

SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

Julie Andreyev & Simon Lysander Overstall
SALMON PEOPLE



Hard Destiny: Julie Andreyev's and Simon Lysander Overstall's *Salmon People*

CAROL GIGLIOTTI

Artists' Statement

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JULIE ANDREYEV
SIMON LYSANDER OVERSTALL
CAROL GIGLIOTTI

Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall
Salmon People, 2015

Generative multi-channel audio video installation, UrbanScreen

Production photo for *Salmon People*.
Image courtesy of the artists

Hard Destiny: Julie Andreyev's and Simon Lysander Overstall's *Salmon People* by Carol Gigliotti

Away with the superficial and selfish phil-anthropy of men,— who knows what admirable virtue of fishes may be below low-water-mark, bearing up against a hard destiny, not admired by that fellow-creature who alone can appreciate it! Who hears the fishes when they cry?

Henry David Thoreau

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)

Salmon People—Wy-Kan-Ush-Pum in Sahaptin—is a combination of the word for salmon used in sacred

ceremonies, 'wy-kan-ush,' and the word 'pum,' meaning 'people.' Sahaptin-speaking peoples include the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Tenino, and Yakama, who inhabit territory along the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. It turns out that a number of societies around the world consider themselves Salmon People. Salmon have helped to form traditional cultures as geographically wide-ranging as Japan, the Pacific Northwest coast, the Norwegian coastal areas, and the Russian Far East.¹ Each of these cultures, however, share a reverence and gratitude for what they consider is the gift of salmon to their sustenance and flourishing.

Salmon People, a generative multi-channel audio video installation by Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall, offers a distinct perspective on

reverence for salmon throughout the world, one that builds on these traditions, while widening their scope. Here, we are witness to the salmon themselves as people, both collectively and individually with their own cultural traditions and specific birthplaces. Here, their underwater lives are not only visible to us, but eclipse the human world above. Separating these worlds runs the surface of the water, in this case the Fraser, British Columbia's longest river, in which we see the orange tips of dorsal and caudal fins of salmon swimming upstream to reach their spawning ground and hinting at the life below.



Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall, *Salmon People*, 2015, generative multi-channel audio visual installation, UrbanScreen. Photograph by Blaine Campbell.

The Salmon's Journey

The top layer of video is of the land, a distant view of the human world and its imprint of logging, shipping, pulp mills, chemical plants, and fish farming. Its visual and aural remoteness compels us even more deeply into the underwater world filled with the journey of the salmon. These are sockeye; individual and groups of salmon fighting their way back upstream to their natal spawning grounds in Adams River, BC. Beginning in the Salish Sea, the labyrinth of coastal waterways of the southwestern portion of British Columbia and the northwestern portion of Washington State in the United States, they have travelled 434 kilometres inland from the mouth of the Fraser River. They have struggled past Mission, Chilliwack, and Hope, east up the Thompson River, through Ashcroft and Kamloops Lake, into the South Thompson River, Little Shuswap, then larger Shuswap Lake, and finally ascending west up the Adams River. Only the luckiest and strongest salmon complete this journey of fourteen to seventeen days. Generally, one in one thousand eggs will actually be able to return to its natal stream as a spawning salmon. Earlier, they made the reverse odyssey, from the freshwater Adams River down to the salty Salish Sea and into the Pacific where they swam for three to four years in a circular path north to Alaska, west to Japan, and back to the northwest coast.²

The recombinant video-audio panorama of these intertwined worlds of land, freshwater, and sea, of human and non-human, projected on Surrey's largest non-commercial outdoor screen, could be seen as yet another nod to revering salmon for their persistence and sustenance of our needs. The title of this piece, however, along with the visual emphasis upon each salmon's difficult swim against the current, and the audio that offers us both natural

and synthesized sounds of birds, the water, and of the salmon themselves—this last an emphatic imagining of salmon communication—points to a reverence and awareness of the worth of the salmon for themselves, not as food or resource, but as beings who are *subjects-of-a-life*, in philosopher Tom Regan's famous phrase.³ The fact that the salmon who succeed in reaching their spawning grounds die soon after they spawn or give birth⁴ due to exhaustion does not in any way minimize their perseverance or their influence. For without salmon, who are what scientists call ecosystem engineers and a keystone species, the ecosystems of the Pacific Coast and all the animals that rely on the dead salmon for food would disappear.⁵ Suddenly, our blinkered view of salmon as just food for humans⁶ changes. In their death, they contribute to the natural world, one that would continue if humans disappeared.

Corrupted Reverence

Rachel Carson says in *Silent Spring*, "For thousands upon thousands of years the salmon have known and followed these threads of fresh water that lead them back to the rivers."⁷ Carson, arguably the person who ignited the environmental movement in the United States, articulates the sentience of individual salmon by recognizing their knowledge of how to find their way back to their natal river spawning grounds through smell and electromagnetic fields.⁸ One wonders: how uncorrupted is the current reverence for salmon when warming sea temperatures, pesticides, chemicals, dams, toxic algae blooms, and risk of genetic changes from fish farming, among many other humanly created and induced obstacles, make what is already a tremendously difficult journey even more impossible?

As in Rachel Carson's writing, Andreyev's and Overstall's *Salmon People* offers a dissenting and

empathic understanding of the lives of other species, one that speaks to current environmental challenges as well as a growing awareness of the agency and consciousness of other species. Andreyev's work since 2009 has placed these ideas front and center, often in collaboration with her two canine companions, Tom and Sugi. Within a body of work entitled *Animal Lover*, Andreyev has committed to focusing on our relationships with animals in order to shift our largely wrongheaded and often abusive behavior towards them. The fact that Andreyev points out that she is vegan on informational materials about her and her work is not an incidental comment, but one that indicates a position from which Andreyev develops her gorgeously produced and sensitively imagined art. *Salmon People* offers us an answer to Thoreau's question: "Who knows what admirable virtue of fishes may be below low-water-mark, bearing up against a hard destiny?"

Notes

1. Commission, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish. "We Are All Salmon People." Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. Nov. 10, 2015, <http://www.critfc.org/salmon-culture/we-are-all-salmon-people/>.
2. Daniel E Schindler, et al., "Pacific salmon and the ecology of coastal ecosystems." *Front Ecol Environ* 1, no. 1 (2003): 31–37.
3. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2004). 2nd Edition, 171. Originally published in 1983.
4. In addition to salmon, other animals die soon after fertilization, mating, or birth, among them octopuses, squid, and mayflies.
5. C. Jeff Cederholm, et al., "Pacific Salmon Carcasses: Essential Contributions of Nutrients and Energy for Aquatic and Terrestrial Ecosystems," *Fisheries* 24, no. 10, (October, 1999), 6-15.

6. Food for 'pet' consumption must be included here since the majority of salmon eaten by our constant companions are processed and sold to humans in pet stores. In other words, there are few dogs and cats roaming the rivers of the US hunting for salmon.

7. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*. (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1962), 122.
8. Nathan F. Putman, et al., "An Inherited Magnetic Map Guides Ocean Navigation in Juvenile Pacific Salmon," *Current Biology* 24, no. 4, (17 February 2014), 446–450.

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Artists' Statement

by Julie Andreyev & Simon Lysander Overstall

Salmon People considers the shared ecologies of nonhuman and human animals through videos of the survivors of the salmon cycle of life, combined with videos of the Surrey landscape taken from the surrounding waters of the Fraser River. The salmon shown in the project swam for 3 to 4 years, making a counter-clockwise circular migration around the northern Pacific Ocean, returning to their natal stream or river—such as the Fraser River—where they then travelled upwards of 25 kilometres a day to their spawning grounds. Salmon find their way back to their birthplace as individuals, and they find their particular birth-stream using scent and other perceptual modes.

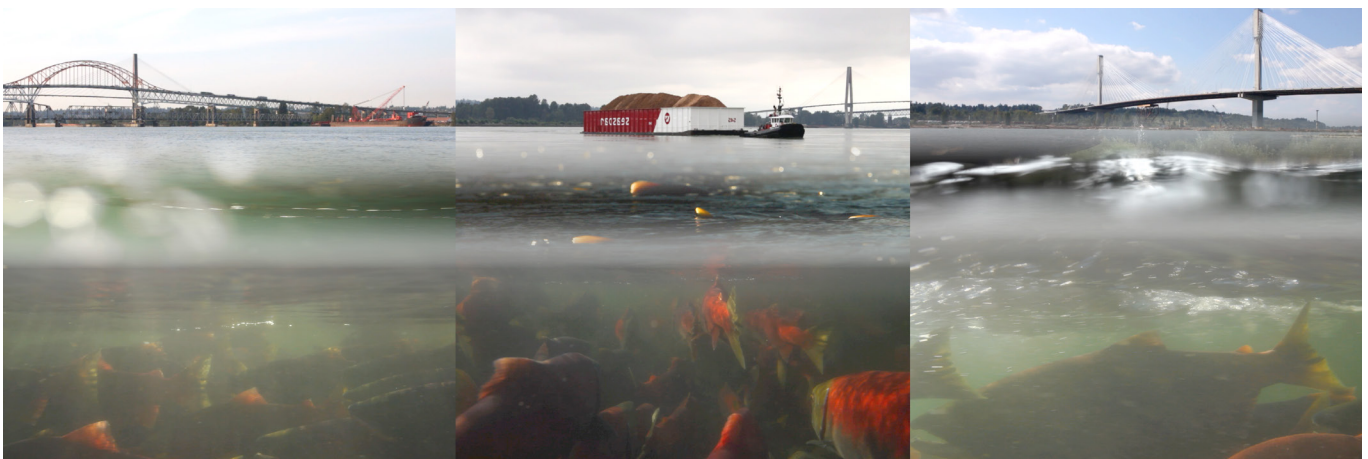
The project presents a below-water point of view, a realm normally unavailable to human eyes. Nonhuman, human, recorded, and synthesized sounds make up the sonic field that suggests a strange yet familiar world. *Salmon People* presents a recombinant video-audio panorama, a constantly changing land-sea-scape, signaling the intertwined worlds of humans and nonhuman beings.

Production Team

Julie Andreyev (concept and editing), Simon Lysander Overstall (custom software and sound design), Paolo Pennutti in collaboration with Elisa Ferrari (salmon cinematography), Jonathan Nunes (Surrey cinematography).

Funding

Salmon People was made possible through the GRAND AD-NODE Project Fund, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.



Julie Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall. Still from *Salmon People*, 2015, generative multi-channel audio visual installation, Surrey UrbanScreen. Image courtesy of the artists.

About the Artists

Julie Andreyev is an artist, researcher, vegan and educator. Andreyev's art practice, called *Animal Lover*, explores more-than-human creativity. The projects take the form of new media performance, video installation, generative art, and relational aesthetics. Andreyev's projects have been shown internationally, and are supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Andreyev is Associate Professor at Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver. She is a Joseph Armand Bombardier Scholar completing her PhD at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Her dissertation is an interdisciplinary investigation into an expansion of ethics for more-than-human being examined through interspecies relational creativity. The study is supported by a Doctoral Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

www.animallover.ca

Simon Lysander Overstall is a computational media artist, and musician/composer from Vancouver. He develops works with generative, interactive, or performative elements. He is particularly interested in computational creativity in music, physics-based sound synthesis in virtual environments, and biologically and ecologically inspired art and music systems. He has produced custom performance systems and interactive art installations that have been shown in Canada, the US, Europe, and China. He has also composed sound designs and music for dance, theatre, and installations. He has an MA in Sound in New Media at Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland, a BFA in Music Composition from the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University,

Vancouver, and an Associate in Music (Jazz) Diploma from Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo.

www.simonlysander.net

About the Writer

Carol Gigliotti is a writer, scholar, and activist whose work focuses on the impact of new technologies on human relationships with animals and on the lives of animals themselves. It challenges the current assumptions of creativity and offers a more comprehensive understanding of creativity through recognizing animal cognition, creativity, consciousness, and agency. She is the editor of the book, *Leonardo's Choice: Genetic Technologies and Animals* and the author of numerous book chapters and journal essays on these topics. Her work is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, The Sitka Center for the Arts, and The Reverie Foundation, among others. She was an Associate Professor at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver, and in the fall of 2011 was Guest Curator of Interactive Futures 11: Animal Influence. Gigliotti is on a number of international advisory boards concerned either with media or animal studies. She now lives in San Francisco, CA.

All weblinks in this document were up-to-date as of June 14, 2016.



About UrbanScreen

Imagined by artists and built by the City, Surrey's UrbanScreen is Canada's largest non-commercial outdoor urban screen dedicated to presenting digital and interactive art. UrbanScreen is an offsite venue of the Surrey Art Gallery and is located on the west wall of Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre in City Centre. The venue can be viewed from SkyTrain, between Gateway and Surrey Central stations. Exhibitions begin 30 minutes after sunset, and end at midnight.

UrbanScreen was made possible by the City of Surrey Public Art Program, with support from the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Surrey Art Gallery Association, and the BC Arts Council Unique Opportunities Program, and is a legacy of the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad project CODE. Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council for its ongoing programming. UrbanScreen's 2015 equipment renewal was made possible by the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage / Government of Canada and the City of Surrey.

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