Art as a Tool for Scientific Education in the Bay of Fundy: Painting a Mural for the Grand Manan Museum

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The intertidal mural project is a collaboration between the Grand Manan Museum in New Brunswick, Canada, and the Bowdoin Scientific Station on Kent Island. Grand Manan artist Sara Griffin, fellow BSS artist-in-residence Isaac Jaegerman, and I created a museum exhibit depicting the ecosystem and industries of the intertidal zone in the Bay of Fundy. The Bay of Fundy is unique in its extreme tidal range, and the intertidal zone strongly impacts the coastal communities and industries that are dependent on this ecosystem. Translating the scientific concepts of the environment for local residents and fishermen as well as tourists increases people’s understanding of the ecosystem and their ability to manage and conserve it. We designed the mural and its interpretive materials to convey the concepts of the vertical zonation, ecological community, food webs, and ecological niches within the intertidal zone. We completed three separate murals portraying the infralittoral fringe: one depicting dulse harvesting in the rocky intertidal, another showing clamming in the soft sediment, and the last illustrating the subtidal zone. While the project challenged us to tell a scientific narrative through an artistic medium, communicating a story about an aspect of the world is the function of all art at a fundamental level. This story is about the interactions between species in an ecosystem and between a community and its environment. The mural includes local people as well as landscapes and organisms, so it will be an educational and cultural tool for the Grand Manan community as well as tourists.

I spent the previous summer on Kent Island doing a creative writing and painting project, and when I was given the opportunity to work at the Grand Manan Museum this summer, I was excited to return. Spending the week painting on Grand Manan while living in the Swallowtail Lighthouse keeper’s cottage and having weekends on Kent Island gave me a broader sense of the ecosystems and communities of the Bay of Fundy. I was able to experience the environment through the lenses of painting and ecology at the same time, and to be a part of the Grand Manan and Kent Island communities. The people of Grand Manan were incredibly open and welcoming to us, characterizing this summer as one of close connections in isolated yet never isolating places.

Faculty Mentor: Damon Gannon

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