

AN ALTERNATIVE FIELD GUIDE TO THE UNKNOWN

**MESSAGES
FROM THE ROCKS /
STORIES OF
THE INVISIBLE**

LINDA DUVALL & JILLIAN MCDONALD




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ART GALLERY OF REGINA





Field guides tell us what we are
looking for, and help us to explain what we have seen.
A field guide gives answers.

This alternative field guide lingers on the
questions. Readers may potentially learn
things about themselves (individually and of our species).





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When I was a child we were driving from Moose Jaw to Regina, and I was sleeping in the backseat. I woke up and had a feeling that I had to tell my father, who was driving: "Slow down, there's a deer". He slowed down, and suddenly the deer appeared on the side of the road.

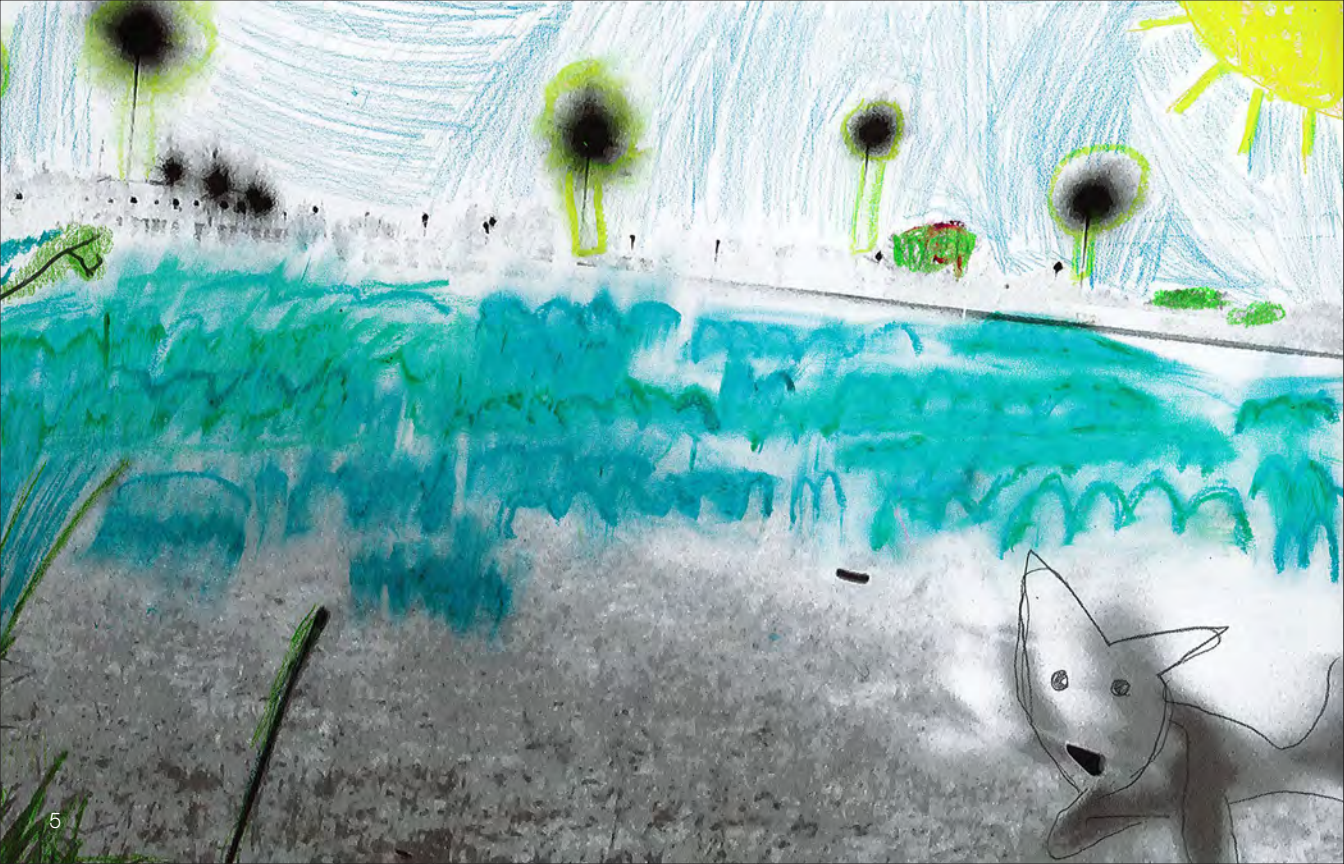
This story is about a dog whose person was dying. The dog was very bonded to his person. He usually brought slippers to his person. At the time of the man's death, the dog took the slippers outside and buried them.

I never met my grandfather, who passed before I was born, but I used to cry over his death as a young child. When we moved to Regina two years ago, my cousin gave me some family items from my grandfather and his father. That night I met my great-grandfather in my dreams!









Working
with the Parks Department
in Grand Prairie, Alberta, I had to
pick up my crew who were cutting grass at
the graveyard. I drove to the site and told
the crew to jump in as we were in a hurry to
get back to the shop. They did, but I noticed they
had left a shovel and rake, so I ran back to
get them. There was a headstone slightly out
of alignment across my path. I was about to
cross over the grave but thought that
it was disrespectful, so I went around. I
noticed the name on the headstone as
I passed - it was my name.

I come from a pagan family and
was a non-believer. Until
my great aunt taught me how
to whistle up the wind. She took
me out to a large flat field
near Regina and it worked.

I called the wind
around me.

*I was lying
in bed one night with my
Chihuahua in the house where
I live with my sister. My dog
noticed it first - scratching on the
outside wall. I heard it too, like a
demon scraping to get in. I ran out
to see what it was. Later I found
out there were over 100 bats
living in our walls.*

Thing.

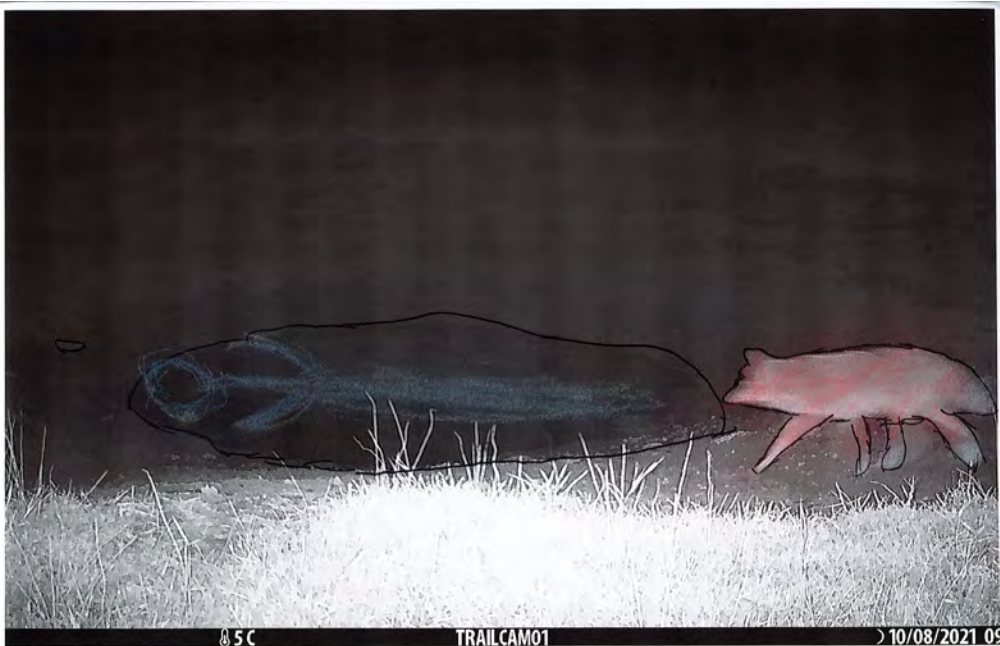


I've seen lights in
the sky, in many places, especially
Cypress Hills. They were not planes...

My grandma

*Violet saw a UFO up close at
night out in the country. It was big, bright, and very vivid. It
shone for about 10 minutes. She saw it with her great auntie. They
were very shaken by it and scared. But I've never seen one.*









I was driving on a
Saskatchewan Highway on the
way to my grandma's funeral. I turned
around a bend in the road, and in the wide
open prairie skies I saw a beautiful scene, the sun
was shining through the clouds, and my mind
and heart saw it as a big, bright, beautiful
angel. I can't explain why, but my heart was
warmed, and I just knew my grandma was
safe and happy. The angels comforted
my heart that day.







It was 40 years ago, on June 1, that my father passed away. His grandchildren have never met him. He smoked a pipe, and his favourite tobacco was Cherries Jubilee. Three times now, I think he has visited us. We would get a whiff of Cherries Jubilee tobacco smoke. No one in my house smokes.

The first time, I was sitting at my computer, and I got the smell of the pipe tobacco. It took me right back to my childhood. I was 12 years old when he passed.

The second time was four years ago, when my older daughter and I were at a concert at the Centre for the Arts. We were discussing the acoustics and my dad. He was a musician and an architect, and had something to do with the design of the Centre for the Arts. Just then, we got the smell of Cherries Jubilee pipe smoke. My daughter had never smelled it too. And, no one was smoking there.

The third time was Saturday night. My daughters and I were out stargazing near Pence ourselves. There was no wind. We were discussing that concert and my daughters and I got the smell of Cherries Jubilee tobacco again. I lost my sense of smell over a year ago because of Covid, and I still

sician
acoustics.
t him, and she

by
smelled the
smelled it.





**I looked after a
Great Horned Owl chick,
feeding it every night. I had to
leave for a few
days, so I got a friend to feed her.
Everything was
fine, and she would take food from
my friend until he
 accidentally spoke. The owl from that
 point on would
 not take food from my friend
 again. She somehow
 knew that it wasn't
 me feeding her.**





It was the
summer of 2003, and I
was working in Sukanon
Park in Moose Jaw. I was
a P.A. on a film project,
and we were in a small
house. It was at night.

The scene involved a really
good actor, the director, and
myself. The actor was doing a
scene in which he was hurt and
screamed. We did a couple of
takes. On one take, he screamed so
loud, everything went black at the
crescendo of his scream. It was haunting
and very emotional. When the lights came on, an

antique mirror
on the wall was now tilted.

**Near
Prince Albert in
northern Saskatchewan,
my partner has some land. Three years
before our separation, I had a vision of
a blonde woman in overalls, on the land, while
driving to the land to drop something off. When
I remember that vision now, I realize that I was
seeing his current girlfriend.**



I was watching a movie at about one or two in the morning. My dad was sick with cancer. I think he was in the hospital. I was laying on the couch, and my dad's chair started to rock. I was petrified and lay there for about half an hour. It was still rocking!

I didn't want to look at the chair, but I didn't want to stay in that room anymore, so I ran upstairs to bed leaving the TV on. My mom asked me in the morning why I left the TV on. I lied and said I must've forgot. It only

happened that night, and the chair didn't rock from then on.

I've had a cat twice in my life.

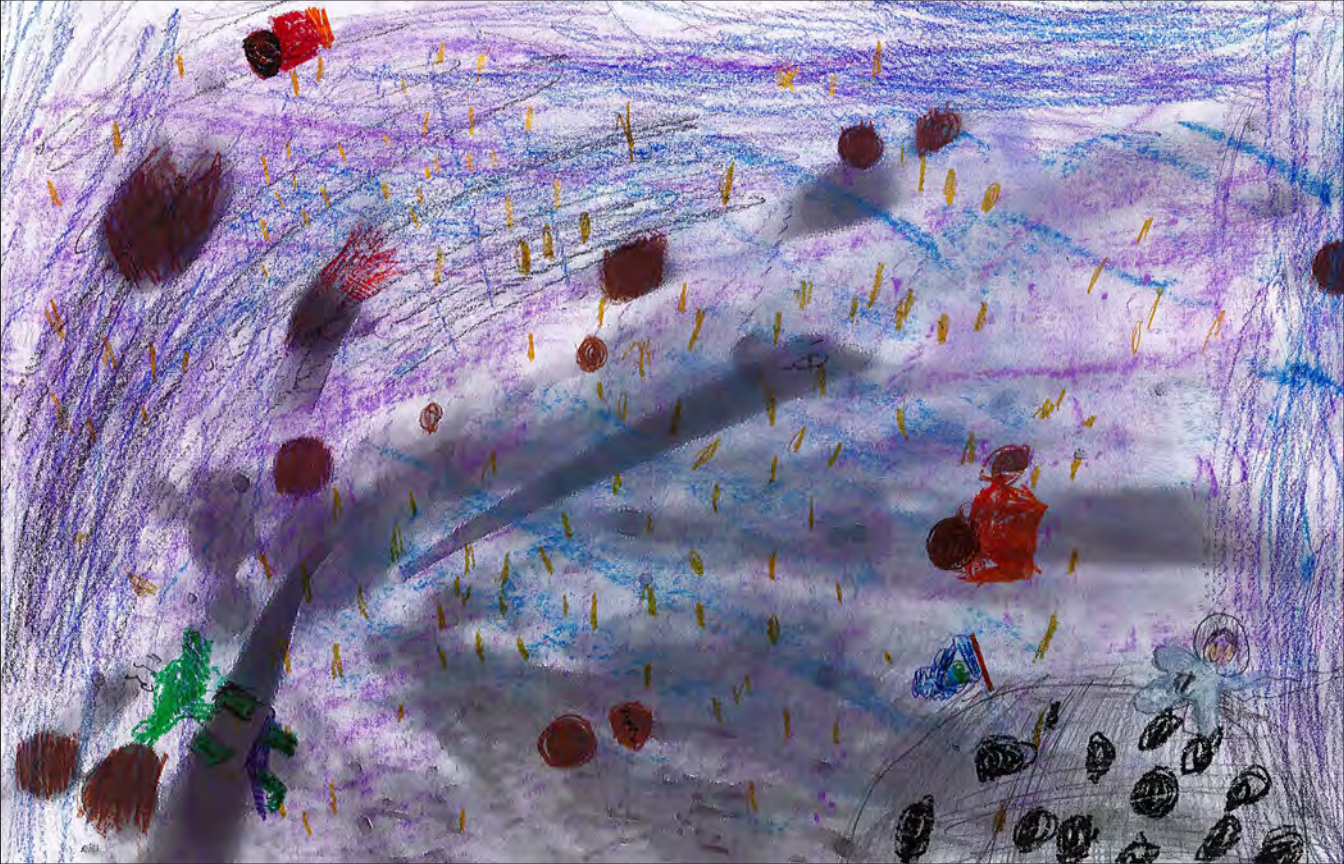
One of these cats was very small, even fully grown. I lived in a building in Winnipeg, and I'm a very heavy sleeper. One night, I was sleeping, and I was woken by the cat jumping on my head. When I woke up, the fire alarm was going off in the apartment building. I got up suddenly. I was confused and walked to the window. The parking lot was full of people, and when I went outside with my cat, I found out we were the last to leave the building. The basement was on fire. I wouldn't say that the cat saved my life since the fire was under control by then. But, she could have.

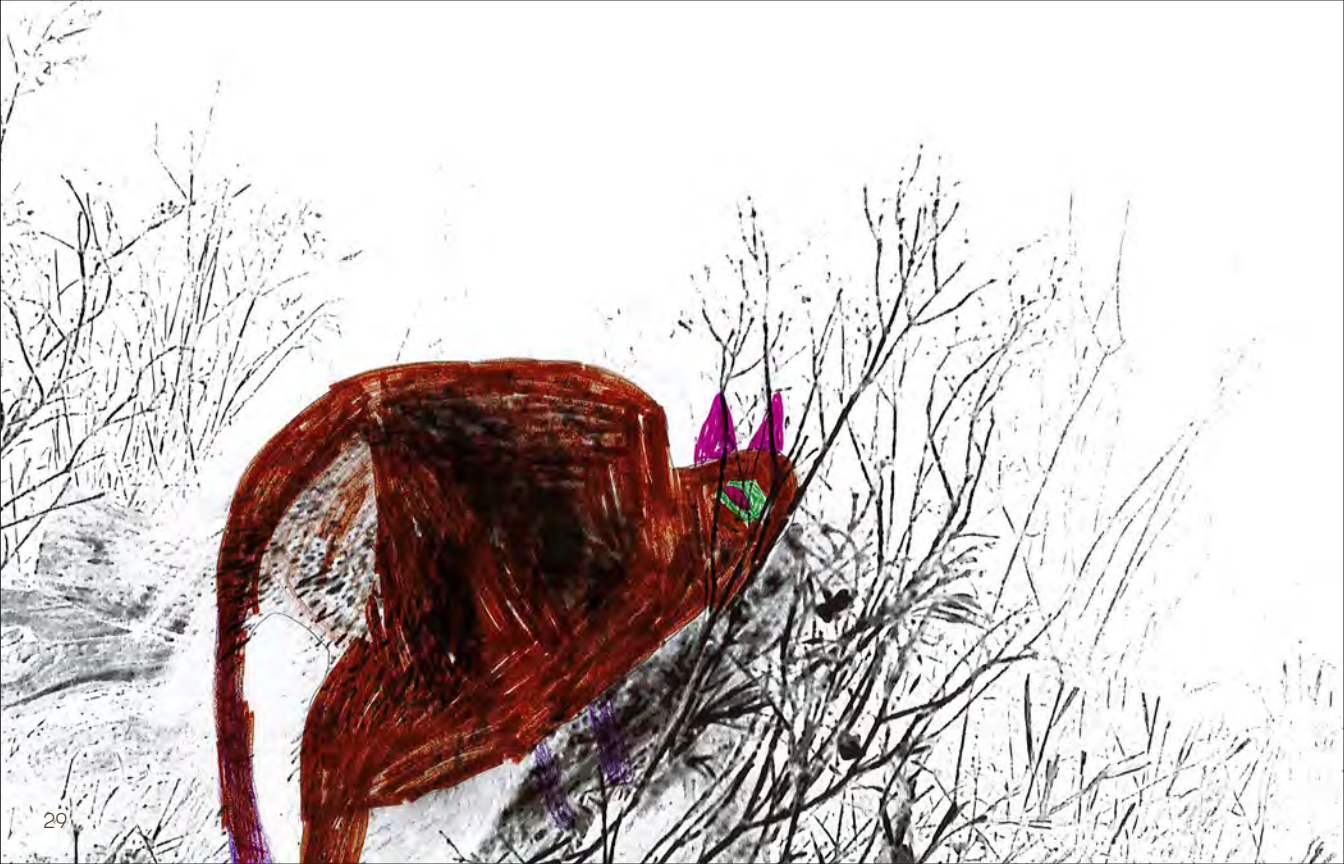
In Cowessess First Nation, a family was chosen to take a bear for the community. It was a great honour. The mother of the family was asked if she would take the bear, with her bow and arrow. She was excited and honoured to be asked. The week of the event, the community put out bait for the bear and made preparations. The mother had a dream that night, in which the bear asked why she would kill it, since it had done nothing wrong. In the morning, she told her family she couldn't take the bear but asked her son if he would like to do it and kill his first bear. He was excited to accept this task. That night he dreamed about the bear, who asked him, "why do you want to kill me - I have done nothing wrong." In the morning, the boy told his family he could not hurt the bear. So the father took the bear that year.

When I first went to University, I was certain I would become a doctor. But I knew in the first year it wasn't a path I wanted to take. I struggled to connect with the other students in Pre-Med and their negative attitudes. All through undergrad I had been volunteering and working at Last Mountain bird observatory, a banding station on the northern tip of Last Mountain Lake. I was struggling with my decision to quit medicine and become a biologist. I avoided telling my parents for four years. One day on a bird walk I saw a male myrtle warbler 5 feet away from me. It was a moment of connection with nature and a feeling that I was on the right path.

Walking
on a snowy trail
with two friends
after an intensive
semester teaching
.. we were the only
people on the trail.
We came across the
valley and noticed an
area of depressed snow
- pink - and light fur.
It was a large-ish area.
Likely elk or moose.
The animal had obviously
been bleeding, but it was
unclear why. There was no
carcass nearby, no trail of
blood, just light pink snow
and fur. We couldn't figure
out what had happened to the
animal.

Six years
ago, I visited
Chernobyl. We were exploring the
abandoned hospital. Some people went to
different levels of the building, but I continued on
the main level. As I walked, the hallway became more
and more dilapidated and decayed. I didn't have my
Geiger counter, so I didn't know the radiation levels.
I began to feel more uncomfortable. The hallway grew
darker and more decayed, and something told me I
shouldn't go any further. I'm not sure if it was a spirit
of someone who died there, or the radiation, but I
knew I should stop.









In the cyclone of 1912, in Regina,
a man was walking his dog.
He was killed by the storm
and his dog blew away.
Later, the dog returned
and kept a vigil
over his owner's grave.
The cyclone also
sucked up tons
of water and
a canoe with two
boys from
Wascana
Lake.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, we are forever grateful to Sandee Moore, curator at Art Gallery of Regina, for the conversations and questions over the nearly three years of this project. She was often better able to put our ideas into words than we were.

Initial Zoom consultations – we met with a series of experts in various fields, during the first year of the project. These meetings were crucial in helping us to become more knowledgeable about Regina as a city, and as a place to live. From these meetings, we continued to shape the project.

Ryan Fisher, curator of vertebrate zoology, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

Ray Poulin, head of research and collections, biologist, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

Lorne Kequahtoway, Buffalo People Arts Institute

Tomasin Playford and Karin Steuber, Saskatchewan Archaeological Society

Sherry Farrell Racette, art historian, University of Regina

Rich From, geologist

Steve Bata, building manager for the Saskatchewan Legislative Building

In Regina – we organized a series of workshops that took the form of both walks and an electronic workshop:

Jordan Rustad, field biologist

Ryan Fisher, curator of vertebrate biology, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

Mark Brigham, biologist, University of Regina

Holophon Audio Arts, particularly Ian Campbell and Ernie Dulanowsky

We met with various groups in Regina. Some told us stories, others drew pictures on images shared by the Royal Saskatchewan Museum's urban wildlife monitoring program. We are grateful to both the RSM and the City of Regina for allowing us to use the images deemed as useless within a scientific context:

All grades and classes at Prairie Sky School

Regina Open Door Society

Elphinstone Seniors' Centre

Shannon Chernick, Nature Regina Kids' Club

Students from Coronation Park School

Special thanks –

Cathedral Village Arts Festival who invited us both to walk in the opening parade, and to occupy a booth where we gathered many inspiring stories from visitors to the festival, assisted by volunteers Maggie Dixon, Holly Fay and Tom Young.

Robin Poitras of New Dance Horizons, who generously dressed us as rocks for the parade and organized a "rock sonata" concert with Regina Symphony Orchestra musical director Gordon Gerrard to accompany the raising of our flag on the AGR's flagpole.

Work study volunteer Marnie Archer who assisted with all events.

Writers Sandee Moore, Tomas Jonsson and Lorne Kequahtoway for all their insights.
SK-Arts for funding this project, and so many other activities that help maintain a vibrant arts culture throughout this province.

CARFAC Saskatchewan for assistance with the publication of the field guide.

Brent Pylot of Epic Art + Design, Regina SK who has taught us so much in the process of designing this field guide.

Patrick Fernandez at Western Litho Printers for printing this publication.

APPENDIX

Reflections

LORNE KEQUAHTOOWAY

Artist and co-founder of Buffalo People Arts Institute Lorne Kequahtooaway reflected on his experience of the project, which included speaking with the artists over two years, the exhibition, Cathedral Village Arts Festival and leading a nature walk as part of their project.

How do you understand the project *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible?*

In the way it is delivered, I understand the project to be scientific in nature, which is quasi-parallel to a spiritual context. In the end, the same message is received or perceived by participants. I think it is a good approach to let people make that judgment for themselves. The message is that things happen in this world that sometimes come with no explanation because they cannot be seen, but know that they happened. It's like a paradoxical interpretation of modern spirituality, depending on how the participants view their experiences.

What essential information should be included in *The Alternative Field Guide to the Unknown*, particularly from your perspective? We invite you to contribute your thoughts based on your personal participation in some of the activities in the *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible* project.

I like the concept that there can be stories from invisible experiences - that being a paradoxical statement in itself. I come from the perspective of indigenous spirituality; there is a reason for everything that happens, and we are meant to learn from these moments. At that moment, creator has brought you to that experience to either provide an answer or pose a question you need to figure out on your own. It's at this time that we are 'ready' to be part of that experience (that event), seen or unseen, so that we as humans use that as a way of personal growth or development.

TOMAS JONSSON

Curator and artist Tomas Jonsson reflected on his experience of the project, which included the exhibition, Cathedral Village Arts Festival Street Fair and a nature walk connecting to the land led by Lorne Kequahtoway.

How do you understand the project *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*?

This project sits outside of the conventional borders of value. It shifts perceptions with openness

and consciously undefined attention to what isn't valued. I appreciated the sorts of transactions (such as listening and sharing stories) that took place in the financially-oriented model of the street fair.

Holes can be ambiguous; trying to quantify a hole is absurd. This project feels like the shape of a hole.

I didn't read all the stories, but I didn't feel I had to. Just knowing that space was held for them was enough. It felt minor, as in "minor key." It wasn't "Rawlco Radio presents."

I appreciated that Lorne turned the walk into a discursive and storytelling act. Walking isn't always a Colonial practice, but this made me aware of walking as a way of mapping and surveying.

What essential information should be included in *The Alternative Field Guide to the Unknown*, particularly from your perspective? We invite you to contribute your thoughts based on your personal participation in some of the activities in the *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible* project.

I really liked all of the fragments; they are incomplete but create a whole together. The reader, events, the book's use, or new contexts all work to complete The Field Guide.

I also think about how [artist] Peter Morin publishes books by burying them. Thinking of publishing as an act of disseminating a book through soil, roots, and underground waterways. I ask, "How does the book exist in the landscape?"

SANDEE MOORE

Something invisible — ideas and interests — stretched over 3,387 km to connect artists Linda Duvall and Jillian McDonald as collaborators. Separated by a great distance, both artists dug holes: Duvall on her land in rural Saskatchewan and McDonald in her Brooklyn, New York, backyard. Together these actions form a 2-channel video they conceived called *The Dig*. In the video, after hours of digging, a physical connection is revealed between the two locations. They consider this project an encounter with the unexplained, pointing the way toward their research into the unseen and unknowable.

Over the two and half years leading up to their exhibition, I had numerous conversations with Linda and Jillian, connected them with individuals who contributed to their research and knowledge to their project, and wrote grant proposals to fund their travel to and residency in Regina. In short, I became an unseen collaborator in their project *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*. Their project encompassed an exhibition from June 2–July 31, 2022, which transformed the gallery into a laboratory for participatory artmaking and was preceded by two weeks of public engagement events for citizens of Regina.

“The unseen” impacted their project in an unanticipated way. Travel restrictions to control the spread of COVID-19 meant that in June 2021, Duvall and McDonald met with vertebrate

biologists, provincial building project managers, archeologists, Indigenous community organizers and geologists over Zoom video conferences, followed by a shortened residency at the Art Gallery of Regina in August 2021.

New sources of inspiration emerged from these conversations between artists, communities, wildlife, and the land. The artists shifted their focus from acting on the land to listening to the land and the unseen forces that animate it.

Like their exhibition, this publication, *The Alternative Field Guide to the Unknown*, confounds expectations and presents novel ways to understand the world using art as a method of research. Rather than objects and images, the exhibition, comprised of conversations, walks in the parkland surrounding the gallery and collective experiences, was largely intangible, immaterial and incomplete. The role to be filled was not viewer but collaborator, whose participation was essential to complete the work.

To make visible the invisible and intangible elements – learning, adaptation, discovery, and camaraderie – essential to Linda and Jillian’s project, in the following pages, we offer a list of thanks to our many collaborators who shared their narratives, wisdom, insight, imagination, images and friendship through the project.

Encounters with the invisible and the unknown staged by the artists included free “nature walks” to discover what we may typically fail to notice: animals in the urban landscape, spirits that live on the Land,

and sounds of animals and electronics beyond human hearing. With the help of biologists, homemade electronics and artists, the architecture and riverside paths of Les Sherman Park came alive with the secret world of sounds (like the sound of the earth's magnetic field), guidance from spirits and ancestors, and animals (bats, hares, birds) that surround us in our daily lives.

Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible values not just what we cannot see or don't usually take the time to notice but the imperceptible slowness with which time writes history upon the rocks and soil or the unexplained sensations that defy Western scientific models of knowing.

The Alternative Field Guide to the Unknown maps extraordinary, deeply felt, elusive encounters with the unexplained in Regina. Alongside the everyday enchantment of seeing traffic stopped on Regina's busiest street to allow a beaver to cross the road the guide includes:

- Entries about dogs who "just knew"
- Haunting smells
- Never-before-seen creatures
- Altered experiences of the world due to illness.

When children rewrite the vagaries of blurry trail camera photographs discarded by scientists as worthless, they reveal the unexpected and raise questions about the nature of knowledge. They have

turned black-and-white facts into vividly coloured dreams. This is how the artists propose that we can all use art as a method to understand the world by embracing the inexplicable and incalculable.

We invite you to use this field guide to seek out and prize the unseen and unexplainable around you.

Sandee Moore,
Curator, *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*, Art Gallery of Regina



Linda Duvall and Jillian McDonald, *The Dig* (video still), 2022, two-channel video, 02:24:12 Images: courtesy the artists

Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible
The Alternative Field Guide to the Unknown

Linda Duvall & Jillian McDonald

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Published by
Art Gallery of Regina Inc.
2420 Elphinstone Street
P.O. Box 1790
Regina, SK S4P 3C8
Canada

www.artgalleryofregina.ca

ISBN # 978-1-927422-29-8

Curator: Sandee Moore

Reflection Texts: Lorne Kequahtooaway,

Tomas Jonsson, Sandee Moore

Director: Jess Richter (2019 – 2022), Robin Lynch (2022)

Design: Brent Pylot, Epic Art + Design

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Engaging.
Contemporary.
Art.

We are grateful to SK-Arts Artists in Communities program for funding this project and to the City of Regina's accessibility fund for supporting accessible adaptations of *Messages from the Rocks – Stories of the Invisible*.





Do you grieve the birds?
Do you find messages in the rocks?
Do the trees call for you?
Have you ever been carried by the wind?
Are you visited by the waters?
Do the fires tell you stories?

ISBN-13: 978-0-14-311796-4

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