

TANEA HYNES

WORKHORSE



About the Artist

Tanea Hynes is an interdisciplinary artist hailing from Labrador City, NL. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Art at NSCAD University in 2019, where she studied photography and art history. She is a current Master of Fine Art candidate at Concordia University. Hynes has shown work across Canada and in the USA. Tanea spent the fall of 2019 working at Eastern Edge Gallery as an artist in residence, and quickly learned that St. John's would be the ideal place to bring her current project to fruition. Tanea is thrilled to have spent an extended residency at The Rooms in 2020, and to have found so much warmth and support within the St. John's community during an intense and transformative time period.

Cover image:

Tanea Hynes
Ross Bay Junction (2019)
Inkjet print from 120mm scan
Courtesy of the artist

Image below:

Tanea Hynes
Wabush Gas Station (2019)
Inkjet print from digital photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Image page 6:

Tanea Hynes
Cloud (2019)
Digital photograph on silk chartreuse
Courtesy of the artist



On tending the fog, the stone, the chisel and the marrow

By Dana Prieto

There was a word inside a stone.¹

I came to learn about Tanea Hynes' practice through her delicate, subtle and somber photographic works that compose an eerie homage to living and dying in her hometown: Labrador City.

Hynes' photographs have poetic and reflexive documentary qualities that, along with the physical and emotional proximity with her subjects, convey an unspoken familiarity and perform largely as autobiographical. One of the themes and environments most profusely portrayed in Hynes' work is iron mining, an activity that has historically founded, geographically surrounded and financially sustained her town.

What began as a temporary workers' camp known as the "Carol Project," Labrador City was incorporated as a town in 1961, and built with the sole purpose of settling employees of the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) in the western Labrador region.²

I tried to pry it clear,

mallet and chisel, pick and gad,

Hynes is an image-based interdisciplinary artist with a profound, cross-generational understanding of extractive projects. Hynes herself, as well as her father, uncles and grandfather have a long history of working at the IOC mine. Stemming from a prolonged and intense Elbow Room Residency at The Rooms, Hynes' *WORKHORSE* evidences a continual and open-ended negotiation around iron mining as a matter of embodied, inherited, social, political and intellectual concern.

This exhibition presents a plethora of affective visuals and objects that bring us inside the haunting depths of ruination prevalent in Canada's eastern boreal landscapes. Within this complex body of work, the artist recognizes mining as a dignifying working-class family pride, as a strategy of survival, as an intrinsically violent colonial process and as a product of ruthless and omnipresent corporate power.

until the stone was dropping blood,

Two of the delicately constructed images struck me right away as a gentle and eloquent synthesis of the human and more-than-human entanglements that characterize our extractive, anthropocentric and late-capitalist times. The first image, *Ross Bay* (2019): the portrait of a colossal grey boulder sitting on the land, profusely scratched, weathered, spray-painted and cracked in parts. The second image, *Cloud* (2019): printed on a large-scale sheer and translucent textile, the image depicts a dense and expansive cloud hovering above an austere implied urban site.

During a personal conversation, Hynes shared with me that the *Ross Bay* (2019) inscribed megalith is believed to have been fissured by lightning, and that its provenance is a local and popularly unsolved enigma. The artist further unfolded that the pompous white smoke of *Cloud* (2019) is a constant mass of steam floating above the town and hailing from the neighbouring IOC Processing Facilities. Hynes explained that both these human-natural phenomena are the most iconic visual markers of Labrador City.³

but I still could not hear

the word the stone had said.

The rock, the paint and the smog; the vernacular and spectacular; the secretive and conspicuous; the airy, smooth and heavy; the transient, broken and eternal; the mythical and lived experience; the pounding escapes, and the lethally alluring. All of these pairings are elegantly threaded throughout Hynes' exhibition. But beyond these evocative conceptual dualities, the governing proposition structuring the exhibition is a political, socio-environmental and self-reflective visual narrative. A composite of a memoir, mystery and speculative fiction, *WORKHORSE* poetically interprets ways to live and die in these haunted landscapes ravaged by corporate extraction.



Hynes guides us through her personal accounts with a prolific and suspenseful storyteller craft. The sober scenic photographs serve as a comfortable and stable entry point that later entwines within an heterogeneous selection of sculptural and ready-made objects displayed throughout the gallery, forming an intelligent material puzzle that is covered in thick layers of fog, ice, neon colours and iron ore dust.⁴

And so, we are offered several captivating paths: a lunchbox, a family legacy, a severed unnamed coffin, the soft gaze on mundane objects, a key, a nourishing ritual, a void, a plundered land, a wolf or a hotel sign. Hynes' constellation of works invokes an uncanny sense of mystery, secrecy and fear that is never fully disclosed or resolved for us. The artist presents her clues on the table and the walls, but she doesn't instruct us with a determined track.

*I threw it down beside the road
among a thousand stones*

In my bewildered encounter with *WORKHORSE*, Hynes' visual arrangements hint me through a lived and situated narrative, infused with attentiveness, urgency, tenderness and anger, towards the necropolitics of extraction. Necropolitics refers to what Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe elucidated as the inequitable geographic distribution of socio-political power determining the ways in which certain people must die and some must live around the world.⁵ More specifically, Hynes' work reminds me of the precarious, voracious and dark underbelly of corporate mining, and its blatant presence in the construction of Canadian national history, economy and identity.⁶

As a young woman born and raised in a small mining town, Hynes has directly experienced the social and environmental fractures caused by large-scale mining operations, a system that, as she accurately illustrates, will "plow through the earth until there is nothing left."⁷ Poverty, precarity, high suicide rates, intense drug use, the feeling of living with guilt, rage, fear, depression, a general desire to escape, and otherwise, a deep lack of desire, are disturbingly common experiences for young people living in towns structured around the devastating and damaging enterprises of open-pit mining.⁸

and as I turned away it cried

Unfortunately, these stories are not exclusive to Labrador City or Canada. Mining towns around the world are sites that, as elaborated by Canadian activist and author Naomi Klein, are deemed “sacrificial zones.”⁹ These are areas of the world designated by government and corporate powers for extractive depredation. Klein expounds that sacrifice zones are largely working class, poor and racialized, or immigrant communities that are disenfranchised, depleted of political power and invisibilized, in the interests of hiding the true costs of socio-environmental catastrophes. Hidden in plain sight, these ghostly locations are doomed to be economically, socially, culturally and environmentally sacrificed for alleged public and private gains.¹⁰

While discussing with Hynes her experiences and understandings of living within a desolated mining town and her ability to exhibit her work in larger urban contexts, it becomes clear that for the artist these are two sides of the same penny. The ravaging invisibilization of “remote” sacrificed territories is propelled by the expansive greed of capital and resource extraction commanded from Global North urban centres. In “Undermining,” American scholar, activist and curator Lucy Lippard offers a conducive metaphor claiming that mines are “cities turned upside down,” and she later elaborates on the inequitable access to land and capital profit across cities and mining host communities.¹¹ With over 50% of world mining companies headquartered in Canada, it is evident that mining, and its geo-political and necropolitical territorial divisions, is thoroughly ingrained in Canadian history, politics and economy.^{12 13}

the word aloud within my ear

Throughout *WORKHORSE*, Hynes offers sombre, gentle and attentive visual meditations on the intimate, familial, communal, economic, human and other-than-human connections with extractive endeavours. Yet, the heterogeneous narrative devices that organize Hynes’ exhibition leave the work open, implicating and involving the audience at the climax of the story.

As a subtle footnote that foregrounds the exhibition, Hynes offers an explicit gesture towards caring, generosity and “desperate attempts of survival.”¹⁴ Sparked through the show, and epitomized in Hynes’ book, the artist deploys a collection of vernacular photographs, poems and drawings that narrate the possibility of more nourishing arrangements for unfolding her visual stories. The publication holds childhood recollections and a special spot in the grass; it draws on gentle blueberry pathways for escaping and returning, on reciprocal relationships and on cherishing the northern lights.

The *WORKHORSE* book is a carefully woven collection of memories and recipes for healing and refusing capitalist extraction. Seemingly unfinished, *WORKHORSE* further acts as a carrier bag for gathering speculative futures to get through the thickest, heaviest and most toxic parts of the day, or the most desolated parts of the night.¹⁵

and the marrow of my bones

heard, and replied.

About the Author

Dana Prieto is an Argentine artist and educator based in Toronto. Dana's site-responsive art practice manifests in sculpture, installation, performance, writing and collaborations. Her work examines our intimate and collective entanglements with colonial institutions and power structures, calling for a careful attention to our ways of relating, thinking, making and consuming in the Anthropocene. Dana holds a Master of Visual Studies from University of Toronto, a BFA from OCAD University and is a York University Research Associate for the Finding Flowers Project. Her work has been presented in national and international galleries, public spaces and informal cultural venues.

Endnotes

- 1 These italicized lines are excerpts of Ursula Le Guin’s poem called *The Marrow*, from 1981, and recently published along Anna Tsing et al (Ed) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, University of Minnesota Press, 2019. This poem is included in Hynes’ *WORKHORSE* book, and I believe it resonates deeply with some of the artist’s most powerful strategies for listening and engaging with human and other-than-human subjects and surroundings.
- 2 Currently, Rio Tinto, the world’s second largest metals and mining corporation, is the majority shareholder in the venture, with smaller percentages owned by the Mitsubishi Group and the Labrador Iron Ore Royalty Income Corporation. <https://www.riotinto.com/en/operations/canada/iron-ore-company-canada>
- 3 Notes from private conversation with the artist, November 2020.
- 4 In a private conversation with the artist in December 2020, she pointed out the importance of the iron ore material in her work and in her life. She expounded that grains of iron ore cover every surface in Labrador City. They are found in “the pavement, the patio furniture, [and] if you pick up a handful of snow, there are tiny grains of ore within it. It sparkles delightfully.”
- 5 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, 15.1 (Winter 2003):11-40.
- 6 For an analysis of the necropolitics of extraction and its artistic and cultural resistances see: T.J. Demos, “Blackout: The Necropolitics of Extraction,” *Dispatches Journal*, Issue#001, Oct 2018. For more on corporate mining as a particular signature of Canadian economic and political identity in Pierre Belanger (Ed.), “Extraction Empire: Undermining the Systems, States, and Scales of Canada’s Global Resource Empire, 2017—1217,” MIT Press, 2018; and Shin Imagi et al, “The ‘Canada Brand’: Violence and Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America,” *Osgoode Legal Studies Research Paper No. 17/2017*.
- 7 Notes from private conversation with the artist, December 2020.
- 8 For a Marxist analysis of contemporary open-pit mining and socio-metabolic fractures see: Horacio Machado Aráoz & Leonardo Javier Rossi, “Mining extractivism and socio-metabolic fracture: The Minera Alumbrera Ltd. case: twenty years of exploitation,” *CITCA-CONICET*, 2017.

- 9 Naomi Klein, "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate," Simon & Schuster, 2014.
- 10 Ibid., 9.
- 11 Lucy R. Lippard, "Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Art, Politics, and Art in the Changing West," New York & London: The New Press, 2014, 11.
- 12 These percentages are always changing, but these were taken from "Canada's Enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy to Strengthen Canada's Extractive Sector Abroad," 2014.
<https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/topics-domaines/other-autre/csr-strat-rse.aspx?lang=eng>
- 13 A case that epitomizes this historical pattern of Canadian political enmeshment in extractive economies is that of Canadian Conservative politician and businessman, Brian Mulroney, who was the president of the IOC mine from 1977 to 1983, later served as a Canadian Prime Minister (1984-1993), has been a Barrick Gold director since 1993, and has recently taken the role of global affairs adviser for the same company.
- 14 Notes from private conversation with the artist, December 2020.
- 15 In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," (1986) Ursula Le Guin disputes the male-centered idea that the spear (hammer, axe, or other phallic objects) was the earliest human tool, while proposing that it was actually a vessel. With this shift, Le Guin disrupts popular understandings of "humanity's foundations from a narrative of domination to one of gathering, holding, and sharing." From Siobhan Leddy, "We should all be reading more Ursula Le Guin," The Outline, 2019.
<https://theoutline.com/post/7886/ursula-le-guin-carrier-bag-theory?zd=1&zi=qe23cx2h>



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