The Symbiotic Relation of Milkweed Fibre and Environmental Art Education

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ABSTRACT

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Through a methodology of research-creation, this thesis explains how an environmental practice consisting of growing, foraging, and harvesting indigenous plants of North America, primarily milkweed, can translate into an environmental art education within the classroom. It describes the path an art educator and textile artist walked to expose readers to elements of the outdoors, and suggests paths to take to proactively embody environmental practices. It asks: "How can she establish a sustaining environmental art education?'' With themes of Canadian identity, epistemology, reciprocity, deep ecology, and environmental conservatism, the artist and educator walks the readers through steps of papermaking with milkweed seed pod fibre grown and harvested locally.

Keywords: Milkweed; Indigenous Plants; Papermaking; Reciprocity; Environmental Conservatism; Art Education.

RÉSUMÉ

La Relation Symbiotique de la Fibre d'Asclépiade et de l'Éducation des Arts Environnemental

Amy Audet-Arcand

À travers une méthodologie de recherche-création, ce mémoire explique comment une pratique environnementale constituant de faire pousser, de récolter, et de cueillir des plantes indigènes de l'Amérique du Nord, principalement l'asclépiade, se traduit en une éducation des arts environnementale au sein d'une classe. Ça décrit le chemin qu'une éducatrice des arts et une artiste textile a pris afin d'exposé les lecteurs aux éléments de la nature, et suggère des voies à prendre de manière proactive en lieu d'incarner des pratiques environnementales. Ça demande: "Comment peut-elle établir une éducation des arts environnementale soutenable?'' Par des thèmes d'identité canadienne, d'épistémologie, de réciprocité, d'écologie profonde, et de conservatisme environnemental, l'artiste et éducatrice mène les lecteurs au travers des démarches de la fabrication de papier en utilisant la fibre contenue dans les cocons de graines d'asclépiade poussé et récolté localement.

Mots-clé: Asclépiade; Plantes Indigènes; Fabrication de Papier; Réciprocité; Conservatisme Environnemental; Éducation des Arts.

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Lastly, I want to express immense gratitude for Nicholas Duguay, my fiancé and soon-to-be husband, for his infinite support through my research and studies. A few photographs exhibited in this thesis have been taken by him through our many travels and projects. His support and encouragement have been a strong directional force throughout the years. I'm one very lucky person to share this life with him.

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Setting the Scene

Indigenous Plants of North America

In our monopolizing virtual spaces, it has become increasingly important to nurture our connection to nature. In hopes of protecting our ecological system, I will walk the readers through our societal need to be exposed to elements of the outdoors, and suggest paths to take to proactively embody environmental practices. In this text, I explain how an environmental practice consisting of growing, foraging, and harvesting indigenous plants of North America, primarily milkweed, can translate into an environmental art education. I am situated in an urban setting, living in Montreal, Québec, Canada; so exercising a gardening practice comes as a challenging routinely practice. As a candidate for a Master of Arts in Art Education at Concordia University, my inquiry is to locate the ways I can successfully put into practice an environmental art education through gardening and harvesting indigenous plants, art-making, and teaching.

Conservative author Roger Scruton states regarding global warming that: "[t]he global warming that is occurring may not be all man-made; but it is still *our problem*. The question therefore arises: what measures will prevent or mitigate it, and if we cannot take them, how do we face the future?'' (Scruton, 2012, p. 54) It is with this inquiry in mind, that I will address ways we can be proactive through this thesis.

Through a process of research-creation, I will illustrate how the task of research on materials leads me to the creation of environmental artworks. It will be through methods of gardening, harvesting, foraging, art-making, and journalling that I will exhibit how a methodology of research-creation is effective in my environmental practices.

The artworks I will create will be categorized as textile-art. Not only are the artworks that I have created results and products of the research accomplished, they are being used as prototypes for future educational purposes in my teaching practice. These artworks also stand as entities of their own, and have been showcased in two exhibitions. Through an animist perspective, I will illustrate how the art produced in this project contains an entity of their own, as to a type of agency.

Figure 1. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). Milkweed paper.

Figure 2. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Untitled*. Milkweed papers installation at *Bold, Italics, and Underlined* group exhibition at Galerie Popop, Belgo Building, 2024.

Positionality

Both my parents and I were born in Montreal. Our ancestors have been living in different regions of the province of Québec for centuries. However, I am originally of European descent, most probably from France. Being a Canadian woman, I carry a complex history of being originally from *somewhere else*, contrary to the plants I am focussing on for my thesis, that are native to North America.

As authors Patmore and Whitelaw describe in their 1967 pocket book on Canada and its cultures, I, too, am French Canadian and am from this niche culture partaking in this vast country that is Canada. They explain: “Whatever the English may be, French Canadians are overwhelmingly themselves. They are likely to be lively, articulate, witty; they can be tough,

stubborn […], but they are almost never withdrawn and reticent in the guarded, English Canadian way.'' (Patmore & Whitelaw, 1967, p. 66) They go on to describe the landscape of villages in rural Québec:

> "There is in those villages today a tranquility, and feeling of permanence which must surely be unique in North America. Perhaps it emanates from the old houses, built of the stone that came from the land as it was cleared. It was beautiful stone to begin with and it has mellowed to a creamy-grey with the centuries; the houses seem to have grown from the earth, to belong to the tall trees that shelter them.'' (Patmore & Whitelaw 1967, p. 71)

It is specifically from this landscape that both of my families originate from for over centuries. This landscape is part of my local and my identity.

My French-Canadian culture is rooted in the rurality and the landscape, a culture of hard workers, and a culture that observes. This upbringing and cultural background lead me to value labour-intensive work, and brought me to be captivated by work that is well executed. It also brought me to aspire to ideas of steadiness, consistency, meticulousness, and hard work. This constitutes the work that I have accomplished through my research. I believe the outcome of a work well implemented grants quality and order—ideas subjected to a conservative philosophy. It is through my research that I relate these values of order, consistency, and place of origin, to environmental conservatism. Paired with these values, I grew a sense of self-discovery from my early childhood. As Tim Ingold explains that,

> "[…] the only way one can really know things — that is, from the very inside of one's being — is through a process of self-discovery. To know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are.'' (Ingold, 2013, p. 1)

Ingold suggests that: "[i]t is, in short, by watching, listening and feeling — by paying attention to what the world has to tell us — that we learn." (Ingold, 2013, p. 1) This, in fact, is the truest embodiment of my learning journey since childhood and that has carried me through my Master thesis.

Background

Being an only child to parents who had me late in their lives, with limited friendships, limited neighbouring age-appropriate friends, or non-existent close cousins, I had a lot of time—supervised and unsupervised—by myself as a child. Between loneliness and dreamland, I had to find ways to keep myself entertained and busy. This helped me tremendously to develop an early sense of autonomy and independency, but also to hone my skills at creativity and resourcefulness where I just had to figure out things on my own. Albeit my natural ease at visual arts and crafts-making, I got to turn myself to the visual arts, gardening, playing outside, drawing with chalk on the pavement, building camps and snow forts, climbing in trees, and collecting rocks, leaves, sticks, caterpillars, snails, and small toads. This is what I could turn to, as these were the things that were available to me and is what would keep me busy when I had so much time on my own. I immersed myself in visual arts, making dozens of drawings every day, investing myself in a multitude of visual arts disciplines. Twenty years later, I continuously turn myself to these things; thinking of what I can create and gather, and how I can get to what I want.

Living Materials

For this research, I chose to work with living materials, ones that have a mind and purpose. Evolutionary biologists and authors Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan argue that living organism, such as the milkweed plant, "[…], [have] been shown to have memory, to be teachable, and to be able to find the quickest route between multiple points. Purposive behaviour is seen even in very simple arrangements of matter, […].'' (Margulis & Sagan, 2023, p. 7) They ask: "Do we want to claim exclusive possession of mind and purpose when the very cells of our brains have multiple precursors in a far more-than-human natural world?'' (Margulis & Sagan, 2023, p. 8) It is with this concept of mind and purpose within the living world that I discuss animism within my research.

Figure 3. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed seed pods.

Figure 4. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed cob with fibre and seeds.

I have been dedicated to growing indigenous plants from seeds—evening primrose, common milkweed, and swamp milkweed—in order to witness the process of a seed becoming a plant. The desire to watch such a process is to appreciate and honour using its fibres for art-making. I care for these plants that I research, travel to, forage, gather, dry, and extract their fibres. Through this process, I am learning traditional textiles techniques, relating this acquired knowledge to

broader art education and to my teaching practice. With this research, I am aiming at investing in the greater good of the educational system.

Figure 5. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Swamp milkweed at garden.

My intention to focus on plants that are native to the land I have lived on my whole life is to concentrate my thoughts, energy, and time on what is here, what is from here, what is—from appearance—believed to be supposed to be here, which is linked to environmental conservatism. So much of our textiles are massively produced and made outside of the place from where we live—here, referring to North America, and Canada, more specifically. I wish to bring more awareness to plants that are from here, that are often overlooked because they are often considered as "weeds.'' But these plants are arbitrary; they are intelligent and essential not only to us, but also to the wildlife. They help bring nutrients to our soils and guard for biodiversity. Overall, these plants are essential to the ecosystem and we must care for them. I believe that through education

and awareness, we can establish a healthier relationship with nature, so as to tend to it and respect it.

I believe that taking materials that are naturally produced, that are available and non-harmful, can be beneficial to nature and healthier for humans to work with, instead of most art supplies that are often harmful to produce and to use. As well, I am confident that using these natural materials can bring awareness and sensitivity to the beauty and challenges that each season brings: in our northern atmosphere, where seasons are generally very distinctive. Learning how to use these natural fibres, how to forage them ethically and sustainably, how to process them, can help us live more symbiotically with the seasons, helping us be more connected to the land, and therefore helping us navigate life. I believe in the benefit of being exposed to nature.

Figure 6. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed fibre and seed.

Figure 7. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed fibre and seed.

I have wished to practise my communicated desire to garden since early childhood, against the constraints I was imposed upon, like not being allowed a gardening space nor materials, like seeds. I was able to start gardening at a very small scale when I was a teenager, and it only grew

since then. I got to research a lot about gardening, plants, and got to work at a plant nursery and do agricultural field work on a vineyard. Since working on small-scale organic farms in British Columbia, I have had my own garden at home, growing medicinal plants for multiple years, until having my own indigenous plants garden on my university's campus in 2023. It is with pride that I carry this gardening practice that I've grown and cultivated, to the point of having it as a main focus of my Master of Arts thesis. It is with a focus on well-being that I include a gardening practice in my life, as Johanna Tagada Hoffbeck expresses so precisely in her book *Créer avec la nature: Pratiques artistiques & méditatives pour se relier au vivant*: "J'ai alors compris que le jardinage conservait en vie l'enfant en moi.'' (Tagada Hoffbeck, 2023, p. 38)

Figure 8. Duguay, N. (2019). Amy working on a small-scale organic farm in Lillooet, BC.

My gardening and art practices have always been deeply important to me, and are at the core of my identity. I believe that the two separate actions of making art and gardening are beneficial to a society, as it connects humans to primary needs and natural modes of expression,

connecting us to our senses and emotions. I venerate the traditional indigenous techniques of processing plant fibres, such as milkweed, and I hope to learn from these techniques to guide me in my art-making process. I am trusting that the development of these fibres, as a sustainable, ecological, and ethical matter will improve the textiles and art worlds.

I remember visiting one of my aunts when I was around 8 years old. She had a vegetable and cut-flower garden in her backyard, one that I will always remember. I have the vivid memory of seeing the garden, in all of its glory, in the warmest 'golden hour' light of the summer. It was a type of garden that I had never seen before. It was original, in the common sense of being *creative*—it had a circular shape, it was curated, but still loose and wild. It was tamed, but still had its own agency. The plants were ruling, but they were still maintained by my aunt and her husband. There was a path crossing in the middle of this garden, where one could see the plants and the entity of the garden on very different angles and perspectives, revealing dahlias, pumpkins, and tomatoes. This garden visit was embodying my desire for creativity, visual arts, gardening, and the outdoors.

Ingold explains the essence of materials as:

> Materials do not *exist*, in the manner of objects, as static entities with diagnostic attributes; they are not — in the words of Karen Barad — 'little bits of nature', awaiting the mark of an external force like culture or history for their completion. Rather, as substances-in-becoming they carry on or *perdure*, forever overtaking the formal destination that, at one time or another, have been assigned to them, and undergoing continual modulation as they do so. Whatever the objective forms in which they are currently cast, materials are always and already on their ways to becoming something else — always, as Barad puts it, 'already an ongoing historicity' (Barad 2003: 821). (Ingold, 2013, p. 31)

How Can I Establish a Sustaining Environmental Art Education?

This question that is leading my Master of Arts thesis will be answered through three accounts—*On Art-Making*, *On Education and Teaching*, and *On Research*. These three accounts serve as chapters, explaining the three simultaneous aspects of my research, making, and educating. On *Art-Making* reflects on artists and educators who guided my art-making processes. *On Educating and Teaching* will feature my position as a visual arts teacher and art educator. *On*

Research will contain ecological, philosophical, and political components, reflecting on the ways I have conducted my research.

Following the three chapters, the readers will be walked through an artist statement, an educator/teacher statement, and a researcher statement. These have as function to state my opinions and visions of what an environmental artist, educator/teacher, and researcher should stand by.

Methodology and Method

My methodology consists of Research-Creation. The knowledge gained from this methodology will inform my inquiry of the connection of human beings to nature and sustainable practices, as well as the development of North American indigenous fibres into visual arts and art education. My methods in which I executed my research are gardening, harvesting, foraging, journalling, art-making, and teaching. My methods are also my outcomes, my "painful practice,'' my thesis, and what has allowed me to write my three statements. Professors Chapman and Sawchuk explain that: "[g]enerating situated forms of knowledge, combined with new ways of developing and disseminating that knowledge, research-creation helps reveal different contexts and methods for cultural analysis […].'' (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, pp. 11-12)

My research -creation methodology is divided into two categories: research-for-creation and creation-as-research. Chapman and Sawchuk describe research-for-creation as:

> "While it seems somewhat misleading to separate initial research phases from production phases […], it is important to acknowledge that any creation, even […] creation that is pursued as a type of research in and of itself, involves an initial gathering together of material, ideas, concepts, collaborators, technologies, et cetera, in order to begin.'' (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 15)

They also explain that this category of research-creation also allows room for trial and error, a place where I have definitely been through my research. (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 16)

Figure 9. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed plants, Loyola Campus.

Figure 10. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed seed pods on plants.

> Creation-as-research is described by Chapman and Sawchuk as:
> "[it] involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge. It is about investigating the relationship between technology, gathering and revealing through creation […], while also seeking to extract knowledge from the process. Research is more or less the end goal in this instance, although the "results" produced also include the creative production that is entailed, as both a tracing-out and culminating expression of the research process.'' (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 19)

I will further elaborate on my methodology in my first chapter *On Art-Making*.

Data

The milkweed papers produced within this research of research-creation consist of my principal data. With this paper, I am tracing a trail that others can follow: “To tell, in short, is not to explicate the world, to provide the information that would amount to a complete specification, obviating the need for would-be practitioners to inquire for themselves. It is rather to trace a path that others can follow.’’ (Ingold, 2013, p. 110) Indeed, I have established an ecological art practice where I have been already vocal about it and I’m planning on teaching others about this milkweed paper practice; therefore tracing a trail of an environmental practice within art education.

Figure 11. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). Milkweed paper.

Figure 12. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Milkweed Papers* showcase at Art Education Vitrine, Concordia University.

Outcomes

Following the completion of the milkweed papers, I have participated in two exhibitions affiliated with Concordia University. The first exhibition took placed in May 2024 where I exhibited my milkweed papers, as a suspended installation, in the graduate students group exhibition *Bold, Italics, and Underlined* at Galerie Popop, in the Belgo building.

My milkweed papers were exhibited for an extended period of time in the showcasing *Milkweed Papers* at the Art Education Vitrine of Concordia University from June to August 2024.

These showcasing of my research-creation work arrived at a beautiful time, signifying and embodying the completion of this labour-intensive art-making practice, and my study of some indigenous plants of North America and my relation to the place.

Procedures

For this research, I sowed seeds of indigenous plants of North America: Swamp Milkweed, Common Milkweed, and Evening Primrose. I have grown these plants in a gardening area that is self-managed on Loyola Campus, in Montreal, in the summer of 2023. At the end of the growing season, in November 2023, I harvested the plants to collect the fibres of the milkweed. I have travelled in a few regions of Québec to sustainably and ethically forage indigenous plants in order to collect their fibres. After having harvested my milkweed, I started to process the fibres to make art. My initial plan was to use the fibre that was in the stalks of the milkweed to make weavings. In the end, I used the duvet-like fibre that is contained in the seed pods of the milkweed plant to make paper in December 2023. During this process, I have journalled my experience, research, and findings. After completing my body of works, I showcased my milkweed papers in two exhibitions, from May to August 2024.

Figure 13. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Common and swamp milkweed, and evening primrose seedlings.

Figure 14. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Swamp milkweed seedling.

In March 2023, I contacted the Diversity and Sustainability department at Concordia University to inquire about a potential gardening space the university could provide me for my research. I have then been put in touch with Jackie Martin, Concordia's Urban Agriculture and Biodiversity coordinator. Since being put in contact with Martin, she has had a main role in facilitating the concretization of my research. In early June 2023, Jackie Martin provided me a raised bed on Loyola campus of about two by three feet of dimensions. She has shown me the facilities that are accessible to me such as the neighbouring gardens, the water source, compost pile, the tools and the tool shed. She put me in touch with Andrea Tremblay from *mind.heart.mouth.*, a collective gardening, design, and community care, that is also neighbouring my then garden. In so far, Martin has joined me to a network of gardeners and sustainability activists, that have to heart a collective good and a hopeful outlook on our environmental and community future. Jackie Martin has also provided me a very big stack of milkweed on August 3,

2023, when she informed me that other gardeners had to cut some milkweed due to its invasiveness in the gardens. They originally wished to relocate the milkweed, but due to a matter of time, they did not get to accomplish the task. It is why she has offered me the milkweed stalks, knowing that it could benefit my research. I then went over the gardens to collect the milkweed, which I removed the leaves and seed pods in order to be able to carry the stack. The stack has now been drying at home and is now ready for me to process the milkweed stalks to extract their fibres.

Figure 15. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Given milkweed, Loyola campus.

Figure 16. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Collected given milkweed, Loyola campus.

Jackie Martin's contribution has made my project possible, which is to have an urban gardening space of my own for the 2023 gardening season, where I could tend to on my own time, visit the space, care for my plants, and finally harvest the plants I grew from seeds, to be able to extract their fibres to then proceed to art-making. This constitutes into an embodiment of soil-to-art-making practice.

In late July of 2023, I visited the Haute-Mauricie and Lac St-Jean regions in the province of Québec. On my passage, I had the opportunity to forage a very limited quantity of indigenous plants: common milkweed, and fireweed—plants that are traditionally used by indigenous people of North America for their fibres and other various purposes. I have collected very few of each of

these plants. I've collected them with mindfulness and gratitude, such as taught by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*. (Kimmerer, 2013) Kimmerer's book is one that I have kept very close to me throughout my research, as I referred to it for guidance.

Figure 17. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Harvesting milkweed in Lac St-Jean, QC.

Figure 18. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Harvesting fireweed in Lac St-Jean, QC.

In my province of Québec, the rhythm of the seasons allows an organic creation flow, where the reality is that one can only create so much at a time, depending on what the season's natural materials produce. I find myself subjected to the natural rhythm of plants and the reality of

the seasons in our Nordic atmosphere. This process can be perceived as humbling when I am directed by something greater than me.

Figure 19. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Fall milkweed.

Figure 20. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Harvested milkweed.

Chapter 1 — On Art-Making

Self-Restraint Within Ecology

The World Conservation Strategy, published in 1980, defines that "[e]cosystems are systems of plants, animals and microorganisms together with the non-living components of their environments. "(IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) Author VanCleave defines ecology as: "[…] the study of the behaviour of living things in their natural surroundings and how they affect each other. It is also a study of the relationships between living things and the unique home that they all share—the earth.'' (VanCleave, 1996, p. 1) Through this thesis, ecology serve as the gravitational force of my research.

The way I work with indigenous plants in relation to the environment is through a gentle and mindful extraction. I have gone through an education of ethical harvesting and foraging, while also gardening and harvesting my own indigenous plants from seeds. Developing a relationship and connection with nature, where one takes the time to give, observe, and harvest which is really formative on how to look at nature. This slow relationship is creating an outlook on nature that presented me with the importance of caring for the conservation of nature. Indigenous biologist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer has taught me so much on ethical harvesting and sensitive relation-building with plants. She tells:

> Asking permission shows respect for the personhood of the plant, but it is also an assessment of the well-being of the population. Thus I must use both sides of my brain to listen to the answer. The analytic left reads the empirical signs to judge whether the population is large and healthy enough to sustain a harvest, whether it has enough to share. The intuitive right hemisphere is reading something else, a sense of generosity, an open-handed radiance that says take me, or sometimes a tight-lipped recalcitrance that makes me put my trowel away. I can't explain it, but it is a kind of knowing that is for me just as compelling as a no-trespassing sign. This time, when I push my trowel deep I come up with a thick cluster of gleaming white bulbs, plump, slippery, and aromatic. I hear yes, so I make a gift from the soft old tobacco pouch in my pocket and begin to dig. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 178)

This commentary of Kimmerer tells of the juggling thoughts between taking what is there, what we found and therefore what seems to be belonging to ourselves, versus self-control, morale,

and reciprocity. In relation to harvesting and foraging, Kimmerer suggests the guidelines for the *Honorable Harvest* where if everyone was to abide to these invitations, people would be have a much more sensible relation to nature:

> *Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.*
> *Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.*
> *Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.*
> *Never take the first. Never take the last.*
> *Take only what you need.*
> *Take only that which is given.*
> *Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.*
> *Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share.*
> *Give thanks for what you have been given.*
> *Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.*
> *Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.* (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 183)

She goes on to say that: "The taking of another life to support your own is far more significant when you recognize the beings who are harvested as persons, nonhuman persons vested with awareness, intelligence, spirit—and who have families waiting for them at home. Killing a *who* demands something different than killing an *it*. "(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 183) It is by following these guidelines of the Honorable Harvest that I grew my milkweed plants, harvested them and foraged some more milkweed and fireweed. The concept of nonhumans is something I will refer to when talking of animism.

I was reminded of the guidelines of the *Honorable Harvest* of Kimmerer by my five-year-old nephew in July 2024 when we went canoeing together in Lac St-Jean, in Québec. We had stopped on a small island to rest, to be in the shade and to swim in the lake when, while exploring the island, we found bushes of wild blueberries. I started taking the ripest blueberries to snack on together and to bring back to the rest of the family. Both my nephew and I had a few blueberries when he warned me to stop picking blueberries so as to leave some for other people that would come on that island and to leave some for nature. I first thought it was adorable of my five-year-old nephew to educate me on the matter and to be conscious of this issue, as well as to show self-

restraint and respect to nature. I was then flattered that he reminded me of this respect towards nature each one of us must carry within ourselves.

Mindful Extraction of Fibres

The way I tackle concerns of extraction through my art, research, and teaching practices is through conservation. I care for the conservation of our North American ecosystem and biodiversity, and so by educating myself on indigenous plants, by ethically foraging them and using their renewable resources as a small-scale art practice, I am also educating others on the importance of caring for these valuable plants. Through my research-creation practice, the attention isn't so focussed towards the final artistic result, but rather on the process and the education that I went through myself. What is important is the process: the practice of educating myself, growing plants, going out to nature, ethically and sustainably foraging, and building knowledge on extracting these natural indigenous fibres.

Figure 21. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Harvested milkweed.

Figure 22. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed fibre.

Textile Art

I believe that what brought me to a fascination to textiles is the fibre's textures and its relation to light, just like fellow Canadian textile artist Sarah Swett. (The Long Thread Podcast, 2023) She tells

> I heard a wonderful weaver, one time, talk about the *frisson* that you get, that little sort of, […], that chill when something is a thing you absolutely must try. And, and I know that the cordage, using leaves, definitely felt that way. (The Long Thread Podcast, 2023)

It is with longing for this special physiological feeling that is a *frisson* that I must pursue textile art.

Figure 23. Light and texture on milkweed fibre on the cob.

Sourcing Locally

Author Toale tells about finding the plant one would work with for papermaking: “[t]o find a specific plant, research it, process it, and make sheets from it puts the whole process on a very intimate, personal level and gives each sheet of paper an added importance.’’ (Toale, 1983, p. 25) They also add that “[t]ime is a factor that cannot be overlooked in any hand process. The pleasure of collecting and processing plants can be quickly overshadowed if it takes two days to hand beat the fiber into usable pulp, […]. (Toale, 1983, p. 31)

British textile artist Alice Fox contribute to this reflection on working with the impermanence of the plants that are local to us, the process of foraging them and using their fibres in purpose to art-making:

> Working with the seasons and learning what materials are available at different times of year helps to ground us in natural cycles and integrates creative activity with other parts of our lives. Taking an open-minded and informed approach to resources means we can make use of what is available locally and experiment with unconventional materials.
>
> Art enriches our lives, but it also makes us think in new ways. It can raise question and awareness, and provide insight in a way that is approachable. If we can work in a sustainable way and help other people to think about the impact of their lives, then what we make can be a positive force for change. (Fox, 2022, p. 6)

Fox tells that there is history that is being made when you get to know the plants you are working with and that by knowing their provenance, you become a responsible harvester and maker, one who has to develop a sense of resourcefulness in order to make do with natural constraints. (Fox, 2022, p. 10) Fox believes that she is creating a link to places and an identity within the locality when working with local natural materials. (Fox, 2022, p. 15)

She says:

> “By exploring the potential of the plants and materials that are available to me, specifically on my allotment and in my garden, my practice is rooted in my local area. By working with what I have, my environmental footprint is kept to a minimum. This approach also enables me to develop my relationship with my surroundings, appreciating what is nearby. I am constantly adding to my understanding of the materials that are tag my disposal. With what that growth in knowledge, I can work in a way that feels right to me. Most of these materials are

> humble at best or considered as weeds or waste by many. Getting to know the creative possibilities of what is often overlooked means that these materials can tale on new value, as time and effort are spent on transforming them.'' (Fox, 2022, p. 14)

Papermaking

My entry point to papermaking was something that sort of came to me unexpectedly; I just came to me. I attended a workshop of milkweed papermaking, did more research passed my attendance to the workshop, equipped myself with all the tools and materials I needed, rolled up my sleeves, and simply got at it. However, I didn't know what I was getting into and that it was going to become a story of blood, sweat, and tears. At last, the moments of despair were finally overturned by an ultimate feeling of satisfaction and of having succeeded when I was manipulating my dry sheets of milkweed paper for the first time, as if I had created magic.

The steps of papermaking with the milkweed fibre are rather distinct and can be done at a slight interval. I started by harvesting my milkweed seed pods in the months of October and November 2023. It was important to harvest the seed pods at a time when it is the end of the season, meaning that the flowers of the plant have finished blooming and that the monarch butterflies had their time to feed off of the plant. The seed pods must be still intact, without being open, otherwise, the duvet-like fibre that is contained within the pod will not be good anymore.

Figure 24. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed cob with fibre and seeds.

Figure 25. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). How to hold milkweed cob to remove fibre and seeds.

Once I had collected all of my seed pods, I got to start extracting the fibre from the pods. It was by opening gently the seed pod, while still holding in place the middle part of the pod that contains a papery fibre that all of the fibre and seeds are attached to. While firmly holding this central part, I got to remove all of the seeds and keep them into a container. I would then place the duvet fibre into a bowl. Through the extraction of the fibre of the milkweed seed pods, I have kept the milkweed seeds that I then used to put in pulp of recycled paper when teaching workshops and classes on recycled papermaking.

Figure 26. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). How to hold milkweed cob to remove fibre and seeds.

Figure 27. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed cob without seeds.

Figure 28. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Papery fibre in the middle of milkweed seed pod, what is holding the fibres.

Figure 29. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed fibre and seeds.

When all of my duvet-like milkweed fibre was collected, I weighed it. For 57 milkweed seed pods that I harvested, I got 39 grams of duvet fibre and 67 grams of seeds. I then had to cook for 40 minutes my milkweed fibre in a pot on the stove top with an alkaline solution. The alkaline solution has to constitute 10% of the weight of the fibre. Therefore, I put 3.9 grams of sodium percarbonate into the cooking water of the milkweed. I then rinsed my fibres under cool water and strained the fibre. I stored my cooked and strained fibre into an airtight bag in the refrigerator, as I was told that I could keep the fibre in at this stage in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks. When opening the refrigerator a few weeks later to look at my milkweed fibre, I saw that there was mold on the fibre. It is then that I had a panic attack. The stress was coming to the fact that this was my material for my Master thesis, that was my research, and now I was running the possibility of losing it? It was defeating for me. I had waited and stored my fibre in the refrigerator because I

could not start processing the fibre earlier. I was waiting to grind the fibre to a moment that was better for me.

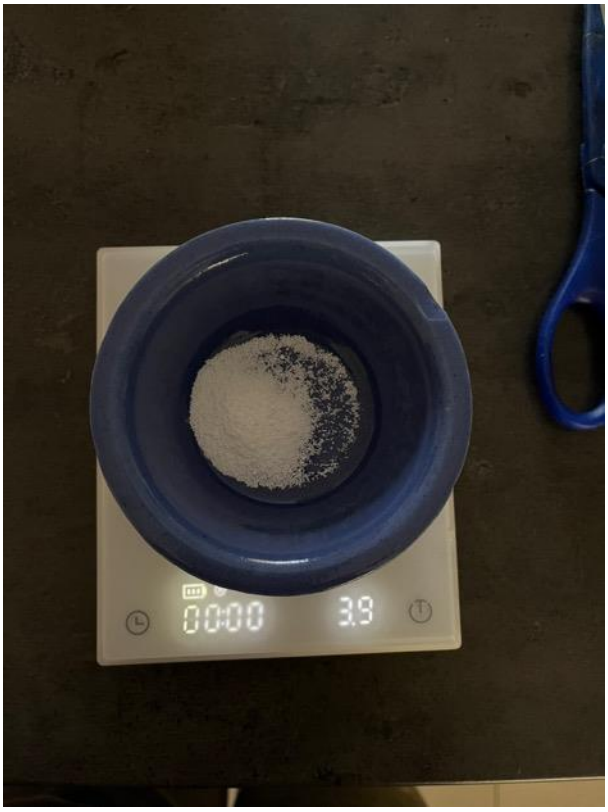

Figure 30. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Weighing sodium percarbonate.

Figure 31. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Wetting milkweed fibres in hot water.

Figure 32. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Cooking milkweed fibres.

Figure 33. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Cooked and strained milkweed fibres.

Figure 34. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Cooked milkweed fibres with mold.

I then had no choice but to process the fibre right away in hopes of controlling the propagation of the bacteria and mold. Doing all of this process at home caused a lot of stress in the home for health reasons. It was a very stressful time, and a time where I had to stay sharply focussed and push through to do my work. I had been told that there were two ways that I could blend the milkweed fibres in order for the fibres to get shorter. The first and ideal option was to grind the cooked fibres in a little bit of water with a mortar and pestle. Doing this technique would ensure that the fibres would be well-broken down and would have a better result for the sheets of paper. The second option was to blend the fibres in water in an electric blender. I started grinding the fibres with the mortar and pestle, which felt like a miserable process. It quickly became unrealistic to me to grind my fibres by hand, as it was particularly time and energy consuming, and as I could grind such a small amount of fibre at a time. After trying to grind by hand for a few days, and with the concern of my fibres propagating with mold in the refrigerator, I had to start blending with the electric blender. I started doing so with a high quality electric blender, to then realize that it was not working out due to the fibres getting stuck around the blades of the blender and that I could not get them untangled. I finally proceeded to putting a little bit of fibre with water in a shallow bowl and blending that fibre with the emulsion blender. This was such an arduous process as I could blend only one second at a time, had to stop to untangle the fibres stuck around the blade, blend one more second, untangle, and continuously like that until the fibres started breaking down a lot more and where I could blend for a few seconds at a time. For every gram of fibre, it would take me over 15 minutes to blend it. It was hard mentally and physically. When the fibres were sufficiently grounded, I got to put all of the grounded fibre back into the big electric blender and blend the fibres together a little longer to make sure they all had a similar grind and were as homogenous as could be.

Figure 35. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). About to hand-grind milkweed fibre with mortar and pestle.

Figure 36. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed fibre in mortar with water.

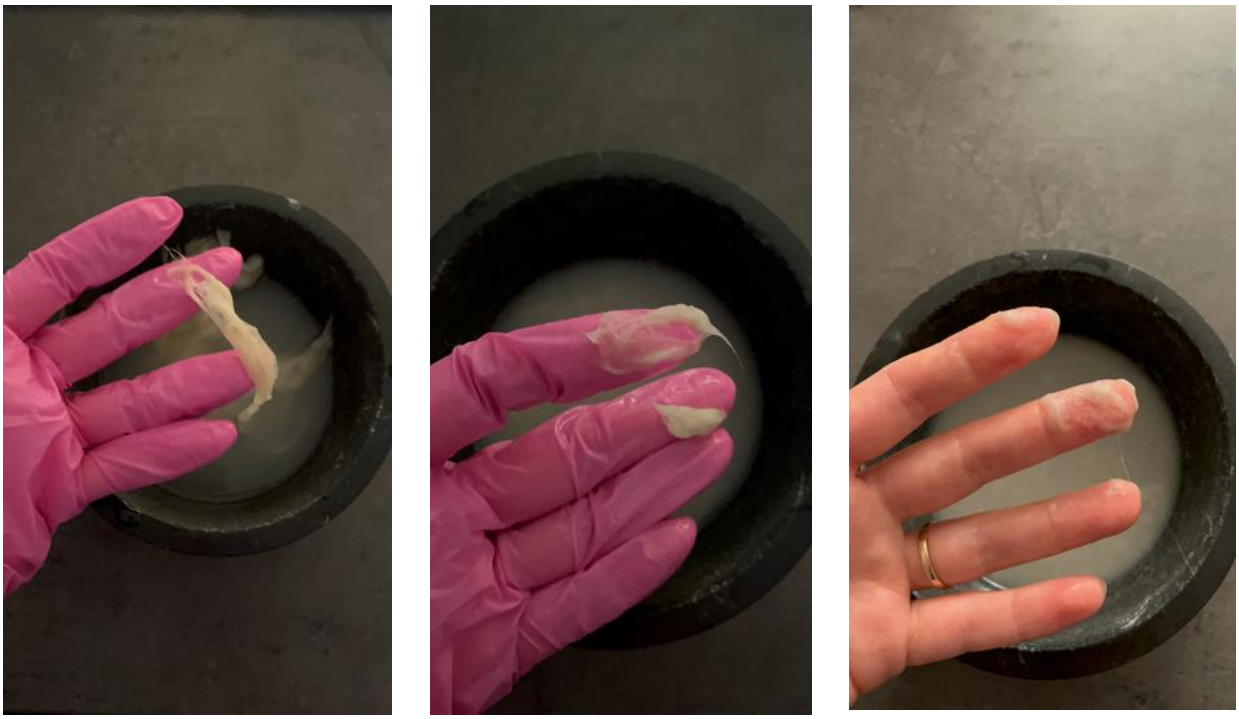

Figure 37. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Coarse grind of milkweed fibre.

Figure 38. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Medium grind of milkweed fibre.

Figure 39. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Fine grind of milkweed fibre.

For the paper pulp, I had to mix konnyaku powder with water for 30 minutes continuously to create konnyaku paste. This paste was going to act as a binding agent in the sheets of paper. Once this paste was made, I got to put water and some of my milkweed paper grounded fibres into my vat, which constituted into a big clear container. To this pulp, I added some of the konnyaku paste. The ratios of fibre to paste to water are totally unscientific, where this process is based on the principle of trial and error. I put water into the vat, added some fibre and paste and it is by mixing the pulp with my hand and feeling it between my fingers that I could judge whether the consistency of the pulp was right or not.

Figure 40. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Grinding milkweed fibre with emulsion blender.

Figure 41. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Measuring and whisking konnyaku powder in water.

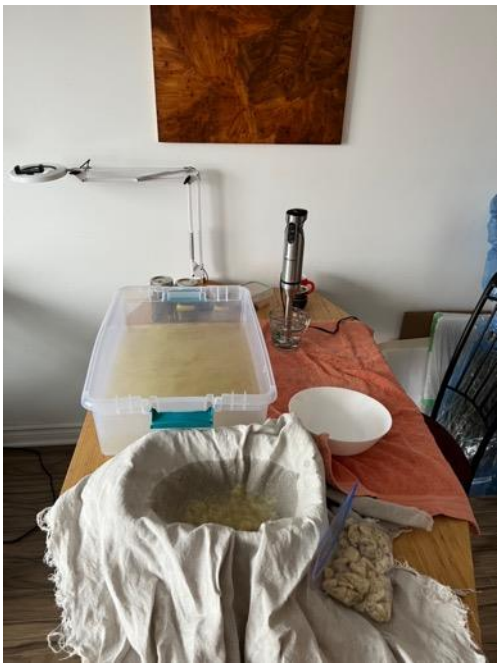

Figure 42. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed pulp vat.

Figure 43. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Milkweed papermaking working station.

At the point that the consistency was good, I could start making my sheets of paper. I would dunk my paper mould at a 45˚ angle, then settle the mould laying flat in the water, to finally lift the mould out of the pulp, letting the excess water drip out of the mould, and giving a little shake to the mould in all ways in order to allow the pulp to settle into the mould as uniformly as possible. The paper mould could then be flipped over on a damp sheet of cotton fabric in order to transfer the wet moulded sheet of paper. When the paper mould was placed on the damp fabric, a sponge can be used to be rubbed onto the mesh of the mould in order to remove any excess of water. The maneuver of forming the sheet of paper has to be done quickly, something that becomes easier as more sheets of paper as being made. This process needs to be repeated to form all the sheets of paper. Along the process, more fibre would have to be added to the vat, and more konnyaku paste as well. The sheets of paper can be formed until there are no more fibre. Once the first sheet of fabric is filled with wet sheets of paper, another damp sheet of cotton fabric can be layered right on top of the first one and new sheets of paper can be added to it. The final result will be layers of damp cotton fabric with all of the sheets of paper between the layers of fabric. All this can be placed between two sheets of felt and then placed between two sheets of thicker and harder surface, like compressed cardboard, wood, or plexiglass. Altogether, these layers can be pressed in order

to remove any excess of water, therefore accelerating the drying process, and placed in a well-ventilated area.

Figure 44. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Wet sheet of milkweed paper.

Figure 45. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Wet sheets of milkweed paper on wet fabric.

After my sheets of paper had rested and dried in these layers of fabric, felt, and cardboard, I laid around all the sheets of fabric containing the sheets of paper on the floors in order for the paper to dry more. Quickly, I got to separate the sheets of milkweed paper from the sheet of fabric as soon as the paper was dry enough to be held in my hands. And just like that, soon enough, I had my product: my milkweed papers. My initial 57 milkweed seed pods and 39 grams of fibre yielded 45 6.5 x 10 inches sheets of milkweed paper.

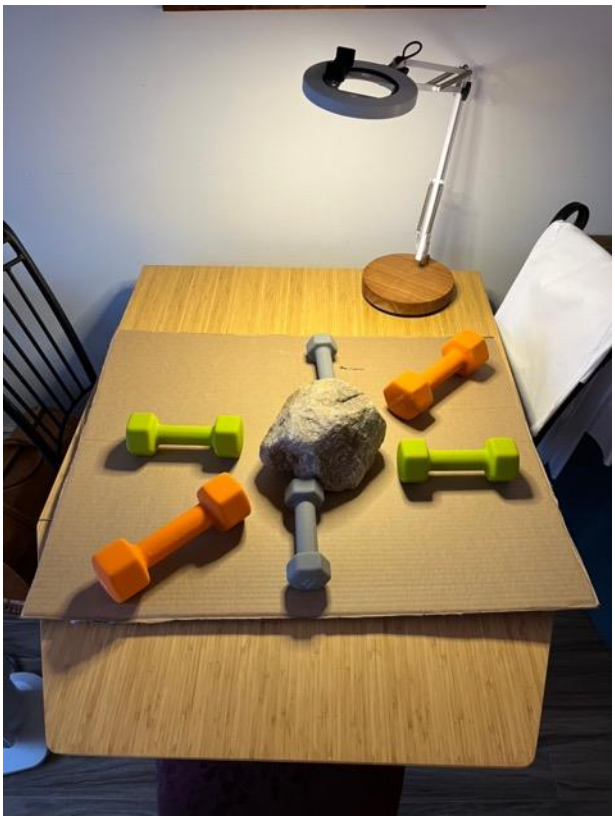

Figure 46. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Pressing milkweed paper.

Figure 47. Audet-Arcand, A. (2023). Forty-five sheets of milkweed paper.

Papermaking Journal Entries

December 2, 2023

I'm getting prepared to start making milkweed paper at home. I feel scared and anxious right now. I even feel nauseous, which then makes me even more anxious and scared.

It's no small thing—no small process. Now I'm thinking: why am I doing this? I could have simply done oil painting as my subject of study. Why am I jumping to a comparison to oil painting? Is it because I feel like it's easier? Because no. Oil painting is not easier. Maybe there's not as many steps to get started, but what happens between painting and the final results are so important. So much pressure on the final thing. I know it because I've done it. It's so much work. Which makes me think that maybe that overlook, that judgment, of what constitutes good art, depends upon the context. Like oil painting, what constitutes a good and

successful result is probably the final outcome, the consistency between the work, the subject, the message, the image. Whereas the approach one may take to look at handmade milkweed paper to judge if it's good art or not, is completely different. The attention is put on the process of making paper, the many steps one has to learn, the knowledge one has to acquire to then be able to proceed to papermaking; especially in this case, where I have grown and foraged the material with which to make paper. Therefore, the attention will be put on all of the steps that were required to achieve a final artistic outcome. That's why I'm so stressed right now. If I mishap on any of the steps, my final outcome will be directly affected by it. The attention is put on knowledge and expertise one needs to possess in order to execute.

December 4, 2023

On Saturday, December 2nd, I've started more seriously tackling the papermaking project. […] I realized that grinding the milkweed duvet fibres by hand with a mortar and pestle, takes way too much time. So I decided to go for my back-up plan, which is to use an electric [emulsion] blender to break down the fibre. I started doing that and realized that one "batch'', or one bowl-full of fibre and water, takes almost as much time to blend/process, as it would take me if I would do it by hand in the mortar. However, in the bowl, with the electric [emulsion] blender, I can blend at once a bigger quantity of fibre, compared to the mortar. However, also, when I break down the fibre by hand, the result is quite better and more consistent than with the electric blender. So, it comes down to quality vs. quantity. To this day, it seems to be more advantageous to use the electric blender.

Now, on Saturday, December 2nd, I went to take my cooked milkweed fibre in [an airtight] bag in the fridge. It had been a bit over a week that I hadn't looked at it. I picked up the bag to see dark green and pink mold on the fibre. I was shocked. I felt a sense of defeat and almost betrayal (not quite, just that I was given information that turned out to not be quite accurate in the end). The emotional response comes from all that I've invested in this fibre, and how everything comes down to be holding on by a thread, literally. I've invested myself solely in this fibre, without much back-up plan. So if this isn't working out, what do I have for my thesis? This is hard. I'm depending on myself and on this fibre only.

So now things are pressing. No time to waste. No time to fool around. I need to process this fibre ASAP. Henceforth the reason why I now choose to break down the fibre with the electric blender. I need a more efficient (a more realistic way of working, especially in today's western world?) way of working that is a little bit quicker, processing more at once.

As I'm still processing the fibre (and have so much left to process), the electric [emulsion] blender is heating, forcing me to take breaks in between. I decided to maybe start making a first batch of paper as I started a vat with some processed fibre, water, and konnyaku powder paste I made myself. I thought the fibre in the vat was good enough to start making paper. As I try to make a first sheet of paper with my wooden paper mould, the fibre does not come off of the mould as I'm pressing down the mould onto felt and a thin cotton fabric. I can't make the sheet of paper. I feel despair. This is so hard. I have such limited knowledge. I'm resourceful, I've always been, so I'm trying to tie things together in my head, trying to make sense of it all, trying not to let the anxiety creep in, no to let the feeling of failure creep in. I'm stubborn just enough to keep on trying and trying to find a solution, making adjustments to make this happen. But I feel a pressure, a new time constraints now: my fibre is moldy, I need to process it ASAP. I feel like the longer I let the fibre be humid/soaked, the more moldy it will get. That's why I want to process all the fibre now, make my paper now, to then dry the sheets—dry the heck out of them to kill any bacteria.

I'm seeing now that my constraints are time and humidity […]. It feels like a matter of time and water, such basic things, such pure and primal elements. Elements that have always been and will always be. That's the ones I'm "fighting'' with right now. How contemporary am I, in 2023, a Canadian woman doing a Master degree in Art Education, fighting such primal things.

Painful Practice

This papermaking process of despair, and of joy and magic was really hard, and mentally and physically challenging. Artist and author Lee tells, in 2012, of the painful practice of practising

jiseung, which consists of cording by hand *hanji*, handmade Korean paper. (Lee, 2012, p. 179) When practising *jiseung* during her apprenticeship in Korea, *jiseung* was taking over her body:

> At the end of long days working on jiseung homework or at lessons, I could not read due to eyestrain. By the end of my apprenticeship, my body had compensated in more drastic ways. During a visit to a blind massage therapist in Seoul, she felt my hands and neck, and exclaimed, "What do you do?!'' I told her about my jiseung study, and she said that it was wreaking havoc on my body and that I needed to scale way back. She said, "You only become an idiot by withstanding this kind of pain.'' Since leaving Korea, I have never maintained as rigorous a jiseung practice as I did during my apprenticeship. (Lee, 2012, p. 100)

Lee also claims that she believed that undertaking a new physical practice such as *jiseung* as an adult would have a great negative impact on her body, contrary to what her *jiseung* master would proclaim to her. (Lee, 2012, p. 99) Indeed, just like Lee taking on the *jiseung* practice, my taking on the milkweed paper making by hand had had its negative effect on my body. Not only was it ever consuming on my time, my mental focus, my energy, and my home, but also on my body. It was painful on the whole of my fingers, all the way to the tip of my fingers, my hands, my sensitive skin, my arms, neck, back, and eyes as well. The moment that I was finishing the papermaking and holding the paper in my hand was a true moment of ecstatic joy as I was relieving my body from this pain, allowing my body to rest, at the same time as realizing that I had done it: I was holding a finished product in my hands.

The Hand Knows

Tim Ingold tells of the quality of the hand, a hand that knows and tells:

> "Not only is it supreme among the organs of touch, the hand can also tell the stories of the world in its gestures and in the written or drawn traces they yield, or in the manipulation of threads as in weaving, lacemaking and embroidery. Indeed, the more gesturally animate the hand, the more it feels.'' (Ingold, 2013, p. 112)

In fact, with my acquired knowledge through my papermaking practice, my hands got to know and tell. By repeating the same gestures over an extended period of time, after being in this mental place of repeating my actions and to simply be making, feeling the consistency of the paper pulp, mixing the pulp in the vat, doing the motion to create the paper sheet in the mould, rubbing

off the excess water on the mould with the sponge, etc., I had gotten in a place where it was my hands that were leading and doing the making. This making by hand also holds meaning and value that is different from what it once was:

> Once, to have said that an article is 'made by hand' would have been a statement of the obvious. How else would you have made it? By foot? In today's world, however, 'handmade' is a mark of distinction. It connotes a kind of authenticity and devotion that people, increasingly cast as passive consumers rather than active citizens, feel is otherwise missing from their lives. With citizenship comes moral responsibility, yet how can we be responsible for a world that comes to us ready-made? At the very same moment when the whole world is at our fingertips, it also seems completely out of our hands. (Ingold, 2013, p. 122)

Ingold tells of the difference the notion of *made-by-hand* has nowadays in comparison to before times. The idea of something that is now made by hand, where an individual knows a skill or had to learn a skill, master is well enough to be able to execute it, tells of a lot more today, in a day and age where most things are yet still produced industrially by machines, rather than before, where machines were not as predominant. My milkweed paper holds a different meaning today where this object that, in appearance, is shouting from the rooftops that it was made by hand, clashes tremendously with our everyday machine-made objects. My papers are therefore situated in time, where today, in 2024, these papers hold value and meaning, something that might not have held as much if I had made them seventy years ago, for example.

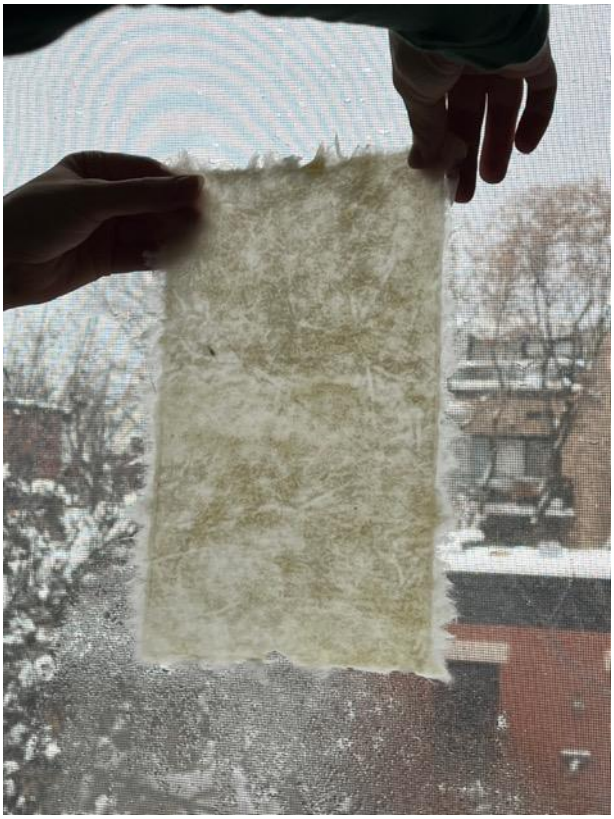

Figure 48. Duguay, N. (2023). Amy holding sheet of milkweed paper.

Figure 49. Duguay, N. (2023). Amy holding sheet of milkweed paper.

Artist Statement

Artists must embody what they preach through their artistic practice. I have established myself as a textile and ecological artist where I thoroughly source my materials in the living space, and done so ethically. Tim Ingold's concept of an *art of inquiry* stipulates that: "[t]he way of the craftsman, […], is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us (Dormer 1994; Adamson 2007).'' (Ingold, 2013, p. 6) Indeed, I deeply engage myself in the process of researching, cultivating, and harvesting my nonhuman living materials, where I become in communion with my natural and environmental surroundings. I practise ethical and reciprocal foraging with respect to the environment while observing and giving thanks.

Timothy Morton explains that: "[a] work of art is a whole, and this whole contains many parts — the materials out of which it's made being just one of them. […] wholes are always less than the sums of their parts.'' (Morton, 2018, p. 50) This statement embodies my ecological art practice as it summarizes that the final result—the *whole*—is lesser than the parts that constitute the whole. In fact, the living materials used in my art practice are far greater in value than my final artistic endeavour—my milkweed paper. As Morton explains,

> The aesthetic experience is about *solidarity* with what is given. It's a solidarity, a feeling of alreadiness, for no reason in particular — like evolution, like the biosphere. There is no good reason to distinguish between nonhumans that are 'natural' and one that are 'artificial', by which we mean made by humans. It just becomes too difficult to sustain such distinctions. Since, therefore, an artwork is itself a nonhuman being, this solidarity in the artistic realm is already solidarity with nonhumans, whether or not art is explicitly ecological. Ecologically explicit art is simply art that brings this solidarity with the nonhuman to the foreground. (Morton, 2018, p. 58)

Specifically, when gazing at artworks produced within my art practice, there is a solidarity built within the viewer towards the living material. There is a synchronicity, a symbiosis created between the nonhuman living form and the materiality of the art.

Figure 50. Duguay, N. (2023). Amy holding sheet of milkweed paper.

Chapter 2 — On Education and Teaching

Training and Teaching

I have simultaneously started teaching visual arts at the same time as I started my training as an art educator at the Master of Art Education at Concordia University. This symbiotic training allowed me to apply directly my learning to execution: my teachings. I feel invested in an education that focusses on the whole of the learner, that is why I believe that instituting environmental practices come as a meaningful strategy for an effective education. Following a path of in-depth and integrative learning, from soil-to-art-making in the studio, is allowing me to develop a meaningful pedagogy. My teaching amendments are focussed on early childhood education partly because it is, thus far, my domain of expertise within my teaching practice as I'm primarily teaching children aged 4 to 8 years old. My observations, within my teaching practice, have brought significant insights to me, revealing important cues on what an effective education comprises. Observations such as the efficacy of using few and precious-like materials with learners, revealing attributes of rarity to materials, has resulted in a more efficient assimilation and assessment of the teachings. It is with the same ideology that I have created my body of work of the milkweed papers.

Ways I Go to Nature

As it is dear to me to practise what I preach, I have to go out to nature in order to then tell about it to my students and encourage them to do the same. The way that I achieve making a connection to nature is by myself going out to nature. I have to go out into nature to connect myself to it, to reflect, to see what needs to be done, to understand how ways of conservation are crucial, and mostly, I educate myself on the environment and nature. The example above of going canoeing on a beautiful body of water in my province with my nephew is one of the many ways I come into communion with nature, where I come to observe it through a different angle—on water—and take the time to take it in. By being an informed artist and teacher on my local nature, I can then educate my students better. The art education field necessitates educators that are embodying what they preach, this means teachers that are also artists and know what an art practice comprises, therefore holding a symbiotic relationship between practising and teaching arts and its pedagogy, but we also need educators that go out to nature and carry the education outdoors. It is while the

artists-teachers are aware of the use of materials in the classroom that their knowledge is leaking to the students, and therefore they can learn about sustainability. By disclosing my process of getting outside, ethically foraging, and creating with minimal and natural resources, I translate a way to create an environmental art curriculum. I believe that for a successful result of an environmentally focussed art education, educators must focus on simplicity, as is it characteristic to nature. It is with minimal and natural resources that we can have an environmental art practice, and educate on nature through an environmental art curriculum.

As an artist-teacher, I get to bring awareness towards environmental justice by implementing changes in my curriculum and lesson plans. By integrating recycled papermaking and projects upcycling fabric, I start enacting a change in the curriculum. Therefore, creating lesson plans on upcycling textiles, and making recycled paper, are steps towards some environmental justice. As an artist, I also enact the change I want to see: I'm educating myself to be a better artist by growing my own art materials, and by ethically and sustainably foraging. I'm gently extracting fibres of local indigenous plants, and using this sole material as the base of my art. As well as through a system of research-creation, my point is to go outside and foster the human-nature connection. The advancement for a sustainable, ecological and ethical art curriculum is a priority in my vision of art education and the training of art educators.

Discussion in the Classroom

When my students and I do projects oriented towards the environment or the landscape, my students, at times, share concerns in the classroom, like things that they've heard at school or at home, and talk about natural phenomenons like the 2024 solar eclipse and the 2024 urban aurora borealis. My students naturally gravitate towards creating art in relation to nature, be it rainbows, flowers, sun, sky, water, fish, trees, solar eclipse, aurora borealis, etc. I feel as though talking about nature with them is an easy and accessible entry point to talk about climate justice, as they are the first ones to address the topic through their art. Giving the students accessibility to materials that we can upcycle in purpose of art-making is a way to get them reflecting on our use of materials and its impact. Fox adds that: "[i]f we can work in a sustainable way and help other people to think about the impact of their lives, then what we make can be a positive force for change. "(Fox, 2022, p. 6)

Intuitive Education

Pedagogues and authors Barrow and Swan claim that adult should be aware of the child's silent inner research where a child is making its way through discovery and learning and developing itself at its own pace. (Barnouw & Swan, 1986, p. 2) This point tells of allowing space for children to explore and shape their path through education. I believe in a guidance and a curriculum that is set in place while still allowing exploration for students. Barnouw and Swan go on to explain that:

> With almost no direct instruction, children gradually acquire astonishing manual dexterity, as well as constructive ideas of their own. The type of planning, support, and stimulus provided by the adults with whom they associate does make a difference, however, in the extent to which they can proceed in their creative efforts. It is wise to limit the number of art media proceeded at one time, and to vary them from day to day. Fortunate is the child who has found in parent or teacher an ally in inventiveness, one who takes delight in experimentation and who can envision the play possibilities of many things not usually recognized as toys for children. The provision of proper tools and assorted work materials is the adult's primary responsibility, but to these basic ingredients should be added the spice of enthusiasm. The varied skills which children acquire play a vital part in building self-esteem and confidence. In addition, there is the thrill of creation which every one should have a chance to experience. (Barnouw & Swan, 1986, p. 123-124)

This explanation reflects the environment that my students find themselves in at the community centre where I teach. I provide an environment where the students are free to explore their own creative endeavours while using quality materials. I can see a distinct evolution in the children's abilities in fine motor skills, as well as creativity.

Exploration

It is important for learners to play in different environments, like in the outdoors, in order to learn about life, community, relationships, and about themselves. Exploring through play allows a safe place for education. Wilson tells of the function that play has in the development of learners:

> For children, play serves a multitude of developmental functions, as well - physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally. Play provides motivation and practice in each of these areas. When given the opportunity to play freely, children will test their limits physically - how high can they climb; how much weight can they lift; how far can they throw; how fast can they run. They'll also be testing their courage and building their self-esteem. Socially, they'll practise cooperation and sharing, leading and negotiating, making friends and standing up for one's self. Cognitively, play helps children develop in the areas of creativity, logic, and problem-solving. It helps them explore-experiment, and discover. Play also contributes to children's emotional development. As they experience joy, togetherness, and accomplishments, they develop a positive sense of self and a zest for living in an ever-changing and challenging world. (Wilson, 2008, p. ix)

This element of play is crucial in a child's development. It is something that is definitely experienced when going outside of the classroom, and learning from and with nature. Wilson goes on to say that play that is experienced in natural spaces have a distinct quality in terms of frequency, duration and quality. (Wilson, 2008, p. x) The place of the outdoors is authentically auspicious to learning. Wilson also argues that creative play in the outdoors build an appreciation for the natural world and a deeper understanding of the outdoors, hence the importance of bringing children outdoors for the establishment of an environmental approach within art education. (Wilson, R., 2008, p. x)

Wilson explains that the type of learning children acquire through exploration grants them specific health benefits such as building an ability to concentrate and a sense of belonging with the natural world. (Wilson, 2008, p. 8) They emphasize that being in the outdoors allows children to experience different sensory experiences and to manipulate open-ended materials which helps improve the child's motor skills. (Wilson, 2008, p. 8) They say: "[e]xperiences in natural outdoor playspaces also tend to be rich in opportunities for nurturing growth in all of the developmental domains, including adaptive, aesthetic, cognitive, communication, sensorimotor, and socioemotional.'' (Wilson, 2008, p. 8) Wilson states:

> To keep this sense of wonder alive, children need frequent opportunities to play freely and creatively in natural outdoor playspaces that are rich in beauty and variety. They need soul-enriching experiences to grow into the fullness of what it

> means to be human. It is through the medium of the natural world that they are most likely to encounter such experiences. Among other things, nature-related experiences foster the child's emerging sense of wonder, which is one of the primary sources of knowledge. In fact, some philosophers contend that it is only through wonder that we can come to know the world as it really is. (Wilson, 2008, p. 18)

This information stated by Wilson reflects the important role that spending time in the outdoors plays in the development of human beings, especially in children. They learn about themselves, about the world, community, and nature opens them to artistic inquiries. It would be after spending this quality time outside like this that young learners and their educator could come back in the classroom and be creative. Wilson goes on to propose a guideline, also developed by Moore in 1993, of safe ways that children can interact with the natural elements: providing an outdoor space with non-poisonous plants (including no poisonous leaves, berries, roots, bark, etc.), including indigenous plants from the local area (this will also benefit the local wildlife), plants of different sizes and shapes (for example some plants of the same size of the children, and some gigantic plants too where the children could take shelter from the sun under said plant), plants and leaves of different textures, seasonal plants, fragrant plants, plants for crafts and cooking (for example herbs to put in salads or sauces), plants providing sounds (for example wind blowing through tall grasses), plants attracting wildlife (like hummingbirds), a designated space for children to take shelter and build forts, space that allows inclusion of children with disabilities. (Wilson, 2008, p. 23) These guidelines can be thought of when considering integrating a gardening and foraging practice with children and potentially using indigenous plants for art purposes. Along with these guidelines can be added themes to keep in mind when educating children on natural spaces: the educator must demonstrate how to respect the outdoors by taking care of it and avoiding its destruction, and the educator must allow space for the learners to experience getting directly involved with the environment. (Wilson, 2008, p. 31) The educators must also allow room for children to appreciate and understand the environment with hopes of them creating a bond with nature; it is by children being exposed to different types of gardens, green spaces, and the outdoors that they can fulfill this bonding experience. (Wilson, 2008, p. 32) The children's natural interests must also be aroused in the exposition of the green spaces: the educator can provide opportunities for children to attend to different activities of various interests and abilities, social interaction must

be evoked, a variety of landscape would be ideal where children could stand at different heights and climb, therefore allowing them a safe space for taking risks without experiencing negative consequences. (Wilson, 2008, p. 32) It would be ideal if the community were involved in this process, so as to enhance the social and communal aspect of experiencing the outdoors in a sense of togetherness as well as providing a place where people of all ages and walks of life can learn together. (Wilson, 2008, p. 32) Wilson states:

> Children learn more from what we do than what we say. Children watch us for information about what is valued, sacred, and important in life. The attitudes and values that children see reflected in the lives of their parents and teachers tend to be attitudes and values they'll carry with them throughout life. If we want children to be sensitive to and interested in the world of nature, then that's the way we'll have to be. The adult's own sense of wonder — more than his or her scientific knowledge — is what will ignite and sustain a child's love of nature. (Wilson, 2008, p. 42)

Indeed, young learners need educators and authority figures that embody the message that are being taught and preached. Coherence and consistent is key in learning, therefore, if the educators can practise this nature exposition in their own lifestyle, it would create a consistence that can then be brought up into the education and learning styles of children. After all, we all need guidance from a reliable, consistent and coherent leader that practises what they preach.

Strategy

The embodiment of such leadership can be transpired into something positively focussed rather than negative. Although it can appear sometimes as obvious to consider of what can be done better in the future in terms of the environment, to be told that no points of turning back and change the course of things, a positive approach can shift the energy into a more constructive attitude. (Næss, 1986, p. 45) Nurturing a sense of joy towards the environment and focussing on the richness and diversity of nature can be exciting for a community to invest themselves in taking care of their green spaces. (Næss, 1986, pp. 44-45) This sense of taking care of something bigger than ourselves can provide a sense of humbleness and a gradual interest into the conservation of nature. (Næss, 1986, p. 45)

The *World Conservation Strategy* states that the curriculum within schools should comprise environmental education to ensure an attitude of conservation affects all activities. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) The organizations working on this 1980 strategy recommends providing classrooms with various forms of information media and teaching materials in order to educate learners on ecology by explaining ecological concepts and objectives of conservation while using local examples. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) This sense of locality would foster a sense of identity within the learners. The *World Conservation Strategy* also suggests assessing the effectiveness of the teaching materials regularly, as well as encouraging students to join wildlife clubs; another manner of assessing the integration of ecological concepts and conservation embodiment within learners. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) The strategy states:

> The need for environmental education is continuous because each new generation needs to learn for itself the importance of conservation. As such, individual campaigns and programmes should not be regarded as ends in themselves but as part of a long term, iterative process. It should also be recognized that any educational campaign is in competition for public attention with many others, including advertising campaigns. To win and retain as much of this attention as possible, it is essential for conservation to be seen as central to human interests and aspirations. At the same time, people—from heads of state to the members of rural communities—will most readily be brought to demand conservation if they themselves recognize the contribution of conservation to the achievement of their needs, as perceived by them, and the solution of their problems, as perceived by them. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980)

It is the responsibility of each one of us to go through an embodiment of care and to educate others on the topic of conservation. By implementing strategies, a progressive change can be made.

Educator/Teacher Statement

An art educator should be caring and guiding. Through training and experience, I have learned to apply both. I embody what I preach through my teaching practice as I'm practising an ecological practice in the classroom, and as I go to the outdoors to bond with nature.

As the attention must be set on all life-forms, human and nonhuman, the care for the natural world must be a priority within education. From a young age, learners must be exposed to the outdoors to foster a sense of community, a sense of self, a sense of resourcefulness, and of aesthetic. Hautecoeur says:

> By an *ecological approach* to lifelong education we mean both a conscious attitude towards the interactions that we have with our natural/cultural environment, an ethic of preserving resources and bio-cultural diversity, techniques and methods of applying this ethic, and a proactive policy of moral (legal) change aiming to preserve or restore the quality of our environment. (Hautecoeur, 2002, p. 8)

This ecological approach must be taught and applied in art education. Children and learners of all ages should be exposed to the natural world to become practitioners of ecological education. Arne Næss states:

> Education should concentrate on increased sensitivity to non-consumptive goods and on such consumables as we have enough of for all, provided sane ecological policies are adopted. Education will therefore counteract the excessive valuation of things with a price tag. There should be a shift in emphasis from 'hard' to 'soft' sciences, especially those that stress local culture and global cooperation. [p. 17] The educational objective of the World Conservation Strategy, 'building support for conservation,' should be accorded priority within the deeper framework of respect for the biosphere. In the future, there will be no shallow movement, if shallow policies are increasingly adopted by governments and, thus, need no support from a special social movement. (Næss, 1986, p. 18)

Indeed, it is through a mobilization, with the change starting from within (the educators), that the educational curriculum can shift and policies can be established towards an environmental justice.

Chapter 3 — On Research

Epistemology

The epistemology of my Master of Arts thesis is rather purist: finding the truths about what it is I do. I hold with convictions to discover the roots of what I do, or where it comes from, and to practise what I find is right. Working with indigenous plants is situated in what I find is something I should do. I must work with what is here, what is from here, what has been here, what I should care about and protect, and what I must take the time to observe and understand—it is about understanding.

On Reciprocity

The participative action of understanding comes hand in hand with reciprocity. Observe, understand, give, and receive. Kimmerer states:

> Cultures of gratitude must also be cultures of reciprocity. Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them. If an animal gives its life to feed me, I am in turn bound to support its life. If I receive a stream's gift of pure water, then I am responsible for returning gift in kind. An integral part of a human's education is to know those duties and how to perform them. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 115)

With the educational aspect of going to and contributing to the outdoors, individuals, from early childhood, must learn about reciprocity and practise it. Kimmerer goes further to explain that the human's duty and gift is the capacity of gratitude. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 115) Contrary to sayings of staying away from nature and to leave it alone in order to protect it, although that is factual in specific cases, Kimmerer believes that the good thing to do is to care for land in ways of participating and being involved in its protection and well-being. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 363)

Deep Ecology

Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss developed the idea of deep ecology. (Næss, 1986 p. 2) He argues that towards deep ecology is a future of prosperity for the order of humans: conservation being focal to humans 'interests, what is serving all life forms, in the end, also serves humans. (Næss, 1986, p. 19) Deep ecology can be carried through these three principles:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the relation of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Human beings have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. (Næss, 1986 p. 2)

Developing a sense of *fundamental deep concern and respect* for nature fosters a care for reciprocity for all life forms, humans or nonhumans. (Næss, 1986 p. 3) Nonhuman forms have a life and agency of their own. This sense of agency is related to animism, where all things and beings are persons. (Harvey, 2017, p. xvii) This agency is correlated to the intelligence found in the purposive behaviours of nonhumans, explained by Margulis and Sagan. (Margulis & Sagan, 2023, p. 7) With this totally natural intelligence contained in nonhumans, we can consider the veracity of all beings and consider conservation of our environment.

Environmental Conservatism

The 1980 *World Conservation* Strategy defines conservation as:

> Conservation is defined here as: the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. Thus conservation is positive, embracing preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment. Living resource conservation is specifically concerned with plants, animals and microorganisms, and with those non-living elements of the environment on which they depend. Living resources have two important properties the combination of which distinguishes them from non-living resources: they are renewable if conserved; and they are destructible if not. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980)

The organizations taking part in this strategy believe that conservation is something that must be applied in all sectors, in order to manage and maintain diversity of species and resources in order to ensure the sustainability of human activities and the natural environmental life. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) In brief, through the graphic logo of the the 1980 strategy, the organizations

symbolized what is at the core of conservation: "[the] maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems; [the] preservation of genetic diversity; [and the] sustainable utilization of species and ecosystem.'' (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980)

Through action and commitment can change be made. It is with a consistent increase of environmental actions being made within the art education curriculum that we can see a shift towards a more sustainable future. The divulgation of concrete strategies, the sharing of knowledge, and the accessibility to information and resources are key to mobilize people to change the art education curriculum. The *World Conservation Strategy* adds that every generation must be educated on environmental conservation and that any strategy put into practice towards conservation must not be taken for granted, but rather celebrated, as they culminate into a greater iterative process towards environmental conservation. (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980)

Complications

Ingold explains that humans are not quite situated in the simplistic view of being part of a species of nature. (Ingold, 2013, p. 5) Rather, he claims that we are a species that emancipates itself by differentiating us than the rest of the species of nature:

> *Human beings*, according to science, are a species of nature, yet to *be human* is to transcend that nature. It is this transcendence that both provides science with the platform for its observations and underwrites its claim to authority. The dilemma is that the conditions that enable scientists to *know*, at least according to official protocols, are such as to make it impossible for them to *be* in the very world of which they seek knowledge. It seems that we can only aspire to truth about this world by way of an emancipation that takes us from it and leaves us strangers to ourselves.(Ingold, 2013, p. 5)

Kimmerer talks of the human's inherent activities of extraction that are hurting conservation: "Industrial forestry, resource extraction, and other aspects of human sprawl are like salmonberry thickets—swallowing up land, reducing biodiversity, and simplifying ecosystems at the demand of societies always bent on having more.'' (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 284) She also denounces the issue of unaccessible language and knowledge proper to scientists , therefore isolating the public to knowledge that must be transferred to general knowledge for the sake of environmental conservation. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 345) Kimmerer questions democracy when, in this instance,

knowledge is coded in ways that is nontransferable to general public's resources. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 345) She asks: "For what good is knowing, unless it is coupled with caring? Science can give us knowing, but caring comes from someplace else.'' (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 345)

Researcher Statement

The practice of research should be done ethically, in reciprocity, where one learns and gives back. The way that I've fulfilled this maxim is by educating myself, researching and learning, reflecting and exploring, before taking. As Robin Wall Kimmerer lays it:

> What is the duty of humans? If gifts and responsibilities are one, then asking "What is our responsibility?'' is the same as asking "What is our gift?'' It is said that only humans have the capacity for gratitude. This is among our gifts. It's such a simple thing, but we all know the power of gratitude to incite a cycle of reciprocity.(Kimmerer, 2013, p. 115)

Indeed, I have given my gratitude for the plants I have researched, grown and harvested. I feel deeply grateful for my relationship with these plants, and for having had the pleasure of harvesting them.

This gratitude comes from a place of caring for our relationship to nature. Arne Næss defends humans' interest of wanting to protect and conserve the environment as he says nature is a vital part of ourselves and a *fundamental human right*. (Næss, 1986, p. 36)

As a community, people mobilize themselves for a common goal of care and protection for the environment. Roger Scruton stipulates that:

> Uniting behind a purpose facilitates sacrifice, gives clear goals and strategies, and produces the kind of comradeship that is witnessed in armies and religious missions. The desire for this kind of comradeship has surely been implanted in us by evolution. People who did not have the capacity to unite in this way would be overwhelmed by emergencies, unable to defend themselves against attack, and probably destined in the circumstances of the hunter-gatherer to starve. (Scruton, 2012, p. 88)

Roger Scruton believes that the social aspect of partaking into the conservation of the environment is caused by something larger than us and gives direction to our future. The environmental conservation has a social impact of uniting people together. In my case, I'm focussing on young people, the people that I teach, bringing them to awareness through discussion, and by mobilizing them through our curriculum within our classroom. I'm preaching for this

movement while embodying it through my actions, such as my art-making and lifestyle. Researchers must embody what they preach.

Figure 51. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Milkweed Papers* showcase at Art Education Vitrine, Concordia University.

Figure 52. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Milkweed Papers* showcase at Art Education Vitrine, Concordia University.

Figure 53. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Milkweed Papers* showcase at Art Education Vitrine, Concordia University.

Figure 54. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Milkweed Papers* showcase at Art Education Vitrine, Concordia University.

Figure 55. Audet-Arcand, A. (2024). *Untitled*. Milkweed papers installation at *Bold, Italics, and Underlined* group exhibition at Galerie Popop, Belgo Building, 2024.

Opening

All life-forms must be appreciated and valued despite their pleasantness or absence thereof. (Næss, 1986, p. 74) Through my inquiry of the symbiotic relationship between milkweed and environmental art education, I have proven how using an unlikely usable part of this North American indigenous plant has benefited the integration of an environmental art practice within art education. As Næss suggests: "[n]ever use life-forms merely as means. Remain conscious of their intrinsic value and dignity, even when using them as resources.'' (Næss, 1986, p. 74) It is through considering the milkweed plant as a person that I gracefully build a bond with it, come to harvest it and give thanks by using it dutifully.

The connection an artist, educator, and researcher develop to the land when executing environmental practices serve for the greater a good of education. (Fox, 2022, p. 17) There is nurturing of a community that is being created when someone gives back to the land in a reciprocal way like this. An appreciation for the natural resources is developed through this sort of ecological practice, as well as a bonding with nature's fragility and resilience. (Fox, 2022, p. 17) Through this appreciation, we develop a greater respect for nature and a sense of reciprocity where, through care, we learn and come to know how to give back.

The educational aspect of the research as shown that we are responsible for our local ecosystems, engage with it as a community, and even embody this maxim by considering our own community as an ecosystem that we must tend to. (Næss, 1986, p. 74) It is by collectively contributing to environmental practices that we can embody the change.

We can, in the end, establish a sustaining environmental art education by embodying what I preach and institute deep ecological practices within my teaching practice. Combining an art practice, teaching practice, and research practice, is shaping a whole and unity that is coherent for an environmental art education. Through connection to a place, one that takes part of our identity, do we build a sense of belonging and further develop a sense of care to the said place. (Næss, 1986, p. 35) This care creates a sentiment of wanting to give back to the natural place, give back what has given us.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer shares in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, I, too, wish to come here to listen—listening to what is here, what is being expressed from the natural world. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 48) Finally, I stand by Kimmerer's statement on genuine mistakes within research: "I accept full

responsibility for the unknowing errors that I will undoubtedly make from my own ignorance.'' (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 390)

I'm looking forward to furthering my research on indigenous plants that are local to my area and to my province of Québec, as well as doing more with the indigenous plant fibres, including milkweed and other plants. My works of milkweed paper are solely an entry point to the world of textile art with indigenous plants, and I feel excited to discover and create more.

With my Masters of Arts thesis, I have worked hard towards signalling important matters to people—environmental conservation, natural art, sourcing from nature, and how to carry these aspects to education. Kimmerer expands: "[t]he land is the real teacher. All we need as students is mindfulness. Paying attention is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving the gifts with open eyes and open heart.'' (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 222) Humility and care is all that art education asks for; let's learn from each other.

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