Circles and Lines: Michi Saagiig

Bonnie Devine

It's a ninety-five-kilometre drive from Mississauga City Hall council chambers to the council chambers of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation in Hagersville, Ontario. Nowadays the journey takes a couple of hours, west on the Queen Elizabeth Way, south on King's Highway Number 6, and west again on 1st County Line into Six Nations of the Grand River territory. Two of these roads are named for the British monarchy, and all of these roads are owned and maintained by the Province of Ontario. Their mowed verges, standardized surface markings, and orderly signage obscure their history and make it easy to forget that the colonial project of mapping and route-making required lengthy negotiation and conflict with the first inhabitants of the region in the ongoing process of transforming land into property. (Figure 1)

Figure 1.
1st Line, Mississauga Road, Hagersville, Ontario
Video Still, *Drawn in Asphalt*, Bonnie Devine, 2018

In June 1787, Augustus Jones, an Empire Loyalist émigré from the newly independent United States of America, was hired as a land surveyor for the British Crown in Upper Canada and charged with laying out a network of county lines, township boundaries, concession roads, and highways along the north shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. A zealous government official until his retirement in 1800, Jones surveyed a long stretch of land extending east from the town of York to the Trent River and west through Ancaster, Hamilton, and Haldimand township to the Grand River. He also laid out plans for a road from York to the Thames River, now called Dundas Street, and surveyed and supervised the construction of a cart road north from the York lakeshore near Front Street to Lake Simcoe that is now known as Highway 11, or Yonge Street.

Surveying is a land science that involves determining and measuring the distances and angles between marked positions on the surface of the ground. Since ancient times, particularly in Europe and the Middle East, surveyors have walked long distances carrying instruments and devices to calculate, mark, and lay out the foundations of settlements, record the boundaries of political and taxation jurisdictions, establish private ownership title, and—in the age of colonialism—claim dominion. Surveyors' findings determine the placement of towns and the paving of roads, and more poignantly the inherent class divisions that separate land-owners from the landless. For North American Indigenous populations in the Eastern Woodlands, the appearance in their midst of teams of surveyors with tripods, chains, sextants, and pegs was the first sign of invasion. A surveyor's transit mounted on a tripod not only looked like a piece of artillery, it was as politically threatening and deadly as any colonist's musket and was usually just as effective and lethal. Consider the story of Battle Creek, Michigan.

One might be excused for assuming that Battle Creek got its evocative name from a major military action that occurred on the site, perhaps during the American Revolutionary or Civil War. In fact, the town name commemorates a relatively minor encounter between two Potawatomi scouts and a party of American surveyors in 1824 that was not a battle at all. The Pottawatomis objected to the incursion on their homeland and tried to drive the trespassers off; the surveyors shot one of the scouts then retreated to Detroit where they obtained reinforcements. Once fortified, they returned to complete the survey the following year. By then the Pottawatomis had been removed to a reservation by order of the U.S. government, and a thorough survey was completed without further impediment. Permanent settlement of the region by Europeans followed in 1831. (Figure 2)

In Upper Canada, British policy with respect to land settlement differed from U.S. practices. Unlike their contemporary American counterparts, and following the ratification of the Royal Proclamation in the Treaty of Niagara in 1764, the Crown claimed to recognize Indigenous title to the land and beginning in 1781 undertook a series of negotiations with the Michi Saagiig Nation for the purchase of several large parcels of territory stretching from the town of Kingston to the Niagara Peninsula. One of these agreements, now known as the Toronto Purchase, was concluded in 1787 and transferred 250,808 acres (101,498 hectares) of land in exchange for a bale of printed cotton, 2,000 flints, twenty-four brass kettles, 120 mirrors, twenty-four fancy hats, and ninety-six gallons of rum. The amount of money paid to the Michi Saagiig Nation was so minimal it was not mentioned in the agreement, and this may be why the Michi Saagiig negotiators regarded it not as a sale of land but a rental agreement. Flawed in its description and detail as to the exact size and location of the parcel, the 1787 agreement was reopened in 1805 when a thorough definition and survey of the territory was complete. Now known as Treaty 13, the 1805 Toronto Indenture was signed by Chehalk, Queneperion, Okemaperesse, Wabensse, Kenebonecence, Osenego, and Acheton as representatives of the Michi Saagiig Nation. The land mass acquired in the transaction included the pre-amalgamation cities of Etobicoke, North York, Toronto, York, and East York for a one-time payment to the First Nation of ten shillings. As a point of reference, Augustus Jones was reportedly paid four shillings a day for his work as Deputy Surveyor of Upper Canada.

Following a protracted twenty-four-year Land Claims Settlement process that began in 1986 and concluded in 2010, the Government of Canada agreed to pay the Mississauga First Nation $145 million for the land.

Figure 2.
Border Line/Border Braid
Antique surveyor's transit and tripod, red cotton. Dimensions variable, 2018. Collection of the artist

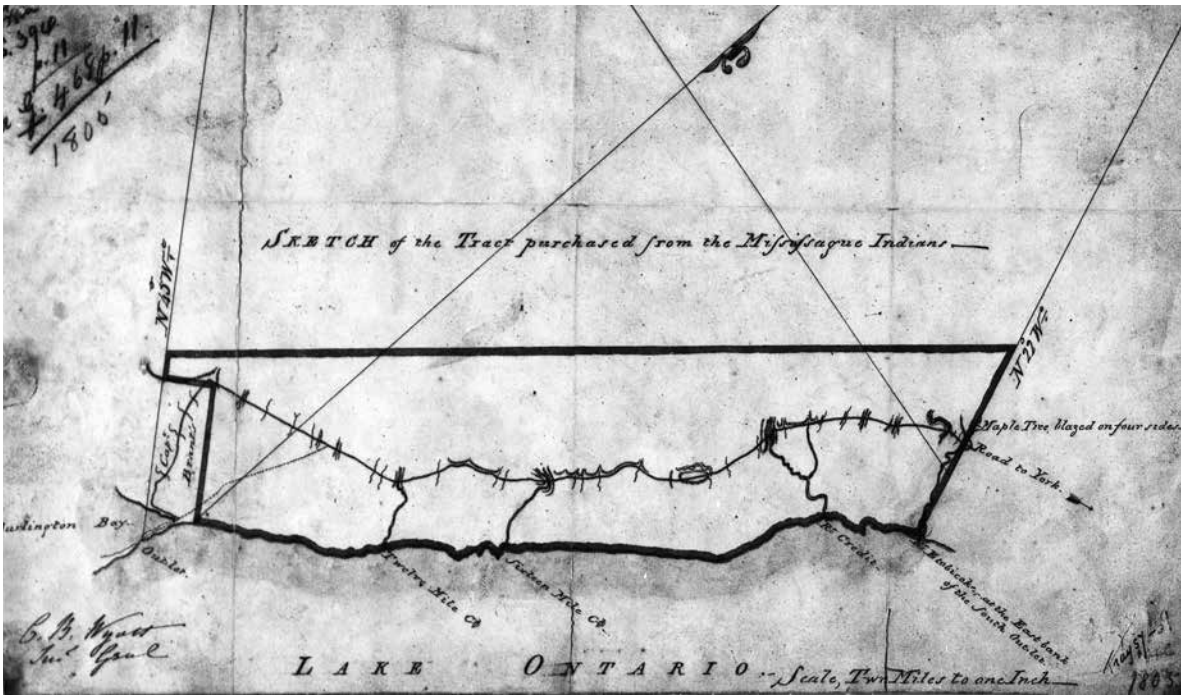
In 2018, I presented *Circles and Lines: Michi Saagiig* at the Art Gallery of Mississauga. Using video, installation, drawing, and painting, the exhibition was intended to open a dialogue about place. The Socratic method holds that dialogue produces meaning and understanding. Indigenous tradition teaches that earnest conversation respectfully engaged is pedagogy. I used eight diptychs to stimulate a dialogue of ideas and images by setting paintings made in acrylic and drawn from memory and intuition beside early surveyor's charts, colonial planning maps, and historic hydrographic diagrams of the lakes and harbours of Upper Canada and the Great Lakes, a place now known as Southern Ontario. In each diptych, contrasting images sat side by side, dialogically, presenting an opportunity to consider what is truly at stake in our bitter, sorrowful wrangle over settlement, land rights, and ownership.

The diptychs were presented in the following order:

Titled/Untitled
Mixed media on digitally reproduced map "Toronto Area, Port Credit, 1961," and acrylic painting on board
2018
Diptych, 36 x 24 inches, 91.44 x 60.96 cm (total dimensions). Collection of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

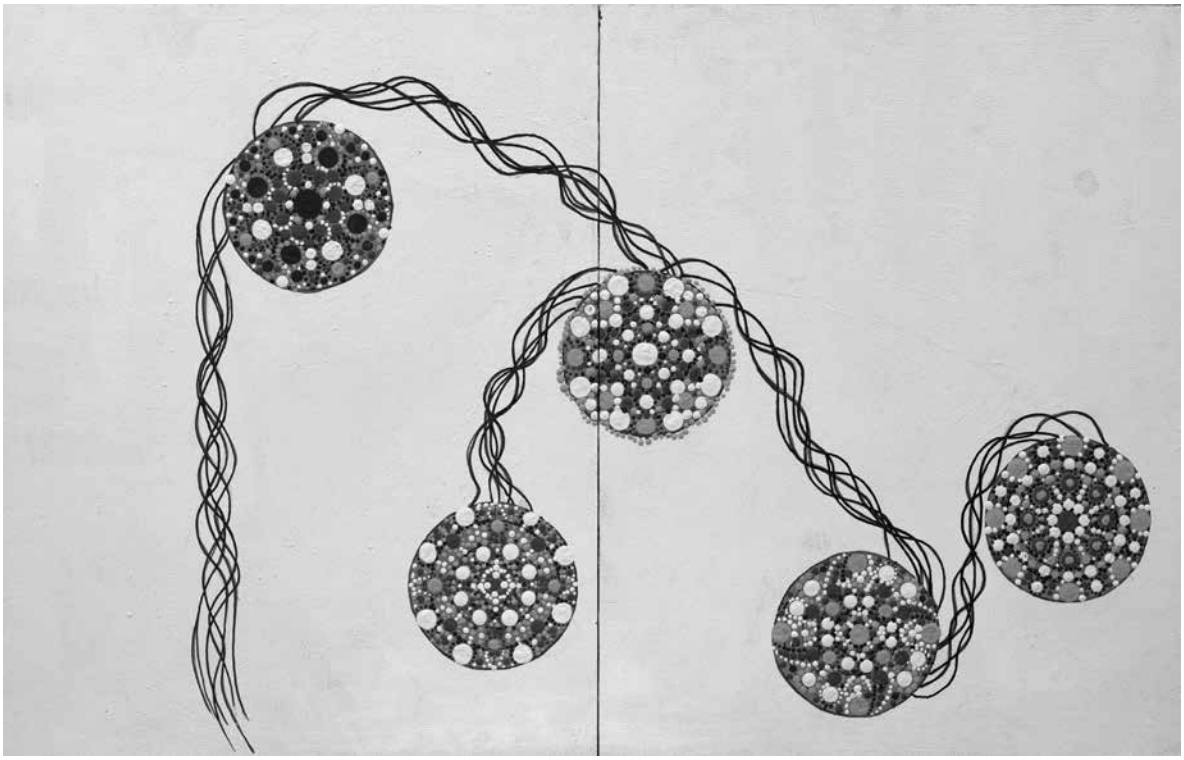
On the left, a 1961 map of the Etobicoke/Long Branch/Mississauga shoreline. The doodem marks of the original Mississauga signatories of the Indenture to the Toronto Purchase are drawn on the map in pen and ink. On the right, Teaching Rock in Michi Saagiig territory near Peterborough, Ontario, at Petroglyph Park.

Does the land know us? I search for a place to settle this question. It is not located on a map.



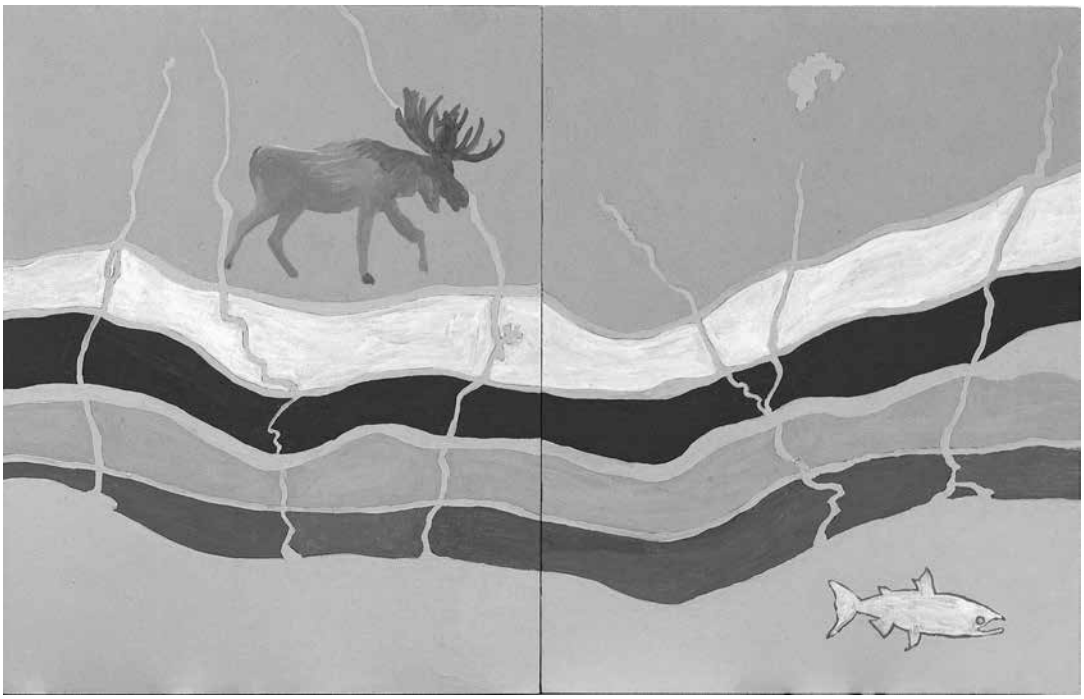
On the left, a map dated 1805, showing the tract now known as Treaty 22. Augustus Jones and his associates surveyed these lands on the north shores of Lake Ontario, securing the boundaries of colonial control.

North Shore Line
Digitally reproduced map *Sketch of the Tract purchased from the Mississaque Indians,* 1805, and acrylic painting on board 2018
46 x 14 inches, 116.84 x 35.6 cm (total dimensions)
Collection of Women's College Hospital, Toronto

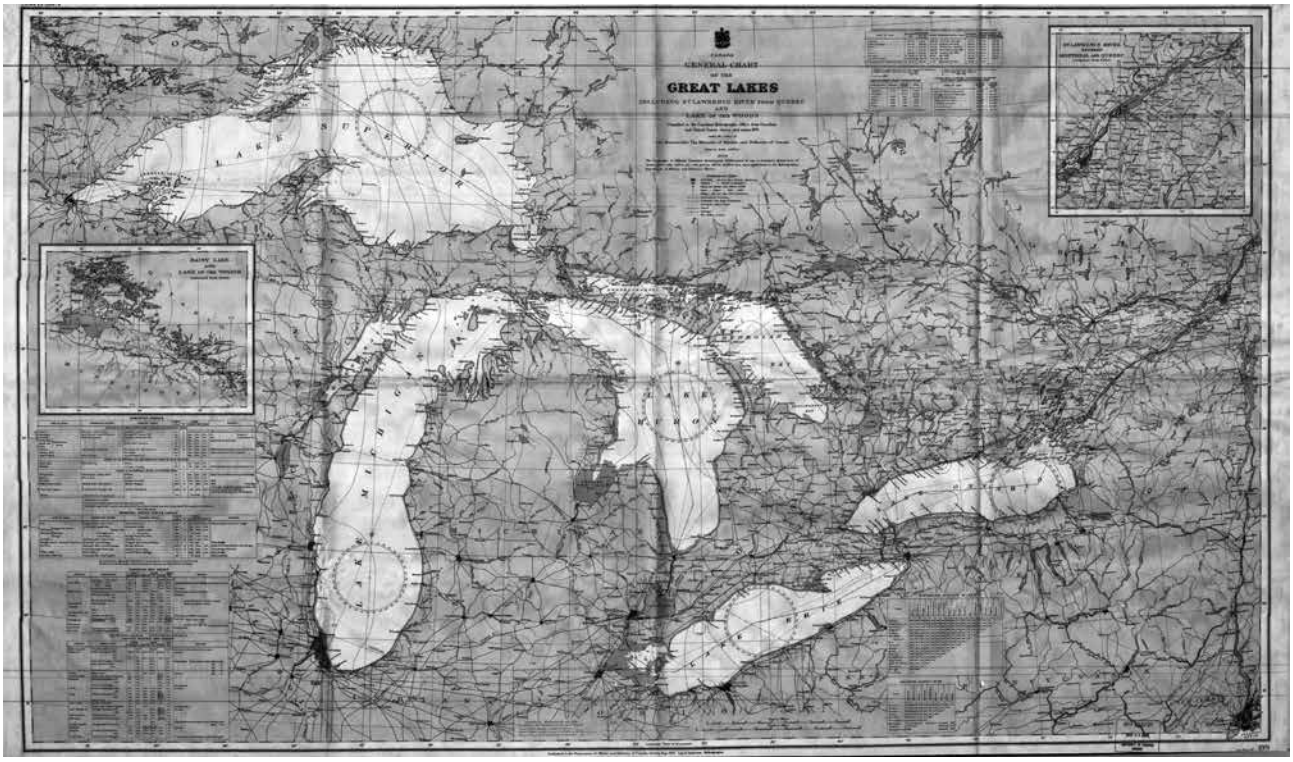


On the left a painted representation of the Great Lakes shows the bodies of water as beaded blue circlets joined with braided twine. The map on the right, an abstraction with a different purpose, describes the international, provincial, and state boundaries, principal sailing routes, canals, railways and a five-fathom contour within the lakes.

Hydrographia
Acrylic painting and digitally reproduced map *General Chart of the Great Lakes,* 1926
2018
46 x 14 inches, 116.84 x 35.6 cm (total dimensions)



On the right, an imagined topography that includes the mouths of the rivers and creeks emptying into the big water. The land gestures, the water responds, and the shoreline is contoured and complicated by their exchange. Oral history tells us that the Mississauga believed that after the treaty they would continue to hold the shoreline for themselves, as they were accustomed to hunting and fishing there.

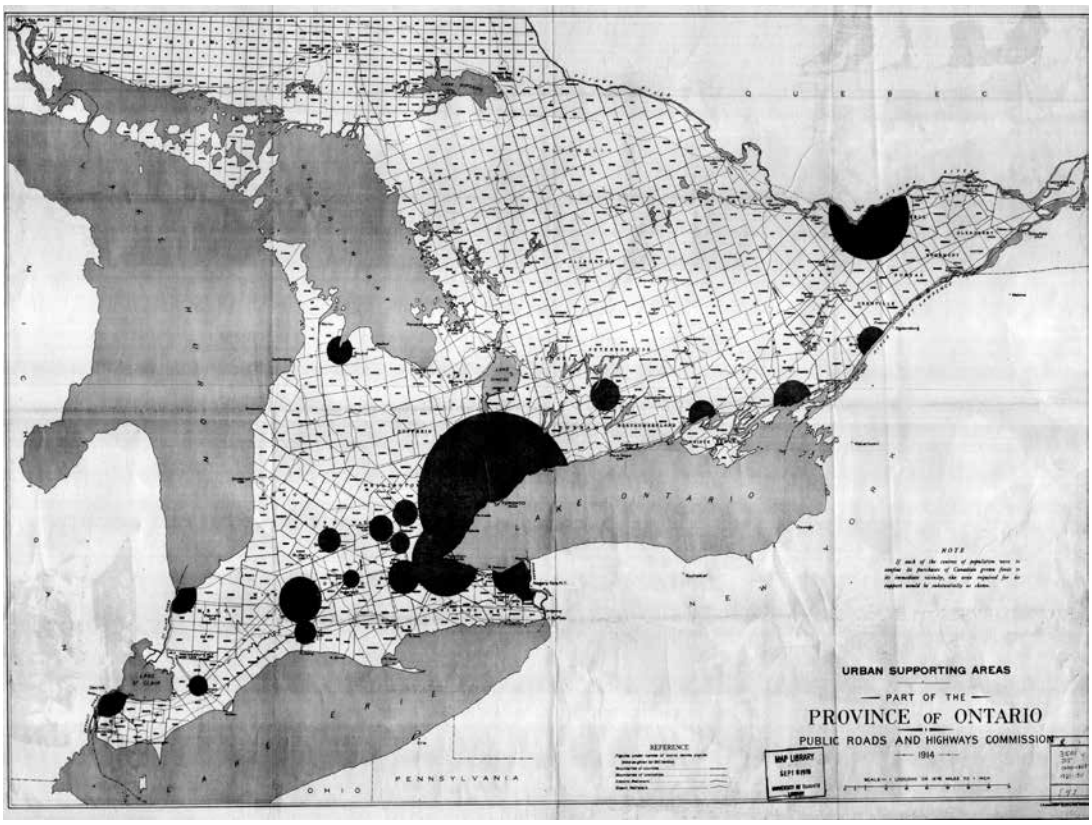


Have they named you correctly, oh great lakes? Do you hear when your people address you?

Anishinaabewi-gichigami
Ininwewi-gichigami
Naadowewi-gichigami
Waabishkiigoo-gichigami
Niigaani-gichigami

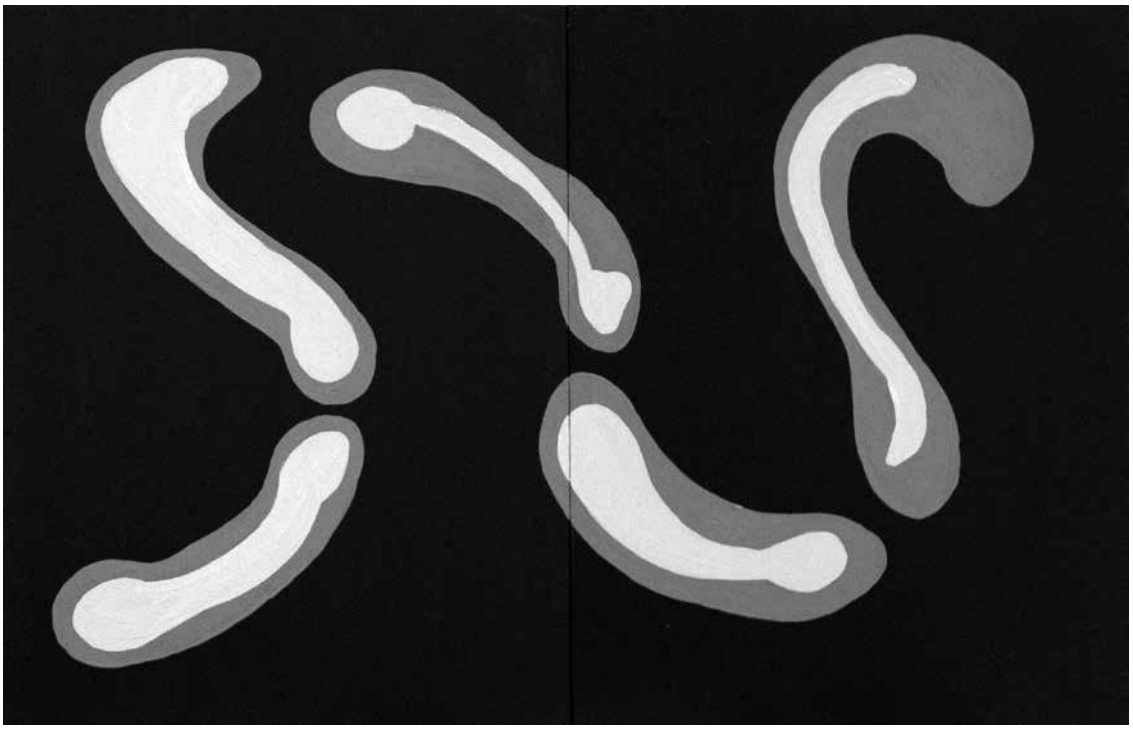
The map on the left, an early diagram of land division and use, reveals a British organizational grid transcribed on the land and waters of this region that sections and in fact dismembers terrain as an anatomical subject, parcelling it into plots, estates, and provinces.

County Lines
Digitally reproduced map *Plan of the Province of Upper Canada, Divided into Counties, 1793,* and acrylic painting on board 2018
46 x 14 inches, 116.84 x 35.6 cm (total dimensions)

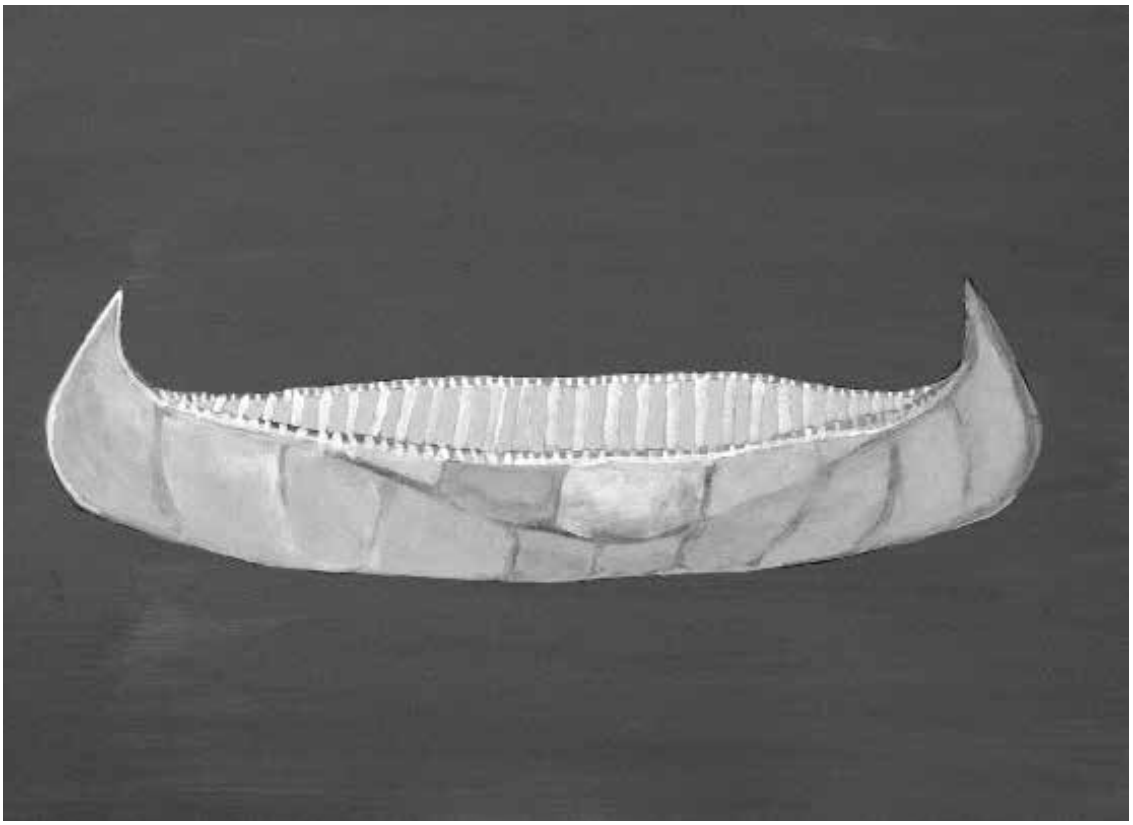


In the map on the left, the grid formation set out by government surveyors is fully realized and depicted. Land has become real estate. Roads and highways determine the arrangement of settlements, trade routes, and industrial development.

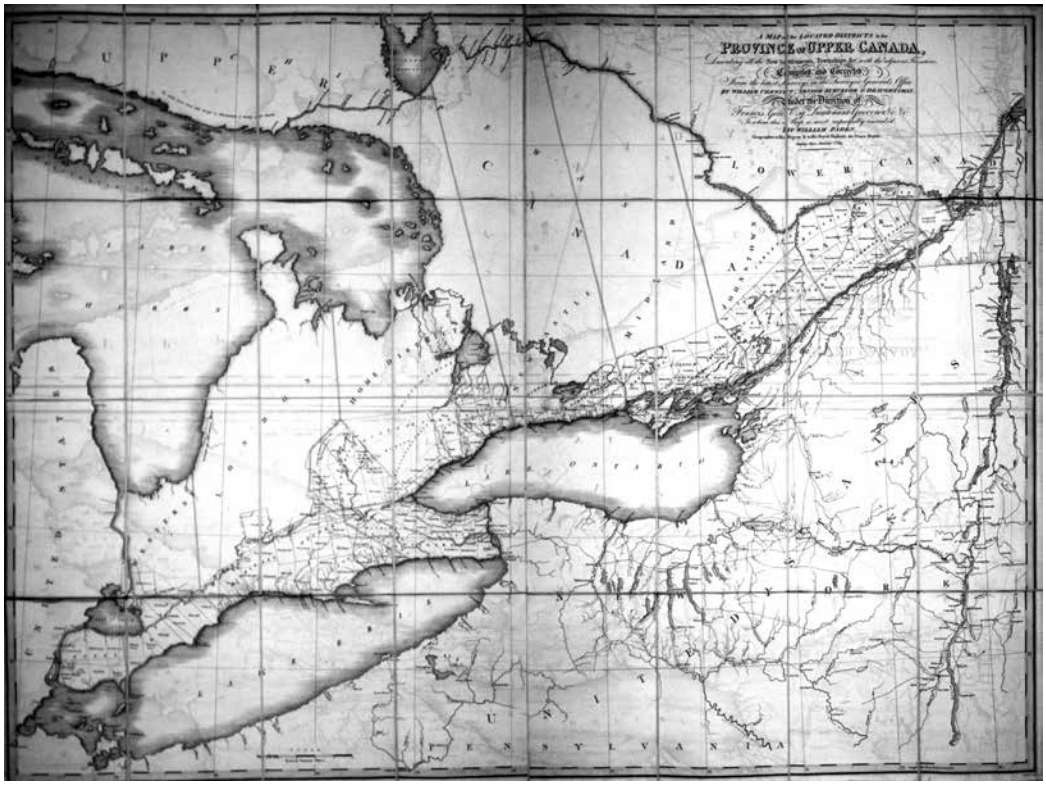
Lands Required to Sustain
Digitally reproduced map *Urban Supporting Areas, produced by the Public Roads and Highways Commission, 1914,* with acrylic painting on board
2018
48 x 18 inches, 122 x 45.7 cm (total dimensions)



Our hope and future dance on the right—the Great Lakes *Nayaano-nibiimaang Gichigamiin*.



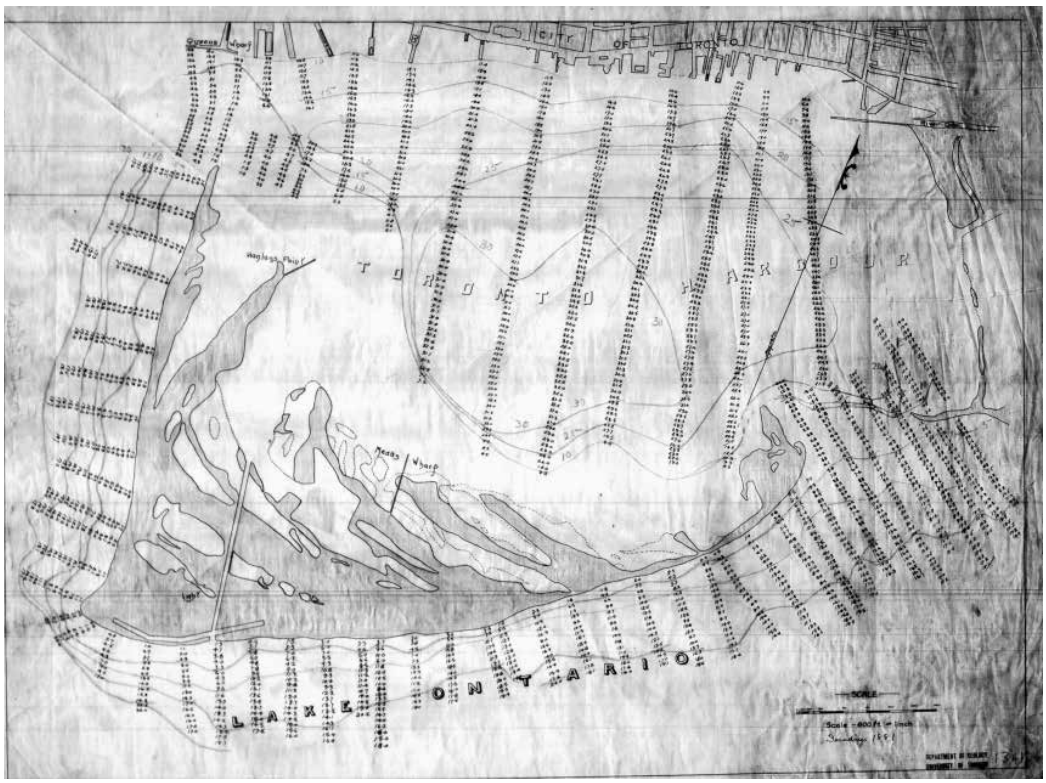
On the right, an Anishinaabe canoe floats suspended on a still lake, waiting.



Settlement
Digital reproduction of *Map of the Located Districts in the Province of Upper Canada, 1813,* and acrylic painting on board
2018
48 x 18 inches, 122 x 45.7 cm (total dimensions)

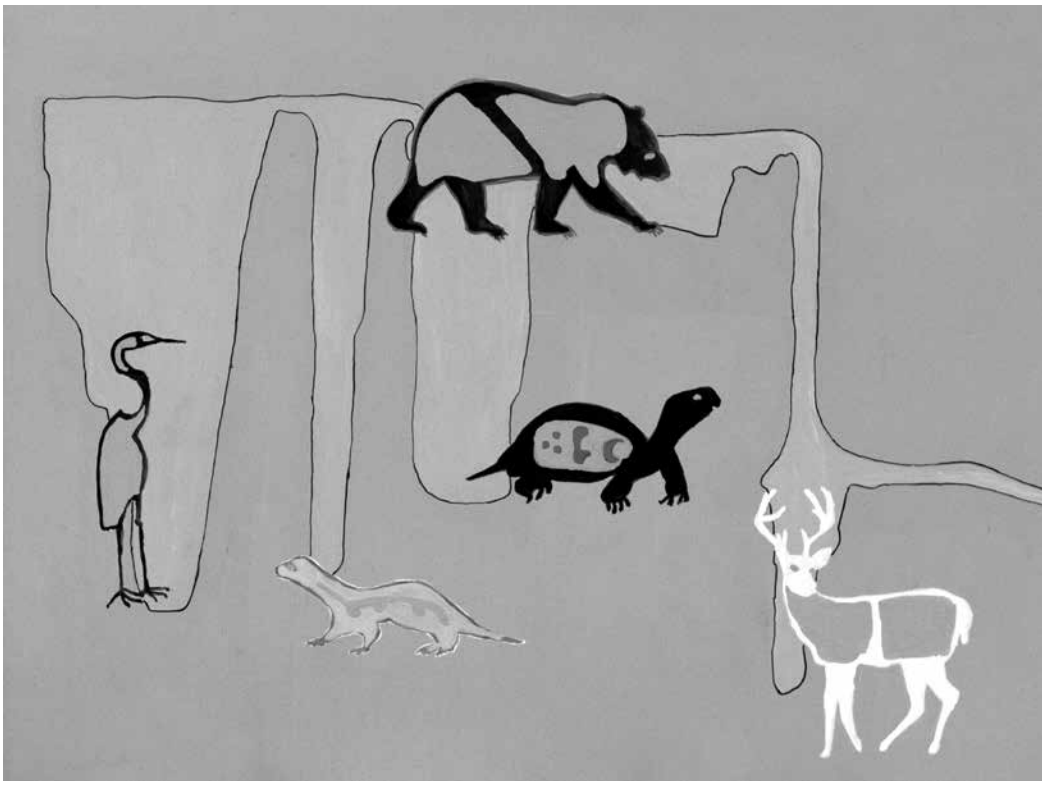
The act of renaming in the colonial project effectively claims occupied precincts for civil habitation and capital improvement. Progress is measured and accounted for as if it has material substance, calculated in land, resources, water, and transportation lanes. The act of renaming shrewdly defaces the national memory, while the country's previous inhabitants are excised from the record.

On the land, however, something endures. The drawing on the right presents the depths and volumes of the Great Lakes and depicts their relations, the land

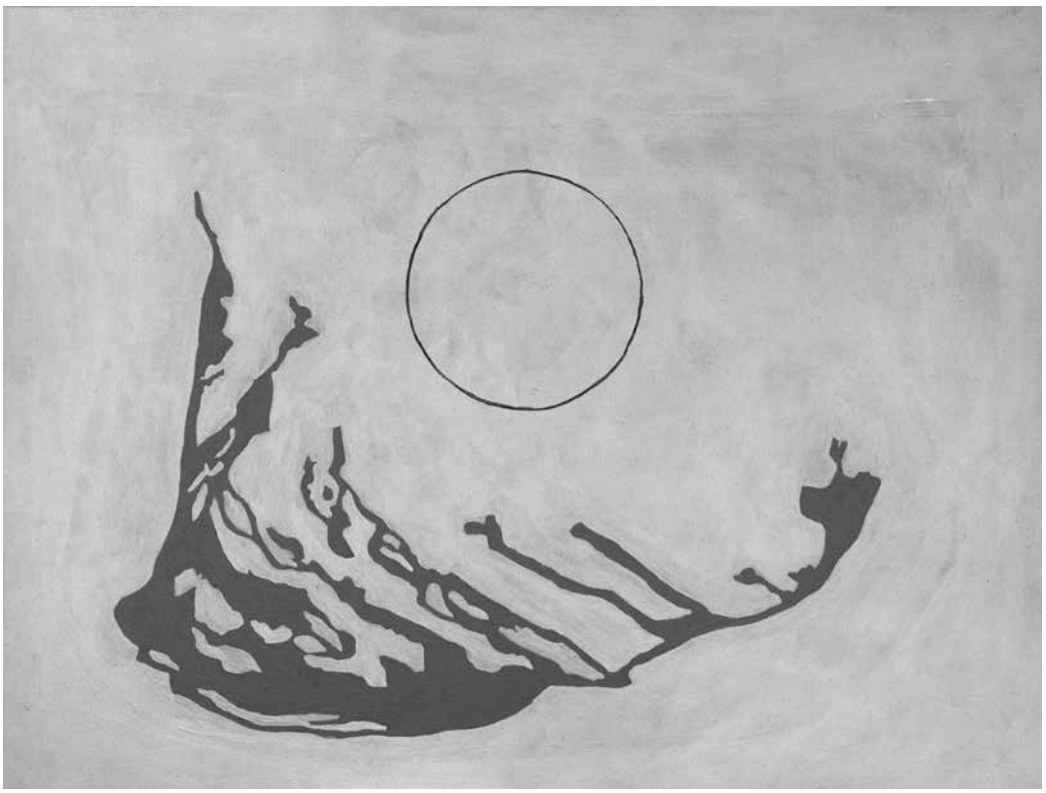


Harbour
Digitally reproduced map (untitled) and acrylic painting on board
2018
48 x 18 inches, 122 x 45.7 cm (total dimensions)

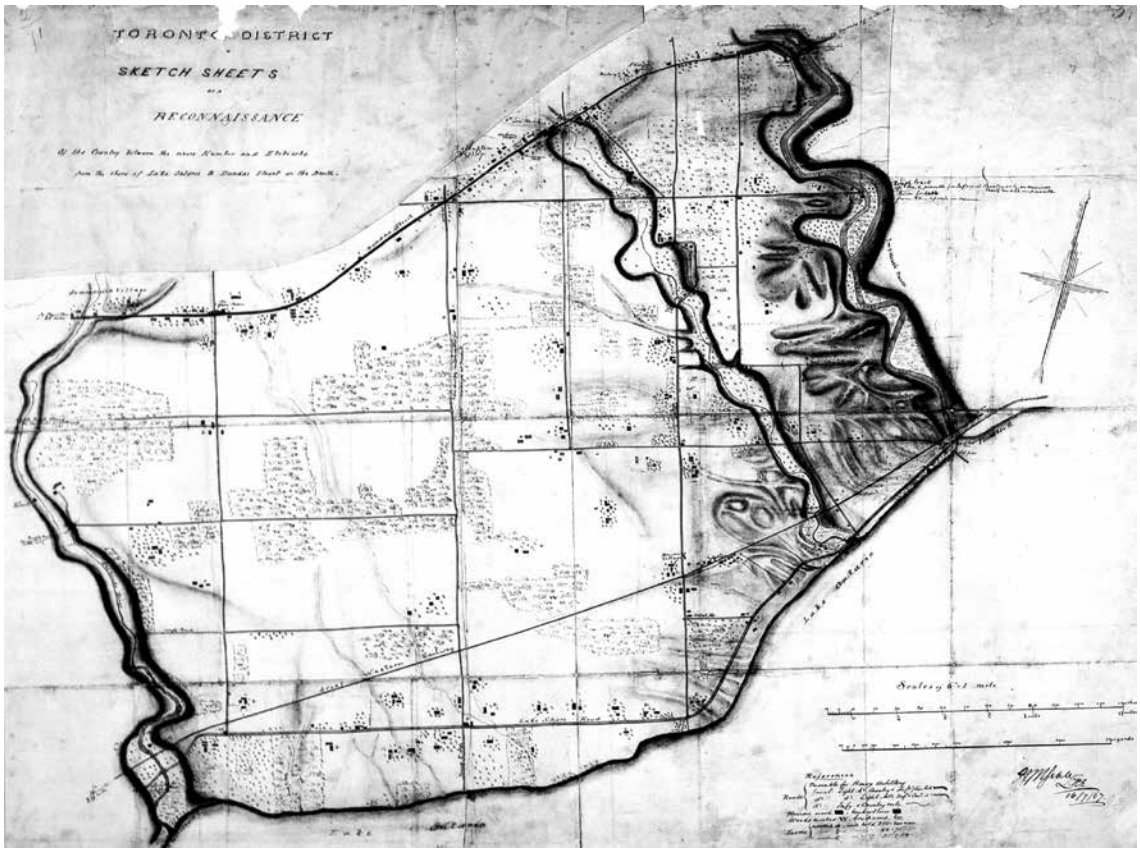
On the left an untitled navigational chart of the Toronto Harbour showing depth soundings and their measurements, dated 1881.



creatures who are sustained by their waters. Pictured are five doodeman of the Anishinaabek: Crane, Bear, Turtle, Otter and Deer.
Ajijaak
Makwa
Mikinaak
Nigig
Waawaashkeshi



Of course the land and the waters have value.
On the right my drawing of the Toronto Island, a recumbent vulnerability.

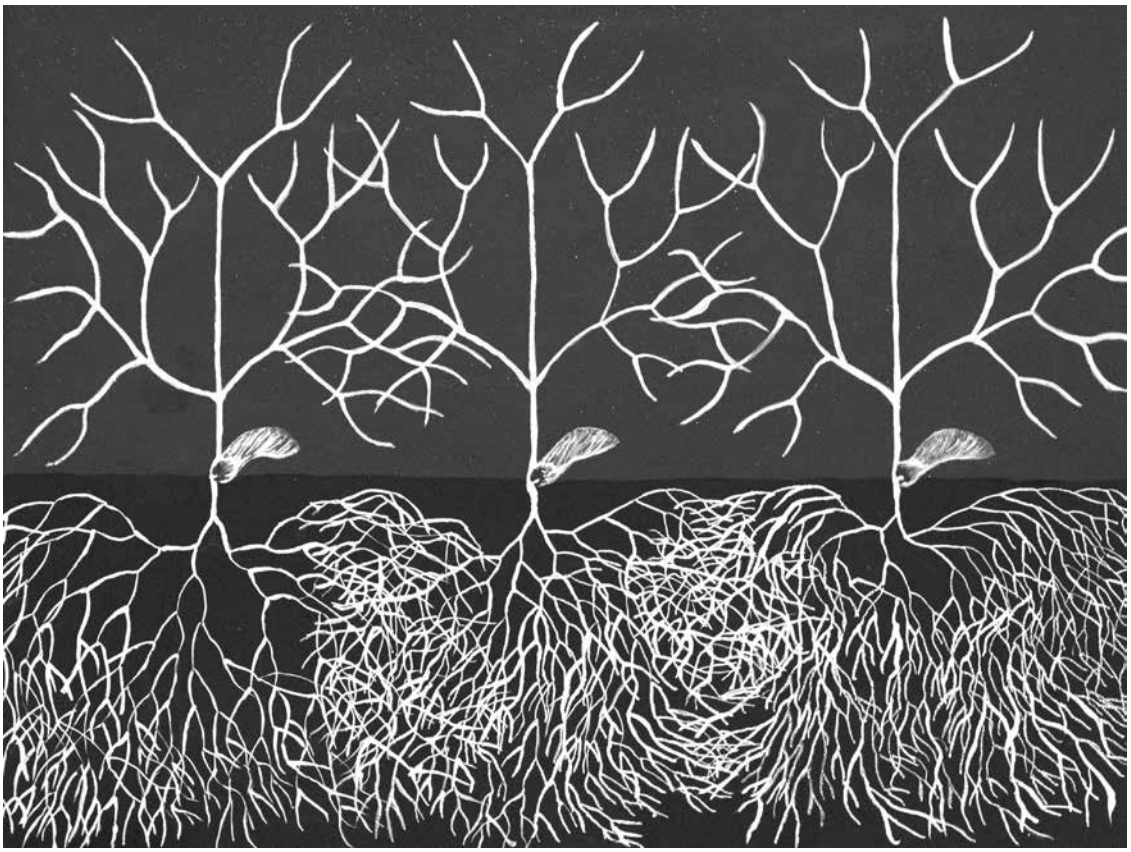


Impassable
Digitally reproduced map *Toronto District Sketch Sheets – Reconnaissance* and acrylic painting on board
2018
48 x 18 inches, 122 x 45.7 cm (total dimensions)

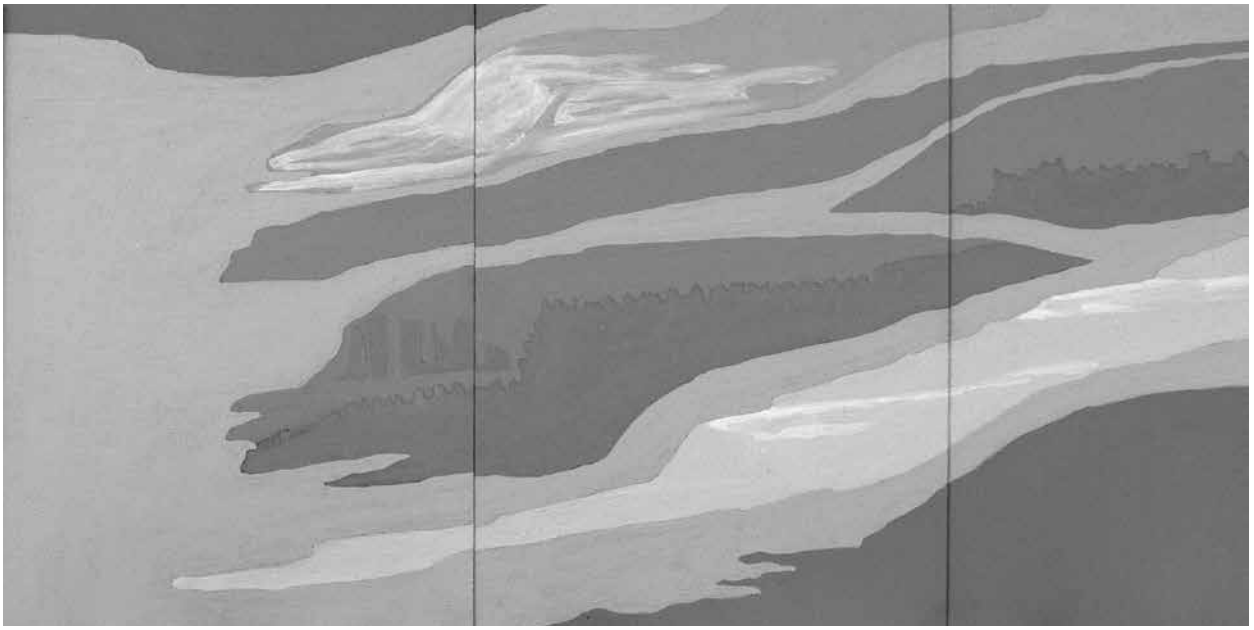
A military reconnaissance map of the western approaches to Toronto, dated July 17, 1767, outlines various natural impediments to attack from foreign invaders. Marshy areas are depicted. Stands of dense vegetation and a series of complicated dunes provide hypothetical protection and fortification for the new town of York. To the right, a small forest of maple seedlings forms a dense mat of tender roots. Their new shoots create tendrils, walls, and enclosures that when fully grown will connect us and guard us from harm.

Ontario 1718
Digitally reproduced map, excerpt from *Carte de la Louisiane et du cours de la Mississippi,* dated 1718, and acrylic painting on board
48 x 12 inches, 122 x 30.5 cm (total dimensions)

The oldest map in the exhibition and abridged from a larger map of the continent of North America by Guillaume De L'Isle, 1675–1726, this chart is remarkable for the attention it gives to Indigenous nations, territories, and populations. Though less exact than later British maps in its depiction of land forms, waterways, and geographical details, De L'Isle's monumental opus presents a representation of the continent that is explicit yet sensitive to another dimension of the land and its occupants.



Both defensive strategies proved ineffective. The Americans landed and burned York in 1813. The maples and other deciduous trees of the vast Carolinian forest were cut down in the destruction and extirpation of the Eastern Woodlands.



In my drawing on the right, the rivers pour into the lake with abundant vitality and life-giving force. Water carves the shoreline and vigorously combs the estuaries that abound with fish, plants, and birds.

Circle of Enquiry for a Dish with One Spoon
Reeds gathered at the Credit River with permission of the Mississauga of the Credit, paper substrate
Dimensions variable

First Line, Mississaugas of the Credit Territory, Hagersville, Ontario
December 22, 2018

Gathered in August 2018, these reeds were carried by road from a ravine on the 1st Line near Hagersville, Ontario, on Mississaugas of the Credit land within the Grand River First Nations Territory. They were laid on the floor of the Art Gallery of Mississauga in the centre of the City of Mississauga. There they were braided into a large, loose ring.

Long years ago, we, the people of the Three Fires Confederacy of the Anishinaabek and the People of the Long House, the Haudenosaunee, agreed to care for and share this place. Our covenant is called the Dish with one Spoon. When the treaty belt was woven between us, the land, our dependence on it, and our love for it were at the centre of our awareness and concern.

Over hundreds of years the Dish with One Spoon covenant has been altered, revised, and violated on account of so very many circumstances, tribulations, and necessities. It has been tested to the very limits of its endurance by long years of conflict, generosity, foolishness, avarice, and forgetfulness. Defunct? Perhaps. Yet also remarkably intact, and essentially unbroken if only we will awaken its spirit and weave it anew.

When the exhibition came down in late December, the circle was dismantled and the reeds borne back to the place where they'd been gathered.

Miigwech to the land for the borrowing.

Additional Reading

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