



Project Space



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Laura Grier

Yádíi Kwə

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How does a stone think? Is it aware of its own weight in our hand, or blissfully ignorant when we drop it and it thumps against our feet? How might we be able to speak to it, teach it, share with it, and how might it teach us back? If a stone can feel, can it hold onto that feeling? Remember it. Keep it for years and years and years and years, until it becomes sand and the memory is scattered across a beach or caught in the lines of our feet as we attempt to brush it off in a car.

Investigating the stone, or *Kwə*, as Dene artist Laura Grier names it, is part of her lithography print practice. Locating the inherent knowledge deep in the lines and smooth grooves of *Kwə* and exploring how this relationship between girl and stone might bring out Grier's own inherent knowledge. The deep spiritual understanding she, as a Dene woman, has carried since birth and from before she entered this side.

“One day,” Grier writes, “while graining in the studio, I found myself wanting to talk with stone (*Kwə*) and tell them all about my experiences in love, heartache, sexuality, depression, of my tireless pursuit to research my Inherent Dene spirituality and teachings. Finally, *Kwə* just said, “show me”.”¹

¹ ‘Artist Statement,’ Laura Grier for Xpace Cultural Centre. 2020.

Yáđı Kwə is a collaborative series of eight stone lithography prints, dances, and conversations between Kwə and Grier, captured on thick cut paper with accompanying poetry as well as three handmade lithography fans. The series uncovers Grier's own investigations towards a new form of printmaking she calls *Yáđı* (Spiritual Being) *Kwə* (Stone) which centers her inherent Sahtu Dene understandings of Spirit, navigating process and ceremony to create a new syntactic language which can only be truly understood by other Indigenous printmakers.

This syntactic language is the markings of Dene spirituality and dreams, the transcript of Grier's personal process of understanding herself as an artist and as an Indigenous person. "They [the prints] are all different themes of the current reality I'm living with. My sexuality, learning about my Indigenous spirituality, and having dreams. All this colliding with depression and displacement."²

Lithography is a process of printmaking involving the immiscibility of oil and water and a flat stone, images are worked using an oil substance that ink adheres to while repelled against the non-worked areas. Described by Grier, "When I draw on the stone it holds the memory of the drawing so I can then ink it up."³

In Grier's practice of printmaking *Kwə* must remember. Must hold onto their intimate conversations through the process of etching. The stone then exists as transcriber; as diary, as equal partner in the conversation.

Examining the methodologies behind Grier's practice of enacting an Indigenous understanding of relationality with *Kwə* allows us to interpret the stories behind each object, each print, and each movement. Accompanying Grier's prints are 'Kwə Lithography fans' and her own brush, which Grier understands as ceremonial tools. These tools allow her to create

² Emma Steen in conversation with Laura Grier, 2020.

³ Ibid.

her work and go through a process of deep therapeutic conversations in the process. She has also written short pieces, lifted from these conversations with Kwə, that locate her work and where she was during the process.

Grier uses unconventional materials for her prints including cheezies turned into powder and placed on her lips and crushed up antidepressant pills. The prints are all accompanied by poems written by Grier that function to narrate the collection as well as exist as a time capsule of her process with Kwə. Kwə remembers their conversations, the poems hold their words.

K'enetIA Ft. Cheezies (lip print)

Touch me.

Her heart is hurt, his heart is

absent

My mind is in the wild

alone

Dajchu sine

Bedzie'eya, Bedie'hule

ánihi?á

Gowhane

segha

K'enetIA

Grier's poetry is deeply personal and speaks to an intimacy developed over time with Kwə. As shared by Grier, "I can tell my friends so much, but I can tell the stone more." Bearing witness to the prints and poems feels like an honour, a vulnerable glimpse inside

Grier's process towards understanding herself better. Her indigeneity, her inherent spirituality, and the knowledge she holds somewhere deep within her that she works tirelessly to regain.

Yádíi Kwə highlights the processes which surround printmaking, and explore Grier's medium as a method towards ceremony, healing, and Indigeneity. Grier emphasizes relationality between maker and material in her collection seeing them as bonded together, stating "It is within these relationships that I want to reveal the story of Dene Spirit Printmaking and *Yádíi Kwə*."⁴

Grier's *Yádíi Kwə*, the prints, fans, and words together all tell an Indigenous story on relationality. The process of creation goes beyond just that of a standard print, and connects with a deeper understanding of Dene personhood and Grier's own identity as artist and storyteller. The story of *Yádíi Kwə* is one of process, of healing and of memory. *Kwə* holds the memory of the long conversations they had with Grier. Grier's poetry, prints and tools enact ceremony and honour the memory of those conversations with *Kwə*. "It is a story of the process of the print, the tools of the print, and together they create Indigenous Spirit Printmaking."⁵

-Emma Steen

⁴ 'Artist Statement,' Laura Grier for Xpace Cultural Centre. 2020.

⁵ Ibid.