

Artist Statement

I was inspired to make my own sand paintings after my mother and I attended a public tour of the petroglyphs at Aisinai-pi (the "Writing on Stone" interpretive centre) while on holiday in Cypress Hills during August of 2016.

When I returned home, I wanted to reproduce some of the images I'd photographed at the site, so I made a mixture of sand and acrylic emulsion to create a kind of artificial sandstone, and copied what I could see in the photos I'd taken while at the site. I used yellow ochre to colour the artificial sandstone, and red ochre to highlight the mark-making. Other colours were added in places where I saw that someone had added colour to the original images.

One of the important facts that our guide highlighted during our tour was that the petroglyphs used symbolic elements to tell stories - some of the stories were about the gods of the Blackfoot people; other stories were about battles, and hunts, and birth and death. In the end, the images at Writing on Stone are examples of a pictorial language with its own shorthand and its own literary conventions.

This way of making story fragments became attached to an on-going day-dream I'd been having about a god named Taviel who eventually converts to Christianity. I was trying to figure out how his worshippers (a wandering tribe of nomadic people I call the Nahtaviel - I think they have some kind of Celtic or Germanic ancestry) record their history. The sand paintings provided an answer to that riddle.

I am borrowing the conventions of Surrealism to ground this work in accepted modern art practices and to provide an entry-way for modern art lovers to access the objects as art objects.

CLUE 1: The conventions of their pictorial language are based loosely on what our guide told us about how to interpret the petroglyphs at Aisinai-pi, with the addition of Gregg's Shorthand for the labels.

CLUE 2: The Romuleans and the Nahtavielans can communicate with each other in Spanish. They both use Spanish as a second language.

Several months ago, I also had the idea that I could record the the story of Taviel in the form of a graphic novel that follows the conventions of the Book of Kells, which is a Book of the Gospels that was created in Britain by Anglo-Saxon converts to Christianity at some point during the 700s AD, at a time when the English-speaking peoples were first beginning to read and write in their own language.

I've decided that this is how the people who live in the village of St. Romulus record their history.

To make the Nahtavielian sand-paintings, I used children's play sand and acrylic. I made the Romulean manuscript pages on the computer, using Adobe Illustrator.

The story is deliberately incomplete, so that you have room to let Taviel and his friends into your own imagination, to see what happens next.

Please enjoy the story, and the exhibition.

Judith McRae, March 2019

Bibliography

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