



Carving out a future with a flint and an axe  
by  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking

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## Carving out a future with a flint and an axe

My research has been focused on the history of camping and wilderness survival. Specifically, I have been exploring how our ideas about the landscape are constructed, and what it means when we interact with the wild by engaging in activities like camping.

Robert MacFarlane's 2003 book, *Mountains of the Mind*, points out that mountains and the wilderness came to be valued primarily from a European perspective. MacFarlane notes that, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, mountains were considered frightening and repulsive. Any landscape that did not conform easily to order and agriculture was thought to be useless.<sup>1</sup> However, late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, studies in geology, as well as changing attitudes towards the idea of the 'sublime' turned mountains, glaciers, and other wild places into areas to admire, and to seek out.<sup>2</sup> There was a shift from a simple aesthetic appreciation of the 'pastoral', to a desire for pursuing sacred, sometimes even sublime encounters with the landscape – through hiking, climbing, and camping.

According to William Cronon, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 'wilderness' was often seen as "...the last bastion of rugged individualism."<sup>3</sup> A space where men – almost exclusively *men*, particularly a wealthy class of men – could exist as *real* men. It was only in the wilderness frontier that a man could escape the comforts of the industrialized world, and avoid becoming "...emasculated by the feminizing tendencies of civilization."<sup>4</sup> Today, to camp in the wilderness is to seek the sublime and sacred but it is also an act of recreation, which is still very much a privileged, and gendered desire. This is perhaps most recently demonstrated by the hipster 'lumbersexual' trend manifested most acutely in fashion, and online through digital image-based platforms like Instagram, and Tumblr.

Cronon considers the unfortunate irony that as wilderness landscapes became protected areas in the forms of national parks (such as Jasper National Park), indigenous peoples were being forced off these lands into reservations.<sup>5</sup> From the colonial view, the land could finally be seen as 'uninhabited', 'pristine', 'virgin', which became a false mythology that is still embedded in our historical memory today.<sup>6</sup> It is this long and complicated history that we often forget when thinking of the wilderness and what we must now recall when thinking of the future of that landscape.

The 2008 book, *Campsite: Architectures of Duration and Place* by Charlie Hailey, expands both metaphorically, and literally on our notion of camping and campsites. For Hailey, the idea of making, breaking, and clearing a campsite can be useful for providing us with insight about the way we view the 'wilderness' as a liminal and separate 'place' in our collective conscious. The temporal and semi-permanent architectures of the campsite, or shack, act as transitional sites – as spaces between the environment and culture. Camps create spaces that are permeable, not just 'inside' or 'outside' spaces. It is this space where our human constructions have potential to meet the reality of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert MacFarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, Pantheon Books, New York: 2003, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York: 1995, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The mixed-media prints in this exhibition combine my own documentation of the so-called 'wilderness', with appropriated images from historical exploration documents, survival books, and online images of wild landscapes. These are merged with constructions of campsites and temporary shelters, which stand in for both real and imagined human experience. It is not always evident whether the shelters I have depicted are occupied, or if they are relics, abandoned. These campsites, and their accompanying landscapes, have become a "site of contest" between humanity and nature.<sup>7</sup> The tension is intensified in today's Anthropocenic age of global ecological crisis.

Many of the works are not completely accurate in respect to the reality of the landscapes but, rather, reflect the age from which they came, creating a juxtaposition between the actual and the 'romantic'. The prints and structures also contain photographic elements combined with hand drawn elements: the documentary with the speculative, the imagined with the actual. The subtle use of dark humour is used to expose the ironies in our ideas about the wilderness.

The method of collage, and my use of found objects is intended to mirror our construction of wilderness and reflects how we, as a society, build and break meaning depending on the various elements involved in the context of its use. The provisional feel of the work, it's DIY aesthetic, is meant to make the prints, the materials, and our idea of the wilderness feel familiar. The goal with this project is to create an uneasy, eerie, and dangerous view of the landscape where our historical past must be reconciled with our contemporary desires to experience the landscape.

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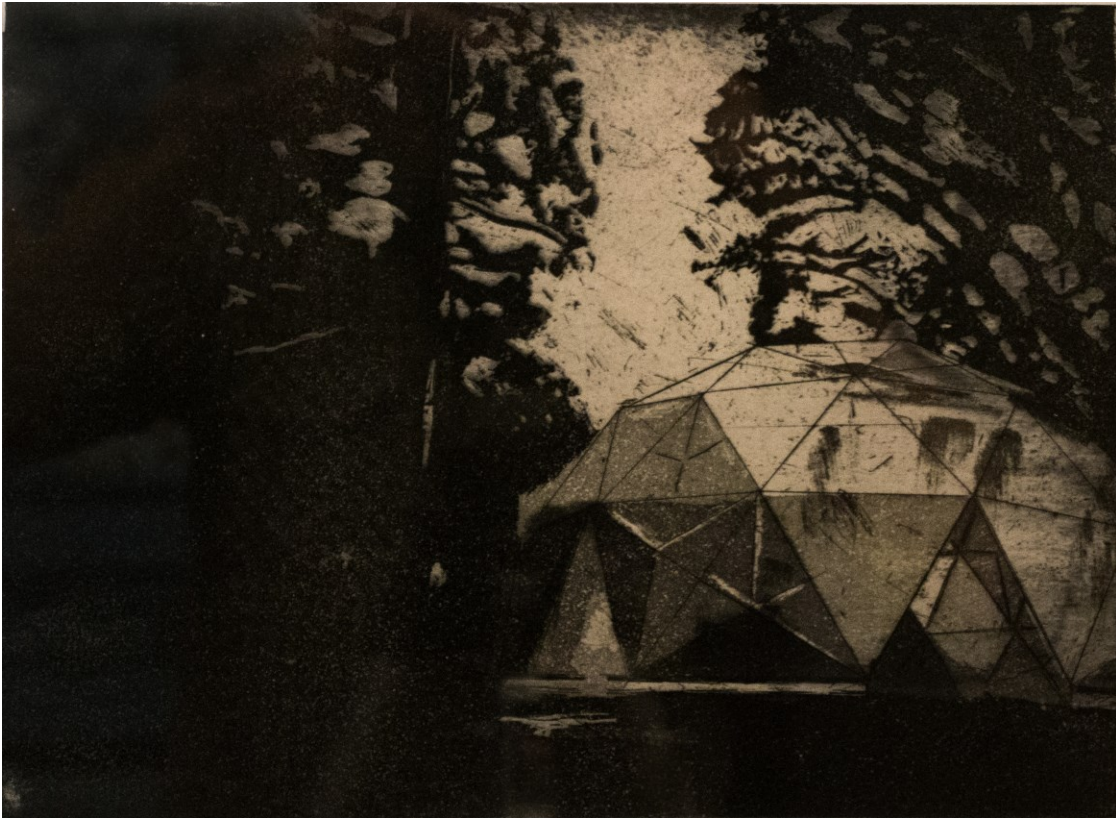
<sup>7</sup> Robert MacFarlane "Eeriness: Tracing an Unquiet Tradition in British Landscape Art", *Momus*, April 20 2016 (accessed May 30 2016): <http://momus.ca/eeriness-tracing-an-unquiet-tradition-in-british-landscape-art/>



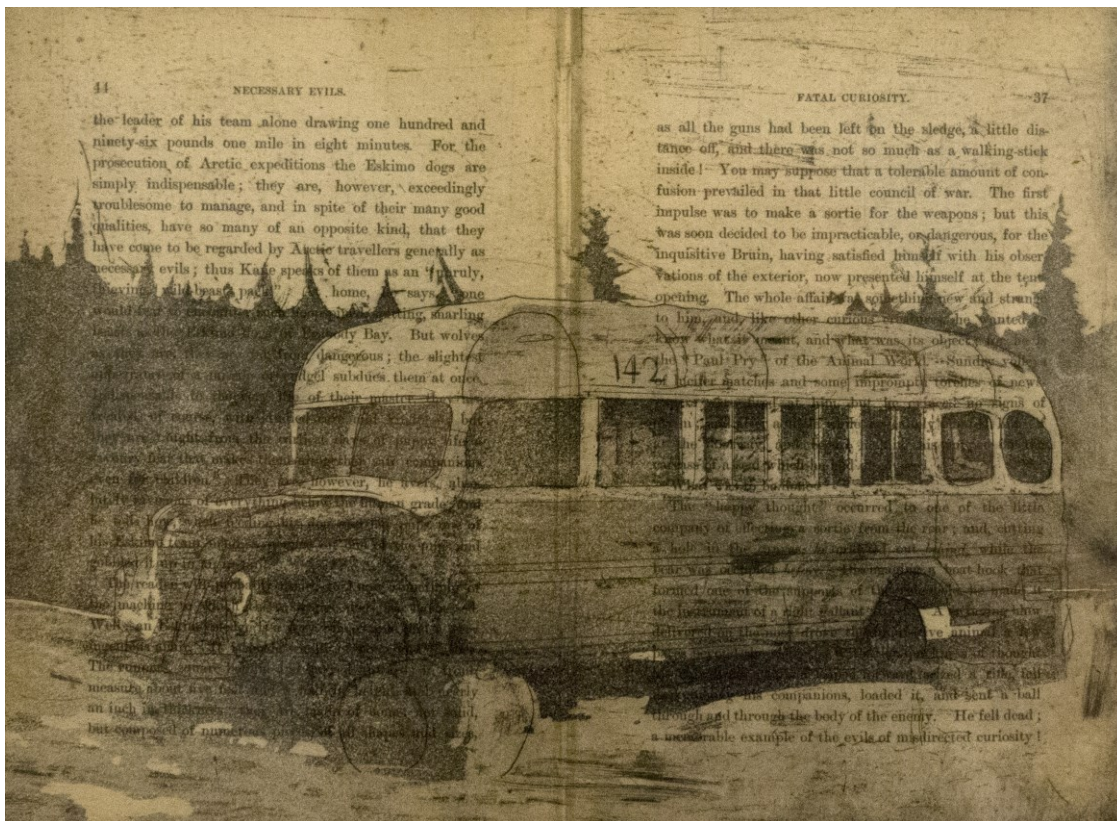
Green\_001 *Beta Series: Foster's Tilt*, 2016, Intaglio on digital print 5" x 8"



Green\_025 Installation shot of *Beta Series*



Green\_002 Beta Series: *Unconventional Living*, 2016, Intaglio, 5" x 8"



Green\_003 Beta Series: *Fatal Curiosity*, 2016, Intaglio on digital, 5" x 8"



Green\_027 Installation shot of *Outlier Spaces* series



Green\_026 Installation shot



Green\_009 *Outlier Spaces: Excrescence*, 2015, Intaglio on digital print, 24" x 16"



Green\_024 *Outlier Spaces: Protrusions*, 2015, Intaglio on digital print, 24" x 16"



Green\_012 Installation shot of *Provision Moments* series



Green\_013 Installation shot of *Provision Moments* series



Green\_014 Installation shot of *Provision Moments* series



Green\_015 *Provision Moments: Lost with a gun*, 2016,  
silkscreen, digital output, wood, hardware, 20" x 16" x 1"



Green\_016 *Provision Moments: Lost with a gun detail shot*



Green\_017 *Provisional Moments: They're coming right for us*, 2016,  
Drawing, silkscreen, digital print, wood, hardware, 24" x 34" x 1"



Green\_018 *Provisional Moments: Some time to reflect*, 2016,  
Relief, drawing, digital output, hardware, 24" x 30" x 1"



Green\_019 *Provisional Moments: Learning curves*, 2016  
Silkscreen, digital output, hardware, wood, 24" x 18" x 8"

I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to my supervisors Sean Caulfield and Liz Ingram. It is with their encouragement, patience and guidance that got me through the many obstacles of the wilderness I found myself in. It is through their instruction and mentorship that I was able to find my route.

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And most importantly and above all, I thank and dedicate this work to my wife, Dr. Riva Symko. Without her support, her spurring me on, her intellectual rigour and knowledge I would still be lost.



Green\_24 *Outlier Spaces: Obstructions*, 2016, Intaglio on digital print 16" x 24"



Green\_022 Installation shot of exhibition

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