

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
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Land as Local Artist

Agnes Learns
2024

SPEAKERS

Jessica Endress

KEYWORDS

Agnes Learns, Grade 9-12, School Resource, Youth Education, Fibre Art, Contemporary Art, Collaboration

TRANSCRIPT

Jessica Endress: "What does it mean to be a local artist?"

"How can we honour the land with the stories we tell?"

These are the two central questions Billie Kearns (aka Billie the Kid) and Jill Glatt pose in their exhibition *Who is Belle Island?* curated by Sunny Kerr.

Their installation centers the voices of the plants and animals living on the land. The large tapestry hung in Agnes's Atrium features community members' spoken words and highlights the flora and fauna indigenous to Belle Island.

The tapestry is dyed using buckthorn, a plant that is invasive to the area and therefore easy to sustainably harvest. It also happens to produce a myriad of dye colours including yellows, greens and reddish pink from its berries, leaves and bark.

Glatt sees parallels between buckthorn and their positions as local artists. She says "Buckthorn is local in the way that Billie and I are local—we've just been transplanted here."

Across from the tapestry, are two cozy chairs gathered around a chartreuse platform with headphones connecting visitors to the recorded voices of community members. For Kearns, centering stories of people's experiences with Belle Island was another important aspect to understanding the relationships the island has, like the relationships any local artist might have. Kearns notes, "The things that other people say about you can build a really clear image [of] who a person is—what people remember about them, and their experience that they had with them. This idea of gathering stories is quite similar. What are people saying about Belle Island? What do they remember about her? And what do they hope for her?"

For me, a new temporary transplant in Kingston, this introduction to Belle Island has inspired more curiosity about this place, and reflected my relationship to the various places I have called home.

How do you relate to the land? What do you think it means to be local? How does our relationship to the land we live on impact our feeling of being local?

