

Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible **Audio Tour Transcript**

Welcome to the exhibition ***Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*** at the Art Gallery of Regina. Working collaboratively, artists Linda Duvall and Jillian McDonald spent two years connecting with the Land and the people of Regina.

We are grateful to SK-Arts Artists in Communities Program for supporting Duvall and McDonald's connection and co-creation with the community in 2021 and 2022. A key concept emerged from the artists' research in Regina: listening to the Land and the unseen forces that animate it. This is what their exhibition invites you to partake in.

I'm Sandee Moore, curator of exhibitions and programming at the Art Gallery of Regina. I'm delighted to introduce you to *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*, a community-engaged project and exhibition by Linda Duvall and Jillian McDonald in this exhibition audio tour.

Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible extends beyond the gallery and expands notions of what Art is. The artists propose Art as a transformative research model that values participation, creation, experience, and the unexplained.

Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible is not a traditional exhibition. Duvall & McDonald's expansive project includes:

- An exhibition co-created with gallery visitors;
- videos that document their intimate contact with the land;
- Posters and flags;
- Nature walks;
- An electronics workshop;
- A field guide co-authored with school children, senior citizens and other members of the public.

Duvall and McDonald both work in a discipline of visual art known as public practice or relational aesthetics. The conversations and experiences that emerge from their connections with our community members *are* their artwork. Additionally, they propose transforming the art gallery into a laboratory for participatory art-making.

Unlike many exhibitions in art galleries, *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible* is **not** hands-off. The artists invite you to write your own story of an encounter with the invisible or unexplained on a sheet provided and leaf through their "research," consisting of children's drawings on wildlife photos discarded by scientists.

Before we start the tour inside the gallery, I wonder if you noticed the flag flying from the flagpole outside our building. This flag is one of the artists' artworks around the city that asks questions to arouse memories, stimulate reflection, and direct attention to magical relationships with the natural world. There are two sides to the flag. On one side, a light streak cuts across a view of pale, bare saplings against a night sky; the words "have you been carried by the wind?" are printed in bold, blue letters. On the other side, a dazzling halo of sunlight illuminates a thicket; green lettering asks, "Do the trees call for you?"

We'll start the tour by going to the left through the gallery entrance door. You'll see the exhibition didactic panel on the wall right beside the door with the artists' names (Linda Duvall & Jillian McDonald), the exhibition title (*Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*), the exhibition dates and a short introduction to the exhibition written by me.

Photos are allowed. If you post photographs of the exhibition online, credit the artists and tag the Art Gallery of Regina.

Messages from the Rocks – Stories of the Invisible and the collaborative research and creation between the artists began with two videos you see projected on facing gallery walls. The artists discovered that they were separately digging holes: Duvall on her land in rural Saskatchewan and McDonald in her Brooklyn, New York backyard. They consider this coincidence an encounter with the unexplained pointing the way toward their research into the unseen and unknowable.

The act of digging itself is one of uncovering what is hidden from view. As each artist digs a hole large enough for her to disappear into, she enters the unknown.

The process of excavating their respective yards is arduous and sustained. Viewing too is sustained; both videos run nearly two and a half hours.

The video on the East gallery wall begins with clouds lit by the sun rising over a field of long grass. Digging the loose sand is relatively easy for Duvall on the untilled prairie grassland on her property north of Saskatoon. We see her lift and pile shovelfuls of dirt in real-time as the wind bends the long stems of green grass topped with golden seedheads.

McDonald digs against a backdrop of tall, narrow brick houses in the projection on the gallery's West Wall. The digging is more demanding and time-consuming for McDonald. During several days, edited down to a two-and-a-half-hour video, she unearths assorted detritus from previous settlements and constructions in the city. Along with dirt, a pile of bricks, chain link fence and barbed wire grows at the hole's edge.

After this prolonged dig, each artist slips into the passage she's opened in the earth, only to emerge from her counterpart's hole on the opposite video projection. It's not a punchline but another sustained performance full of surprises. Duvall struggles to heave herself out of the pit but repeatedly slides back in. McDonald walks across the plain toward the horizon, scampering over a barbed wire fence. She walks and walks for a very long time, growing smaller until she finally becomes smaller than a pixel and disappears.

You'll notice a neatly arranged grid of handwritten stories on the South wall. They tell of times that people might not have been sure what they saw or had a premonition of something to come. They tell of people who felt a sudden and irresistible need to contact family members who were sick or injured, unbeknownst to the caller. They tell of pets that knew something that no one else knew.

Duvall chose this small sampling of stories to encourage people to think about an unexplained experience in their lives. Not necessarily supernatural or occult, but something hard to quantify and explain logically.

Help yourself to more reading from the pile on the pedestal between the two comfy armchairs. You can offer your own story to the artists; they've placed pens and papers on the pedestal for you. Why don't you sit down and think for a moment? They invite your thoughts with the following questions printed at the top of the paper: What does the moon tell you? Have you been carried by the wind? Do the fires tell you stories? Do you grieve the birds? Have you tasted the clay today? Are you visited by the waters? Do the trees call for you?

In their research for *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*, the artists made contact with scientists at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. The scientists gifted the artists photographs taken by wildlife trail cameras. Because the camera failed to photograph the animals being studied, the biologists discarded these images as worthless. These photographs, which the artists refer to as "uncinematic miasmas," are marred with light flares and motion blurs. In the hands of artists, these ambiguous images have new value as aesthetic material and stimulators of imagination.

On the North wall, the artists have pinned specimens of these unclear and undefined images that frustrated scientific quantification. The enlarged photographs have been altered by children who have rewritten their vagueries into personal narratives: a singing mushroom, an eye that lives outside of Regina, aliens searching for the "missing piece" that looks like a white flower, an idyllic island where everyone can snack on a gigantic blue Dorito, an octopus with a hat, a new breed of beaver. 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.

McDonald has stacked more drawings on the pedestal in front of this wall. The artists invite you to put on a pair of white art handlers' gloves and leaf through these drawings, which they term their research. Instead of numbers and empirical data points, the artists' research into the unseen and unexplained is built upon half-truths, invention and fantasy. Art can fill in the gaps in what we know to be true and provide alternatives to unsatisfying voids.

Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to experience *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible*.

The Art Gallery of Regina is a nonprofit, public art gallery that programs contemporary art to tell Saskatchewan stories.

We are grateful to our core funders, SK-Arts and the city of Regina, who enable us to make our exhibitions free to the public while compensating artists for their work. We are especially grateful to SK-Arts Artists in Communities program for funding Linda Duvall and Jillian McDonald's collaborative and creative activities with people in Regina. We are also grateful to our project partners: Cathedral Village Arts Festival, Prairie Sky School, and Nature Regina. We also thank the Elphinstone Seniors' Centre and SaskAbilities for allowing the artists to connect with their clients. We also recognize the inspiring depth of knowledge shared by Steve Bata, Dr. Mark Brigham, Ernie Dulanowsky, Dr. Ryan Fisher, Dr. Richard From, Lorne Kequahtoway, Dr. Tomasin Playford, Jordan Rustad, and Dr. Karin Steuber.

I especially thank **you** for taking the time to listen to this audio tour and attend this exhibition. You can support the Art Gallery of Regina by becoming a member, donating, or both. Visit our website, www.artgalleryofregina.ca, for details on becoming part of our gallery's community and more information about *Messages from the Rocks - Stories of the Invisible* and the AGR's other programming.