

NORTHERN FAMILIARITIES

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### **Abstract**

Rooted in the disciplinary traditions of Fine Arts, Geography, and Cultural Studies, this thesis seeks to understand how an understanding of melancholy and longing related to memories of one's familiar cultural landscape illuminates a place-based Francophone cultural identity. To understand the unique elements of northern Francophone Ontarian cultural landscapes and define northern familiarities, I pose the following questions. 1) What images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity? 2) Does juxtaposing Sudbury's cultural landscape images with images of an estranged location highlight the unique elements of Sudbury's cultural landscape? 3) Can place-based cultural identity be defined by visualizing the affects of longing, melancholy and stranger-ness when creating art-based research of Francophone Ontarian northerners from Sudbury. The creation of 3 large paintings accompanied by 100 postcards were exhibited in Sudbury and in Toronto in search of the answers to these questions.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Creative Practice .....	7
Research Questions .....	10
Chapter Summaries .....	11
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Frameworks and Context .....	14
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Research Design .....	36
Fine Art Methodology .....	37
Phenomenology .....	38
The Curatorial .....	39
Geographic Location .....	41
Instrumentation.....	43
Choice of creation location: Sudbury .....	46
Choice of creation location: Toronto .....	51
The Curatorial .....	59
Research Limitation .....	60
Credibility-Dependability.....	60
Conclusions .....	61
<b>Chapter 4: Findings .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Data Collection.....	63
Artist Statement.....	83
Exhibition Reflections .....	85
Conclusion.....	86
<b>References .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>96</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the history of art, melancholia has led many artists to investigate the unique relationships of cultural landscapes and visual identity. The artistic fascination with place-based identity continues to interest contemporary artists, in some part due to the challenge of representing the power of place and defining how it sculpts an individual's identity and the collective identity of a community. Consciously or not, humans have an attachment to the place and the landscapes where they live or grow up, and in turn, they shape those landscapes. Thus, the daily human experiences in a particular place shape the cultural identities of individuals and groups sharing that place. Cultural identity implies a sense of belonging to a place causally related to a cultural landscape shaped by a particular geographic place and specific culture, including language, that develops those landscapes.

Cultural and human geography studies the interactions between humans, culture, and place. This research will investigate these interactions and use the effects of site-specific visual cultures along with affect theories, including the power of melancholia, to identify the essential nature of a cultural landscape, particularly the visual cultural landscape of Francophones from northern Ontario. When northern Francophones in Ontario move beyond northern familiarities and lose the relationship to language and familiar accents, the essential nature of cultural landscapes becomes clearer. Human geographer Edward Relph observed that the study of place must go beyond formal geography to include an exploration of "the entire range of experiences through which we all know and make places" (Relph, 1976, p. 6). He added that "the spirit of place lies in its landscapes" (p. 6). Relph's work supports the focus of this thesis to understand if and how melancholy and longing related to memories of one's familiar cultural landscape illuminate a place-based Francophone cultural identity. Relph suggested that an intense identity

with place can be “essential to self-identity, reinforced by memories of landscapes and events, accents, attitudes, and beliefs that comprise an individual’s geographical past” (Relph, 2021, para 11). These landscape effects build an individual and collective identity while interacting in a circular relationship that impacts the landscape in return.

In environmental psychology, Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff argued that place-based identity consists of feelings and knowledge developed in a place through a range of experiences. Giesecking et al. also supported the idea that cultural identity influences the way we adapt to or interact with the cultural landscape of a new place.

A sense of place identity derives from the multiple ways in which place functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning, foster attachments, and mediate change.

The place identity of a person can inform their experiences, behaviours, and attitudes about other places. (Giesecking et al., 2014 p. 73)

Relph discussed this concept that the relationship with place can be “just as unpleasant as our relationship with other people” (2008, p. 33).

Cultural embeddedness in a familiar environment can lead to cultural blindness, defined as a failure to appreciate the comfort of this embeddedness. The familiarity leads to an inability to recognize a social and cultural landscape’s unique features in the familiar environment.

Removing oneself from a familiar environment causes comparisons and gaps between cultural landscapes and experiences. Whether the new environment is better or worse, the individual carries their cultural identity and the familiar place’s power to impact their intentions, experiences, and actions spatially and attempts to insert them into the new cultural landscape.

Julia Kristeva explored this place-based impact and described it as a sense of “stranger-ness” that can be unknowingly triggered by an unfamiliar environment (1991). Faced with a new,

unfamiliar cultural landscape, the individual compares it to the one that shaped their fundamental identity. For those no longer in the familiar landscape that reflects their identity, a sense of turmoil, confusion, and loss can manifest, defined here as melancholia.

I was born and raised in Greater Sudbury, geographically the largest municipality in Ontario and the second largest in Canada, covering approximately 3,627 square kilometres peppered with lakes. In 2010, I left Sudbury to study and work in remarkably diverse cities. I spent a semester studying language and culture in Quérétaro, Mexico. I documented my au pair experience in Istanbul, Turkey, in a journal and later in paintings. I worked in Banff, Alberta, where I was isolated for a short time by the flood of 2013. Travelling alone, I connected with my French heritage on the arrondissements in Paris, France. I spent time in Spain, where I admired the architecture of Barcelona. I witnessed the resilience of New Yorkers in Manhattan days after Hurricane Sandy made landfall. Finally, I volunteered at La Selva Biological Station in Costa Rica, where I worked alongside volunteers from around the world to save the rainforest. During each trip, I experienced longing and a *mélancolie* for familiar language and culture. I missed the familiarity of the landscape of my northern home on the Canadian Shield. While living in unfamiliar places, I compared cultural landscapes, which led to studying the relationship between culture and place. I was trying to define the concept of what I called northern familiarity. As an artist, these attempts to define the concept of northern familiarities led to a creative focus on painting cultural landscapes.

In the context of the broader Western culture, there has been little interest in elaborating on and celebrating northern Ontario's history, identity, local culture, language, accents, and landscapes. As a northerner and a Francophone, I seek to rectify this oversight. I need to examine my northern Francophone community's cultural landscape to understand how its visual and

cultural identity fosters a sense of belonging to this familiar environment. Francophone northern Ontario culture should not fall under a blanket definition of French-Canadian culture, which most people would relate to the very different cultural and historical experiences of the Quebecois. In his thesis, Edward Relph initially investigated the relationship between Canadian national identity and the Canadian Shield's symbolic landscapes (Relph, 2008). My research borrows Relph's conceptual model and refines the scope to research the relationship between Francophone northern Ontario cultural identity and the unique landscapes of northern Ontario and the Canadian Shield. My exploration led me to initiate specific research on the subject. Using *mélancolie* as a tool to decipher the visual cues of Francophone culture, I studied stranger-ness, longing, collective memory and assessed the cultural landscape as visual components of the



Figure 1: Above and Below, acrylic on wood panel, 2015

natural and built environments. For me, writing about melancholia takes a powerful meaning as my writing and the need to communicate its relationship to cultural identity springs from that very *mélancolie*.

For this research, I define melancholia as a feeling of pensive sadness fueled by an absence or sense of longing. Its mystery and anguish have inspired much artistic production.

I created paintings capturing site-specific cultural landscapes. In Figure 1, melancholia is the tool used to pinpoint Greater Sudbury's

cultural landscape's valuable and distinctive elements. The simple act of identifying the effect of melancholia caused by the lack of a familiar environment highlighted the environment's power on the individual and the sense of self. By removing myself from the familiar, I quickly began to long for a place that I could identify with on a cultural level. I created a collection of paintings called *Northern Familiarity*. The paintings in Figures 1 and 2 were featured in the *Connection-Connexion Exhibition* in 2015 at the Living Arts Gallery in Mississauga.

The absence of the familiar environment caused a strong sense of melancholia that fueled a search for the familiar. By undertaking such a search, I discovered which visual elements I was longing for and marked them as precious elements of my home's cultural identity (Figure 1). I



*Figure 2: Sunset on the Black Rocks. acrylic on wood panel, 2015*

was not homesick; neither did I want to move back home. However, no longer embedded in my familiar place, the longing triggered awareness of the missing critical cultural elements of

northern familiarity. The search for the familiar led to the study of experts such as Freud and their analyses of mourning and melancholia along with Julia Kristeva's research of longing. This allowed for a more profound understanding of the environment's effect on a community and individual identity.

Memories are rooted in specific places in the familiar environment, and they are shared collectively amongst those who inhabit the environment as they create a coherent identity. The longing for critical elements of the familiar was fueled by the unfamiliar in the new environment. Figure 2 reflects memories of sunsets in Greater Sudbury.

The study of scholars such as Julia Kristeva and Shelly Hornstein and their work on melancholy shaped my thoughts and refined my processes. Julia Kristeva's literary career is grounded in a cultural critique of depression and melancholy powered by geographic unfamiliarity and the sense of being a foreigner. Her book *Stranger to Ourselves* (1991) exposes the effect of travel and how it fosters self-caused melancholia. The book highlighted a foreigner's experiences, recognized melancholy as part of the travel experience, and examined the individual's conscious idea of self based on stranger-ness. Shelly Hornstein, an expert in visual culture, focuses on memory and connections to cultural sites in her work. Her research touches on longing, not precisely melancholia, which informed my research's cultural visual aspect due to the scholar's expertise in travel, cultural artifacts, and visual culture. Hornstein spoke about the need to communicate the effects of an environment. Her book *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (2011) was a powerful influence on my research, as she highlighted the use of the postcard as a cultural artifact and method of communication. Hornstein identified the postcard as an influential tool (method) to disseminate the meaning of places, and

she explained the power of a postcard to capture a memory or sentiment and send it somewhere else.

Kristeva's concepts of melancholia, geographical unfamiliarity, stranger-ness, and the foreigner, together with Hornstein's studies of memory and place, and cultural artifacts like a postcard, paved the way for my research as an artist. Through my research and artistic practice, I examine the role of visual culture in a Francophone community in northern Ontario. To better analyze the community's cultural landscapes in Sudbury and gain insight, I relocated to the urban city of Toronto, triggering a melancholic, self-induced longing and emotive response to familiar and unfamiliar cultural landscapes. The lack of visual cues of northern Francophone culture caused a sense of stranger-ness and heightened emotions of melancholy, longing and a desire for communication in French, my first language. A need awoke to communicate visually and in French.

### **Creative Practice**

Shelly Hornstein published research explaining how postcards with images of places can both trigger memories of being in the place or share the experience of a place supporting its emotive power. This original creative research looks deeply into the visual culture of northern cultural landscapes and the emotional effects on identity and collective memory with an interdisciplinary approach. The dense emotive response to stranger-ness could not suitably be translated into words but has been examined extensively through my creative practice and supported by solid theoretical and literary references. By thinking of postcards as cultural artifacts, my research led to the search for the familiar by creating a collection of postcards capturing the cultural landscapes of Toronto and a series of three paintings of the northern cultural landscape.

The approach, in this case, is to juxtapose the cultural landscape of the North with the contrasting cultural landscape of Toronto, to shed light on the elements that trigger the sense of being a foreigner or stranger to define northern Francophone culture through the experience of melancholia and nostalgia for the first landscape. Documenting the cultural landscape of Sudbury as a Francophone, alongside the cultural kaleidoscope of Toronto, I offer the viewer the time and space to experience my melancholic longing for a familiar place and cultural landscape. The viewer reflects on what is present or missing in the visual images of both landscapes that make it possible to identify the visual component that defines the Franco-northern cultural landscape.

To this end, I created a series of three large acrylic paintings of Ramsey Lake in Greater Sudbury in the spring of 2016 and a collection of 100 small mixed media postcard-sized artworks of Toronto using collage acrylic paint techniques. I painted each of the large paintings *en plein air* during a trip to Greater Sudbury. The colours reflect the natural and built landscape of the city in early spring. The large paintings draw the viewer from afar and engage them in the experience of discovery.

The collection of small-scale mixed media paintings and hand-made postcards is tangible and approachable and captures various built environments. Each postcard was mailed individually from Toronto to my childhood home address, where my parents still live by the lake. They were later returned directly to the Toronto exhibition location. The cards show traces of the process of travelling both to Sudbury and back to Toronto. Through the postcards, sent, received, and collected, the essence of the postcard becomes clear. The collection clarifies the importance of postcards as a method of capturing a place, as described by Hornstein (1991). Each postcard represents an intimate moment with the city of Toronto, its architecture, natural

spaces and happenings, and the people of the city. Its natural and built environment, as seen by the creator, becomes an experience for the viewer.

The dramatic juxtaposition in size and quantity, with paintings and postcards, reflects different places and emotes the dense kaleidoscope of visual cultural diversity in place and the vast open natural landscapes of the other. Each medium has a very different effect on the viewer. The visual representation goal was to juxtapose the elements of the cosmopolitan city with the familiar cultural landscape of the northern Francophone community. The body of work distinguishes art's capability to conceive and reconfigure the cultural, visual, and social landscape.

My research led to a collection of postcards of unfamiliar cultural landscapes and a series of paintings of the northern familiarity. In addition, the scope of the project's engagement with my research questions led to the production and collection of:

- Still photographs of a personal collection of historical images and postcards
- Still photographs and video documentation of site locations for visual research
- Still photographs of Sudbury as a research site
- Still photographs of Toronto as a research site
- Professional still photographs of a collection of study of scale paintings – Northern Familiarity Collection
- Still photographs of the creative process of large paintings in Sudbury
- Video documentation of the creative process of large paintings in Sudbury
- Still photographs of the creative process of postcard making in Toronto
- Professional still photographs of a collection of large paintings – Beyond Northern Familiarity Collection

- Still photographs of postcards when they arrived in Sudbury
- Still photographs and video documentation of curation, installation and exhibition at the Art Gallery of Sudbury
- Still photographs and video documentation of the exhibition at the Propeller Gallery in Toronto
- An eBook published in the spring of 2018

I discuss each of the above in more detail in other chapters.

### **Research Questions**

Rooted in the disciplinary traditions of Fine Arts, Geography, and Cultural Studies, this thesis seeks to understand how an understanding of melancholy and longing related to memories of one's familiar cultural landscape illuminates a place-based Francophone cultural identity. In this context, I reviewed the current literature on cultural landscapes, human geography, melancholia, art-based research, studies of place, fine art and visual culture, and theoretical and methodological contributions on this topic. I captured photographs of elements of the place-based Francophone cultural identity in Greater Sudbury's landscape. Next, I contrasted these images with images of Toronto that sparked the feeling of longing and melancholy for the familiar visual cultural landscapes and language. I looked for elements related to each other and informed the Francophone identity and cultural landscape. Finally, I explored how I could visually represent the *mélancolie* and longing for Francophone culture and landscape related to my familiar cultural landscape memories through my creative practice.

To understand the unique elements of northern Francophone Ontarian cultural landscapes and define northern familiarities, I pose the following questions.

1. What images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity?
2. Does juxtaposing Sudbury's cultural landscape images with images of an estranged location highlight the unique elements of Sudbury's cultural landscape?
3. Can place-based cultural identity be defined by visualizing the affects of longing, melancholy and stranger-ness when creating art-based research of Francophone Ontarian northerners from Sudbury

### **Chapter Summaries**

I discuss my literature review, methodology, results, and conclusions in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 begins by reviewing the work of people who have asked similar questions. Next, I describe the foundations of my interdisciplinary creative research and how it fits into current knowledge and is reflective of the disciplinary traditions of Fine Arts, Geography, and Cultural Studies. Finally, I question what inspires my work and how postcards and landscape paintings are relevant to the research process through my creative practice.

Chapter 3 discusses my creative practice, methodology, and artistic methods applied to studying culture and geography. Finally, I discuss art-based research and how my work fits into previous scholarship.

Chapter 4 presents images of the artwork, the exhibition, the curatorial practice, the creation of the limited-edition program book and how theory fits into the results. Finally, I discuss aesthetic interventions, installation of the exhibition in both research sites, Sudbury and Toronto, and the artwork selection process for inclusion in the exhibition.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the purpose of the limited-edition program book and how the artwork has been able to help the viewer understand how a place-based

Francophone identity can be illuminated by an understanding of melancholy and longing relate to memories of ones' familiar cultural landscape through an interdisciplinary lens.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the work of scholars who have asked similar questions about visual culture and relation to site specific identity through the frameworks of melancholia, place-based memory, and visual cultural landscapes. Finally, I describe my interdisciplinary creative research foundations, how it fits into current knowledge, how it belongs to and reflects the disciplinary traditions of Fine Arts, Geography, and Cultural Studies. To understand how melancholia and place-based memory can define the visual cultural landscapes of Francophone Ontarian northerners from Sudbury, I define melancholia and its relationship with a specific place through the lenses of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva. I also apply the place-based memory research of Pierre Nora (1989), and Edward Said (1977) to this art-based research. I then review the literature on longing and stranger-ness as emotive responses. As a northern Ontario Francophone, I examine how place-based memory carries the stories and images of those who lived experiences in a specific place long after they are gone. Through this new interdisciplinary lens, I question what inspires my work and how postcards and landscape paintings are relevant to the research process through my creative practice. Finally, I discuss how all the research elements provide answers to the questions identified in Chapter 1 and inform and relate to the Francophone identity and visual cultural landscape.

To best deconstruct the questions at hand and add depth and focus to my research scope, I draw on scholarly literature in cultural geography, communication and cultural studies, and visual arts. In Chapter 2, I present and discuss the three research questions I presented in Chapter 1. First, to answer the question about what images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity, I review research on how place-based memory holds the stories of our lives long after they are gone. Second, to contrast the profound effects of images of Sudbury

and Toronto's cultural landscape on Francophone identity, I review the literature on longing, melancholy, and stranger-ness as emotive responses. Finally, through my creative practice, I clarify how the remembered past and the current location and their relationship to each other and the scholarly literature inform Francophone identity and cultural landscape.

By combining elements of scholarly literature in cultural geography, communication and cultural studies, and visual arts into a new interdisciplinary lens, I analyze, through my creative practice, concepts of melancholy, the idea of a postcard as a cultural artifact, and the ability of cultural landscapes to evoke place-based memories capturing place-specific identity.

### **Frameworks and Context**

#### **Melancholia**

To contextualize melancholia, I approached it from three different frameworks as I worked through its intense effect. First, I understood the bearing an environmental affect can have on identity, then looked at the emotive response of longing and its power to identify the stranger within and the stranger-ness in an unfamiliar environment. Finally, the research narrowed in to examine how loss plays a role in melancholy yet differs in many ways.

#### **Environmental Affect**

Cultural landscapes, including memorials, protected natural land, iconic architecture, and other geographic particularities, become part of a community's visual identity. Wandering past such objects daily, even if we are paying little to no attention, still significantly impacts both in terms of their presence or absence. The significance of such overseen visual components is brought to light when missed from a distance. Removing oneself from the familiar, from a specific cultural landscape, triggers emotional responses to previously unacknowledged visual components.

Melancholia and its relationship to a specific place lie at the heart of my project. Elements like mining memorials, rehabilitated protected natural landscapes, iconic architecture, hundreds of lakes, and geographic particularities become part of a community's visual identity. The act of wandering daily through the city, through a cultural landscape, past the visual components of this specific place, disregarding their importance, significantly impacts a community's identity both in terms of the presence or absence of elements. The significance of the visual components is brought to light when they are missing. Removing oneself from the familiar triggers an emotional response to previously unacknowledged visual components of a specific cultural landscape.

According to DeLyser's cultural-historical geography research studies (2009), an affective reaction to an environment causes emotional responses to a particular space, place, and time. Visual cues often trigger these responses. DeLyser's research focused on landscapes, and social memory defines emotions as hardwired by distinctively open to being translated cognitively into conscious, subjective experiences with cultural content, historical, and place specificity. Biggers and Pryer's expertise (1982) on cultural communications were fused into the writing of *A Function of Emotion-Eliciting Qualities of Environment*, which supports DeLyser's theories as it defines the characteristics of the environment's powerful sensory elements as the combination of the luminosity of light sources, the nature and level of ambient noise and acoustics, the presence of specific odours, colour hues and shades, and materials and atmospheric factors such as temperature and humidity.

I agree with DeLyser's description of emotional responses to landscapes shaped by discourses concerning place-based identities. DeLyser (2009) describes the power of landscapes in visual culture by explaining how "landscapes are used as imagined spaces that hold images,

desired collective memories and ideologies” (p. 242). Even though landscapes themselves are concrete, the viewer experiences the environment’s visualization in unconscious, practical, and unarticulated ways. The insufficiency of words justifies my use of visual art as a form of articulation of the emotional responses to landscapes experienced by painting the landscape and later through the viewers’ experience of the paintings. However, paintings cannot capture the entirety of the landscape’s complexity, as smells and sounds can provide this density and trigger emotional responses to places. If, alternatively, an artwork can trigger the memory of an experience, the viewer may fill in the other sensory elements through personal lived experiences. Also, an artist’s process is crosscut with melancholia, making it suitable for presenting this research data. Various techniques and production processes allow for artwork’s visual components to capture and emulate the same sensory responses to landscapes as the lived experience.

### **Emotive Response: Longing**

Historically, the study of emotions often falls in the department of neurobiology and psychology; however, contemporary scholars have welcomed interdisciplinary approaches. This includes a wide variety of new combinations of disciplines such as emotional geographies and bio-artists who engage with affect theory. These interdisciplinary artists can integrate emotional psychologies and neurobiology in relation to human emotions and strive to produce visual work that is a response to their research and will affect their audiences. Professor William Reddy, the specialist in emotions and researcher of theories of culture, explained landscapes as emotive and can establish or alter effects on people’s memories and physical level reactions (2001).

Psychology is also tightly connected to the study of environments and their effect on culture.

These effects are emotional and become embedded into the individual’s subconscious needs and

relation to culture. Artists continually blur the lines of psychology and cultural environments to discover the meaning behind emotive responses.

Many professionals blur the lines in contemporary academic studies and create interdisciplinary studies, such as German psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer and his book *Gut Feelings* (2007), which studies a non-rational emotive response to one's environment. Our emotional self dictates our behaviour, and as Gigerenzer stated, we need to be part of a larger group, whether religious or based on nationality, which often triggers our emotions. Gigerenzer based his understanding of the need for a community on Charles Darwin's explanation of the human instinct to cling to a tribe:

A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes. (Gigerenzer, 2007, p. 211)

Consistent with Darwin's view, anthropological studies indicate that social norms that support loyalty and generosity toward all group members tightly regulated most traditional human cultures. French northern Ontario culture is very young, and it is still tightly woven emotionally and geographically and has held on to this tribe mentality as reflected in its visual culture. The younger generation is constantly reminded to speak French with honour and pride and reflect and remember the trials and tribulations of the first Franco-Ontarians, including the now overturned law that denied Francophones their language rights in education less than 100 years ago. With such a strong sense of community and pride, an individual removed from this culture feels a sense of loss and melancholy (Freud's definition of melancholy instead of mourning) without consciously knowing what is explicitly missing.

Although research into the scientific approach to studying culture is exciting, it places importance on environmental neuro-biological responses to culture. Alternatively, my research focuses on culture, geography, visual arts, and affective responses, such as melancholia, triggered by one's environment, and how cultural identity reflects these responses.

Christian Nold (2016) is a cultural activist with a fine arts background who believes in an interdisciplinary approach meshing both the technological measurement of neurological responses to the environment and the arts. In his project BioMapping, one reasonably basic technological approach measured emotions (Nold, 2016). Nold collaborated with residents to discover how they reacted emotionally to aspects of their local landscape. Over the last several years, he has wired up thousands of people with GSR (galvanic skin response) devices that work like lie detectors to measure their high and low emotional arousal points as they walk around their neighbourhoods. They then annotated these mapped journeys, explaining why they reacted emotionally in particular places. Nold's technical approach based on neurological research suggests that "place cells" in the hippocampus are thought to become active when they are in a particular known place (Redish, 1999, p. 93). These cells help to focus and integrate memories, making them coherent. What is essential from the point of view of landscape researchers is how malleable the human brain is. Scientists and artists alike agree that the environment, whether it is natural or built, can profoundly affect someone's sense of self and memory. Christian Nold stated that this technology helps us understand how landscapes shape emotional and psychological states (2009). Longing for a landscape, a cultural landscape, might be measurable to some extent. His artistic project authenticated the study of cultural landscapes with emotive responses, adding validity to this study of Sudbury's cultural landscapes and its relation to Francophones' sense of belonging and melancholia through reliance on visual components.

Claiming the environment has a personal effect on people is a broad statement; I argue that the lack of a familiar environment causes a sense of melancholia and longing. These emotions can lead to a better understanding and identification of visual cultural landscapes. The research on “place cells” further legitimizes the familiar environment’s effects on an individual’s senses (Nold, 2016). A familiar environment can be comforting and can grow deeply rooted, consciously or not, into one’s sense of self and connection to cultural identity. When feelings such as melancholy and longing are further deconstructed and analyzed, it is possible to identify the elements of an environment or visual components that define a specific culture.

### **Emotive response: Stranger-ness**

When travelling, travellers often describe longing as homesickness. A need manifests for the comforts of the familiar and the recognizable. However exciting, exploring the unfamiliar, wandering without mooring, leads to a self-evoked melancholia, a stranger-ness. Julia Kristeva is a very influential cultural philosopher with an extensive body of work, including cultural analysis, art, and art history. These studies have a strong influence on the frameworks of this research. Kristeva (1991) discussed the concept of melancholia as a self-imposed longing in the “Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner” chapter in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Kristeva deconstructed individuals’ emotions from their familiar environments as she considered the foreigner and the mourning for home as they pass through phases of nostalgia. She described the foreigners as dreamers “making love with absence, one exquisitely depressed” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 58). Her use of the term “exquisitely depressed” resonated with this research due to its strong link to melancholia and longing; it is the individual’s own doing, and it’s caused by removing oneself from one’s home environment. However, it may be painful; such a removal reveals the critical components of self-identity and relations to a cultural group. The significance of this

insight in her research is to question which lacking elements create such a strong affect. Kristeva dissected a few elements responsible for the emotive response, including sights and language.

### **Loss of Language**

There is an overwhelming sense of comfort when I hear someone speak French with a northern Ontario accent for the first time in a long time. The tone, the expressions, the accents, and the slang of the mother tongue will cut through a noisy room and resonate, leaving a sense of longing while providing a taste of home. Kristeva analyzed the effects of the mother tongue and how someone is affected when the use of this language is eliminated from their day-to-day life. She compares the act of not speaking one's mother tongue to the loss of a limb. She further says that a new language is a new tool that leads to the sense of a new body, an artificial or constructed self. She observes that language is strongly linked to self-identity and has the power to link together people under one identity. The new language creates a newly constructed self that cannot return to its original mother tongue, as it is rusted and compromised. Kristeva (1991, p. 15) claimed the foreigner to be "between two languages," left in the realm of silence. Interestingly, she went on to give an example of a foreigner who turned to artistic outlets "just in order to say something." (p. 16) Removing myself from northern Ontario to study from a distance and do so in another language, not my mother tongue, created a need to express my research artistically to express the data without language limitations. Kristeva's research also justifies the careful investigation of French culture, as its language defines the cultural identity differently from others occupying the same geographical land.

Kristeva's work is relevant for Franco-Ontarians stripped of the right to have schools in their mother tongue because of Regulation 17 in 1913. Forced to speak English and abandon a key component of Franco-Ontarian culture, Francophone communities were othered. The

Franco-Ontarian communities became foreigners in their land. According to Kristeva's notions, the Francophone community became foreigners when the consciousness of their differences arose (1991, p. 1). This regulation was reluctantly repealed 27 years later. Its impact goes beyond its implemented years and has long-term cultural effects. During these years many Francophones, like my own grandmother, dropped out of school early and were pushed into the realm of silence. The Francophone community is still working on recovering from such cultural and educational deficiency. My grandmother, for example, no longer speaks French and was unable to pass down our cultural history. As Kristeva suggested, a search for a new form of communication led to the use of art. Due to the removal of written language support, Francophone culture in Northern Ontario is heavily based on the spoken word, which includes sharing history through storytelling, music, theatre, and visually through the arts. This link to visual and artistic expression explains the strong relationship to visual culture and the facility to define the culture through an artistic expression of northern Ontario's cultural landscape.

### **Freud and Melancholia**

Kristeva often draws on similarities between her work and Sigmund Freud's work. In his article entitled "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1917) argued that melancholia was a response to loss, and Kristeva (1989) applied similar frameworks and ideologies to her study of loss. Both academics tackle melancholia, but through different lenses, to help understand the longing and melancholia for familiar cultural elements. Melancholia, per Freud (1917), is a "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to the degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment." (p. 244). Kristeva's definition seems a bit more hopeful in its depression as she implied a use for the

melancholia in a search for one's self-identity. However, both Kristeva and Freud strongly defined melancholia as an affect caused by one's surroundings. The artwork created in northern Ontario for this thesis represents both views. Although there is a pain in melancholia as explained by Freud, there is also hopefulness as described by Kristeva, as lost elements of cultural identity are identified and acknowledged.

Sigmund Freud's (1914) field of expertise did not concern visual culture; however, his theories and research included environmental effects and touched on identity and the self. His study of melancholy and mourning examined the comparisons between the two affections. He concluded that the common element of both melancholy and mourning is a significant loss; however, they differ in various ways. Per Freudian theories, "a loss is not defined by a death, yet one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred" (Freud, 1914, as cited in Bokanowski, 2008, p. 21). The essential factor here is the individual's inability to see what has been lost and to what degree it has affected them. This inability is even more reason to suppose that the individual cannot consciously perceive what he has lost, suggesting that melancholia is in some way related to an object loss withdrawn from consciousness, in contradiction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious. When entirely consumed by one's familiar environment, it is not easy to pinpoint the key elements that significantly affect one's sense of place. The loss of place and space triggered by geographic unfamiliarity caused by a physical and emotional displacement can highlight the description and definition of the place's key elements. The displacement process allowed for a clearer view of what visual elements of Francophone culture were missing in the new urban environment.

Freud's explanation of the differing relations of melancholia and mourning to displacement explains the choice to define the emotive response used in this search for the

familiar as melancholia. Kristeva explored the displaced individual who recognizes nostalgia's role in melancholy. Unlike Freud, who strictly relates melancholia to the loss of an object, Kristeva applied melancholia to the loss of place and space.

Visual culture expert and art history theorist Michael Ann Holly, like Kristeva, relates melancholia to art history and art objects (Holly, 2013). Going one step further, Holly proposed the use of melancholy as a central theme to reveal unrelated visual narratives estranged by era and insight into the discipline of art history. Holly validated the use of melancholy as a tool of research. Holly presented melancholia's ability to engender a kind of creativity born from deep awareness. Holly's interdisciplinary view meshes psychoanalysis, philosophy, and art history to explain how art has historically had the power to evoke a sense of intertwined pleasure and loss—the essence of melancholia, for the artist, viewer, critique, and art historian—and how this essence of melancholia tells stories that were previously marginalized or unseen. My search is to understand the *mélancolie* and longing I feel when I am away from northern Ontario. I desire to use melancholy to understand, guide this research, and inspire the art products created.

### **Place-based memory**

Objects and environments causing emotions of melancholia or fostering a sense of communal culture are not mere material or embodiments of raw nature. They are animated by the many lives of people who either cherished or abandoned them; landscapes and cultural artifacts describe and hold memories as rich as our own. Places carry rich histories, and their visual iconographies trigger memories of those who experience them.

French historian Pierre Nora (1989), specializing in identity and geography related to collective memory, and cultural geographer and curator Karen Till (2001), who uses an interdisciplinary approach to further the research about place, collective identity and memory

and creative practice, both have greatly contributed to the studies of the cultural geography of collective memory and identity using interdisciplinary approaches. Nora is known for his concept *lieu de mémoire* defined over three volumes in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. A *lieu de mémoire* is a significant addition to cultural geography and place-based memory. His main argument is that visual elements, material or non-material in nature, effected by human will or the work of time, can become symbolic elements of the collective place-based memory of any community. The three volumes identify the places and the visual elements in which are the incarnate national memory of the French. Similar to this research's goal to visually capture and identify a particular cultural landscape, Karen Till curated Mapping Spectral Traces (2010), which also reinforced the relationship between human geography, identity, memory and fine art. "Spectral traces, especially at places marked constitutively by acts of violence and injustice, often re-emerge when a society is undergoing change; individuals may come into contact with past lives through objects, natures, and remnants that haunt the contemporary landscape" (p. 1). Till's use of curatorial methods and visual arts is particularly inspiring in relation to this research. Like the historical conflicts faced by the Francophone community of Northern Ontario, Mapping Spectral Traces analyzed effects of displacement and injustice on a cultural landscape: "Memories and traces of displacement in particular have the potential to disrupt established zones of social identity, allowing the excluded to re-imagine how they might inhabit the spaces from which they and their ancestors were removed" (p. 8). The concepts of landscapes holding histories and phantom scars aligns with the theories of landscapes as palimpsest defined by Carl Sauer later in this chapter.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1980) defined memory as a social activity, as an expression and active binding force of group identity. Halbwachs's definition makes strong ties

between memory and place as he links cultural environments as a factor in communal identity. Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman (2004) published an article entitled “Memory and Place: Geographies of Critical Relationship” in which they argued that memory and place conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities. When referring to collective memory, they acknowledged the expansion of the subject going past psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies and gradually into geography.

Edward Said (1977), a cultural critic, contends that many people look towards a new view on memory, particularly collective memories, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, and a place in the world. Said showed how the confluence of memory, place, invention, and power added up to what he termed “imaginative geographies”—the construct of geographical spaces that paid little attention to the actuality of the region’s geography or its inhabitants but more accurately reflected the fantasies and preoccupation of the inhabiting agent.

In *Remembering, Repeating and Working-through*, Freud (1914) claimed memory itself to be an archive and a generator of the past’s effects and traces. The compulsive acting out of melancholy could be transformed through remembrance and reflection, leading to identifying the self. Freud pointed out that the key is to search through the archive of one’s memory and work through the experience and process of remembering. Freud furthered this philosophy: intending to share recollected memories is not specifically to convey a happening but rather its value lies in the storyteller’s life as he passes on a unique experience. The acts of storytelling and sharing have strong parallels to communication through postcards. Both need to share the past or an ephemeral moment.

Postcards have taken on a leading role within the more significant move towards a consideration of visual culture in interdisciplinary research. As images that are carriers of text,

and textual correspondence that brings images across geographic boundaries, postcards are cultural artifacts that provoke the choices of subject, producer, sender and receiver. Hornstein spoke to the power of the postcard: “Postcards as visual and textual objects impact on our consideration of architecture, nation-building, geography, image-making, and the construction of ideologies” (2011, p. 75). In this research project, the postcard captures Toronto’s unfamiliar environment, architecture, and cultural landscapes. The images captured in the Toronto postcards identify the constructed identity of the vast metropolitan city. Their purpose is to juxtapose the cultural landscapes of Sudbury to visually identify the components that are particular to each’s identity. The ephemeral material object lends itself well to the capturing of the bustling ever-moving city’s cultural landscapes. Analysis of the postcards is under the following three perspectives: the postcard as a cultural artifact, the use of architecture images as the power of the built environment and the images, and the storytelling of cultural landscapes.

A postcard is a unique object with powers of visual, textual, and tangible communication. It transports a recorded moment from one location to another. By recording and connecting Toronto and Sudbury, the postcards’ travels become visual documentations of the city viewed in northern Ontario. Dydia Delyser’s chapter, written in *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (2010), encouraged readers to examine the often-under-analyzed memorial practice of visual documentation. Her research demonstrated how analyzing the relationship between collective memory and place requires paying attention to small things, such as people’s photographs, postcards, and stories in addition to their more visible monuments and museums. Delyser set up a strong backbone for this project’s goal to capture a city’s identity and memories through postcards.

In her book *Losing Site*, Shelly Hornstein (2011) argued that postcards capture the memory of place and send that place somewhere else: “postcards play a significant role in perpetuating the meaning of places” (p. 10). Sharing a postcard triggers a sensorial recall for those who have visited and know the place depicted, and for the receiver, the image becomes an ideal icon or keepsake for a dream about a place. According to this perspective, the postcard is a tangible memory that triggers a nostalgic memory for the sender. In this artistic project, the postcard creations explore the stranger-ness of the new environment and capture the new city’s visual cultural landscapes. These postcards seize the melancholic moment for the sender whose environment juxtaposes its northern familiarities.

Postcards have the authority to engage and inform individuals. Hornstein (2011) argued that the “postcards as visual and textual objects impact on our consideration of architecture, nation-building, geography, image-making, and construction of ideologies” (p. 75). Furthermore postcards, unlike other forms of fine art, can measure time. They mesh time, place, and space into a mobile cultural artifact by capturing an image of a site with a date and text.

Postcards have historically captured natural and built architectural icons that best describe a specific location. Architecture is used as a cultural landmark, as it is unique to its geographical location, often based on climate, spiritual practices, and lifestyle. I argue that both built and natural landscapes are the key visual factors to define and identify collective cultural memory. These ideas, refined in contemporary studies, date back as far as the Victorian Era when artist and art critic John Ruskin (1849) published *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and stated that “We may live without architecture, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her” (p. 165). Rooted in events and places with architecture, Shelly Hornstein (2011) argued that architecture is more than a building and should be “the mapping of physical, mental

or emotional space” (p. 172). Hornstein claimed the postcard had an influential role in perpetuating the significance of places.

For this project’s purposes, the postcards capture Toronto’s diverse visual cultural landscapes and create a visual communication network by sending them to Sudbury. There are plenty of touristic and national icons within the city’s architectural landscape; a city’s local cultural production responds to global cultural tourism. As per Hornstein, a museum’s architecture and context have always attempted to house and nurture a national image while preserving national heritage concepts. As an architectural tourist icon, a museum fosters a sense of imagined community and national anchor (Hornstein, 2011). Hornstein validated the power of architecture as a cultural symbol and recognized its structural use as mobilized by the postcard.

### **Cultural Landscapes**

Francophone culture in Sudbury is strongly tied to the use of language, storytelling, and the landscape. The first Francophones settled in Ontario during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when the region was part of the Pays d’en Haut region of New France. Settlement of northern Ontario remained limited until the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the railway in Sudbury in 1883. A large number of Francophones established themselves in the area for work in forestry, agriculture, and mining. By 1911, they represented 35% of Sudbury’s population. A local Francophone professor, Father Germain Lemieux, left a particularly remarkable legacy. He conducted ethnological surveys in Francophone communities throughout Northern Ontario from 1948 to 1972, assembling an impressive collection of 3,100 traditional songs and 680 traditional tales and legends, handed down orally from generation to generation. The Centre franco-ontarien de folklore (CFOF) now houses this collection, as well as more recent inventories of tangible and intangible Franco-Ontarian heritage. The Centre organizes storytelling and sing-along evenings

to keep this heritage alive. It was in Sudbury, in 1969, that the first, fully publicly funded French-language high school opened, École secondaire Macdonald-Cartier. I attended high school with the son of one of designers of the Franco-Ontario flag. In the 1970s, Sudbury was at the centre of the turmoil surrounding Franco-Ontarian identity that eventually laid the foundation for a distinctive Franco-Ontarian culture. In 1971, a group of Laurentian University students founded the Coopérative des artistes du Nouvel-Ontario (CANO), as a reaction to the rise of nationalism in Quebec that redefined French Canadian culture. Their objective was to define their own distinct identity as Franco-Ontarians with minority status. This collective of young artists launched multiple initiatives: they created Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario, the publishing house *Prise de parole*, and *Galerie du Nouvel-Ontario*, and formed a musical group called CANO. History students joined the movement and created the Franco-Ontarian flag, which was flown for the first time in Sudbury on September 25, 1975. The visual and oral histories held the community together with a common goal to protect and preserve the language and culture and the land that provided jobs; they did so with art (further discussed in chapter 3).

Without written documentation, the culture's history is recorded in their artistic heritage, including architecture, oral storytelling and songs, and crafts. Hornstein (2011) explained that “we wear the architecture of our everyday lives like a skin, with the expectation it will always be there to protect us and continue to provide the shell within which we become defined” (p. 88). In my opinion, the same could equally be said for a cultural landscape. Cultural landscapes are fundamental to one's identity of home and place. They allow us to learn about a culture's identity and its communities from their architecture and traces of their relationship to their land.

In the case of northern Ontario Francophone culture, landscape plays a significant role in cultural identity. David Lowenthal described the landscape as “all-embracing — it includes

virtually everything around us” (Lowenthal, p. 1). Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1989) defined landscape as a way of seeing. Consequently, I define landscape as a form of imagination, representation or sensory perception of the land. American cultural and historical geographer Donald W. Meinig (1979) stated, “Any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads” (p. 66). Following a review of these landscape researchers’ studies, I resolve that landscape is both material and ideological, as it impacts those who experience its sight. The Sudbury landscape paintings in spring were created on-site, including the land’s sensory perception and what lies within my head, as suggested by Yi-Fu and Meinig.

Carl Sauer, a well-known professor in modern cultural geography, reads the landscapes as evidence of the past (Denevan and Mathewson, 2009). In his studies, he used the term palimpsest as a metaphor for landscapes; this term refers to a written document that is erased and used again as it leaves evidence of its previous use and erasure marks. Essentially, palimpsests in this use of the word refer to landscapes as having multiple layers and holding traces of their history. Landscapes can hold a wealth of information and offer clues to the history and cultural identity of local residents. Northern Francophone culture has very little documentation of its history; therefore, studying its visual cultural landscapes allows for a better understanding of the culture. Many geography experts such as Donald W. Meinig (1979), British geographers and historians, such as H.C. Darby (1948), landscape historian W.G. Hoskins (1955), and Richard Muir (2000), in their varied ways, all see a landscape as a profoundly layered palimpsest. Others similarly describe landscapes in various ways as, “a priceless archive” (Zelinsky, 1993, p. 1295), “a record of change” (Darby, 1948, p. 426), or “a continuous process of development or of dissolution and replacement” (Sauer, 1963, p. 333) that can reveal past cultural histories to those with “trained eyes” (Duncan & Duncan, 2009, p. 225). Defining the trained eye is a challenge;

however, in this project, the trained eye would be the artist's eye, gazing, observing, and absorbing the natural and built landscapes and using the creative process to create a collection of artworks that communicate the visual data collected.

Duncan and Duncan's essay (2009) about landscape interpretation compares Carl Sauer to the French historical geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache; both have similar poetic approaches to landscape as a palimpsest (Duncan & Duncan). Vidal's approach to landscapes and his belief in their ability to be visual indicators of a relationship between culture and nature legitimizes the approach used in my research and creative expression. Like Sauer, Vidal was concerned "not to break apart what nature has assembled" (p. 193) to understand the correspondence and correlation of things, whether in the setting of the whole surface of the earth or in the regional setting where things are localized (Martin & James, 1977). Both these innovative conceptual perspectives of landscapes, designed to preserve authenticity and understanding, justify the creative approach and methodology applied for this research. While both Vidal and Sauer's approaches are holistic and romantic descriptions, they reiterate the same conclusion as other geographers on the topic. They also allude to the relationship many cultures hold with their land, spiritual practice, and communal identity. The Francophone culture does not necessarily have a religious relationship to the land like the Indigenous people who occupy northern Ontario; however, they have a cultural relation to the land, as their ancestors were farmers and miners, and their livelihood came from the land. Landscape and its connections to people are undeniable; the power of place sculpts a community, and this concept is supported by decades of geographers, anthropologists, and cultural critics who have found new ways to look and define the same phenomenon. The melancholia previously discussed is sourced from a disconnect from this solid tie to the land and visual surroundings rooted in Franco-Ontarian cultural identity.

W.J.T. Mitchell (2002) is an art historian who redefined landscapes in his first edition of *Landscape and Power* by seeing landscapes as an instrument of cultural authority and a fundamental tool for creating identities. He defined visual culture as a form of being. He suggested that landscape should be used as a verb rather than a noun by looking beyond the questions of what landscape is and research the power of what landscape can do and its importance in cultural identity. This approach investigates beyond the visible surface of landscapes to reveal the complex narrations and justifies using an abstracted painting method to capture its power compared to a photorealist approach to painting, which would simply study its visual surface. Again, cultural-historical geographer DeLyser is a valuable resource, as she agrees and supports Mitchell's approach by affirming that cultural landscapes play a central role in the practices and performance of place-based social identities, community values and social distinction (DeLyser, 2003). Sudbury landscape is distinctive and reflected in the paintings created based on the theories and frameworks of the cultural landscape.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond the books and articles, lived experiences have fueled the investigation into the Sudbury community's unique relationship with their particular cultural landscape and its power to identify Francophone culture. It has been vital to examine the cultural landscape of the northern Francophone community in a visual and cultural context after seeing firsthand the lack of research on the subject and the power visual arts have in Francophone culture.

Defamiliarization is one reliable method to view any current situation with fresh eyes, requiring the removal of oneself from the subject altogether. As I stepped away from the northern city of Sudbury, immersing myself in a contrasting environment, I was fully aware of the absence of familiar Francophone elements. Working on-site in Toronto, I faced a strong emotive response,

a *mélancolie* for the familiar. Postcards, created by hand, were the physical expression of travel from one cultural landscape to another.

This research draws on academic literature in cultural geography, communication and cultural studies, and visual arts. The project's major frameworks are rooted in melancholia, place-based memory, and the cultural meanings of postcards and landscape paintings. Those frameworks are then deconstructed, without disciplinary limitations, by applying various subject lenses to bring forward the most valuable information. Melancholia is rooted in affect science, cultural history, cultural geography, and even neurobiology and creative practices. Nonetheless, this research chooses to focus on its relation to culture, geography and artistic creativity. Something deeply personal fuels my creative practice; what is bad for your heart is good for your art. Melancholia is theoretically defined and finds its place in many disciplines, reinforcing its value as a creative tool. Postcards, analyzed by historians, cultural geographers, art historians, and iconographers, have a strong footing in historical, artistic practice as an effective political and cultural tool. By pulling from the various definitions and uses for these frameworks, the project is built on a foundation supported by a wide range of expert research and produces valuable relations as it bridges gaps between disciplines and various forms of knowledge.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I discuss my creative practice, my methodology, and the artistic methods applied to the study of culture and geography. I detail art-based research and how my research fits into the previous work. I begin by framing the research design and locating the project geographically. Next, I list the instruments used for data collection and making, followed by a detailed description of methods applied to the data collection and making.

For artists, the creative process is the most valuable and noteworthy element of cultural production. During this art-based research project, particular attention was directed to both the process of artistic practice and the research process itself. This chapter offers a detailed account of methodology as a process, documenting the journey undertaken towards completing works of art that reflect upon Sudbury's cultural landscapes and their power to inform the Francophone community's collective identity.

Whether it is in an academic context or a person's creative expression and process, art-based research typically starts with realizing that you cannot ultimately know or define the outcome when you begin the work. In contrast with scientific methods, you know little about the final product of an artistic experiment when you are at the beginning. The most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly, and even against the creator's will in the creative process. The capability to bracket the outside influences and create a work intuitively without a forced hand allows for an authentic product and elevates artwork's value as research data. The defining aspect of knowing through art is the emanation of meaning through the process of creative expression.

When approaching this interdisciplinary project from a methodological standpoint, it was vital to consider the standard scientifically-based approach's ability to direct or influence creative research. Rooted in the disciplinary traditions of Fine Art, Geography, and Cultural Studies, this thesis seeks to understand how a place-based Francophone cultural identity can be illuminated by understanding melancholy and longing related to memories of one's familiar cultural landscape.

To understand the construction of self-identity within the geographical culture of Franco-Northern Ontario and to integrate the methodological design through an interdisciplinary approach, I utilized an amalgamation of Clark Moustakas's phenomenological methodologies and the fine-art-based creative practice methods of Stroud Cornock. Components of visual anthropology and curatorial methods such as aesthetic intervention inform this project's methodological foundation and theoretical frameworks (Madeja, 1974). Observations, research, and artwork, done both in northern Ontario and away from the familiar environment, become part of a theoretical framework that clarifies the key elements that define the northern Francophone cultural landscape (Cornock, 1983; Moustakas, 1994). Analytical approaches, including data selection and collection, art-data creation, looking, and relooking at collected artifacts, art, and analysis through close reading, are integrated into the research design. The methodological approaches will materialize to a visual representation of the conclusions in an installation in an art gallery space.

This chapter illustrates my process of creation for both creative and theoretical research. I begin by framing the research design and locating the project geographically. Next, I list the instruments used for data collection and making, followed by a detailed description of methods

applied to the data collection and making. Afterward, I present the crucial step of data analysis and procedures. The project limitations explanation follows, allowing the space to explain what this project intends to be and its structured boundaries. Subsequently, the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research are defined. Finally, I describe the expected findings before arguing the significance of the chosen methodological processes.

### **Research Design**

The research design is an amalgamation of both a fine art methodology and a phenomenological methodology, and its result is analyzed using curatorial frameworks. An art-based methodology allows for flexibility in the creative process and visual data discovery yet provides a logical structure to the project. Art methodology is not a prescription that ensures successful or good art. However, it provides a reliable framework within which human intuition, emotion, and invention play. One might propose that fine art by its very nature is an anti-method, but even an anti-method that includes chance, chaos, randomness, and anarchy is, in fact, a method. Expert in visual art studio research Robert Nelson (2009) justifies the use of anti-method in a situation where the research is “setting out to make a creative cultural contribution with unique authorship, an idea” that frames the research appropriately (p. 5). There are strong parallels between creating a painting and conducting scientific research. It is as if art and its process are already research without actively having to stress doing art research. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck, communication studies professors, argued for the power and abilities of creation within a social science research. They coined it “research-creation” and define it as “an emergent category within the social sciences and humanities that speaks to contemporary media experiences and modes of knowing. Research-creation projects typically

integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of a study” (p. 2). The methods of this project would align with their definition of “creation-as-research”: “It is a hands-on form of theoretical engagement at the same time as it acknowledges the processes of analysis and articulation of new concepts that are potentially part and parcel of artistic creation” (p. 21). This concept supports the methodologies that allow the artistic practice of this research by acknowledging the artwork as research itself (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012).

The creative processes and tools applied during creation include data collection, selection, analysis, testing, critique, problem-solving and contextualization like those of the scientific methodology.

### **Fine Art Methodology**

The process undertaken for this project follows Stroud Cornock’s (1983) identification of the following cyclical pattern of activities, the first three being generative and the remaining three being analytical and reflective: generation, selection, synthesis, articulation, presentation, and critical discussion. His methodology was produced for the actual problem-solving situation and is not a vague artistic experience. The goal of his methodological process, according to Peter Checkland (1981), is “not (to be) precise, like a technique but should allow insights which precision might exclude” (p. 162). Cornock was a fine arts teacher and needed to provide structure without smothering the student. This method is ideal for this research due to its flexibility, creative freedom, and theoretical writing balance. Nelson (2009) identified this method as an intuitive semi-structured process: “the next intuition is not dictated by a method but arises by the stimulation of the last move” (p. 46). Due to the nature of this approach, the

translation of art experiences into expressive language can present challenges. Although I agree that artistic knowing is not always easily reduced to the language and considerable truth of a phenomenological declaration, I believe there is value in describing the unfolding of thoughts and decision making (Knowles & Cole, 2008). The written component allows another level of transmitting information similar to an in-depth artist statement with theoretical backing. Writing is a practical tool, not a qualification of legitimacy.

The final component of Cornock's fine art methodology (1983) is a presentation—a gallery exhibition—that includes words as a meaningful part of understanding the context and, perhaps most importantly, an audience. The exhibition had limited didactic text to lead the viewer to be immersed in their visual experience. Words were captured in the limited edition printed program, including a visual documentation of the exhibition. In this case, the curated display of my artwork is its publishing and public engagement with an audience.

### **Phenomenology**

Artistic practice is a phenomenological inquiry intertwined with the creative process for a particular purpose. The phenomenological method is a personal and intuitive effort to suspend the common attribution of meaning to a phenomenon instead of approaching it without preconceptions to apprehend its essence (Spiegelberg 1965, p. 659). Spiegelberg (1965, p. 660) saw the description of phenomena as intimately linked with two other operations: “intuitive grasp and analytic examination.” This method values lived experience as its foundation. The phenomenological process often begins with a question that may have social and personal significance. The lived experience is not an interpreted text, but an unfolding and unfinished story vividly portrayed and further revealed through art. The first-hand experience produces

valuable data imperative for understanding personal identity and value formation processes in such a research approach.

Producing valuable data through experience and being in lieu allows the artist to observe natural and built landscapes consciously. Therefore, the first step of the creative process when approaching this research was, with an artistic eye, to engage in a phenomenological experience with the cultural landscape to bring that experience to the viewer. Although this type of reflective data collection is visual and sensory, it is comparable to the hypothesis and incubation stages of the systematic project. The images, movements, and sounds of the phenomenological experience were recorded on video and in photos. Photos and stills of the videos are included in the annex. These artifacts document this stage of the project.

### **The Curatorial**

In the 1980s, faced with a lack of institutional support for exhibitions, artist Martha Rosler incorporated curation into her artistic practice (Montmann, 1989). In this way, artists take over the profoundly influential yet still under-studied phenomenon of curatorship as a medium. Even though the exhibition can be ontologically ambiguous, it is a critical medium that was reworked from its conventional form to become a valuable and meaningful form of data representation.

Rosler's *If You Lived Here* began as a direct response to a lack of institutional support for exhibitions (Montmann, 1989). Rosler filled all the roles necessary for an exhibition, including the curator's role. In this research, I work across multiple roles as researcher, artist, and curator. My practice always put great importance in the curatorial display. The artwork is

only a fraction of the storytelling, and the curatorial choices dictate the narrative. While the artist and the curator roles seem to merge seamlessly, it was challenging to balance both written research and visual expression without diluting or compromising either. At times, the need to translate the visual methods and creative theories into words caused creative blockages. However, these forced pauses allowed for deeper thought and meaning to be related to the work. Working through these tensions led this artistic practice to build a new relationship between the creative and the written research and results. While my strengths still lay in verbal and visual methods, I chose to use prototyping, aesthetic intervention, and curatorial installation methods to convey this projects' research conclusions.

### **Data Collection – Data Making**

This study's data collecting component included travel to both study locations, Sudbury and Toronto, and the use of art-making tools and photo documentation. Stroud Cornock's (1983) creative methodological process responded to his fine art students' need for a creative structure without letting them lose sight of the flexibility of the creative process. His six-step methodology allows room for growth throughout the process and creates a step-by-step methodological procedure.

Alongside the creative process, the phenomenological methodology of Clark Moustakas structured this research to incorporate the meaningful experience of working onsite and including the lived experience and giving room for the value of environmental affect. (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, the first phenomenological step is to engage in the Epoché process to create a proper atmosphere for data collection. The data collection led to recognizing the visual elements that reflect Sudbury's Francophone cultural identity by

removing myself from the environment and being faced with a strong emotive response of melancholia while living in Toronto.

### **Geographic Location**

Sudbury's unique geography and history has fostered a vibrant Francophone community that has struggled and continues to struggle to keep its community alive and strong. This fight for cultural survival passes on to each succeeding generation. According to a Statistics Canada census in 2011, 26.9% of people in Sudbury claimed French as their mother tongue, making them part of the 1,007,580 people outside of Quebec identifying as Francophones. Just over 6 million Francophone Canadians live in Quebec, where French is the majority official language. Claiming Ontario has a smaller French community than Quebec is not news. However, it may be news that Ontario is not officially a bilingual province (though New Brunswick is). New Brunswick's population is composed of 32% people who have French as a mother tongue, while a mere 4.3% of Ontarians identifies French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2006; 2011). In Quebec and New Brunswick, the cultural landscapes are different and Francophone communities do not face the same struggles to preserve their language and heritage, thanks in part to the official language status of their communities. However, Sudbury is isolated from its French neighbours, and, in the past, Anglophone Ontarians' efforts to mute their voices and extinguish their culture were nearly successful. The younger generations of Franco-Ontarians resisted their cultural responsibilities. Being one or two generations removed from the fight for Francophone rights has led to a lack of appreciation for its survival. Sudbury is primarily English; Francophones work and live in an English environment, and it often consumes their quotidian behaviours, often leading to a loss of language and connection with

their heritage. Language loss leads to a gradual replacement of their Francophone culture and language with an anglophone one.

One of the significant problems for Sudbury's economy was the younger generations' disregard and lack of pride in the city due to its absence of cultural community. In 2014, the Greater City of Sudbury launched a cultural plan emphasizing the value of the artist and creative culture, acknowledging both the French and Indigenous minorities whose artistic culture could be used as a tool to revive the city. Those young Francophones who wished to pursue a creative career would leave the city searching for larger cultural centers, such as Toronto, and most likely transition to working and studying in English. However, thanks to the cultural plan's support, there is a significant artistic community revival with a 20% growth in employment in the cultural sector (*Greater Sudbury Development Corporation 2016 Annual report 2017*, p.18). The plan places great importance on the uniqueness of the French language and culture in the community, adding Arts & Culture Grants tailored explicitly for emerging artists and Francophone cultural growth-based projects. The cultural plan's first goal is to encourage "a committed and supportive community of arts & culture" (Great Sudbury Development Corporation, 2015-2020 Cultural Plan, p. 5) in the city. The plan's mandate is to "cultivate greater Sudbury's creative identity, people, places & economy" (p. 18). In late 2016, the Greater Sudbury city council approved five million dollars for Place des Arts, a shared arts facility for Francophones. The Francophone community of Sudbury reflects elements of the cultural landscape that define the identity of the community. Gathering all the French cultural centers under one roof makes a significant statement and will allow unity and growth in the community. The number of people it takes to create and implement a cultural plan and its financial investment shows communal agreement about the power of a visual and creative culture. This support encourages the concepts of this

research by supporting the relationship between site specific identity building and cultural landscapes whether its architectural or natural landscapes.

### **Instrumentation**

The most prominent and challenging aspect of the art-based research experience lay in negotiating a balance between the visual and the verbal. There needed to be a way to describe both personal and collective cultural experiences rooted in tacit sensitivities and visual observation or creation. Those other areas of experience are made up of perceptions that are the product of analysis and reflection and find expression in the written format. A theoretical grounding was needed and appropriate research tools when working with the complex concept of melancholia within the artistic process.

Within the social sciences, standard qualitative research tools include interviews or survey questionnaires. However, these tools do not apply to my arts-based research practice. Instead, the research instruments that apply to my methodological process include a phenomenological approach to lived experience and visual data collection through photo documentation and artmaking.

Lived experience is central to phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 2006). Such an experiential goal is not to explain the cultural landscape but rather to carefully describe an immediate, intimate, and immersive interaction. Furthermore, visual phenomenology understands that an individual's social understanding of self and the collective are inseparable from the environment in which they live (Leavy, 2015). The environment, then, is a crucial influence on ones' identity and lived experiences.

Informed by photo documentation, the artwork produced for this art-based research became a form of data, as did the photos. The instruments used to create the data are the art materials: wood panel, paintbrush, water, rags, spatula, and paint. Like photo documentation, the validity of documenting the lived experience through paint creates valid visual data. Visual anthropologists Collier and Collier (1986) presented several strategies for using photography as a research method in their book *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Alva Noë (2000) proposed that art could be a useful tool, although previously neglected, for phenomenological research: “Artists can teach us about perceptual consciousness by equipping us with the opportunity to have a special kind of reflective experience. In this way, art can be a tool for phenomenological investigation” (p. 1). Noë suggested doing phenomenological research to refine the “conception of experience as a mode of interactive engagement with the environment” (p. 124). Ardra Cole (2004) concurred, confirming that data drawn can be from a source accessible to all. In this study, lived experience and visual expression are central to the process of knowledge-building.

**Comparison: Sudbury versus Toronto.** Sudbury’s downtown culture is very different from a large cosmopolitan city, such as Toronto. Toronto’s neighbourhoods that compose its core are vibrant in various cultures, including various cuisine and art institutions and ethnicities. In contrast, Sudbury seemed to struggle to find its identity and define its own culture. Through the process of beautifying the city with murals and hosting nationally recognized artistic festivals such as *UpHere*, the city seems to be finding its ground. However, to visually define Sudbury’s Francophone cultural landscape, a visual comparison to its southern neighbour Toronto allowed an acknowledgement of what was visually present and what was not. Toronto’s cultural landscape differs significantly from that of Sudbury, and the

process of being immersed in the contrasting environment allowed for a clear view of the components of Sudbury's Francophone community's uniqueness Social anthropologist Radcliff-Brown stated,

“It is only by the use of the comparative method that we can arrive at general explanations. The alternative is to confine ourselves to particularistic explanations similar to those of the historians. The two explanations are legitimate and do not conflict, but both are needed to understand the societies and their institutions.” (Manners and Kaplan, p. 57)

The use of visual data collection and visual presentation of data allows presenting the findings similarly to how someone would experience different cultures: sensory. Travelling and living in various geographic locations causes a sensory reaction from the visual cultural landscape. These evoked emotions are captured in the artistic process and presented without words or definitions to allow for an authentic experience cued by the paintings.

The nature of comparison in this art-based research is different from a comparison in quantitative science-based research. In quantitative research, the purpose is to measure the difference. The value of comparative qualities research is in understanding rather than measuring the difference. The comparison method will contribute to the understanding and identification of the absence or presence of a particular phenomenon by exploring differences in the contexts in which the phenomenon arises or that issues are experienced. Qualitative research always involves some comparison element, whether between the views and experiences of different participants or between specific aspects of the research phenomena under study. For this research, the comparison of environment, culture, and localized identity is

the research design feature. The choice to create a comparison between Sudbury and Toronto was to subjectively analyze Sudbury without including biases in using Toronto as a benchmark comparison. Due to the city's basic social structure and geographic location, Toronto had major contradicting factors to Sudbury, allowing for a valuable visual juxtaposition. The same artistic analysis and similar data collection methods were used in both locations and to conduct the comparison correctly.

### **Choice of creation location: Sudbury**

While living in Toronto, I planned two trips to Sudbury with the single focus of data collection and artmaking. The first trip was to locate and position myself in an environment that best represented the cultural landscape in question. Five locations were selected and explored: the Grotto, Bell Park–Sudbury Art Gallery, Blueberry Hill, downtown, and Science North. These locations represent the heavily frequented environments of Sudbury locales throughout childhood for participation in cultural events. The grotto had heavy religious components. The Bell Park, Sudbury Art Gallery at Bell Mansion, Science North, and the downtown area did not allow for a significant perspective and did not capture the proper natural landscape and were not associated with French culture. The ideal site presented itself during the exploration of Blueberry Hill; it was not the hill itself but a rocky hill between Minnow Lake and Ramsey Lake visible from Blueberry Hill. This rocky patch captured both lakes found in the centre of Sudbury, it was often the secret rock jumping and blueberry picking locations for many locals. The black rocks and vast lakes captured all the raw natural sensory components that inspired local artists and were infused in Sudbury's culture and history. The key considerations to assess these sites' viability included the accessibility of performing a

creative practice in the environment in questions, considering the detailed thematic of the visual component of the environment and the sites' ability to capture and evoke Francophone culture: observations and photographic documenting of the possible environment allowed for thoughtful consideration in the selection process. The chosen locations were each differently conducive to my artistic and creative practice.

The first three steps of Cornock's (1983) six-step method are generation, selection, and synthesis. Step one is the generation stage; this stage allows for the manipulation of materials and forms and selecting elements out of which the work is synthesized. This stage in a creative process is explorative and includes manipulating elements in the creative space to generate the beginning of a project. The manipulation of materials and subjects is a sensory stage and can seem chaotic, yet 'happy accidents' often cause significant creative breakthroughs. Even though these choices are primitive, based on the exploratory sense and playing with various elements, the artistic choices made regarding materials reflect the meaning and must be chosen to consider their context within the study.

To capture the Francophone northern visual cultural landscapes, I decided on large wood panels to fill a gallery and present the northern landscape's simplicity with open, large imagery. Wood panels reflect a natural feel and properties thanks to their ability to soak in paint and show the wood grain and varying natural colours. Compared to canvas or other materials, wood panels physically signal their direct relationship to the natural forested landscape, organically capturing the landscape in question with their materiality. The 6' by 3' size of the wooden panels reflects the horizontal view, creating an encompassing feel in a gallery space. I chose

acrylic paint for its manipulability and its swift drying properties and worked outside where the paint's ability to dry quickly allowed for spontaneous and immediate results.

The choice of paint colour and texture followed experimentation with colour mixing and appropriate viscosity. Finally, I experimented with applying the paint using spatulas, paintbrushes, and rags, each of which produced different surface textures. The paintings' narrative efficiency lies in the ability to convey messages and invoke emotion with visual cues. The most striking visual cues are the depiction of depth and creating visual or actual texture.



**Figure 3:** Creation of “Paysage éphémère” Date: April 2016; Location: Sudbury

“Paysage éphémère” is a *plein-air* painting created in Northern Ontario (Figure 3). The birches inspired the colours and the movement. This painting sought to capture the ephemerality of the landscape transformed by the seasons, by time, and by human transformations. Layers of translucent paint give way to those that reflect the sky, snow, and black rocks. The pleasure of being home and expressing myself in French in my

community is ephemeral. I am faced with otherness as I reflect on cultural landscapes and the relationships with a visual history.

The second step of data-making is selection. This activity embraces the identification of significant elements of visual subject matter such as the meaning behind the choice of wood

support and the meaningful choice of painting on location and not in a studio. The process shifts towards the last step of creation when the manipulation of the materials has reached a readiness, and the focus shifts from the material to materializing. Thanks to the following steps, this step will lead to a synthesis of the form, patterns, and elements into an organized whole. The synthesis step embodies the execution of the work. This process produced three large landscape acrylic paintings on wood panels. For instance, one of these, “Force immobilisée,” is a plein-air painting created in Northern Ontario. The wood panel and materials were transported by portage over the rocks to get a view of the spring landscape. The painting captures two worlds’ juxtaposition, above and below, that vibrate intrinsically together in the mining community. The solid block of black at the bottom of the painting represents the mining heritage and the strength of the people. Above, the translucent and opaque layers capture the essence of Francophone Northern Ontarians’ cultural identity—an identity that exists with a specific geographical location.



*Figure 4: Creation of “Force immobilisée” April 2016; Location: Sudbury*

**Recording.** To analyze the final product better and follow the analytical steps of this artistic project’s methodological process, the creative practice was recorded both with video and photographs. A recording camera perched upon a nearby rock during the painting process of the work in Sudbury captured the act of painting and an insight into the thought process and development of the painting. Photos were also taken during rest periods to document the various layers and steps of the creative process. It is important to emphasize that the creative process is a valuable component of a final product, and therefore it is helpful to appreciate processual details in both photographic still and dynamic video form. The painting process video captures my hands’ movement with creative tools and the passage of time through moments of stillness and movement of natural elements of the environment in which I worked. The large paintings

were primarily created with rags, water, and paint directly from the tube and a lot of physical manipulation of the material on the wood surface (Figure 5).



*Figure 5: Video recording still – creation of “Rocher consommé” Location: Sudbury*

### **Choice of creation location: Toronto**

In Toronto, the creative process resulted in postcards that capture contrasting images of Toronto, inspired by the third methodological step of visual phenomenology, the process of imaginative variation. This step looks to change the perspective and employ polarities to understand the phenomenon in question. Through imaginative variation, the themes developed were inspired by the structure. The best way to achieve a new perspective and compare Sudbury to its opposite is to apply the same processes to the City of Toronto. The materials appropriate for this section of the project differ from the first and fundamentally reflect this part of data making and collecting.

Toronto's cultural identity reflects a wide variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. The city's built environment reflects the chaotic mix of cultures and dense population. As a result, there was not one viewpoint or location that captured the Toronto cultural landscape; however, it was captured through daily walking and multiple viewpoints. This experience was reflected in making numerous postcard paintings to capture the fast-paced metropolitan sites' considerable variety and complexity.

The data collection method was taken from the Situationists, who in the mid-1900s approached their study as psychogeographers to establish how different places make you feel or behave differently. Psychogeography aims to cultivate an awareness of how everyday life is presently conditioned and controlled by culture. Theorist Guy Debord invented this method to suggest playful and inventive ways of navigating the urban environment to examine its architecture and spaces. This method is perfectly interdisciplinary, as its goal is to visually take in the environment with a critical eye while reimagining the surroundings. This method's roots are in Dadaism and surrealism; the postcards were inspired by a Dadaist approach and mail art movement founded in Dadaism. Psychogeography starts with wondering and walking while observing and being aware of the self in relation to an urban environment. The chosen scenes using this approach were conscious or unconsciously attracted to a sense of comfort and familiarity. The locations were captured with a simple camera to be used later in the studio with a Dadaist collage approach. In situ sketches and quick colour choices were created.

**Data Making: Stroud Cornock's Creative Methodology.** The choice of materials and form would dictate the audience's response. The options were chosen due to their symbolic meaning in the overall understanding of the project. The postcard is intentionally made to last

for a temporary period. The choice of this form launched the concept of ephemeral cultural artifacts to communicate and make connections between one person or one community and another. Many postcards were created to capture the kaleidoscope of complex cultural layers in Toronto's environment and the complexity of the cosmopolitan visual culture. The structural goal set was to create 100 postcards. For each of the 100 postcards, the process of creation was applied from step one to execution. However, through the process of selecting a form, material, and design, I predetermined some elements for the work as a whole. These choices started with step one, generation. I experimented with various papers to discover which properties were best for this project. The postcards had to be sent back to Sudbury as a metaphor for the journey performed to understand Sudbury's cultural landscapes and a metaphoric representation of the melancholic longing for connection to the Francophone community, landscape, and language and the culture. Small thin wood panels were the initial idea for postcard material for wood's properties, aesthetics, and historical reference in northern communities; however, it reduced the ability to gather physical traces of travel during the communication and transit process and did not encapsulate the ephemeral context. I chose white watercolour paper instead of wood panels to represent the ephemeral concept, the idea of mass production, and the disposability associated with many elements of a large cosmopolitan city's identity. The ephemeral aspect of postcards perfectly represents the always-fleeting scenes of Toronto rather than the small wood panels initially chosen to mimic the large wooden ones used for the Sudbury images. Toronto's landscape is not permanent; it constantly changes due to new construction and demolition.

Photography and paint were used as media of data documentation in this project.

Photographic documentation of everyday life in Toronto's unfamiliar city captured the source of inspiration for the postcards. Even though the camera is seen as a staple when exploring

visual anthropological documentation forms due to its realistic representation of its subject, photography is not objective. The camera allows the photographer to select, crop, omit, stage, and create visual narratives based on their research needs. The researcher holding the camera is no more objective than a researcher holding a paintbrush. Each tool creates a different outcome and, most importantly, impacts their viewer differently. Photographic images lead the viewer to believe the image's reality, and a painting allows the experience to be more thoughtful.

The photographs I took in Toronto were analyzed, and notes were taken based on their content and locations. They were then used as collage material to anchor the city's visual cues into the postcards. Collage became a practice during the Dadaist movement in the early 20th century. Inspired by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques in Paris, the Dadaists adapted the development and application of collage technique as their canon. Both the Cubists and the Dadaists pasted paper, fabric, and other two-dimensional material to their artwork to break down the limitations between art and everyday life. However, the Dadaists abandoned the still-life subject matter and opted for abstract imagery. They also went beyond paper and used transportation tickets, calendars, various textiles, pamphlets, maps, and other ephemeral and disposable materials. Because of this step into the expansion of source material, they could form a chaotic visual diary of modern life. The Dadaist is also the source for the flux movement who now took these visual diaries off the galleries' walls and sent them by mail, creating mail art. Thus, I applied methods grounded in art historical practices to this project's creative components, theoretical grounding, and artistic processes.

Collage is a visual art-based research practice and a method of gathering, selecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting. Gene Diaz defined collage as the blend of everyday

reality “with paint or ink, thus merging the illusionary with the actual, art with society, aesthetics with every day- every nightlife” (Diaz, 2001, p. 149). Collage was consciously applied in this context to create new meaning out of selected images, taking the visual intervention and juxtaposition of imagined and captured images one step further.

As I explain in my exploration of the medium, the application of step two is straightforward: selection. Shards of photographs of the city’s architectural and human elements were integrated into the postcards through collage, painting, and mark-making, with the precious addition of dirt marks and damage acquired in postal transit. The selection of the forms and patterns on the postcards were determined to capture a chaotic, complex, and kaleidoscopic culture. I chose a geometric graphic design style for a sharp photographic collage. The forms and colours represent the structural and industrial components of the city of Toronto’s built environment. Postcards’ use points out the importance of the architecture and references the traditional images found on traditional postcards collected as part of this research. Ongoing development captured in the postcards images is, in fact, part of the cultural landscape of Toronto.

Taking photographs of the environment was a part of the creative process of the Toronto postcards. I followed the methodological process of generating and selecting the form, patterns, and elements synthesis into an organized whole. This process produced 100 paper postcards that were stamped and sent to the city of Sudbury. They were sent to A.Voz, which is both myself and my mother Artina Voz, addressed to my childhood home where my parents still live. Many postcards were damaged and a few lost along the way. They carry the marks and

damage of their journey. The postcards did not have text, only the address and the painting along with the mailing stamps. All postcards that were received are documented in the annex.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

With the collection and creation of data complete, the goal is to determine how to identify what images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity. How do these images define the cultural landscape of Sudbury and reflect the individuals' and community's collective identity? The procedure will also activate the juxtaposing of the Sudbury cultural landscape images with images of Toronto in search of the unique elements of Sudbury's cultural landscape.

Gunilla Holm (2008), an expert in qualitative research methods, was influenced by Collier and Collier's work in their book *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method* (1986). She advocated the classification of visual images into three groups: (1) subject-produced images, (2) researcher-produced images, and (3) pre-existing images (Leavy, 2015). In this project, the paintings and photographs are classified as researcher-produced images, while the images informing the project—postcards and historical images—are pre-existing images.

Visual ethnographic content analysis is a method to locate, identify, retrieve, and analyze images for relevance, significance, and meaning. It is essential to begin by observing the data (in this case, the paintings and created postcards) as a whole and as two bodies of work. The observed data was organized in a type of image inventory using categories chosen to reflect and assist with the research goals. Next, an anthropological analysis was applied to the

classification of the images to create artistic distance, followed by a detailed analysis. The next step was searching for concrete evidence of time, place, environment, architectural elements, and cultural references. Narrative analysis was also applied visually, searching for stories told within the postcards and landscape paintings that may create multiple standard structural narratives. As with any research method, the final step to both these approaches was to investigate for meaning and conclusions based on the entire visual record (Leavy, 2015).

The analyses of the body of artistic work led to the written documentation of the findings. The analyses were less of a personal critique of the paintings' quality as artwork but more of an exploration of what appeared in the works without value judgment. Typically, the second step of art critique asks why the artist created it and what it means. In this case, this component is what the context of this research reveals. Being critical of one's work in any capacity can be challenging. The artistic process's visual documentation allowed for an out-of-personal perspective on the actual process and not simply remembering the creative act. When working with visual components as a source of data, it is vital to provide context; Gunilla Holm suggested using the artist statement as a model for accomplishing this (Holm, 2008). Collier and Collier point out the importance of not attempting to "decode" or "translate" visual data into verbal data but rather "build a bridge between the visual and the verbal" (Collier & Collier 1986, p. 169). Following this precaution, the written component is not an exhibition review or artist journal yet is similar to an artist statement. It is the norm for the artist to compose an artist statement, allowing for fewer self-critique challenges and more authentic and reliable results. Chapter 1 includes an artist statement for this research.

Regarding the overall experience, the phenomenological approach of Clark Moustakas was followed to uncover the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas's first step, Epoché, is the act of setting aside prejudgements and conducting research in an unbiased receptive presence. The choice of locations, materials, and creative process was based on answering the research questions and not achieving personal artistic accomplishments. In a sense, the affective response of melancholia during the postcards' creation allowed for a light to be shined solely on the experience ignoring the touristic tendencies or glamorized images of Toronto.

The second step in Moustakas' methodology is a phenomenological reduction that allows for bracketing of the question at hand while illuminating outside elements that expand or narrow the study's view in an unwanted manner. The third step is imaginative variation. Moustakas explains this step as actively seeking "possible meaning through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives" (1994, p. 97). This explanation defines the essence of the phenomenal structure of the experience, which is vital to comparing Sudbury and Toronto. Its purpose is to change the project's qualities to determine which of them are essential and accidental, leading back to the questions of this research.

Comparing the components of both the postcards and the large-scale landscape images on wood leads to the development of structural themes: clusters of structural qualities integrate the composite textural and structural descriptions to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience.

### **The Curatorial**

The project's visual component was published through a curated exhibition in Sudbury and another in a Toronto art gallery. The Sudbury Art Gallery was selected for exhibitions due to its architectural features such as the rock walls and its personal relation to my artistic development. I attended many art classes at the SAG and later became a teacher; it was also the home of one of my first exhibitions. The Propeller Art Gallery in Toronto is owned and operated by a member of the Bureau des regroupements des artistes visuel de l'Ontario (BRAVO). This Francophone professional artist connection created a great tie to the gallery. Site selection was an important component of the curatorial process. Curation is a medium of its own, a form of publishing, and includes curatorial theories, frameworks, and curatorial techniques applied to the exhibition. The process of curating the exhibition was an essential part of addressing the research questions. The curatorial "contrives the context, which then acts as an installation in its right, possibly poignant, highly licensed and even subversive. It is a lot like art" (Nielsen, 2004, p. 44). The paintings and postcards on their own would lack structure and ability to answer any of the questions at hand in this research unless properly curated: "the curatorial imagination discovers things artistic, formerly unheralded or unknown. It compares images, regroups objects, and formulates new interpretations. Curatorship reinvests objects with ideas" (Nelson, 2009). Exhibiting artistic prototypes was done in the form of photographs of the creative process. It can be challenging for audiences who may not know how to respond to this unusual use of the gallery or museum as it shifts the value from the final product to the production experience. The curator plays a vital role in ensuring that the installation process is valuable for the artist and rewarding for the audience. The curator's crucial task is to clarify that the prototype is not merely an 'unfinished thing.' Instead, it is part of an ongoing dialogue

between artist and audience—a way of stimulating and grounding imagination and discussion. It is the curator’s task to support this dialogue and provide ways for the artist and audience to engage productively with prototyping. The last method of the creative process, according to Cornock, is a critical discussion that allows the education of the viewer and the opportunity to contribute to the valuable discussion (1983). I further discuss the exhibition in the next chapter.

### **Research Limitation**

This research is limited in its geographical, representative, and analytical reach. The study does not intend to create a list of the particular elements of Sudbury or Toronto’s landscape. The study’s goal is not to compare Sudbury’s Francophone communities to its Anglophone or Indigenous neighbours. Because of the resilience and strength of Sudbury’s Francophone community and their work to keep their language and artistic voice, the culture has a particularity that is worthy of academic study. Therefore, the study limits itself to the visual cultural landscape of Francophone identity in Sudbury and its comparison to the cultural landscape of Toronto.

### **Credibility-Dependability**

The credibility of phenomenological research has been questioned, yet its purpose is to bring validity to the lived experience and the human experience of affect. Three components of my research allow for added creditability: long-term observation, thick description, and negative case analysis. By “long-term observation,” I refer to two separate periods, one being an unconscious observation through a lifetime of experience of Sudbury as a hometown and the other being two years of conscious examination of the environment using psychogeography

methods. During the former period, I engaged with my surroundings on all sensory levels—with the aid of sound, smells, sights, and touch—acquiring a cohesive impression of the surroundings; this experience became the source of memory and creative energy used to capture the cultural landscapes of Sudbury in paint. Even though this research is not autobiographical or auto-ethnographical, my position as a Francophone from northern Ontario allows for certain credibility to be gained through long-term observation of the cultural landscapes. As an artist, I study the landscape and reflect the environmental affect of Sudbury in my practice. This research's documentation and conclusions are dependable based on their stability and consistency over time. However, the most valuable and credible backing lies in thick description: presenting all the facts in a detailed and precise manner to allow the reader and the viewer to deduce their conclusion. Being transparent allows for integrity. Visual documentation and visual presentation, gallery exhibitions, a thick description of the process, and analysis allow the reader and viewer to create their conclusions. Since the project is based on a search for essence, the viewer's conclusions are of great value and benefit the project. Finally, without guiding the viewer, I chose to create a comparative case analysis to put forth the findings best and allow for a greater understanding of the purpose of the study. The cultural landscapes of Sudbury are compared to those of Toronto. Both visual data components are displayed side-by-side and create a sharp juxtaposition, bringing the fundamental elements unique to each city.

### **Conclusions**

Art-based research has value based on its production component and its roots in aesthetic and academic theories. Even in high school, my visual arts teacher would not let any of the

students use the materials until they had first conducted a study of the subject or theme and of the materials and methods, allowing grading to be based on the process, not on the product. With an emphasis on the value of knowledge and theoretical grounding of the work, this research design is a mixture of a social science approach while following a creative process structure. Both phenomenological methodology and fine art-based methodologies were conducted to structure the methods developed in this research. My art teacher would say that it does not matter if you create ‘beautiful’ art or not. After all, what is beautiful? If the content and analytical justification is strong, it is a valuable piece of art. I ensured the research’s value by creating a robust framework within which human intuition, emotion, and creativity can play. This method is directly aligned to answer the research problems and research questions.

Lorri Nielsen (2004) claimed that art research allows discovery in a way no other method can reveal, “Knowing, I am learning, is in itself an art. Inquiry informed by the arts teaches me all over again what I didn’t know I didn’t know” (p. 45). Nielsen justified the process of going into the act of painting without a visual plan but very well informed and researched, allowing the creative process to reveal components that cannot be studied any other way.

The methodology applied to this study moves us towards a better understanding of the cultural landscapes and their power to inform collective identities within Sudbury’s Francophone community. The creative process is a valuable and noteworthy element of an artist’s production and is fundamental to art-based research. By compiling an in-depth study of the literature and the phenomenological process and details of specific elements of the creative process, the methodology allows for the creation of an innovative final product.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter contains the findings for the art-based research conducted to answer the research questions:

1. What images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity?
2. Does juxtaposing Sudbury's cultural landscape images with images of an estranged location highlight the unique elements of Sudbury's cultural landscape?
3. Can place-based cultural identity be defined by visualizing the affects of longing, melancholy, and stranger-ness when creating art-based research of Francophone Ontarian northerners from Sudbury

This chapter also includes the production process, images of the artwork, the curatorial practice, and how theory fits into the findings. In addition, it discusses aesthetic interventions and the installation of the exhibition in both research sites, Sudbury and Toronto, and the observations and results of both exhibitions.

### Data Collection

Intending to identify Sudbury's Francophone visual cultural landscape and inspired by Hornstein's book *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (2011) and her uses of the postcard as a cultural artifact, this research began with collecting historic postcards. Antique shops were searched throughout the Northern Ontario region to become familiar with the artifact and its use throughout time in this specific region. The postcards showcased historical landscape photographs, some erased over time and some still used today as visual icons (Figure 6). They were collected and observed with historical books of Sudbury. The first step of the creative process is to become familiar with what already exists to be better prepared to add value to current knowledge and produce unique art. In this case, the cultural artifacts were analyzed and

compared and closely observed to build the foundation of the art-based research.



*Figure 6: Postcard of Toronto, 1913 (Alix Voz private collection)*

### Site Selection

To define the visual cultural landscape of Sudbury best, I selected a method of comparison that would highlight the unique elements of the northern Ontario culture. The approach, in this case, is to juxtapose the cultural landscape in question with a contrasting culture. Toronto was the lieu of study during this research, selected as an ideal contradictory location due to its geographic proximity and similar social and economic status, and its contrasting cultural landscape. This research is founded on lived experiences and being in lieu while consciously observing the natural and built landscapes triggered the emotive elements associated with the creative process. In this case, the creative process began with an artistic eye, conscious observation, to engage in a phenomenological experience with the cultural landscape to bring that experience to the

viewer. The images, movements and sounds of the phenomenological experience were collected on video and in photos. This type of reflective data collection is visual and sensory, comparable to the systematic project's hypothesis and incubation stages.

### **Artistic Approach – Material Selection**

To best capture the wide variety of cultural landscapes of Toronto, the postcard was selected as the method of artistic production and data making. The need to capture the kaleidoscope of cultural landscapes in the large city of Toronto justifies the choice to create 100 postcards in situ. Large paintings would best capture the large vast, and open landscapes of northern Ontario.

The audience's response during the final exhibitions and their symbolic meaning in the overall understanding of the project reflect the materials and form chosen for their power to illustrate the cultural landscape of Sudbury and Toronto. Small thin wood panels were chosen to become the postcard material for their properties, aesthetics, and historical reference in northern communities. Thanks to their natural properties, large wood panels were chosen and portaged to the perfect spot in the natural northern environment. Their large size and panoramic shape envelop the viewer to trigger the experience of the subject matter depicted in the paintings. The postcards were meant to embody the concept of ephemeral cultural artifacts, which communicate and make connections between one person or one community and another.

With the concept of comparison in mind, the postcards were initially imagined as miniature versions of the large wood panels. However, the postcards' ability to gather physical traces of travel during the communication and transit process was so valuable that I decided to

use a more ephemeral and fragile material that would best mimic the historical postcards' properties. Therefore, the small thin wood panels were replaced by white watercolour paper chosen to represent the ephemeral concept, the idea of mass production, and the disposability associated with many elements of a large cosmopolitan city's identity. The precious addition of dirt marks and damage acquired in transit, photographs of the city's architectural and human elements, collage, painting, and mark-making wrap up the material lists.

### **Cultural Landscape Analysis: Site-specific selection**

The first question addressed in this art-based research project is searching for what images of Sudbury's landscape are reflective of Francophone cultural identity. To narrow down the visual search it is important to understand the history of the Francophones in Sudbury. Sudbury's origins can be traced back to 1883 and the development of the transnational railway, 35% of the workers relocated to Sudbury were Francophones. (Sudbury, a long-standing cultural hub for Franco-Ontarian culture, p.1) After the railway was completed in 1884, the discovery of rich minerals embedded in the geographical formation known as the Sudbury Basin drew immigrants and displaced persons from around the world to the area, the majority French-speakers. As Sudbury matured, the Francophones were drawn again to the area to develop farmland. Several generations of my family have earned a living as underground miners and as farm owners. Since the origins of Sudbury, the Anglophone community represents the majority of mine owners and business professionals. Because of the nature of the settlement of the Francophone community, in contrast to those of the Anglophone majority, the connection to the land was unique. The Francophones cultural identity was established by created an everlasting unique relationship to the landscape of Sudbury due to their work cultivating both above and underground.

The site selection for the subject captured in paintings was of high importance. As detailed in the methodology chapter, the site selection by eliminating significant visual icons of the city until what was left is the essence of the cultural landscape. Five locations were chosen and explored: the Grotto (Figure 7), Bell Park–Sudbury Art Gallery (Figure 8), Blueberry Hill, downtown, and Science North. I took photos of various sites to compare and analyze in the search for the painting location. The land that separates Ramsey Lake and Minnow Lake was ideal for capturing the vast open scenes that reflect the area’s unique landscapes (Figure 9). Far in the distance, the Sudbury smokestacks were visible, the lakes were essential, and the black rocks told the local mining industry’s story. Together, the elements are geographically unique and represent the distinctive natural and built architectures that drew the Francophones to the north in the first place and kept them in the area. Although the black rocks resulted from the initial mining activity that marked the land, and



*Figure 7: Site Research, the Grotto – Sudbury*



*Figure 8: Site Research, Sudbury Art Gallery, Sudbury*



*Figure 9: Site Research, Ramsey Lake, Sudbury*

trees and plants were lost in the acidic soil, those who first called Sudbury home, including the Francophone families, depended on the land for their livelihood.

The second question this art-based research aims to answer is how the juxtaposition of Sudbury's cultural landscape images with images of an estranged location highlights the unique elements of Sudbury's cultural landscape. In this case, Toronto is the estranged location. Chock full of cultural landmarks, the cityscape's remarkable architecture and diverse neighbourhoods differ from Sudbury. I captured the complex and diverse visual cultural landscape of Toronto to allow all its diversity to be displayed. In this case, there were 100 locations chosen to represent the estranged location. Very few came from the same neighbourhood. I photographed all the locations during exploratory walks to create the postcard collages. While going from one neighbourhood to another, I took photographs of the streets, the logos, the signs, the people and the natural and built architectures.

The GTA is a vast geographical region, but old Toronto is a pedestrian town. There may be cars everywhere; however, the locals know the best way to get around is by foot. The scenes that were captured are those that the locals would recognize and those that define particular neighbourhoods, such as the colourful crossing at Church and Wellesley, the Princes' Gates



(Left) **Figure 10:** Prince's Gates, Site Explorations, Toronto  
(Right) **Figure 11:** View of CN Tower from Royal Ontario Museum Members Lounge. Site Explorations Toronto



(Figure 10), and the Starry Night house in Kensington Market, the CN Tower (Figure 11), and the natural landscapes in locations such as Cherry Beach and The Waterfront. Even though the lakeside images partially soothed the longing for home and the melancholia of the unfamiliar, they are dramatically different, which is analyzed further in the chapter.

### **Artistic Production**

The creative process is a series of choices guided by visual, theoretical, and practical needs. In this case, creative practice methods were implemented to ensure the results are a valuable addition to visual knowledge. The postcards and large wood panel paintings each separately followed the creative process.

**Postcards.** The selection of forms and patterns on the postcards were determined by the need to capture a chaotic, complex, and kaleidoscopic culture (Figure 12). The geometric graphic design style was ideal for the photographic collage with lines and structures layered with the complexity of the city's culture. By creating one hundred postcards with chaotic and geometric visuals, the collection captures the complexity of the cosmopolitan visual culture.

As previously mentioned, photography is a medium of data documentation in this project, such as the photo-documentation of the exploratory walks in Toronto. Photographic documentation of everyday life in Toronto's unfamiliar city was captured as the source of inspiration for the postcards. The photographs were analyzed, and notes were taken based on their content and locations. They were then used as collage material to anchor the city's visual cues into the postcards. Collage is a visual art-based research practice and a method of gathering, selecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting. Gene Diaz defined collage as the blend of everyday reality "with paint or ink, thus merging the illusionary with the actual, art

with society, aesthetics with every day- every nightlife” (Diaz, 2001, p. 151). Collage was consciously applied in this context to create new meaning out of selected images, taking the visual intervention and juxtaposition of imagined and captured images one step further.

Even though the camera is often used to explore and document visual anthropological forms, its realistic representation of its subject photography is not objective. The camera allows the photographer to select, crop, omit, stage, and create visual narratives based on their research needs. The researcher holding the camera is no more objective than a researcher holding a paintbrush. Both tools create a different outcome and, most importantly, impact their viewer differently. Photographic images lead the viewer to believe the image’s reality, and a painting can allow the experience to be more pensive. Each medium has a very different effect on the viewer.



**Figure 12:** 100 postcards – Capturing Toronto cultural landscape

In art history, collage became a practice and the development of technology and printed materials during the Dadaist movement in the early 20th century. Led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris, the Dadaists adapted collage techniques as their canon. Both the Cubists and the Dadaists pasted paper, fabric, and other two-dimensional material to their



*Figure 13: Postcard exemplifying collage and manipulation of photography*

artwork to break down the limitations between art and everyday life. However, the Dadaists took things further by abandoning the still-life subject matter and opted for abstract imagery. They also went beyond paper and used transportation tickets, calendars, various textiles, pamphlets, maps, and other ephemeral and disposable materials (Figure 13). Because of this step into the expansion of source material, they could form a chaotic visual diary of modern life. The Dadaists are also the source for the flux movement who took these visual

diaries off the walls of galleries and sent them by mail, creating mail art. The methods grounded in art historical practices were directly applied to this project's creative component's theoretical grounding and artistic processes. Since the Dadaists, the world's interaction with visual media and technology has dramatically evolved. Photographs are captured within milliseconds in our modern-day, and the typical viewer is not compelled to spend more time on a photograph. The manipulation of the images and adding paint and marks demands a more profound response to the postcard. The creative process emphasizes the role of the postcard as a

cultural artifact used to communicate, connect, and compel contemplation and suggest for the viewer to look closer and search for familiar cues in the imagery.

**Paintings.** The rectangular wooden supports, explicitly chosen to contrast the postcards' form and shape, allowed for sizeable northern landscape paintings to stand firm and quietly, differing in their creative process. A video of the painting process captures the movements of my hands with creative tools, the passage of time, the moments of stillness, and the movement of natural elements in the environment (Figure 14). The large paintings were primarily created with rags, water, and paint directly from the tube and a lot of physical manipulation of the material on the wood surface. These tools allowed for the natural grain of the wood to play a role in the composition.



*Figure 14: Still of video documentation: Painting in Sudbury - Paysage éphémère*



*Figure 15: Force immobilisée, acrylic on wood*

*Force immobilisée* (figure 15) was created with the world below in mind. Looking out over Sudbury's black rocks is a reminder of the underground world of mining. Nevertheless, the cultural landscape of Sudbury goes far beyond the horizon. This painting captures that horizon and its dark depths below.



**Figure 16:** Paysage éphémère, acrylic on wood

*Paysage éphémère* (Figure 16) has fewer solid marks allowing the viewer to explore the translucent layers. More than the others, this painting has the feel of a landscape with the heavy horizontal imagery in the top third of the panel and the vertical tree or long grass lines. I employed an abstraction strategy to encourage the investigation and capture the emotive response of the landscape. It truly felt as if the painting became part of the landscape and removing it from its creation location was like taking a part of the landscape with it. *Paysage éphémère* was a form of abstraction purely led by the surrounding landscape that allows the viewer to recognize the familiarities and permits them to insert their own memories and feelings into the painting, filling it with the undefined openness.



*Figure 17: Rocher Consommé, acrylic on wood*

Rocher Consommé (Figure 17) captures the black rocks consuming the Sudbury landscape. From childhood memories of climbing rocks in sandals to reach the best wild blueberries to jumping off the rock cliffs surrounding the nearby lake in the summer, the rocks are an icon of Sudbury living. The relationship of the Francophone culture with the land is historically based. Its ability to nourish and provide work for the community continues in the Francophone traditions of cultivating and engaging with nature. The bold pale blue mark near the top of the painting evokes a feeling of the sky or the endless lakes. Its soothing effect, weighing down the painting's dynamic movement in the middle, mimics the lake's effect on those raised lakesides. This painting allows for contemplation of the power of the environment, culture, and memories. The size of the painting attempts to immerse the viewer in contemplation and relationship to their identity and the familiar cultural landscapes. The collection captures the Francophone cultural landscapes of Sudbury.

## **Curation**

Curation is predominantly a research process involving critical reflection, investigation, and discovery, ultimately exposing particular ideological inclinations. In this art-based research, the curatorial acts as the publication and active critical reflection of the art-based data created in search of answering the questions at hand.

The curatorial process differs in this research due to the combining of researcher, artist, and curator roles. Meaning, the curatorial methods could skip past the research steps that lead up to the production of the artwork. With the artwork in hand, the curation necessitated deliberate choices for display and publication. From the beginning of the curatorial process, it was important for the exhibition to be local in Sudbury and Toronto. A series of large 6' x 3' paintings and 100 small mixed media postcard-like artworks (collage and acrylic paint, approximately four by six inches) were transported and exhibited twice, first in Sudbury in the summer of 2016 and again in Toronto in fall 2016. The large paintings draw the viewer from afar to look for details and engage in the experience. The collection of small-scale mixed media paintings in hand-made postcards are tangible and approachable; sent by post from Toronto to Sudbury, I later drove them to the Toronto exhibition location. The viewer responds to postcards and identifies marks made by the postal process of the ephemeral artwork.



**Figure 18:** *Sudbury Art Gallery Installation of Postcards*

**Sudbury Exhibition.** The postcards were

created and mailed to Sudbury from Toronto, and the large wood panel paintings were created in Sudbury. The first exhibition was proposed to the Sudbury Art Gallery in its locally famous Bell Mansion, and the in-house curator agreed. Bell Mansion, built in 1907, was previously part of a large strip of land along Ramsey Lake,

which is now the public Bell Park. The mansion itself is built of local dark black stones; the exhibition space allocated for this exhibition had exposed black stone walls. On those walls, I chose to pin up a wire mesh to hang all the postcards. This wire mesh bolted on top of the black stone wall resembles the security meshing in the mines. Miners' children often visit their parents' mines on family days, so they would recognize the material as would others who visit the underground mine exhibition at the local science center Dynamic Earth. This curatorial hanging choice was founded in this locally familiar and geographically unique visual (Figure 18). The Toronto postcards were hung to be absorbed as a collection to make the visual chaos of the city visible in one gaze. The three large paintings were hung each on walls, giving enough space to both step back and investigate the work closely (Figure 19).



*Figure 19: Sudbury Art Gallery Installation of Paintings*

**Toronto Exhibition.** The next significant curatorial choice was the decision also to have an exhibition in Toronto. The need to see how the northern Ontario Francophone cultural landscape paintings presented in an unfamiliar location pushed the juxtaposition method. The artwork was packed into the box of a half-ton truck and driven down to The Propeller Art Gallery in Liberty Village, Toronto. This art gallery happens to be off Sudbury Street, which was unexpected. The gallery was selected for its simple white cube aesthetic. The paintings each occupied a large section of the wall, allowing them space to breathe. This was similar to the curation of the space in the Bell Mansion. However, the postcards were hung on one large piece

of wire mesh on a large white wall. Without the black stone wall, they presented completely differently in their hometown (Figures 20 & 21).



**Figure 20:** Propeller Gallery, White cube style space, postcard installation - Toronto



**Figure 21:** Propeller Gallery, White cube style space, landscape installation - Toronto

**Curatorial Methods / Theoretical Contextualization**

The final exhibition concludes this research project and accomplishes two key objectives. First, this exhibition contributes to the emerging body of contemporary literature relating to Francophone identity by adding to the discussion and by presenting the complexity of northern and city familiarities and stranger-ness triggered melancholia. Second, this exhibition serves as a venue to celebrate the Francophone culture and present this research completed through significant creative thinking, resulting in a collection of visual works and a corresponding narrative. The exhibition allows for sharing the results with family, friends, and strangers and acknowledges the importance of Francophone culture in a larger community.

The exhibition addressed the research questions of this thesis. The experience of the viewers allowed for a shared lived experience and new collective knowledge. Gunilla Holm (2008) and Collier and Collier (1986) were the forerunners in the validation of artistic practice as a valid and valuable approach to cultural studies. A decade following this artistic breakthrough, Bell Hooks' strategy of aesthetic intervention presented a theoretical framework that is useful for analyzing artistic practice products (Hooks, 1995, p. 25). For hooks, the power of visual images and their cultural symbolism reimagine collective images into a new context, allowing the viewer to see the image differently suddenly. This kind of artistic intervention triggers the antagonist potential of art and is consistent with "critical epistemologies that have a strong interest in cultural identity" (Leavy 2015, p. 10). This exhibition aligns with hooks' theories about the relationship between visual art and visual group identity. In hooks' framework, art can serve two primary functions: (1) recognizing the familiar and (2) defamiliarization (Hooks, 1995, p. 219). Defamiliarization is an artistic technique of

presentation to heighten perceptions of the familiar. This defamiliarization would be the postcards' manipulation of the mundane visually elevated for evaluation during the Toronto exhibition. By changing its traditional context, the image provokes a rethinking of its purpose. This research's artwork—paintings created in Sudbury and postcards created in Toronto—offers the viewer this experience.

Once the viewer becomes acquainted with the subject matter and context of the exhibition, they can infuse their own experiences and perception of their identity with what they identified as familiar or relatable in the imagery. James Rolling Jr. (2007) investigated how visual culture images contribute to a person's identity, focusing mainly on the experience as the "other." This validates the curatorial choice to host the exhibition in both Sudbury and Toronto. First, the postcards, then the large paintings, played the role of the unfamiliar or other, thus creating a different experience for the viewers based on the geographical location and experience of the viewer. Visual culture is a space of contention where ideas of normalcy are created and out of which the idea of "other" emerges. Rolling's approach is fundamentally similar to Collier and Collier's (1986) in the sense of their interconnecting of artistic practice and social sciences. From this theoretical vantage point, Rolling proposes "visual culture archaeology" (Rolling, 2007, p. 8) as a method of identifying ways in which images, as a part of visual culture, become a visible social narrative and an accepted identity. This method, grounded in critical theoretical perspectives, was applied to the research and study of Sudbury's collective identity's visual representation and cultural and natural particularities. This research was documented visually in the mists of the city's iconic landscapes. Therefore, the images produced for this project are now part of the visual narratives for Sudbury Francophone culture and play a role in its cultural history.

The visual presentation and exhibition of the research are essential. As explained by Pablo Picasso, “painting is just another way of keeping a diary” (Schlam, 2020, p. 277). Therefore, the visual imagery created for this project and production points are inextricably bound to the art. The binding of the three elements allows for multiple meanings determined by the artist and the viewer and the context of viewing. The visual imagery can evoke both emotional and visceral responses from their perceivers. These responses are filed somewhere in the subconscious without the same conscious interpretive process people engage in when reading a written narrative.

Moreover, the visual images occupy an elevated place in our memory, allowing this exhibition to play a role in the community’s collective memory, further discussions of Francophone identity, and identify the complexity of northern culture, city familiarities, and stranger-ness. *Melancholia* was used to initiate the need to explore the northern familiarities. The exhibition creates a space for the emotive response and the fundamental self-reflection, which may lead to the realization of the visual cultural elements that define the collective identity. The artwork can teach us about perceptual consciousness by furnishing the viewer with the opportunity to have a special kind of reflective experience. In this way, art is a tool for cultural investigation and was utilized in this research because of its ability to bring conscious reflection to the overlooked visual elements that are the foundation of northern Francophone culture. However, one of the historical problems with Francophone history is its ephemeral artistic documentation. These moments of contemplation and the results of the curatorial choices are, in fact, ephemeral in their experience-based nature. The exhibition itself becomes an ephemeral cultural artifact documented both in this text and through photographic

documentation. The idea of keeping a diary is further explored through an eBook that allows more viewers to see the results of this research.

My body of artistic work analysis led to the written documentation of the findings along with the eBook and photo documentation. When working with visual components as a source of data, it is vital to provide context. Holm suggested using the artist's statement as a model for how to accomplish this. An introductive didactic panel accompanied the exhibitions to contextualize the exhibition's viewers' understanding as they entered the gallery. To further contextualize and mesh both the theoretical aspects of the visual project, a program book was published. The program holds all images of the works in the exhibition and the artistic statement and artistic process, and touches on its theoretical grounding. This program works as a visual essay on its own and complements and connects both aspects of the project seamlessly. Based on this concept, a written component with an in-depth artist statement follows below. An artist's statement is the verbal intent of the artist and does not follow the same written structure as a thesis. The process of meshing both visual and written data can be problematic. Collier and Collier (1986) pointed out the importance of not attempting to "decode" or "translate" visual data into verbal data but rather "build a bridge between the visual and the verbal" (p. 169). Following this precaution, the written component is not in any way an exhibition review or artist journal.

### **Artist Statement**

My art-based research studio practice is rooted in the exploration of my northern Ontario Francophone culture. Painting and photographic interventions are my tools of choice to identify and document cultural identities, collective memories and trigger reflection of one's influential

environment. My creative process draws on the complexity of my Francophone culture, identity, and visual cultural landscape informed from collective memories, histories, and natural and built architectures. My artistic inspiration draws from exploring unfamiliar environments while deciphering my own cultural identity and its visual particularities. I had become aware of my 'otherness' triggered by a melancholic search for visual familiarities.

In the exhibition entitled *Mélancolie, Longing and the Built Environment: a Visual Narrative from Beyond Northern Familiarity*, the viewer will explore paintings and postcards of either familiar or unfamiliar space and reflect through the visual interventions on their memories of responses to the landscapes. The act of confrontation with the unfamiliar and the familiar leads the viewer to nostalgic and melancholic stirs. As an artist from Sudbury removed from the familiar, I created artwork highlighting Francophone Northern life's norms and environmental qualities compared to the new experience of living in a built environment of an urban setting. Then, I curated an exhibition to provoke a response from the viewer as they both recognize the familiar and explore the link between landscapes and cultural identity.

Each of the large paintings was painted en plein air in Sudbury during a limited weekend length visit to the city and reflects the colours and the natural and built landscape of the home location. The body of work distinguishes the capability of art to conceive and reconfigure the cultural, visual, and social landscape of northern Ontario. As well, the power of the painting's over-size scale is imposing on the viewer's sensibilities.

Through the creator's lens, I share the natural and built environments in the installation that becomes an experience for the viewer. Each postcard represents an intimate moment with the city of Toronto, a new home located away from the familiar. The dramatic contrast in size

and juxtaposition of approachability of the installation elements echoes the emotive trigger for melancholia by reflecting the strong contrast of the intimate tangible artifact (postcards) and the imposed structured representation (large scale paintings).

In this instance, the combined data entails researcher-generated paintings and personal narrative text, which comprised a gallery exhibit titled: *Mélancolie*, Longing and the Built Environment: a visual narrative from beyond northern familiarity. Each painting is a narrative panel that discursively and visually provides a discourse for the viewers' understanding of the visual subject matter.

### **Exhibition Reflections**

Even though the content of each exhibition was the same in both cities, the installation and context of the greater environment created two different experiences. For instance, in Sudbury, the postcards were displayed on the chicken wire, to represent the rock meshing many people will recognize from the mines, placed above a black stone rock wall in the Sudbury Art Gallery. This curatorial installation metaphor was well received, and many mentioned the relationship between the work and the particularities of the space. In Sudbury, the viewers were focused on the landscape paintings, and each had memories and stories of what lake or what rocks they saw in the landscapes. In contrast, in the white cube aesthetic of Toronto the chicken wire meant much less to the viewers and the postcards were like a scavenger hunt for recognizable city landmarks. The viewer searched for the visual cultural landmarks they identified as being part of their Toronto neighbourhood and expressed pride and memories sparked by the visual cues. This made me feel as if the selection and methods used in the

capturing of both visual cultural landscapes was successful in triggering collective site-specific memories.

Welcoming guests into the exhibitions was a vulnerable moment in the research. My personal melancholia was heartfelt, using melancholia as an artistic tool while rationalizing the process in theory created complex juxtapositions in my creative process. The viewers seemed to sense the melancholia, particularly in the chaotic overwhelming search for Toronto's cultural landscape in the multitude of postcards. This was interesting, considering the unfamiliar visual environment was part of my emotional trigger.

Both the postcards and the large landscapes can be a standalone series. I believe they are strong enough to individually capture the specific visual cultural landscape of their subject matter. However, their juxtaposition allowed for me as the creator-researcher and the viewers to be forced to identify their differences and acknowledge their unique site-specific elements all while acknowledging the different emotional reactions when standing before each series. The reaction of the viewers in both galleries and my own personal reflections as I stepped back and observed the viewers led me to understand the power of the elements I captured. It was fascinating to see the power of visual memory triggers and listen to the those who had attachments to the spaces I painted.

### **Conclusion**

The Francophone culture of northern Ontario is unique in its history and political battles. However, attempts to strip the community of its language and access to French-language education left the culture with rich oral and visual traditions and documentation methods. This

art-based research aimed to expose this gap in historical documentation and deepen the contemporary visual research of the geographically specific landscape's ability to define communal memories and identities. Methods of comparison, juxtaposition, and emotive responses from melancholia led the research to the creation of 100 postcards capturing the cultural diversity of the city of Toronto and three large wood panel paintings of Sudbury's vast open natural, cultural landscape. The exhibition of the art-based data addressed the visual realization of Sudbury's landscapes and their reflection of the Francophone cultural identity.

At the same time, the juxtaposition of Sudbury's cultural landscape paintings with the postcards of Toronto allowed for visual cultural particularities to become more apparent. While the cement jungle of Toronto mimicked the blackened rocks of Sudbury, the comparison of both visual analyses highlighted the difference 400 km of distance can mean to the cultural identities of a community and their visual familiarities. The limited-edition exhibition catalogue captured stills of the video creations and documentation of the artwork. The catalogue allowed the process to become part of the exhibition by visually informing the viewer with short didactic explanations and titles. The artwork presents the viewer with an example of how an understanding of melancholy and longing can illuminate place-based Francophone identity related to memories of ones' familiar cultural landscape through an interdisciplinary lens.

I explored the juxtaposition of paper and wood to point out what was missing in the city landscapes by presenting the northern landscape's simplicity with large open imagery. The landscape paintings were created through investigation en-plein-air to give the truth of the appearance to the viewer.

The visual documentation of the Francophone landscape of Sudbury and its juxtaposition alongside the cultural medley of Toronto gives the time and space for the viewer to experience the melancholic longing for and reflect on what are those visual images of home.

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Appendix

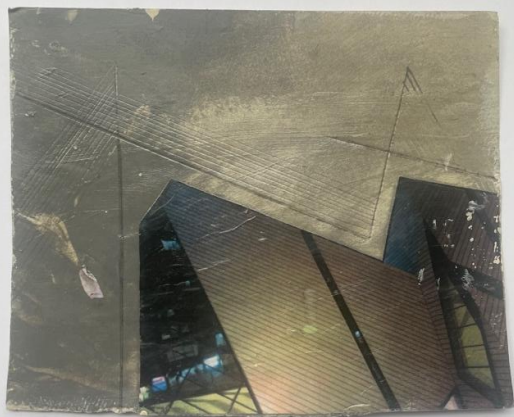
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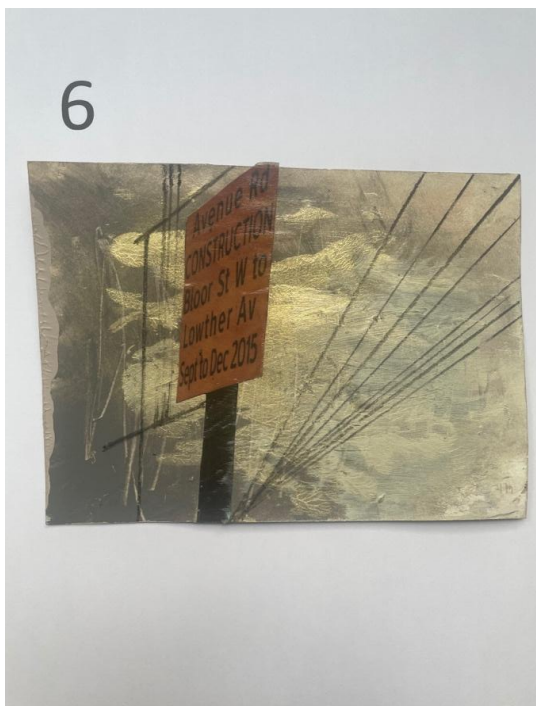
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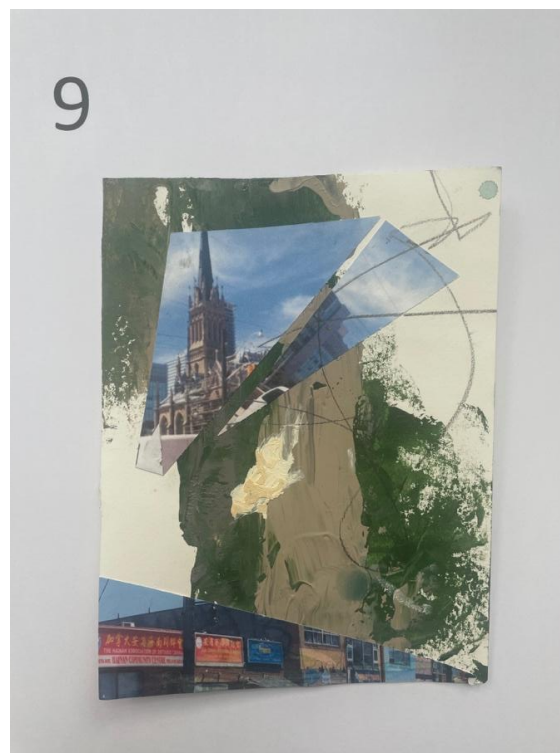
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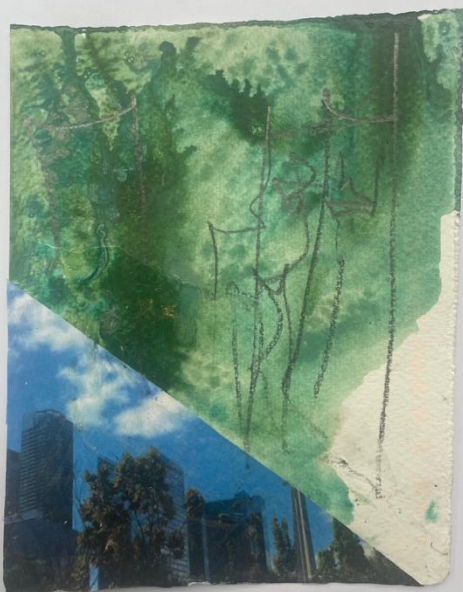
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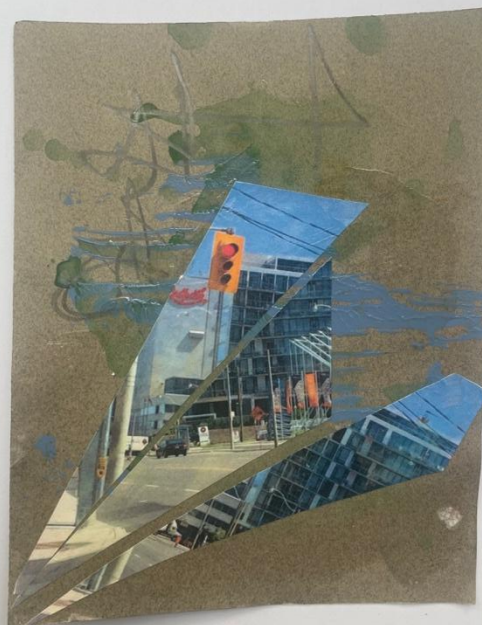
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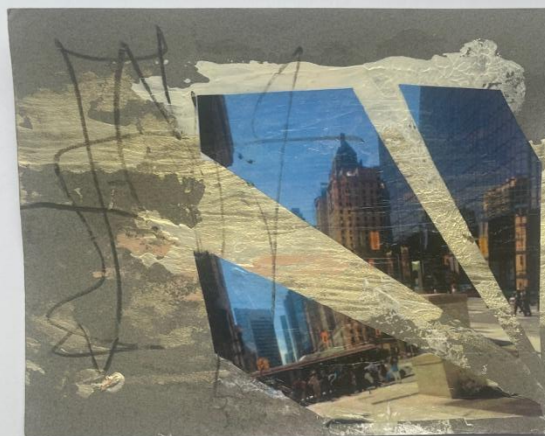
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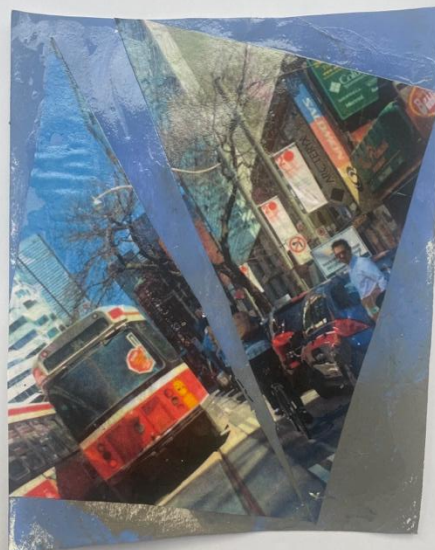
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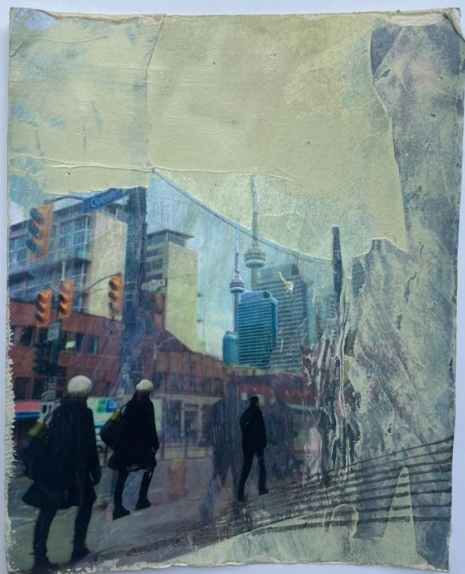
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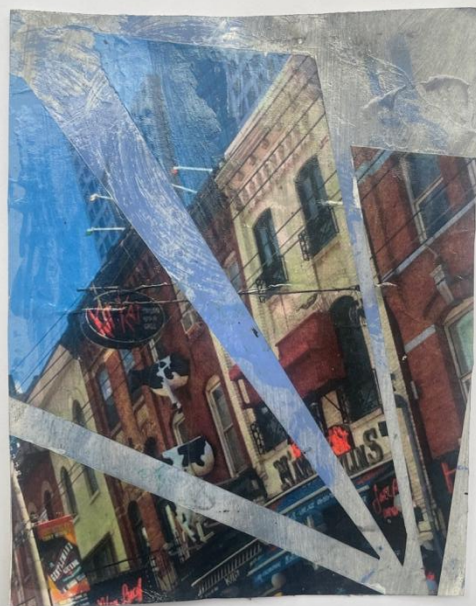
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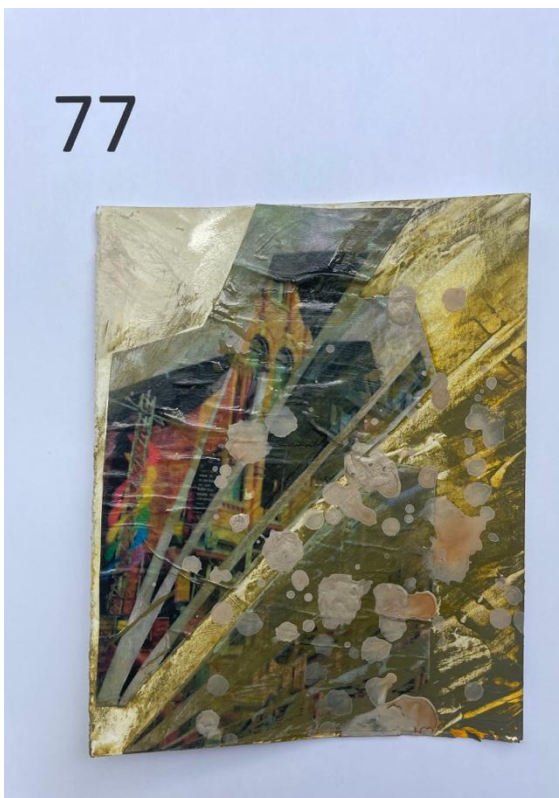
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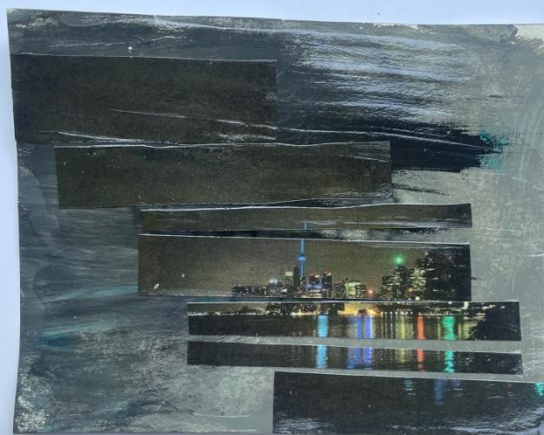
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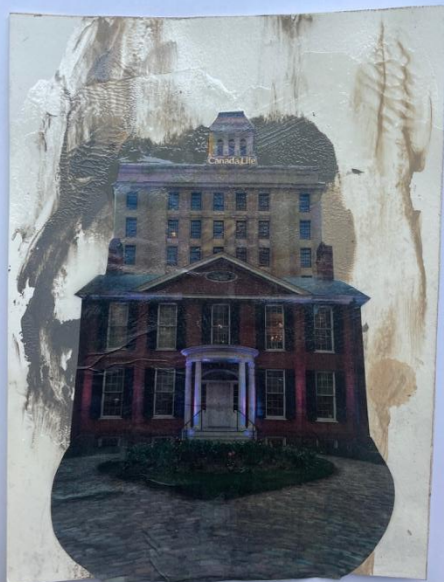
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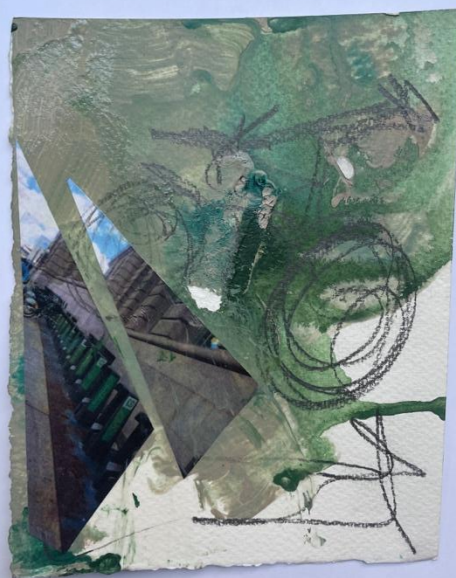
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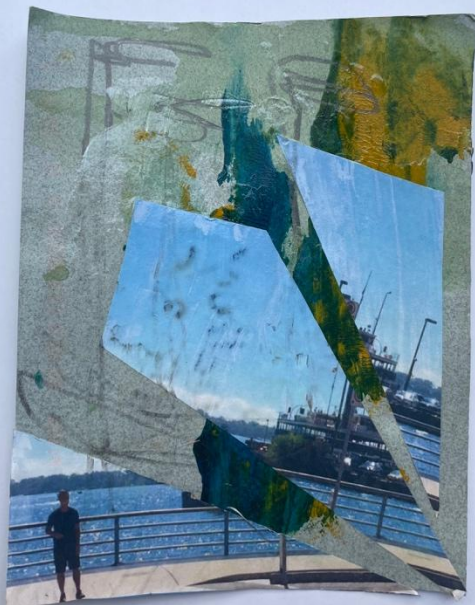
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