

THE CREATIVE CURRENT

The presence of place: Artist Leslie Reid

By Vanessa Coplan

“Any landscape is a condition of the spirit.”
Henri Frédéric Amiel

“Before landscape can ever be the repose for the senses; it is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.”
Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

The Baltimore Grotto, an organization founded in 1952 and dedicated to “the exploration, study and conservation of caves,” coined the phrase “take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time.” The life and work of OOS artist Leslie Reid is an incredible example of a woman who lives by this creed. As someone who is able to “walk the talk” or to act in accordance with one’s words, the only place where Leslie’s footprints have left lasting impressions is in her work.

Through the mediums of photography, video, printmaking and painting Leslie has connected us to the far reaches of Canada including Resolute Bay in Nunavut, Cape Pine in Newfoundland, the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in BC, and



Painting of the Llewellyn glacier “Llewellyn I” by Leslie Reid.

also to the New Forest in the UK, the Camargue in France, Point Lobos in California among many other places. She has also recorded the upper reaches of the Ottawa River and the valleys of the Gatineau in her family-focused works. Although the mediums she works with differ from one another, her vision does not; she consistently brings us closer to the rich presence and deeply lived histories of both

distant coasts and more familiar places and peoples, preserving the experience of both. The footprints left from her very deliberate and considered creative search are minimal, while her perceptions are showcased with great conviction.

Driven by both a strong academic background and a deep connection to her past, Leslie navigates her way through geographical place and emotional space as she allows her impressions, thoughts, feelings and perceptions to settle towards the creation of an artwork. There is a feeling of non-linearity here as she weaves back and forth through time and space, in places both well-known and very new in trips she has been on, in the notes, photographs and videos

and to use the original photographs, now archived in the National Air Photo Library (NAPL), to track visible changes in these environments. The project was driven by my deep concern over climate change, particularly in the North, where the effects of global warming are greatly intensified, and a desire to witness the effects of both climate change and increasing commercial pressures on Indigenous communities. It is a narrative of then and now. The paintings, developed from my own aerial photographs, are about the fragility of the North, about ice and climate change. The photographic installations I created explore the interaction of military operations with Indigenous peoples and communities in the North. These communities again have to adapt, now to accelerating climate change, after decades of imposed relocation and resettlement.”

It is remapping visual history; the overall project is called “Mapping Time.”

With her most recent work in the North, Leslie has been invited to exhibit at the Ottawa Art Gallery. With Curator Rebecca Basciano she has chosen to have a collaborative exhibition with an Inuit artist; they have reached out to Clyde River photographer Robert Kautuk, who works with similar concerns in his drone photography and video of his Baffin Island community. His involvement with “The Clyde River Knowledge Atlas” is about carrying his region forward. His photographs show how his culture lives and thrives today, not memorializing an idealized past.

On creative acts and making art Leslie believes that: “curiosity is the main trait of art making – curiosity about experience and place, concepts and resulting mediums; it is where a passion begins. You have to ask yourself, what drives you? The answer is that you keep driving yourself.”

Vanessa Coplan is an artist, art teacher, creative coach and a resident of OOS.



Artist Leslie Reid.

she has taken while travelling. In one particularly powerful series on the Arctic, sponsored by the Canadian Forces Artists Program, Leslie was able to retrace her father’s flights when he was an RCAF pilot. In Leslie’s words, “the Arctic had been part of childhood stories through the many years my father flew there for early photographic mapping. I did not have the opportunity to travel in the North until I found out about the residency with the military, a wonderful gift. I was able to take aerial photographs of areas flown over by the early flights,



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