

D/A

The Vocabulary of Water

JULY 12 - SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

REBECCA JANE HOUSTON + KELLY JAZVAC

OPENING RECEPTION

JULY 12, 6 - 8 PM

+ quiet rural reading riot:
a storytelling for children.

JULY 13, 10AM - 5PM

ArtsFEST! Finders Keepers
at Durham Art Gallery

JULY 23, 1PM

LUNCH DATE

Author Allen Smulylo Reads
from The Memory of Water.

AUG 14, 10:30AM

WALK&TALK

Educational Saugeen River Hike
with Saugeen Conservation

...

AUG 20, 7PM
AFTER HOURS TRIPLE BILL

A Conversation with
Walkerton Clean Water
Centre's Manager of
Research and Technology
Souleymane Ndiongue
Ph.D., P.Eng.

+

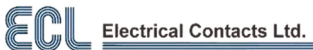
Resilience: Transforming
Our Community
55:00

+

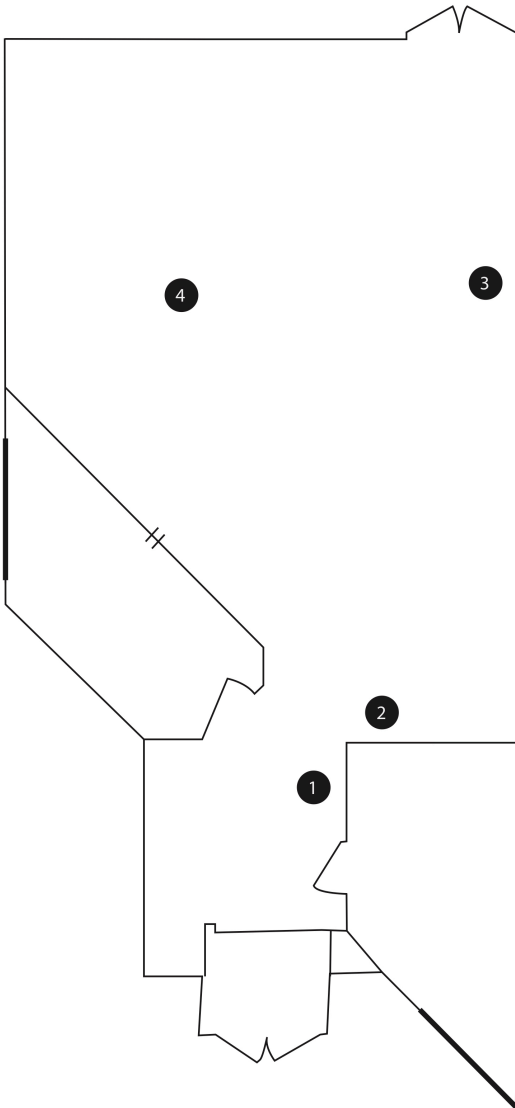
4 Waters: Deep Implicancy
Arjuna Neuman + Denise Ferreira Da Silva
30:00

www.durhamartgallery.com

Durham Art Gallery would like to thank our members, donors,
partners, and sponsors for their support.



The Vocabulary of Water FLOOR PLAN



1. *Canada Water Act*, Government of Canada (1985).
Marine Debris Colouring Book, Department of Commerce, USA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (year unknown).
2. Coral with plastic augments
3. Kelly Jazvac, *Forward Contamination*, 2017. Digital Video. 10:38
4. Rebecca Jane Houston, *Hope is Our Only Hope*, 2019. Lake Ontario sand, handmade clay vessels, tarp.

The Vocabulary of Water is an exhibition that is void of water in image and actuality but is full to the brim with watery imaginings. Here on the banks of the Saugeen River, Durham Art Gallery is delighted to host an exhibition that features Lake Ontario. Artists Rebecca Jane Houston and Kelly Jazvac both address the Lake. Kelly considers it from deep below its surface, while Rebecca sticks to the shore. They are concerned with the place of plastics, specifically microplastics, in and around the great aqueous body.

Microplastics are tiny bits of plastic debris that are found in the environment. These plastic particles are chunks, flakes, shards and unravelled threads belonging to consumer and industrial objects that have not broken down. The video, ***Forward Contamination*** (2017), by Kelly Jazvac features the work of scientist Anika Ballent. Through a microscope, we watch Anika sort sand, rock, wood and microplastics found in a core sample taken from Lake Ontario. The plastics in the sample have made their way into the deep muds that cradle the freshwater.

As we watch, we hear a conversation between Kelly and the planetary geologist, Catherine Neish reenacted by voice actors. They speak of possible human microbial transfer to interstellar bodies, planets far, far away, and the care that is taken by space agencies to avoid this kind of contamination. As their conversation progresses, a drum track enters gradually rising in volume, making it difficult for the actors to hear each other and for the viewer to listen to them. Eventually, one can catch them yelling about NASA's Planetary Protection Treaty while Anika continues to meticulously sort.

In ***Hope is Our Only Hope*** (2019) handmade, handheld clay vessels sit gently atop a mound of sand. Rebecca Jane Houston has transferred a portion of Lake Ontario's sandy shoreline to the Durham Art Gallery. Viewers are invited to harvest plastic waste found within the mound using the bowls to contain it. At the end of the exhibition, Rebecca will return

the borrowed sand home to Lake Ontario, free of pollution, preventing the microplastics from returning to the lakebed.

From this exhibition comes a flood of questions: What is the vocabulary of Water? How do we speak, about, to and with Water? Who speaks for Water? And how do we honour our relationship with it? Through the vocabulary of Water, can we expand our thinking around plastics, contamination, and human impact in relation to the precious liquid resource? Is Lake Ontario so different from the Saugeen River? Do plastics not sit along our shores? What contaminants lay beneath? What settles into the bottom? Into Us? Here on Earth, which agencies prevent against the contamination of this planet?

To help work through the questions prompted by the work of Kelly Jazvac and Rebecca Jane Houston, curator Jaclyn Quaresma turned to Elder Shirley John.

Elder Shirley John, whose Anishinabe name is Strong White Buffalo Woman and She Who Sees Vision of Wisdom. Shirley is a member of Loon/ Grizzly Bear of the Chippewa's of Saugeen along the beautiful shores of Lake Huron. Both Ojibway and Mohawk, her favourite saying is "Each and Every Day." As Shirley will say, this grandmother lives for peace for all of humanity each and every day. Over the years she has been a visiting elder with many organizations throughout Canada and U.S sharing spiritual guidance, and traditional teachings and a long-time supporter of the friendship movement.

Below is a transcript of their conversation:

Jaclyn Quaresma

I'm wondering how you came to Water and how Water came to you.

Shirley John - Strong White Buffalo Woman

I've been praying for Water for a long time. My Spiritual Teacher Diane Longboat is from Six Nations. That's how we

began many years ago and how we started praying and walking for the Water. Of course, prior to that, I was taught by my Nokomis - Grandmother and my Mom the importance of Water at a very early age. There comes a time when your spiritual teacher sees in you that you will Carry the Water Teachings, do Water Ceremonies and Pray for the Water on a daily basis.

JQ It sounds like Water was something that you felt within yourself, and that your elders guided you to the place you are now?

SJ Yes, Water is life, or else we wouldn't be here today. Women are life-givers, are like you, you have a little boy. You know? You're a life-giver, so you bring him into the world, he was already in Water. There is an important part that the boy's semen plays in being with the Water also. Water is life and is a gift that we carry. As Women Life Givers we teach the girls the importance of Water.

JQ Was there a time when you moved from having an appreciation and a knowledge of Water to practising your role as a Water Carrier?

SJ I honour the pieces that the higher power, creator, god, Jesus, light of light, Buddha, whatever you call that one that gives us the breath of life, that I walk and talk about and teach about the Water no matter where I go. I work with this in the spiritual sense. From a spiritual place, this is where I come from. It's always been within myself to do this work, so I pray for the Water no matter where I go, for all nations, not only for my Anishinabeg people but for all nations.

JQ It sounds like praying for the Water, for all nations is important to you.

SJ There are women that pray for the Water on a daily basis, do Water Ceremonies and Water Walks. Even in this

community, there are women that can do this work and they need to step up as some of us are getting older and need the younger generation to start recognizing the importance of **Water for All Nations**. My daughter carries Water teachings and she works alongside me and other women in Ceremony. It's the younger generation that needs to step up now and do this work! Whether they are ready or not. It all depends on their healing journey and maybe they walk with other gifts.

I have lots of things in here [Shirley gets up and walks to a poster board where she has a drawing].

If you have these going on in your personal life you are not ready. [Shirley is handing me a hand drawn picture of a Tree of Addiction that depicts areas of growth and pain. It shows that addictions and pains can be rooted in physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse and implies that to be healthy in all areas one may work with all of the Seven Sacred Teachings]. You have to find forgiveness and let go in order to walk in a good way. That doesn't stop you from praying for the Water, but you're not giving it your one hundred per cent.

JQ To continue this tradition, this practice, you have to give the Water everything.

SJ Yes. You have to pray for the Water every day. What you do in the morning is, with the sun on the west side, you place a glass of Water like that [Shirley lifts and puts a glass of Water, presumably blessed, on the table in front of me]. All night it sits at the windowsill. In the morning when we wake up, that's already been blessed by the morning sun or morning whatever that may be. That's your medicine for today. Yeah! So you consume that, you drink that, you share it amongst yourselves, your family, and that starts you off in a good way.

JQ Do you have to be at a specific place in your journey of the seven teachings...?

SJ The Seven Grandfather Teachings, or Seven Sacred Teachings, there are many words for it, you know! Truth, bravery, honesty, love, humility, wisdom and respect. They are similar to bible teachings. We need to adopt one of the teachings, then move on till you have received the seven teachings.

JQ Thank you. In order to bless the Water in the way you have described, and to take it into your life, do you have to be at a certain point in your journey through the seven sacred teachings?

SJ I truly believe a person knows where they are at and what healing needs to take place within one's self. Maybe they are just beginners in that, but, it's all up to them how much they are going to work with the Water, walk with the Water, pray for the Water on a daily basis. I can't say that you don't do that. I don't know what you do on your journey.

So, we give thanks in many ways. Sometimes we don't have to say anything. All we can say is Miigwech - thank you. That one that gives us the breath of life already knows what we are giving thanks for.

JQ What does it mean to be a Water Carrier? Is giving thanks a part of that process?

SJ Water Carrier. [Pause] Water Carrier – All Women are Life Givers. A Water Walker is one who has and continues to walk for the Water – for all nations, all of creation. You walk with a copper pail filled with Water that is big. [Shirley motions with her hand what might be the size of a medium soup pot] about three-quarters full. None of it should spill out. All the Water should stay in the copper pail. It all depends where that Water came from! The Water could be heavy, so you're, you know , [Shirley leans to one side as if she is weighed down by something] walking with a heavy pail of Water until you get to

another place when, when it's time the leader will tell you, it's time to change the Water.

The one that is conducting the Water Walk, I don't conduct Water Walks, it's always somebody else. That is their part that they play. But I do my part, being a Water Walker, praying for that Water all over Ontario, Canada doing Water Ceremonies [Shirley points to a royal blue sweatshirt with a map on it depicting the route of a Water Walk].

JQ I think I read that that [I point to the sweatshirt] was a two-week journey?

SJ Saugeen Ojibway Territory Water Walk took twelve days. It started from Neyaashiingamiing in Cape Crocker, and going down to Wiarton, Owen Sound, all the way down to Thornbury, Collingwood and cutting across going down to Orangeville, Arthur and all those places, then going over to Goderich and and back, Kincardine, Port Elgin, South Hampton, Chief's Point and back down to Tobermory and all the way back down from Tobermory to Miller Lake and all those little places in between. Then back to Neyaashiingamiing in Cape Crocker where we started from. That's twelve days of walking.

Men walk with the Eagle Staff, that's their duty. To walk with it [Shirley points to a set of Eagle Staffs]. The staff here, that's an Eagle Staff. There's many forms of Eagle Staffs. The white one is mine; there are twelve feathers on it. We walk with those. Sometimes the men are not available, so the women have to do both duties, you know? Sometimes there's not many of us; maybe there are only two women walking, so you do them both until more people come. That way it can rotate and that.

It is a spiritual walk, and then again, it all has to do with a person and how much they're giving up of themselves, whether they want to release the old habits, like you have seen there [Shirley points to the Tree of Addiction]. It's how much you

want to release of that so you can walk in a good way. It's always working within your own self, because, from the time we're in our mom's womb to the age we are at now, there's a lot of things we have to fix up!

The good things, yay for all the good things! But also there are bad things over here that have happened to us from zero to age seven. Many things happen: mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, sexually. Everything happens. So each and every one of those people who had done something to us has to be fixed up and forgiven. Sometimes [when we need forgiveness], those people won't be there to forgive us. Or, they don't want to forgive us, but we still move with that, because I want to get forgiven, I don't want to carry that anymore. So, you visualize that person sitting here in front of you, or beside you, tell that person everything you need to tell them. It doesn't belong to you to me, what you have done to me it belongs to them. "You take it. It no longer serves me. In a way, it's going to continue haunting me." So, we give it back to where it belongs.

Sometimes we see people on the streets, coffee shops, community and that, and they'll look the other way, they cross the street, run away from you or ignore you. But you're able to walk and move freely yourself. If you happen to cross paths and you're able to talk to these people. You can say "Hi, how are you today?" And it won't even bother you; it's like nothing ever happened between the two of you. You have that forgiveness within your own self. If they chose not to talk or say something to you that's not very nice, or that's in a negative way, that's their problem! Just keep on going yourself.

JQ So this, sort of, journey of self-awareness, or forgiveness within yourself...

SJ You have to, I truly believe, you have to do those pieces within your own self. For myself, I've been working on myself for a long, long time. Even at the age I'm at, and I still have to

work on myself because we will until the day we die. There are always pieces new or old that we need to work on and let go. So we just keep on going as the days go on. Do the best we can! It is very important that you work on yourself. Suffering is over work on Minobamadsawin – Good Life. And watch it bloom with happiness.

We have this great big bag that we carry around; they call it baggage, do you know what I mean? Or we hide things under the table like those junky things I've got there, or I pull that [Shirley points to a bench], there's stuff hidden in there. If they were locked in there, under the mattresses and in every place, you know? Yeah! We just tuck them away in our purse...

JQ And keep it all with us, everywhere! [We're both laughing now.]

SJ So, you know, there's many places that we have to look at. Many places within our own selves, we have to start taking care of ourselves, we don't want to pass this on to our children, our grandchildren, and those ones yet to come. We work with those pieces so you can see your own children growing up in a good way. So they are able to talk to all these people [Shirley makes a sweeping gesture with her arm] and be friends with them and treat them well! If you're not like that yourself, you're passing things on to your child, and you wonder, why is my kid like this? Kids need to be allowed to speak up also, to allow them that peace, so they don't take it all in. It needs to come out, verbally come out. Sometimes we may not like what they are saying to us, but it is something we need to think about.

We need to listen to the children. They are giving us something; they are telling us something. But we don't pay attention. We don't know everything. Kids are really smart. A kid comes along, or a little child comes along, and they tell you something and its like, oh, I need to look at that piece.

JQ We're so often told as parents, that we must be the teachers.

SJ Well, you have to be a good role model for your children, yes. The way we are brought up, I don't know how you were brought up, but that doesn't matter. What matters is, we are brought up by our mom and dads, maybe an auntie or uncle or a grandma or grandpa, or someone has taken us on because our parents couldn't look after us. Or, maybe, sometimes we end up in children's aid and then we got foster parents. So, you know, the list goes on and on like that. Within our own immediate family, our moms and dads teach us everything we need to know in this lifetime. We don't take everything. We just take what we think we need from there. As an adult, you begin to resonate with all their teaching, but to say: You know what? This is my journey. This is how I want to walk my path. I don't want to walk the way mom and dad did, the way they brought me up. We need to sever that cord and take only the goodness. Even with our grandparents! They are so stuck sometimes it isn't even funny. There again, you only take the goodness.

JQ It sounds like the Seven Sacred Teachings can guide you through the process of making those severs.

SJ You have to! You're going to be a better person all around, you can see further! You can be able to see where people are coming from, to understand them. All you can do is plant those seeds, those good seeds. There comes a time in someone's life when they want change. They don't always want to be like this. To adopt that in one's own self, it's all up to that one person. I can plant seeds, I can talk to a person in a good way, but it's all up to them. It doesn't belong to me.

JQ When you take a Water Walk, and you are carrying the Water, are you going through this process yourself? I'm wondering about the spiritual journey with Water.

SJ Yeah, it's a spiritual journey. For me, Praying for the Water, Water Walks, Water Blessings, Water Teachings, Niibi - Water Song is a Spiritual Journey Song. We connect with the Water, stay focused as we are in prayer for the Niibi – Water For All Nation and all of creation. If a person needs to work on their personal healing – prayer is very important. In the Water Walk I did, I felt like I was walking up here! [Shirley gestures a few feet above the ground], that is the power of prayer! Giving yourself fully to do this work!

JQ That's a hard thing to do, isn't it? To give yourself fully to the Water?

SJ It is, but it's not until you come to a time in your life. We are not ready. Like I said before, you will have the calling. There will be one time when you are ready. But, you know, we are at different stages of our life, going through all of this. This thing called life. The teenagers are into things; they like to party, things like that. It's a process. That's the wandering years. You wonder this stuff, but we all do that. Next thing you know, you're wandering around, you have relationships and stuff and trying to find out who you are and what you want.

It's not until you come to a time in your life that you want the Spiritual Journey, change in your style of living, that you are ready to do Creator's work. There are different stages of our our life and we need to go through all of these. Experience life, birth, youth, teenage, young adult, adult, senior, old age. Experiences are many.

But we need to pray for the Water. We pray for the Water each and every day, so that our children, our grandchildren, and those ones yet to come, will have good Water. That's the purpose of it, that we will have to nourish our minds, our bodies, our spirits in a good way.

JQ As I think about Water in relation to what you are saying, I am struck by interconnectedness of our conversation, how speaking about the Water is also speaking about our personal health: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and sexual, like you said. I didn't expect us to be speaking about the connection of the self and environment on these many levels. It's kind of silly that I didn't!

SJ Water is spirit. Water has a spirit. If I curse and swear at this Water, this Water [Shirley points to the cup of Water to her left] would be dark. When I pray for this Water and give thanks for it, it will be nice and clear. So everything has a spirit! We take care of that Water, that spirit. If we cursed at that Water, if we don't take care of it, that's what we are passing on to our children, or that company that is coming for lunch. We are giving them that, we are feeding them that!

In order to walk, talk, in a good way on all levels we need the power of prayer. People see that we are walking, talking, experiencing Minobamadsawin - Good Life in a good way - on all levels.

JQ My late grandmother used to say: Never eat food that was prepared by someone who was angry with you. For me, that was a warning against bad ways but also a warning for myself to be mindful of what I put into the work I was doing, the materials I was using. It showed me that I had lasting effects beyond my intentions. I think about this this as we're talking about how to be with Water, acting alongside the Water. It sounds like the way we are both with Water, and ourselves is effecting Water in general.

SJ Exactly.

JQ And this will, in turn, affect us.

SJ Exactly. That is the truth.

JQ Our affect goes beyond the immediate moment.

SJ Truth, exactly. And we forget we are human, but we must always come back. Somewhere along the way, we need to give Miigwech - thank you for peace, to ask for forgiveness when and where it is needed. ∞

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Kelly Jazvac is an artist who works with an interdisciplinary team of scientists, writers, and artists to research plastic pollution. Jazvac's recent exhibitions include *Sharp and Numb* at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon; *Song of the Open Road* at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; *Atmospheres of Form*, Parisian Laundry, Montreal; and *A Stratigraphic Fiction* at The Berman Museum of Art, Collegeville, PA. Her work has been written about in *e-flux Journal*, *Hyperallergic*, *C Magazine*, *The Huffington Post*, *Magenta Magazine*, *Border Crossings*, *Canadian Art*, *artforum.com*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. She has upcoming exhibitions at Fierman Gallery, New York, and Or Gallery, Vancouver.

Kelly Jazvac, *Forward Contamination*, 2017. Digital Video. 10:38.

Rebecca Jane Houston is a sculptor, painter and art teacher who has also worked in arts-based community development for many years. She works with many kinds of materials to create works that reflect our own actions back to us. Often working with waste, Houston explores the agency of matter and the power that refuse has over us through our bodies, on human/non-human interactions and on the built and natural environment. Rebecca completed her BFA and MFA at York University and currently lives in Toronto. She is a member of the Akin Collective.

Rebecca Jane Houston, *Hope is Our Only Hope*, 2019. Lake Ontario Sand, clay vessels, tarp.

The exhibition, ***The Vocabulary of Water*** reminds us that action, even small, succinct action is the only medicine against despair and human carelessness.

ABOUT THE DURHAM ART GALLERY

Durham Art Gallery is a non-profit, exhibition-driven space for contemporary art and visual culture in West Grey, Ontario. From our earliest incarnation in the local Carnegie library to our current purpose-built home, the Gallery's evolution is marked by an engaged community and a diversifying landscape.

Visitors & Letters |

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