reminding me that I am home, reminding me of my grandma, of my own youth, and telling me what time of year it is.

Figure 23. Bluffs on the way home from Tahlequah to Jay, Oklahoma. March 2023.

My mom brings me back to the land (and to the present) by talking about all of the fake pear trees that have infested the area. We see large groves of them, and I wonder if the state will take action. I wonder. And we get to the part of the road where there are hills and bluffs on one side and river on the other. It has its own scent. The smell of the water is grounding, filling me with contentment as I deeply inhale it. I often stop at the water, usually on the way home to Jay, just to put my hands in it, throw rocks, gently overturn a rock in the water to see if the ᏥᏍᏛᎾ are out yet. I was not planning to catch one but just wanted to see it; and I remember grandma saying that if they runaway fast, they are used to being hunted, but if they don’t, it is not a place people hunt in often. The fast ones are a challenge, and catching them by hand, especially the big ones, is cause for cheer! I smile. My grandma would tell me stories about the bluffs and things that happened along that road—as the community van driver, she heard everything. I do not

recall all of the stories, but some, I do. There are also bluffs on the road to grandma's house, and when my family (and me as an adult) would go home, as soon as we reached the bluffs, I knew I was only minutes from her, and I would become impatient with anticipation and excitement. (I hope she knew how much I loved her.) In March 2023, those rides down the road and back with my mom were important times for us to talk about what I did that day, to think about our family, and to laugh—we always laugh.

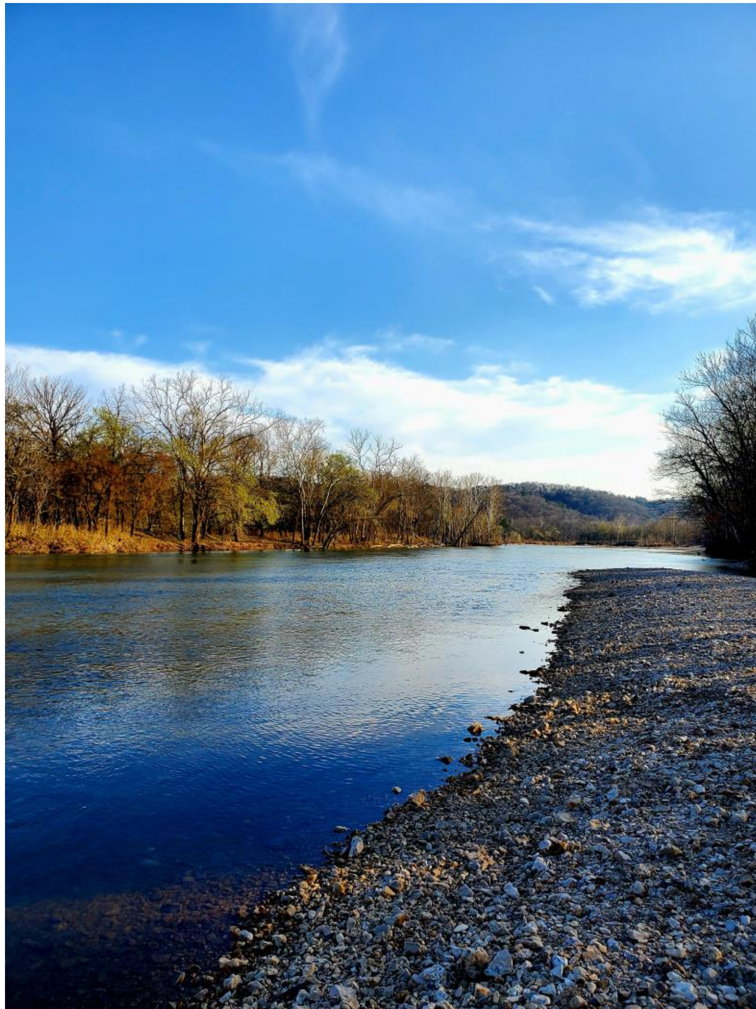

Figure 24. Stopping at the Illinois River on the way home to Jay. March 2023.

When I arrived at Vinita and pulled into the Cherokee Nation Anna Mitchell Cultural & Welcome Center, it had stopped raining, but the wind was still fairly strong. I walked around outside to see the displays, but I was eager to go inside and be with her, so I did not stay long

outdoors. I had seen news of the construction and the opening online, and mom and I had talked about it. I remember being very sad that I could not attend the opening celebration of Anna Belle's legacy with my family, friends, and the Cherokee Nation. But there I was, finally entering the space; it felt so important for me to be there, to be with Anna Belle's spirit in that space, and I was shocked by how emotional it was for me. It still is.

I am not going to go into depth about the ways in which Anna Belle helped me understand my life and the changes that came with that knowledge. Suffice it to say that one night in Washington DC, when Anna Belle was a Smithsonian Fellow, she and a 20-something year old me had one of those conversations of a lifetime. I asked her so many questions I dare not ask anyone else in my family for fear of being judged. She quiet and caringly listened to me. After careful consideration, she answered all of my questions. She changed my life. She allowed me to accept myself in a way no one before ever had before. From one Cherokee woman, relative, to another, I understood so much that I had not before. It was important.

The Cultural Center is a beautifully and thoughtfully constructed building with meeting space and a gift shop, and all of it is centered around the permanent exhibition based on the life and art career of Anna Belle. The walls are painted in muted earthtone colours, adorned by images of Anna Belle at different ages, making pottery or being honoured for her work and knowledge. Numerous cases fill the room, with each holding pots from different periods in her life, wonderfully demonstrating the range of her talent and creativity, and the extent to which she advanced the field of Cherokee pottery. This assortment of pots is reflective of the many years that Anna Belle spent researching our pottery, visiting the various museums that hold Cherokee pottery, and making connections with our relatives who remained on our original homelands—they maintained Cherokee pottery practices. It all honours her commitment to her People and our pottery, our ways of learning and how we continue to hold that knowledge, even in her absence.

The Cultural Center also highlights the generations of students who studied under Anna Belle, to name a few: Jane Osti, Lisa Rutherford, Troy Jackson. Their pottery is thoughtfully displayed in the area next to Anna Belle's work. There is an information board introducing these former students who are now successful and innovative artists and teachers in their own rights. Some of these award-winning artists are also Cherokee National Treasures, recognizing their contributions to our nation through their continuity of this important practice, and the extent and impact of the legacy of Anna Belle's initial decision to simply make a pipe for her husband, Bob.

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ᎦᎵᏉᎩ / 7. You never know until you try…Unexpected Outcomes

Figure 25. Bisque fired pots, March 2023.

Weather. Customary pottery practices are dictated by the weather, and if you did not know, Oklahoma has pretty extreme weather! I am thinking about torrential rain, intense humidity, and, yes, tornadoes. From the digging of clay, the time it takes for pottery to dry, and the wood firing of greenware, these steps require some consideration of the weather. As stated earlier, Lisa and I were not able to go to the clay dig site because Oklahoma had experienced torrential rains days before I arrived in Oklahoma. Our fear was that we would get stuck in the woods in the mud—it is a valid concern, as you also cannot always get cell service everywhere. We also had to adjust how we dried my pots and ended up setting up fans to assist in their drying, as we needed them dry in time to be fired before I returned to Canada.

As you know from section ᏑᏓᎵ/6, while my pots dried, Lisa told me to go visit Anna Belle. While I was gone, Lisa looked after my pots, flipping them from their rims to their bottoms so they would dry evenly, and making decisions about how and when to fire them. There are other potters and ceramicists at the arts center, so firing is usually also about when others in the community have pots to fire. For my pots, Lisa decided to use the smaller kiln. She

made the decision to bisque fire them first in the kiln because the wind decided to kick up, making it unfeasible to create a wood fire at Lisa's house.

When I returned to the Arts Center, the pots were done, and the kiln was ready to be opened. My friends were waiting in anticipation for me to open the kiln—there was an air of excitement! Lisa took me to the kiln, and everyone stood back as I slowly opened the door. Before opening it, I said a silent prayer for my pots and made some giddy nervous remarks. The fear that your pots did not survive the heat is so visceral. I had put so much love labour into smoothing out the coils is to ensure that no air pockets are left in the clay, making them more capable of withstanding the heat of the kiln or the fire without exploding. I opened the little door and I burst into tears to see that my first pots had survived their initial firing (photo above, figure 26). It was such an emotive and celebratory experience, as we all shared the same exhilaration. Lisa assured me this feeling of exhilaration never goes away. It was then that we, as a community, went out onto the grounds to prepare to put my pots in the aluminum tub to be flashed fired to give them that distinctive wood-fired look.

It truly took a village that day to manage the outdoor firing of my pots. It was a windy day, so we had to work quickly to ensure the pots fired evenly and that the wind did not hit them and cause them to crack. We sat the pots on flammable materials, so the outsides experienced the flames, and put shredded paper inside the pots, so those walls oxidized, as well. We lit the materials, shifted the pots when they needed it, adding more materials to maintain the heat and the fires. I remember the men moving a large foldable table behind the tub to block the fire—we are nothing if not innovative. My pots were still vulnerable to breakage, so everyone did what they could to keep them whole and intact.

Figure 26. Firing Yvonne's Pots at Cherokee Arts Center. March 2023.

Once the pots were fired sufficiently, had taken on the heat and colouration, they were placed in an aluminum bucket and quickly taken inside the arts center where my friend and knowledge keeper Matt Anderson had already run the tap so the water was scolding hot. He then placed each pot under the very hot water and slowly brought their temperature down. This was the last crucial step in my first firing. Gadugi. The pots would not have been successful without

all of these Tsalagi hands reaching in to help me. My success in creating the pots depended upon this, my Cherokee community. My successes—my pots, my academic work, my career, and my roles as mother, daughter, wife, sister, and friend—continues to depend upon all these hands, all this care, even from so far away. And this is why I am ending this dissertation here, within the memory of my community and a commitment to helping them move our pottery arts forward.

Figure 27. Successful first pots. March 2023.

In conclusion

There is no conclusion to this journey or my work. While this dissertation is a western institutional requirement, it was created from the work and epistemologies of a Tsalagi woman. The generational transference of our knowledge dictates that this journey is unending. It will continue on well beyond me, as it has done after Anne Belle left us.

Before returning home to Oklahoma, I did not know what I was capable of doing with clay until I tried, and my practice and learning will be a constant on-going process. While I have yet to have a pot crack in the kiln, I know that experience is coming. I will not see it as failure, but as an unavoidable circumstance, like so many things in life. Upon leaving home to head to my current home, to my family, in Lethbridge, I knew that I was leaving Oklahoma differently—I became part of a different Tsalagi community, and I had finally connected with Anna Belle in a way that she wanted me to 20-something years ago. While I was not ready to do this work then, I am that person now. So, this is not the story of an expert Cherokee pottery maker, but that of a learner, and a practitioner, a maker, and a receiver and keeper of knowledge. It is the story of someone who lives in reciprocity with the earth, the land, who honours those relationships. Wado.

I will close with a story:

GRANDMOTHER SPIDER STEALS THE SUN [CHEROKEE]

In the beginning there was only blackness, and nobody could see anything. People kept bumping into each other and groping blindly. They said: "What this world needs is light."

Fox said he knew some people on the other side of the world who had plenty of light, but they were too greedy to share it with others. Possum said he would be glad to steal a little of it. "I have a bushy tail," he said. "I can hide the light inside all that fur." Then he set out for the other side of the world. There he found the sun hanging in a tree and lighting everything up. He sneaked over to the sun, picked out a tiny piece of light, and stuffed it into his tail. But the light was hot and burned all the fur off. The people discovered his theft and took back the light, and ever since, Possum's tail has been bald.

"Let me try," said Buzzard. "I know better than to hide a piece of stolen light in my tail. I'll put it on my head." He flew to the other side of the world and, diving straight into the sun, seized it in his claws. He put it on his head, but it burned his head feathers off. The people grabbed the sun away from him, and ever since that time Buzzard's head has remained bald.

Then Grandmother Spider said, "Let me try!" First, she made a thick- walled pot out of clay. Next, she spun a web reaching all the way to the other side of the world. She

was so small that none of the people there noticed her coming. Quickly Grandmother Spider snatched up the sun, put it in the bowl of clay, and scrambled back home along one of the strands of her web. Now her side of the world had light, and everyone rejoiced.

Spider Woman brought not only the sun to the Cherokee, but fire with it. And besides that, she taught the Cherokee people the art of pottery making.

–From a tale reported by James Mooney in the 1890s.[110]

Figure 28. Four generations of matrilineal Cherokee women. From left to right: Virginia Revas (my grandma), Yvonne Tiger holding Lucinda Tiger, next to me is my mom, Sandra Tiger, and in front of her is Anna Belle Sixkiller Mitchell, my third cousin/Aunt. 2010.

[110] Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz (Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo), *American Indian Myths and Legends.* (Pantheon Books, 1984): 155.

Documenting Creative Practice

"Each Indigenous culture globally has an aesthetic system that represents the total of its epistemology and philosophies, its history, and its knowledge." -heather ahtone[111]

Pottery Piece One: Bowl, 2023

Figure 29. Bowl, 2023.

This hand-coiled attempt at a pot made of commercial clay turned into a bowl was my first attempt at pottery making. In the creation of this pot, I focused on many aspects of the process, but especially coil-making. The handmade coils are important to master, and the making of one pot does not equal mastery. Since making this pot/bowl, I have made coil after coil, and I am finally getting to the point of creating good one quickly. I have also watched numerous videos that have allowed me to understand the girth of the coil can vary which is good to know. Fingers develop a sense of what a good coil feels like. My fingers, sense of touch, and nerves know what a coil feels like when it is even and long enough. What I did not know was how to build a pot that grew taller, instead of splaying out into the bowl it ultimately became.

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[111] heather ahtone (Chickasaw), "Shifting the Paradigm of Art History," In *Routledge Companion to Indigenous Art Histories in the United States and Canada,* eds. Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton. (Routledge, 2023), 42.

But, getting it right was not the goal of this pot. Learning to make the coils, and adding layer after layer of coils, smoothing them out to form strong walls—that was the point. This bowl represents my nascent state of learning, very humble beginnings. There is also some element of ‘running before I could crawl’ to this bowl. The addition of design to this pot was one example of this. But I was so excited to have completed a piece, I wanted it to be aesthetically complete, as well. For me, this pot represents the beginning of a lifelong journey that will take me places of deep learning and will require from me equally deep patience. It also reminds me of the joy of being within my community and of the courage it took for me to ask my friend to become my mentor which is such a shift in our relationship. I already had so much respect for Lisa’s pottery making and talent, but we were just friends. Now, her knowledge is available to me and she is invested in seeing me grow. In return, I am obligated to continue to learn.

Pottery Piece Two: Pot, 2023

Figure 30. Pot, 2023.

This pot was my first successful pot, in that it began to take on the correct shape, moving upward instead of out. I intentionally kept is small because this was my learning process, and it felt more manageable. I created thin walls that withstood the different textures I applied to the surface. A corn cob without the kernels, a paddle stamp, and hand engraved lines.

The inside of this pot glistens and reflects off the numerous indentations from my fingers. You can see where I held it, where my fingerprints dug into the clay, and is stained with colour of smoke and fire. This pot is precious to me. It quietly sits in our living room, holding random bits of our life.

Pottery Piece Three: *Wilson*, 2023

Figure 31. *Wilson*, 2023.

This hand-coiled pot named “Wilson” was a joy to make at the Cherokee Nation Arts Center. Made from a commercial body of clay, he was my triumph in that the pot finally grew upwardly, as opposed to splaying out into a bowl shape. He was also a surface upon which I could experiment with incising, stamping, and applying different textures. I was a little too eager to create designs on Wilson, and this is the story of how he received his name.

I used a customary paddle to lay down the stripes around the body of the pot, but I decided I wanted a little something more. With blueberries on my mind, I began to incise berries freehand. I, then, used a stamp of flora in between the berries. I also wanted the upper neck to have design elements upon it, so I used a dried corn cob to create texture. I when I was finished,

I examined the pot, specifically focusing on the berries. They looked awful! It was apparent to me that I needed more practice on my drawing. I made the decision to press a seashell onto the berry site. Upon completion, I stepped back and saw Wilson, the volleyball from that movie, pressed into my pot. Lisa and I laughed and laughed.

Another decision I made about this pot was to leave my fingerprints and markings all over its surfaces, inside and out. When I think about my ancestors' making vessels, they do not carry the idea of perfection, though they do hold beauty, functionality, and the markings of having been made by Cherokee hands. My pot signifies the beginning of my pottery practice, a commitment to learning and to making mistakes, and to enjoying and being perplexed by this entire process. While my practice happens here in Canada on my own or in a community class, I am returning to Oklahoma for another week with my mentor Lisa, and to spend some time with Jane Osti. The learning aspect of this is ongoing as it requires me understand so much beyond the process of making. I am planning to learn to make paddles for stamping, and to do more research about our iconography—the designs passed down to us by the ancestors.

Pottery Piece Four: Pot, 2024

Figure 32. Bowl with hand built coils and corncob impression; from commercial clay body, 2024.

This pot was made at Casa in Lethbridge in one of the courses I took. It represents a continuation of my Tsalagi studies in pottery making. I listened to and learned about other means of hand-building pottery, as well as about the kiln and glaze application. I even tried my hand at a few of these other ways of making. But primarily, while other people made their vases and sculptures, I plugged away at making coils and building pots. I had foundations to learn and master.

The untitled pot, made with commercial clay (cone 6), came out a little bowl-like, but I loved it nonetheless. I applied two types of corn cob to its exterior. The walls came out nice and thin. Since I had a deep appreciation for seeing my fingerprints and marks on the pot, I did not burnish it. As I worked in Casa, I was in constant communication with Lisa via text. I sent her pictures, asked her questions, and received the support I needed to continue this work so far from home. My community meets me, no matter how far I am from home.

Pottery Piece Five: Rat of Alberta, 2024

Figure 33. *Jordan's Rat*. Commercial clay body greenware pictured with corncob impressions. 2024.

One fact about Alberta is that there are no rats in our province. There is a whole history about the eradication of the rats, and it's funny because rat jokes abound, but the moment someone says they think they saw a rat, people jump to correct them and tell them there are not rats in Alberta! It was for this reason that my son and his best friend called themselves the Rats.

One of the clay courses I took in Lethbridge at CASA was a hand-building clay class. Of the many lessons, one was about sculpture. I have never regarded myself as neither a talented, nor a creative person. This rat, in honour of my son and his friendship, formed in my hands as a

natural manifestation of creative expression. And love. Love had everything to do with this. So much of what I create in my work life is not for my children, but for the children of other people; I create lessons and move forward histories and knowledge. I like to think that these pots, and this sculpture in particular are made for my children.

The process of making this sculpture was such a different experience from pottery making, and it was nice to take a break from my self-imposed pottery learning. I began by holding this body of clay, thinking about what I could make. I decided to make a rat, but I wanted to make it lay on its back. The more I worked on the clay, more it decided it wanted to be standing. Fingers working inside the body, and outside of it. I chose to continue my Tsalagi lessons with the textures I applied to the Rat. I used the cob of a piece of corn I had grown in my garden and dried the year before. Corn cob imprinting is something I learned to do from Lisa. Using this method keeps me close to home. I also engraved fur onto the belly.

While the Rat was made out of love for my son, the whole process is one of love that honours Anna Belle and Lisa, as well as my ancestors.

Pottery Piece Six: Title, 2025. (36.3271° N, 94.72382° W; 53.55309° N, 113.48142° W; 49.68905° N, 112.89640° W; 53.54718° N, 113.51214° W; 49.68905° N, 112.89640° W or Flattened Punctate)

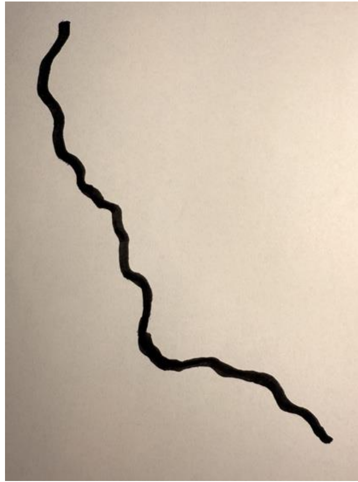

Figure 34.

Figure 35.

As I sit here with a shard of this pot next to me, in pieces as it is, warm from my hands, I have many thoughts and new understandings. This pot is a symbol of my journey, and it was the final pot I made for me and this dissertation.

I am now an assistant professor at MacEwan University, which is a 5-hour drive from my family and home; they remained in Lethbridge. The days without them were long and lonely. The unfamiliarity was suffocating, especially with the snow, ice, and days with very little light. I shed so many tears over those three months, or sat in depression, unable to work despite all the work I had to do. As you have read in this dissertation, I know that pottery I carries memories, but it also holds onto emotions. So, like my mentor, I do not make/create when I am feeling certain emotions. Everything goes into the clay as you work with it, and there are feelings I do not want caught in my pots.

One morning in February, I awoke to another snowy frigid day, but my body was calling to me to do something, to move. The message was: Make a pot. I had no choice. I went to work to our studio and gathered some of the repurposed clay. I bought the most minimal supplies I needed, as all my pottery tools are here at home. I figure, my ancestors needed few things to make, and I was no different, especially with commercial clay in my possession. I was given a large, beautiful canvas by colleague weeks before, as I had an idea of what I wanted to do with it but was still conceiving it. The canvas became my surface; I turned my small apartment table into a pottery making space. I made my coils in the quiet of the morning, and bound them to each other, layer by layer. I covered the unfinished by growing pot. I and it needed to rest. The next morning, I awoke with the same calling—to make. I checked on my pot, removed it from its bowl. I realized something was not quite right with it. It was too wet. I folded it back in upon itself and reworked that clay. And I made coil after coil and bound them to each other, and the pot grew. I thinned out the walls with the upward movement I learned from watching videos of Anna Belle. My pot was incomplete and needed to rest, so the last thing I did was add punctate to the rim. This pot's smooth grey surface marked by my fingers and fingertips, spoken to with

love as I thought about my family, was what my body called forth. For the first time, I felt content.

The importance of this pot is that it represents both my journey and its own, as it does have its own story—it is just meddled with mine. The title of this pot is made of journeys, several journeys with stops along the way. It is also comprised of multiple destinations, indicated by the coordinates listed. It also acquired a nickname, Flattened Punctate, which I will come to shortly. This pot called to me from a chunk of clay. It asked me to use my grounded knowledge from within my community, which is related to my personal journey, to create it far from home. I was getting ready to go home to Lethbridge for reading week, so it gave me a place to capture my joy where it would be shaped and held until it returned to the land.

Figure 36. titled, Edmonton, AB, February 2025.

This moment is where our stories take a strange turn but isn't that just life. In preparation for my trip to Lethbridge, I bundled up my pot to leave it at work in the studio. I had asked my colleague to look after her, so she did not completely dry. I still had some work to do with her. After arriving at work, I held her in a bucket in one hand, coffee in the other, backpack on my back…then I took a tremendous fall on the ice. It has been suggested that this moment should be

a performance piece because alongside me trying to regain my bearings, my first words of anguish were: “Oh no! MY POT!” As students came to my aid, and were helping me get off the ground, I saw a young person pick up my coffee flask and drop it in my bucket. I tried to stop her, I recall saying, “No, I have a pot in there,” but the deed was done, and my attempt was ineffective. She plopped the metal container down on my still wet pot, and I limped to my office with assistance. Before my colleague took my pot for safe keeping, I looked in on her and lamented the *flattened punctate* and partial collapse of one side; I lifted it up as much as I could. This nickname for my pot has stuck.

Upon returning to Edmonton, I collected my pot. She sat in her bucket in my apartment until we both returned to Lethbridge a week later. She sat in the kitchen, as I contemplated what more to do with her. I was, however, very injured and suffering from concussion, so I decided to take her out of her wrappings and let her dry. As greenware, I knew she was fragile, but she was safely on the table. A few days after I returned to Edmonton, my husband called me. The tone of his voice made my stomach flip, and I thought: Oh no, who has died! As it turned out, my pot was not safe from my children—go figure. My two teenagers were roughhousing in the dining area, slammed into the table, hit my pot and sent her flying. She broke into about 10 pieces and some tiny shards. I was upset, but not angry—honestly, there was nothing I could do about it. I was sadder than anything else because that pot came to me in such a special way. And here are my thoughts on this devastated pot:

my family is represented in each coil
bound together, holding on
to each other
creating a whole
even when I am far away
the pot broke and
neither kintsugi, nor

super glue will save it
or me
We are not broken.
We have taken on new forms
and new roles.
This is a transformation
and we are still bound together
though apart
the walls and base of this pot
me and my family
and we will continue
to hold
and remember each other
as we continue to change

The breaking of the pot came with several, mainly personal, lessons. There were, also, technical ones, too. I have studied these broken walls, because, if you recall, I have never had a pot break in the firing stage, so I wanted to see what the inside of the walls looked like. I realized that even though I thinned out my walls, they were still fairly thick, thicker than I wanted. My tactile senses, my fingers, still have somethings to learn. The walls split from the base, and, of course, the walls broke, but they did not break at the coils, and that feels like a win. In fact, I was unable to discern the coils, they were so melded together. I believe in my technique and processes; in the teachings I have had the honour to learn. I just need to learn to trust my materials and my instincts more.

Pottery Piece Seven, Canvas, *Untitled*, 2025

Figure 37.

When I decided to make *Flattened Punctate*, I intentionally chose to make it on the gorgeous canvas I received from my colleague. I knew that the creation of this pot needed to be documented, but it needed to be recorded as action and movement. The physical action of pottery making leaves many marks upon the surface, and I find them to be important records. I knew I wanted to save this canvas a chronicle of her creation.

The untitled canvas holds the creation of two pots from the same body of clay. I made one pot, but had to remake it into *Flattened Punctate*, as the original one was too wet to hold its form.

In order to make this canvas represent my intentions for *Flattened Punctate* before the multiple accidents she and I encountered, I included, on this canvas, the aesthetic applications I

intended to apply to the pot's surface. In preparation, I created slip from the Anna Belle clay I carry with me, and I applied it to the canvas with the stamps that I was gifted by Jane Osti. These stamps represent some of the important symbols our artists, like Jane and Lisa, use on their pots. It is also a way of honouring these gifts, by including them in my dissertation work.

On this canvas, I also honour the journeys that I have made that led me to create this pot and canvas in Edmonton, Alberta. I have included the physical title of the pot on this canvas, created from my saliva and cochineal, to achieve a very personal colour. I was introduced to cochineal by my colleague Dakota Mace in 2023, and this natural dye, for me, foreshadows my next project. It reminds me that when this dissertation is complete, I have new work awaiting me.

If we think back to the beginnings of this dissertation, one that began with landscape paintings, I assert that this canvas is a truer landscape, representing Indigeneity and Indigenous lands in every way. It especially embodies Tsalagi Peoples, past, present and future.

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