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My current artwork is intended to help dissolve a form of mind-body dualism maintained by our western social system. In one half of this dualism, the dominant side, resides the “rational” mind that sees nature as an abstract, female-like entity with resources to be extracted and manipulated.

In order to sustain this dominance, we numb our bodies, shutting off sensory yearnings for fresh air and starry nights. Physiologist Rene Dubos observes that humans can adapt (via culture) to “starless skies, treeless avenues, shapeless buildings, tasteless bread, joyless celebrations, spiritless pleasures—to a life without reverence for the past, love for the present, or poetical anticipations of the future. But, he says, “it is questionable that [we] can retain physical and mental health if [we] lose contact with the natural forces that have shaped [our] biological and mental nature” (Shepard: 147).

The other half of the dualism holds our sensory, emotional bodies as inhabitants of the cycles and systems of the Earth. A focus on our bodies in this context raises the ecofeminist notion of care and relationship with all life. In her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy* Karen Warren states that “...An ecofeminist ethic provides a central place for values typically unnoticed, underplayed, or misrepresented in traditional ethics...for example, values of care, love, friendship and appropriate trust. These are values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to an understanding of who we are.” (P. 178).

Within ecofeminist philosophy, caring, mental activity, and body awareness are not separate, but form a continuum of intelligence. I believe it is with this expanded intelligence, sustained by a healthy sensory experience of the natural world, that we will begin to shift from environmentally destructive behaviors toward the life and work choices that harmoniously include animals, plants, soils, air, and water. My art introduces people, through the mind and the sensory, to an element of the Earth—the concept of watershed—and a possibility for a caring relationship with the watershed ecosystems in which one lives.

A watershed is the basin shaped by surrounding hills into which rain falls, forming streams that run to the sea. Some watersheds are wild, some lightly populated by humans (rural), and some are paved over by asphalt and buildings. Humans and all other living things, as well as soils, weather, and the flow of energy, depend on the Earth’s sculpted surface: the contours of watersheds. The watershed we rely on most, usually the one we live in, is our home watershed. Our sensory ability, honed over millions of years, enables us to develop a strong connection to place, its natural elements and human community. This proficiency, when kept sharp and bright, tells us when our environment is balanced or stressed.

In his book, *Reconnecting With Nature: Finding Wellness Through Restoring Your Bond with The Earth*, Michael J. Cohen presents a list of 53 senses and sensitivities (P. 48-50). These attributes, functioning in concert, respond similarly to invisible moth-like antennæ that inform us about our world. We sense balance and gravity, rhythm and motion. Moisture, dryness, and wetness are discerned through distinct senses. We perceive color, shape, and volume, and can determine temperature, thirst and hunger, motion, pain and pleasure. We are capable of a sense of wonder.

Poet Gary Snyder eloquently explains how we came to acquire such an array of possibilities when he says,

How could we be were it not for this planet that provided our very shape? Two conditions—gravity and a livable temperature range between freezing and boiling—have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. The “place” (from the root plat, broad, spreading, flat) gave us farseeing eyes; the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. The land gave us a stride, and the lakes a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. We should be thankful for that, and take nature’s stricter lessons with some grace (P. 28-29)

I focus my art at the union between our body and home watershed for a number of reasons. For one, it is in this place that we usually begin to make the small changes that eventually lead to environmental healing. For example, watersheds, like neighborhoods, can be contemplated in tiny increments. Each one of us lives near a small wash, creek or stream, although it may be hidden within a culvert. With some attention, we can learn to feel the slope of the land and course of the water flow,

sense the direction of the breezes and become acquainted with the plants and animals that live there.

Secondly, a watershed includes not only other living beings, but also whole systems of interactions between water, soils, rock formations, energy, chemistry, and air. Since water permeates all, it is through water that our home extends beyond four walls. In fact, by drinking from the same source for seven days, all the fluids in our cells and veins are replaced by that water. In effect, we become, along with other animals, small wandering tributaries of the watershed from which we drink.

Third, an environmental consciousness, dawning on some of the human residents of my home watershed, has awakened me to the possibility of an entirely new paradigm in which people place a sense of kinship with the non-human world foremost in their everyday decisions just as they might think first about a child or friend in their conversations and plans. This consciousness motivates many people in my community to form watershed alliances that collectively work toward public education and watershed protection.

My vision as an ecological artist, therefore, is to encourage deeply personal relationships with the wild. For example, *The Salmon Skin Capes* and the series of *Cape Fragments* are watershed maps that imply that the watershed in which we live can be experienced as a garment that both touches our exterior and fills our interior. The maps speak to the fact that our blood vessels, the blood streams of fish and otter, and the sappy channels of trees are in a relationship that makes us all tributaries of the same stream. This art series encourages familiarity with our own source of water, even if it flows from a tap. Displaying translucent imagery and embedded words, these cape-maps remind us that, through water, we are in close contact with other species that live in our watershed.

Walking In Deeper is a set of handmade nature guides, booklets that fit into a pocket like a shell. Made to be used on walks anywhere from backyards to back country wilderness, the words and phrases open awareness to the sensual: to gravity, light and dark, intuition, up and down, dampness and dryness. Here are some excerpts from the booklets:

- Sit still until something falls.
- Startle your skin.
- Smells that drifted off of dinosaur eggs are still riding on the breezes.
- Sniff the wind for clues.
- Bury your feet.

The Ant Bridge is ephemeral art made of leaves and twigs by seventh grade science students. The young people, born in a city of pavement and dirty streets, were awed by the velvety textures of the leaves they found on the ground. Here, community and process were most important. The project encouraged relationships between art and science, adults and children, humans and other life forms.

By habit we are voyeurs of nature. We watch nature shows on TV, sunsets from our cars, and birds from our kitchen windows. *The Bird Feeder Hat* brings us even closer. A participant wears a wide-brimmed, brushy hat covered with seeds. She or he must sit silent and still in order to feel the movement of birds on the hat. The experience is vivid and sensory. It highlights a species in a watershed, and it encourages, with an accompanying mapping activity, getting to know one's home watershed intimately through the senses.

In summary, the sensory defines my ecological art practice. Science and technology have given us all the tools and know-how we need to halt environmental destruction today. What is missing is a feeling of kinship and empathy that motivates us to include the health of our watershed in our everyday decisions.

By awakening the senses and establishing an emotional familiarity with place, we learn to fly on another's wing feathers, swim with another's fins. It is my hope that, having had such experiences, people will become conscious of the destructive impact that dualistic thinking has on their place, will begin to take action to reverse this condition and will fall in love with their home watershed. This effort inspires me to imagine a day when, watershed by watershed, small groups of citizens everywhere will participate in the healing of life on Earth.

Works Cited

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