

brochure that the artist picked up in Norwich England while visiting the birthplace of Joseph Rudderham, a stone mason and her ancestor who came to Cape Breton in the late 18th century to build St. George’s church in Sydney. Although it’s a tourist image, it could be from a surrealist collage by Max Ernst or Hannah Höch, or referenced in the writing of Walter Benjamin. A seated figure gazes upon a romantic pre-industrial scene, their back against a factory interior.

Family Gathering/Gathering Family works from materials and places like these: things found in sheds or acquired during Lounder’s travels, family heirlooms, graveyards, archives. The exhibition includes assemblages of objects placed in baskets, photographs of documents from the Beaton Institute, and a series of works on papers that collage together found images, watercolors and drawings. Much like mutualistic biological relations, these arrangements use assemblage and collage to make associative connections between different material traces, gathering disparate and at times unsettling historical fragments into new relationships.

The assemblages are arranged as two baskets; one made in Unama’ki by a Mi’kmaq basket maker, and another made by an artisan in Norfolk England. The baskets contain potatoes, a pewter relief of St. George’s Church, a drawing of an early anchor made from antlers and rocks lashed to a wooden cross, a deer antler, a saucer with a floral print from her grandmother, and a copy of Mi’kmaq historian Daniel Paul’s *We Were Not the Savages*. These conjure colonial and Indigenous histories, migration and the specificity of place. Plants, like the potato, came from South America as part of colonial trade, and goods, like the imported Limoges porcelain were a symbol of status and prosperity in Cape Breton households. They are displaced artifacts of colonization, placed in poetic juxtaposition. I am borrowing the term “poetic juxtaposition” from Charlotte Stokes and her excellent discussion of the surrealist books of Andre Breton.

The juxtaposition of these fragments gives room for the imagination and the unconscious, of both the artist and the audience. Some of these fragments are material: the antlers and the rocks and the wooden cross are a surreal form, perhaps a sculpture, but also an anchor, a forgotten trace of our relations

to land and the influence of oceanic currents on our migration.

Other fragments are archival: a photograph portrays the 1792 land grant to Joseph Rudderham, at Point Edward. Another image is of a blueprint that reveals many unrecorded burials in the cemetery. And one particularly jarring image is of a burial record penned by several women from the church, the same year as Rudderham’s land grant. It accounts for the death of Diana Bastian, an enslaved 15-year-old Black girl who died in childbirth, the pregnancy resulting from a violent sexual assault by George More, a member of the governing council of Cape Breton. This story is detailed by Afua Cooper in her essay “Deluded and Ruined: Diana Bastian - Enslaved African Canadian Teenager and White Male Privilege”. While Bastian’s grave is unmarked, her burial record remains at the insistence of those who cared for Bastian’s surviving child. The juxtaposition of these traces points to what is remembered by the land and is part of the unconsciousness of a place, recorded by the women in that community.

Among the colonial artifacts depicted here is a Limoges porcelain creamer, a Rudderham family heirloom, filled with dark, sticky molasses. Imported from the West Indies it conveys a tension that lays beneath the surface of these works, that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade reached Cape Breton, through goods and through people like Bastian and many others, who came here in bondage. The porcelain appears again in the works on paper where the flowers are rendered in watercolor, isolated and re-arranged, shifting in scale. They flow from a stack of teacups and saucers, and in another they veer towards abstraction; saucers are arranged to look like a sea anemone or jellyfish. In one collage, transect lines connect images of St. George’s church and the floral Limoges pattern, locating Cape Breton as a point in the Trans-Atlantic trade routes of the 18th century, and within the larger geometry of slavery.

To return to the lichen on the gravestone in St. George’s cemetery; just as lichen are not individual organisms, they do not have singular traceable ancestries. Their familial relations are of mutualistic association, affinities formed among thousands of species of fungi, algae and bacteria. Similarly, in *Family Gathering/Gathering Family*, Lounder does not follow a linear logic of ancestry, but instead uses poetic juxtaposition to

challenge the limits of memory and reflect on how we might engage with difficult histories. She gathers these relations to create new constellations of time and history. This is a practice that proposes different possible familiars and new biological and cultural synergies, as the lichens slowly turn gravestones back into soil.



Detail of a headstone, Barbara Lounder, 2023

Bibliography

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