

Artist Statement - Diana Chabros

“The land is made up of the bones of my ancestors...”¹

Bones mean a lot to me: my own and those of the land. I broke my spine as a child, so both literally and metaphorically speaking, I know the body is one's first home and I understand what it means to lose it. This knowledge forms the skeleton of my artistic path, and compels me toward ideas which connect me to the land. The land is also our home and ultimately the receptacle for our remains. I have come to the realization that I will only remain true to my practice by staying true to the land.

Known to biologists, artists, photographers, tourism operators, ranchers and other locals as 'grasslands', to the Lakota as 'maka tatanka' and the nêhiyaw/Cree as 'paskwaw mostos askiy', the southwest and its natural inhabitants are celebrated for their beauty and resiliency to survive under extremely harsh weather conditions. Compromised, however, by accelerated human intervention, the lives of these inhabitants, (many of them considered species at risk), are compromised to the point that even the soil has become a 'species at risk'.

My visual fascination with life in southwest Saskatchewan, leads me to explore energy in its physical, psychic and spiritual forms as a means to understand my interdependent relationship with the land. The Sanskrit yoga term, *samskāra* refers to the decisions, patterns and habits of thought, action and speech we all develop throughout our lives. These patterns play out with karmic results. I became interested in examining my own *samskāras*, as well as others' across the Southwest, thus each painting documents multiple real life stories; a combination of mine, and those I encounter on coffee row and elsewhere.

Collaging these stories together as visual narrative, the paintings portray actual landmarks along with their non-human inhabitants. I walk the land with camera, conducting traditional protocol as I go. My artistic process is also informed by reviews of historical documents, poetic literature, oral history, my meditation practice, dream work and a specialized dialogue technique borrowed from intuitive process painting. These research techniques allow me to build a working relationship with each painting. As a result I am able to witness, honour, learn from and care for the land and its resident beings. This method of research also allows me to discover the transformative currency of these various forms of energy, and the inherent cycles of life and death.

My ongoing studies with First Nation knowledge keepers, including my life partner, as well as the practices of Yoga and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy move me beyond my colonial understanding of the natural world, and are reflected in my work. For me, these practices, world views and my experience of the land transform my subject matter from simple 'landscape' to a fusion of land, self and other. My artistic practice is evolving into one of reciprocity and humility.

Inspired by contemporary visual artists like Marsha Kennedy, photographers Edward Burtynsky and James Page, and Métis and nehiyaw/Cree interdisciplinary artists Madonna Hamel, Moe Clark and Joseph Naytowhow, the act of painting for me yields a visual health record or 'temperature gauge' of the land and its inhabitants. Painting is how I stay in touch with my subject matter while I am away from 'the field'. My primary way of creating public dialogue about land and related issues to achieve transformation, painting is my act of agency and my medicine.

¹Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015