

HABITUATE,
ACCLIMATE



HABITUATE,

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program
Curated by Shannon Bingeman © 2020 Alberta Society of Artists

ACCLIMATE



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Cover image top

Loop 14 #4 (detail)
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Cover image bottom

Arctic Sea Lift #9 (detail)
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
50.8 x 40.6 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Left image

Loop 14 #7 (detail)
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

ABOUT

THE TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM (TREX)

Since 1980, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program. The TREX program strives to ensure every Albertan is provided with an opportunity to enjoy fully developed exhibitions in schools, libraries, healthcare centres, and smaller rural institutions and galleries throughout the province.

The TREX program assists in making both the AFA's extensive art collection and the artwork of contemporary Alberta artists available to Albertans. Four regional organizations coordinate the program for the AFA:

REGION ONE — Northwest: The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie

REGION TWO — Northeast / North Central: The Art Gallery of Alberta

REGION THREE — Southwest: The Alberta Society of Artists

REGION FOUR — Southeast: The Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre



THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS (AFA)

Beginning in 1972, the Alberta Art Collection was proposed as an opportunity to support and encourage Alberta artists by purchasing original works, as well as creating a legacy collection for the people of Alberta.

As a crown agency of the Government of Alberta, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act was later established in 1991 with a mandate to support the arts in Alberta. This mandate is accomplished by providing persons and organizations with the opportunity to participate in the arts in Alberta; fostering and promoting the enjoyment of works of art by Alberta artists; collecting, preserving and displaying works of art by Alberta artists; and encouraging artists resident in Alberta to continue their work.

THE ALBERTA SOCIETY OF ARTISTS (ASA)

The Alberta Society of Artists is a large part of Alberta's visual arts history, through its members, its exhibitions and other initiatives. The ASA was founded in 1931, making it the oldest society of juried professional artists in the province.

The ASA is an active membership of professional visual artists who strive for excellence. Through exhibition, education and communication the society increases public awareness of the visual arts.

The ASA is contracted by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to develop and circulate the TREX exhibitions to communities throughout southwest Alberta.



EXPOSURE: ALBERTA'S PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

Exposure presents exhibitions annually that showcase photographic works by internationally renowned photographers, alongside emerging and established talent from Alberta. Through its program of exhibitions, portfolio reviews, artist talks, discussions and events, Exposure provides an exciting, innovative meeting place for photographers and art lovers to connect, along with curators and photography professionals from around the world. The festival brings together people of all ages to celebrate Alberta's rich photography scene and creative communities. Exposure 2020 explored photography's past and present, as well as its future—what photography might be. By engaging with photography's current place in contemporary art we can begin to envision the future of the medium.

Joanne Marion, Director/Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat, juried the 2020 *Emerging Photographers Showcase*. The exhibition celebrated the rich talent of Alberta's emerging photographers, introducing fifteen early-career photographers including Nahanni McKay and Liam Kavanagh-Bradette. Exposure presented the exhibition at Contemporary Calgary, as a part of the gallery's exciting reopening.

For more information about the festival and its programming see:

www.exposurephotofestival.com and Instagram [@exposurephotofestival](https://www.instagram.com/exposurephotofestival)

Right image

Arctic Sea Lift #8 (detail)
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

EXPOSURE
ALBERTA'S PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVAL





EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Habituate, Acclimate features the artworks of two emerging Alberta photographers, Nahanni McKay and Liam Kavanagh-Bradette. Both artists have created a series that explore emerging survival dependencies necessitated by the effects that humans have had upon the environment.

In the summer of 2016, McKay was working as a campground attendant at Two Jack Lake in Banff National Park when a wolf was euthanized after becoming habituated to human food. The incident had a lasting impression on the artist. She began to question the role of national parks as tourist destinations and the location of the campground within an active wildlife corridor. The title of her series, *Loop 14*, is a reference to the location where the wolf was shot. Her photographs pay homage to the spirit of that wolf and the five additional wolves that died of unnatural causes in Banff that summer.

Kavanagh-Bradette's work is also related to a food supply dependency but concerning the people of Nunavut who rely on freight shipments from southern Canada to deliver essential cargo (food, goods and fuel). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, climate change has opened up the seaways and drastically changed Inuit economy and culture. Kavanagh-Bradette brings attention to this new reality through his photographs of the people working at the forefront of the change.

Habituate, Acclimate is presented by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program in partnership with Exposure: Alberta's Photography Festival.

—Shannon Bingeman, Curator

Left image

Loop 14 #10 (detail)

Nahanni McKay

2019

35 mm film digitally printed

33.8 x 50.8 cm

Courtesy of the artist

THE ARTISTS

Liam Kavanagh-Bradette

Artist Statement – The Arctic Sea Lift series represents a chapter in a larger ongoing project exploring the dramatic and damaging impact that a warming arctic has on the people who live there, their culture and the environment. The series also examines the impact of the people who participate in the global economy, as it expands north, seeking new markets and resources to exploit.

The MV Umiavut is a cargo ship owned by Nunavut Eastern Arctic Shipping Inc. (NEAS), an Inuit-Quebecois owned company. During the summer months, it ships everything from vehicles to fuel and building materials, from diapers to condensed milk out to isolated communities in Canada's far north that are heavily reliant on the annual shipments.

Biography – Liam Kavanagh-Bradette is a documentary photographer living in Edmonton, Alberta. By examining the intersection between Canada's economic and environmental impacts on the land and its people, Kavanagh-Bradette's work highlights many of the real-world implications of the theories and concepts he studied at York University in the international studies program. Liam then studied photojournalism at Loyalist College and worked briefly for local papers, such as *The Wellington Times* and the *Lac La Biche Post*, before deciding to focus on both freelance and long-term, self-directed projects to bring attention to issues ignored or overlooked.

Nahanni McKay

Artist Statement – The Loop 14 series had its origins in the summer of 2016 when I was working at the Two Jack Main campground. That summer a female wolf with pups became human-food habituated in and around the campground. As a campground attendant, my co-workers and I repeatedly directed campers to use the food lockers provided, to keep their campsites clean and to not leave barbecues with food on them when not at the campsite. We issued countless warnings and violation notices. By the end of July, tent camping was banned due to the female wolf’s “bold behaviour.” She was shot by Park’s personnel in loop 14 of the Two Jack Main campground, but tragically it wasn’t a clean shot and the wolf’s location was uncertain. After several days the wolf was located. It had taken a long time to die. Without a mother to care for them, her pups died too. This was the second food-habituated wolf killed by Parks Canada that summer. In total six wolves died of unnatural causes in Banff National Park in the summer of 2016.

This experience had a lasting effect on me. Over the next two and a half years, I thought a great deal about these wolves. I was distressed by their suffering and ensuing deaths. I questioned the location of the Two Jack campgrounds in a wildlife corridor; the almost impossible task of persuading thousands of campers to keep hundreds of campsites free of animal-attractants; and the true purpose of a national park. The Loop 14 series honours these wolves and seeks to bring peace to their spirits and to mine.

Biography – Nahanni McKay is a Métis artist from Banff, Alberta. She graduated from Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 2017 and was a photography practicum participant at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2019. McKay resides in Banff and plans to continue her studies at the Burren College of Art in Ireland in the fall of 2020.

McKay’s practice is about her connection to the land of the Canadian Rockies where she grew up. She communicates this unique connection through film-based photography. Her creative practice contemplates the human impact on the environment, focusing on national parks in Canada. She observes that humans are so consumed in the digital world that we forget to live in the natural one. Growing up in Banff National Park has made her focus on the mix between tourism and wildlife.

LIST OF IMAGES



Arctic Sea Lift #3
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #4
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #5
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #6
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



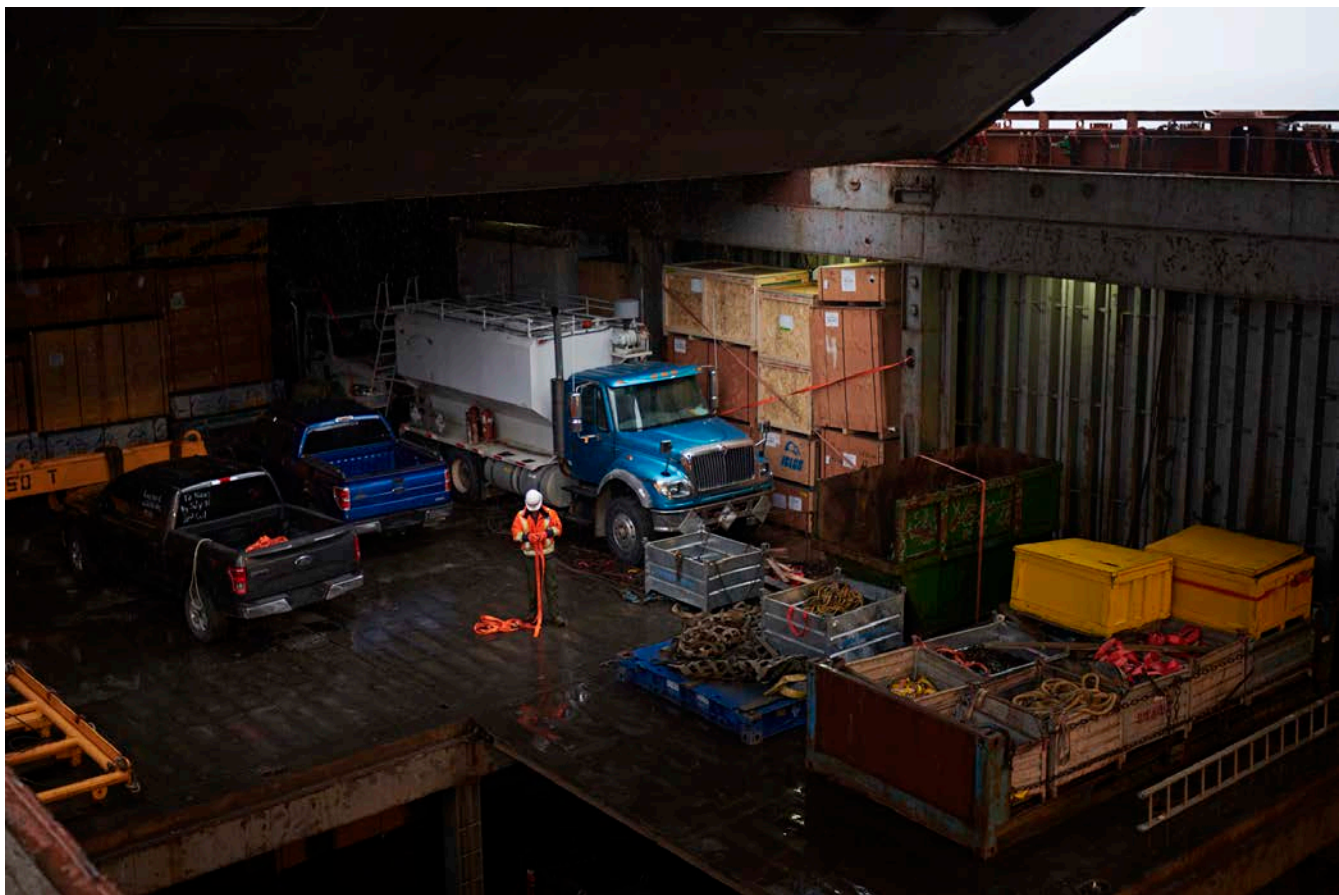
Arctic Sea Lift #7
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #8
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



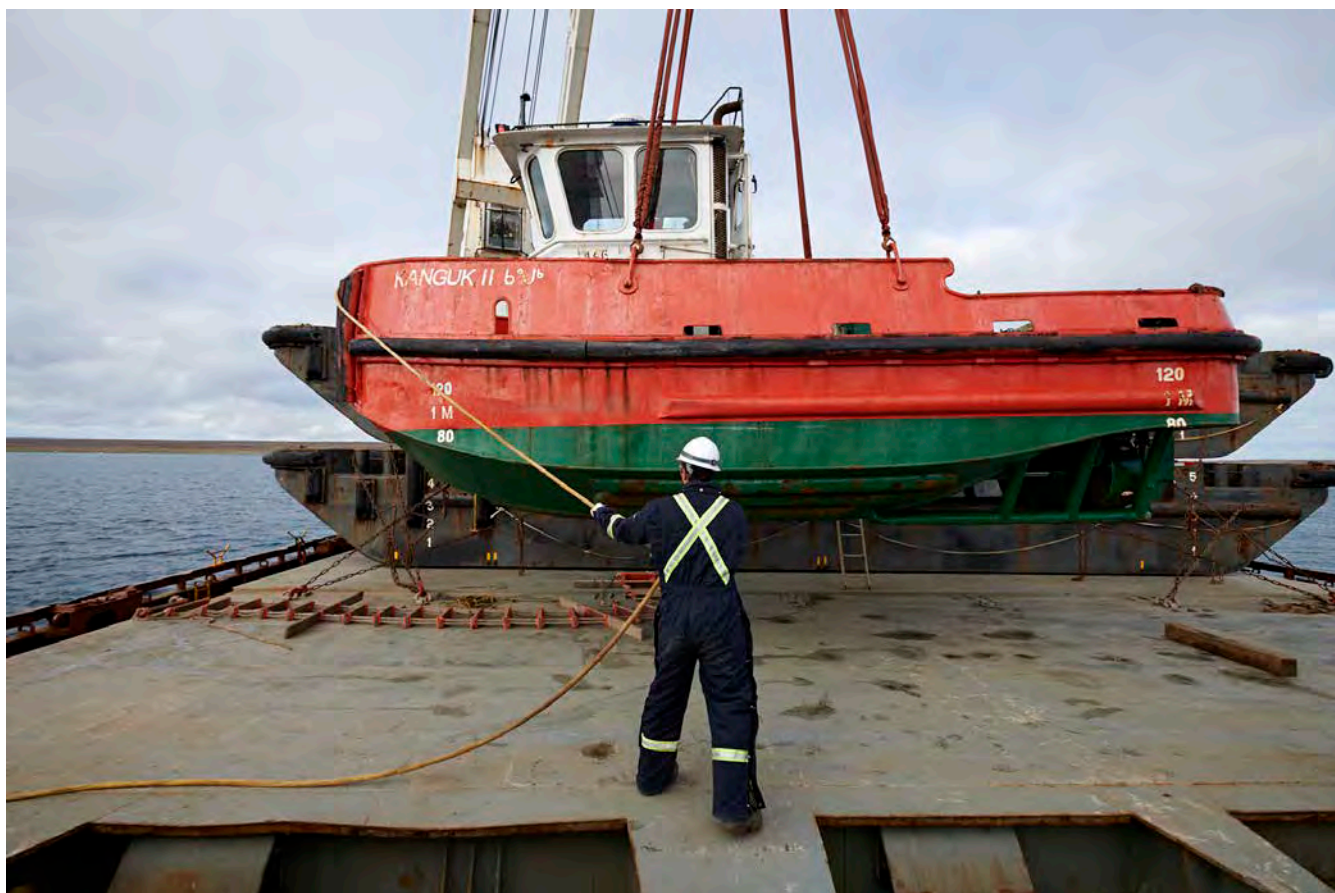
Arctic Sea Lift #9
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
50.8 x 40.6 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #10
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #11
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Arctic Sea Lift #12
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Loop 14 #1
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
33.8 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Loop 14 #2
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
33.8 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Loop 14 #3
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Loop 14 #4
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist





Loop 14 #5
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
33.8 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

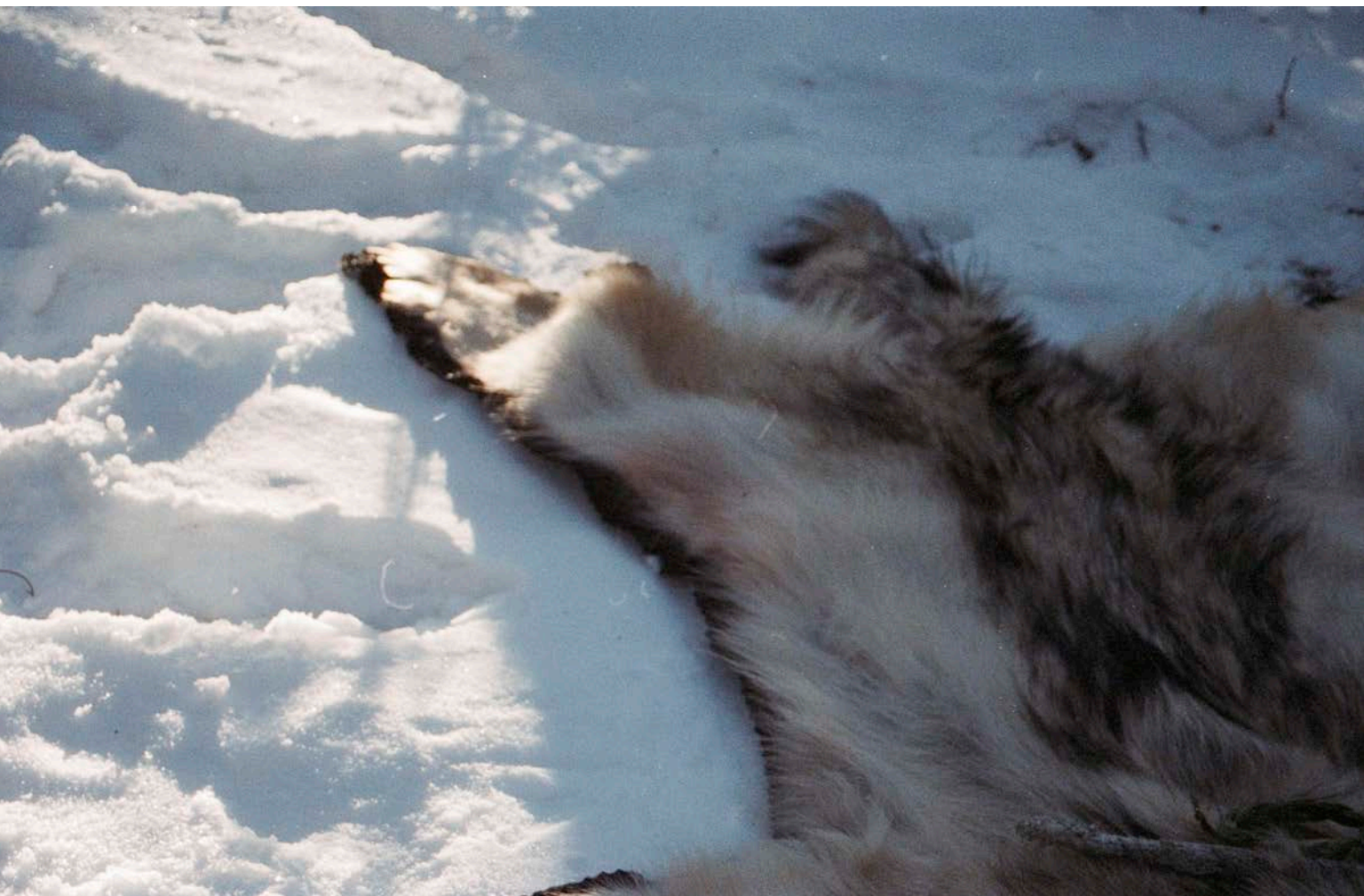


Loop 14 #6
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Loop 14 #7
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Loop 14 #8
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
33.8 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist





Loop 14 #9
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
50.8 x 33.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Loop 14 #10
Nahanni McKay
2019
35 mm film digitally printed
33.8 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



EDUCATION GUIDE

This education guide is comprised of activities to move the audience through the various themes presented in *Habituate, Acclimate*. The content of the exhibition and the following lesson plans have been carefully developed and designed to enhance the curriculum set by Alberta Education. The guide includes questions for discussion, vocabulary and activities designed for the level of ability, understanding and complexity of the participants:

Beginner – participants who are just beginning their exploration of art.

Intermediate – participants who have some experience looking at and creating art.

Advanced – participants who have much experience looking at and creating art.

Throughout the Education Guide, you will find key concepts, words and terms emphasized that can be found in the Vocabulary section.



Right Image

Arctic Sea Lift #7 (detail)
Liam Kavanagh-Bradette
2018
Digital photographic print
40.6 x 50.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below are questions that are intended to prompt meaningful discussion about the content presented in the exhibition *Habituate, Acclimate*. The questions can be selected and the vocabulary altered to suit the appropriate age level.

What is a habitat? Have participants differentiate between an animal habitat and a human habitat. How are they related to one another?

There are a lot of similar words used in this exhibition like habit, habitat and habituate. How are these words different? How are they related? Discuss the differences between a habit and a habitat. Participants should begin to understand that the act of becoming habituated to something is related to a learned or adapted habit. These learned habits can impact ecosystems and the regular cycles present, in particular, habitats for both humans and animals.

Compare the two series of artworks made by the artists – Loop 14 and Arctic Sea Lift. How do Liam Kavanagh-Bradette's artworks highlight human habitats? How do Nahanni McKay's artworks highlight animal habitats? What similarities can you find between both?

What is a resource? Liam Kavanagh-Bradette's photographs capture moments related to resource trading in the arctic seaways. Discuss with participants about how resources come from the land, and how human-trade impacts both human and animal habitats.

What does the word acclimate mean? Have you ever had to change your behaviour because something changed in your environment? Provide simple examples to participants, like changing the volume of your voice to being quiet when you enter a study area in a library versus being loud when you play outside, then explain how animals adjust their behaviours when they share a habitat with humans.

Why do you think it is important that we learn how human behaviours impact environments which are shared with animals and other living things?

Both Kavanagh-Bradette and McKay have included photographic portraits in their series of artworks. In the Arctic Sea Lift series, Kavanagh-Bradette has taken portraits of people, and in the Loop 14 series, McKay has taken portraits of a wolf pelt. What similarities can you find between the two artists' approaches to photographing their subjects?

Why do you think Nahanni McKay has photographed a wolf pelt in her series Loop 14, rather than photographing a living animal?

Why do you think the artists chose to use photography as the medium of their artworks? Before photography existed, how do you think artists documented different kinds of habitats and environments?



ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

My Own Habitat

Using the questions in the previous section, discuss in more depth what a habitat is and have participants consider the various features of a habitat that must be present for survival: food, shelter, water and air (also, described as “space”).¹ Go outside and have participants observe what kind of *organisms* live in our shared urban habitat. *What allows those organisms to thrive in that location?* Following this period of observation, have participants answer the questions: *Can you describe your habitat? Where do you live and what makes that particular place livable?* Participants can then be given a homework assignment to take photos of the things in their “habitats” that make it livable. Ask participants to take photos representing where they get their food, water and shelter at home.

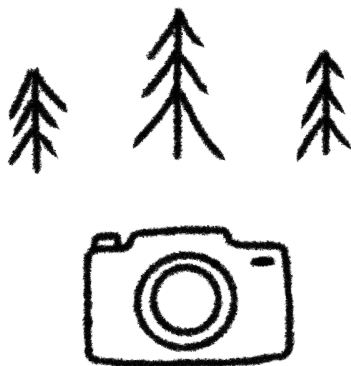
Run-Away Resources

Complete this activity indoors in a classroom or public space with some room to wander. To begin, give participants one to two minutes to quickly walk around the space and write down five different items that they come across, then return to the group in a sitting area when done. These items should be random and selected quickly without too much thought—the time limit can be a contest for the quickest list made! Once everyone has returned to the group, review the terms *nonrenewable resource* and *renewable resource*. After review of these definitions, go through each participant’s list of items and have everyone discuss whether the item is made from a renewable or nonrenewable resource. Tally up how many items are renewable versus nonrenewable. Ask participants to consider how the use of items made from nonrenewable resources impacts the environment. This activity can be concluded with a discussion around recycling and reusing—have participants reuse the paper that the item lists were made on! You can reuse the paper to make folded paper kites to fly outside, or you can save the paper for the beginner lesson plan outlined in detail on page 41.

¹ Kim Rutledge et al., s.v. “Habitat,” Resource Library: Encyclopedic Entry, *National Geographic*, last modified January 21, 2011, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/habitat/>.

Tourist, Take Note!

In this self-directed activity, encourage participants to develop an outdoor tourist travel notebook over the course of two or three weeks. Their notes could be experiences during outdoor field trips, on walks to school or while playing in a local park; or they can create notes about past summer activities like camping with their families. Have them take photos to print off and accompany their writing. Participants can be provided with additional prompt questions to fill in their tourist journals: *Did you interact with any animals during your activities outside? What kind of habitats did you encounter? Did you leave anything behind during your time outdoors? How did you keep the animals or habitats you came into contact with safe and minimally impacted by your activities?*



BEGINNER LESSON PLAN

RECYCLED PAPER PORTRAITS

Both photographic series in this exhibition include *portraits*. Liam Kavanagh-Bradette and Nahanni McKay use different forms of portraiture photography as a way to show respect for a person or an animal. This lesson plan involves the development of a collage-style portrait made using recycled newspaper, featuring a person or animal of each participant's choosing.

In this lesson, participants will learn how to identify different *shades* of *black* and *white*, while thinking about what it means to *reuse* and *recycle*. Start the activity with a brief introduction to colour theory regarding black and white. For very young participants, you may omit the colour theory and simply describe the opposites of *light* and *dark*. Continue with an explanation about how different shades of black can be used to create *light* and *shadow* in a portrait. As a visual teaching tool, show examples of light and dark areas found in black and white newspaper photographs.

Materials

Recycled newspapers, scissors, paper or board for artwork backing (solid colour recommended—recycle if you can!), pencils, glue sticks, black construction paper and black wax crayons.

Preparation

Set up workstations with some pre-cut strips of newspaper about two inches long and half-an-inch wide, as well as some newspaper that is left uncut, for those who want to cut out custom shapes for their portraits.

What we needs to do next:
The article discusses the need for a comprehensive approach to address the challenges posed by climate change. It highlights the importance of international cooperation and the role of governments, businesses, and individuals in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The text emphasizes the urgency of the situation and the need for immediate action to prevent catastrophic consequences.

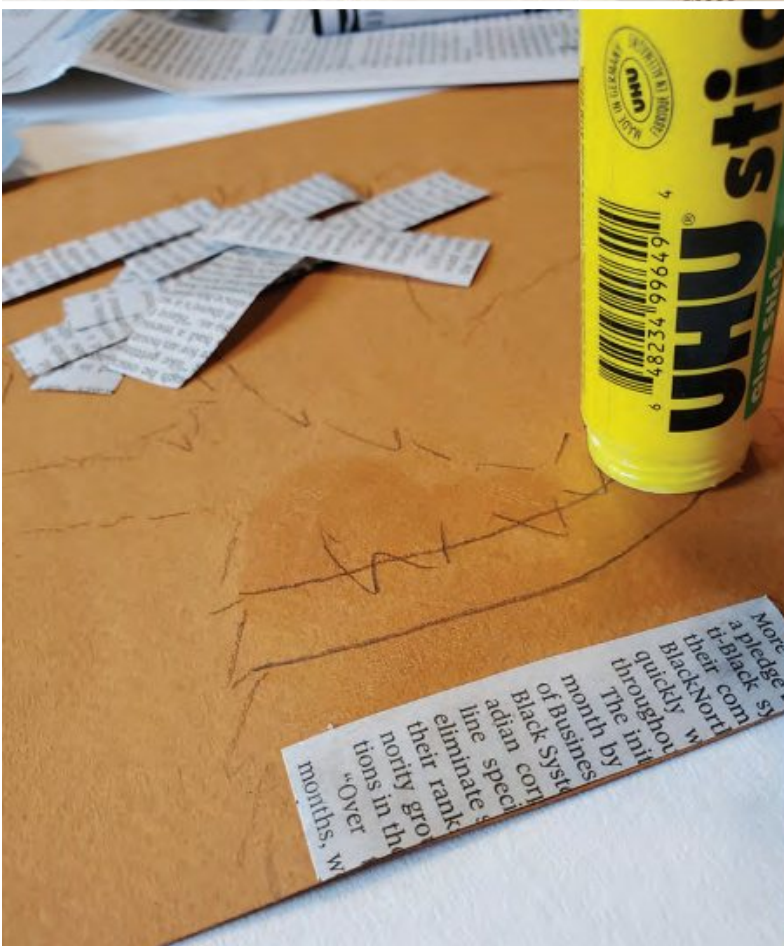
Majority of polar...
The article reports on the findings of a study conducted by scientists from the University of Toronto. The research indicates that a significant majority of the world's polar regions are experiencing rapid warming, leading to the melting of glaciers and ice sheets. This has serious implications for sea level rise and the displacement of coastal populations. The study also notes the impact on local ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity.

Van der...
The article mentions the work of a prominent scientist, Van der, who has been instrumental in advancing our understanding of climate change. His research has shown that the effects of global warming are more widespread and severe than previously thought. He has called for a global effort to address the crisis and has urged governments to take more aggressive action to reduce carbon emissions.



Instructions

- Step 1 Participants should first identify one person or animal they admire, care about or want to memorialize by making a portrait of them.
- Step 2 Use a pencil to draw the outline of the figure chosen to collage onto a piece of backing paper. Participants can identify the various shaded areas and outline those shapes if they wish to have added guidelines to follow when gluing newspapers down to create their collage.
- Step 3 Begin selecting strips of newspaper to glue onto different sections of the portrait. Find light-coloured newspaper strips (text print works well) for whiter areas and darker-coloured newspaper strips (greyscale photographs or graphics) for shadowy areas or dark spots.
- Step 4 Continue gluing down the paper strips until the portrait is completely filled in.
- Step 5 Once the glued down paper is dry and if additional detail is desired, participants can glue cutouts of black construction paper onto the newspaper collage or they can draw in details using a black wax crayon.
- Step 6 On the back of the artwork, the participant should write the name of the person or animal that is featured in the portrait as an artwork title, and sign their own name as the artist!



Discussion Questions

What did you learn about shade, light, dark and shadow as you completed your collage?

Do you notice areas of light and shadow in the photographic artworks created by Liam Kavanagh-Bradette and Nahanni McKay? Where do you see examples of light and shadow in the artworks?

How do lighter photos and darker photos create different moods? What emotions do you feel when you look at the different photographs in this exhibition?

Which of the photographs would you consider portraits? Which photographs are not portraits? Why or why not?

Variations

If you would like to complete this lesson plan using colour, black and white recycled newspaper can be replaced with colour magazines to create more dynamic portraits.

Another variation is to create mosaic-style portraits using small cut squares of the magazines (about half an inch by half an inch works best). The mosaic can be created more easily by gluing directly onto a colour photograph of the subject so that participants can try to match the colours present with the small mosaic magazine “tiles.”



INTERMEDIATE LESSON PLAN

ENDANGERED SPECIES CLAY MINIATURES

The two photographic series in *Habituate, Acclimate* tell stories of environments impacted by human activities on the land. In the Arctic Sea Lift series by Kavanagh-Bradette, the artist is drawing attention to the impact of rising climates (largely caused by global human activity) on the people of Nunavut, their economy, habitats and culture. The Loop 14 series by McKay focuses on wildlife habitats being negatively impacted by human activities while camping in these shared wildlife habitats—leaving human food and trash behind for wild animals to find and become reliant on. When the wolf at Two Jack Lake Main campground became habituated to human food, it started coming around more often to the public areas of the campgrounds to eat rather than hunt for its own food. The wolf then became a danger to the campers, and because of this turn of events, its life had to be cut short. Human activities that may *seem* unharmed to nature can have lasting impacts. It is because of this that it is so important to remember we share the earth with many different living creatures, and we need to adjust our human behaviours to ensure the well-being of all species and habitats.

In this activity, participants will create air-dry clay miniatures modelled after endangered and threatened species in Alberta. These miniatures can then be carried in one's pocket or placed somewhere that will be seen regularly, serving as a reminder that as humans we can take positive and proactive actions to minimally impact the habitats of other living organisms.

Materials

Sketchbooks, pencils, cardboard, air-dry clay, small clay modelling tools (toothpicks, chopsticks, toothbrushes, forks and spoons also work well), acrylic paint and small paintbrushes.



Preparation

Review the terms *endangered species* and *threatened species* with the group. Ask participants to choose one of the endangered or threatened species listed below, and if desired have them take a look at the research about this species and their habitats documented in the *Species at Risk Alberta* guide which is credited in the Resources section.² It would be helpful to print photos of each of the species and have the printouts on the worktables so that participants have something to reference when deciding what animal to choose. Having printed photos on hand will also give participants something to reference when modelling their clay and painting details onto their miniatures.

Here are some suggestions from the list of the “endangered species” to choose from: burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, short-horned lizard and the swift fox.

Here are some suggestions from the list of the “threatened species” to choose from: grizzly bear, northern leopard frog, peregrine falcon and the westslope cutthroat trout.

² Lisa Wilkinson et al., “A Guide to Endangered and Threatened Species, and Species of Special Concern in Alberta,” *Species at Risk Alberta*, ver. 2 (Edmonton: Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, 2015), <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/d5f03916-aa1a-4c37-acee-354e69a479f0/resource/6b2c4da7-c933-410e-a6c0-575e7c6361c9/download/speciesatriskguide-jan-2015.pdf>.

Instructions

Step 1 Research the selected animal to be sculpted and draw a few basic sketches of the animal's silhouette to provide an idea of the simple shape that the modelling clay will need to be formed into.

Step 2 Use a piece of cardboard as a work surface. This is especially important when using terracotta air-dry clay, as it can stain table surfaces.

Step 3 Form a small amount of modelling clay into a ball (just a little bigger than the size of a golf ball), by rolling the modelling clay between palms.

Step 4 Using fingers and small tools begin pressing and pinching the modelling clay to match the shape of the selected animal and preliminary sketches. Make sure any legs or appendages of the animal do not become too thin or stretched out from the body or else they will break off when they dry.

Tip: If modelling a bird that has thin legs, have the bird sit on a tree stump where the legs are mostly hidden or build the legs as one thick base and paint them in with some grass around them in step 7.

Step 5 Once the shape of the animal is formed, add any desired texture onto the surface using the prongs of a fork, the tip of a toothpick or the bristles of a toothbrush. The tools work well for feathers and fur texture but remember that more detail will be painted on after (you do not need to carve all the details). On miniatures most of the detail comes from the paint!

Step 6 Once the clay is formed and any textures are carved in, leave the miniatures to dry for at least a few hours.

Step 7 After checking to see that the miniatures are completely dry, participants can finish their animals by painting on final details using acrylic paint. Be sure to let one colour dry before moving on to another, or they will mix and become muddy.







Discussion Questions

Was it easy or difficult to think about another creature’s habitat and how it is affected by human behaviours?

*How would you feel if your home became negatively impacted by the behaviours of animals?
How do you think you would react?*

What did you learn about what animals and humans need in their habitats? How can we share habitats more mindfully?

Variation

Create an entire habitat diorama using air-dry clay – instead of creating only one animal miniature, participants can sculpt mini trees, rocks and other natural elements to create a shoebox habitat for their miniature animal. Additional materials can be used to develop more dynamic natural environments—recycled materials are encouraged! Some possible materials could include recycled plastic bags, plastic netting from grocery vegetables, disposable utensils and bottle caps.

ADVANCED LESSON PLAN

PHOTOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Did you know photography was not initially used or considered an art form when cameras were first invented? At first, photography was mostly experimental and scientific in nature, but it did not take long for artists to adopt photographic techniques in their creative practices once the knowledge of how cameras worked became more widely known to the public.

Cameras themselves have changed quite a bit since their inception. In only two centuries since the first photograph was taken in the 1820s, the camera has evolved from a simple box called a *camera obscura* (or pinhole camera) that could only develop blurry images to the advanced and highly computerized digital cameras we use today, including both DSLR cameras and the cameras now standard in every portable smartphone.³

In Liam Kavanagh-Bradette's series, he chose to use a DSLR camera, and in Nahanni McKay's series, she chose to use an older format of photography called 35 mm film. The processes for digital and film photography are quite different; however, there are entire books dedicated to explaining how they both work! For this advanced lesson plan, we will be focusing on the similarities between both techniques of photography (compositional techniques) and applying them to a photography storytelling project.

This photography activity is a two-week project where participants will take photos regularly to tell a story using only photographic images. The theme of the photographic series should be around land and/or habitats, but participants can choose whether the narrative they present is fictional or non-fictional. Participants should end up with five to ten well-composed photos but will likely need to take many more than that to start with and then they can be more selective when picking their final works as part of their project.

³ Liz Masoner, "A Brief History of Photography and the Camera," *The Spruce Crafts*, last modified January 3, 2019, <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/brief-history-of-photography-2688527>.

Materials

Journals, pencil, camera (either a smartphone camera or a DSLR digital camera if participants have access to one), a printer, and photo frames* or a book-style portfolio*.

*optional material

Preparation

Before embarking on the creative process of storytelling through photography, review the Compositional Techniques section that follows and guide participants through some prompting questions that will help them to develop the concept for their stories and images. Some good questions to start with could be: *What kind of story do you want to tell? Is it going to be based on something real or imaginary? What is the focus of your story and is there going to be a main character? How do you want your final images to engage a viewer? How will the images draw attention to the theme of land and habitats?* Let participants know that photos can be *candid* or *staged*, some may choose to use a combination of the two.



COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES

Rule of Thirds – The rule of thirds is one of the most commonly used compositional “rules” that beginner photographers can learn. The basic premise of this compositional technique is that an image frame can be divided into thirds either horizontally or vertically and that the subject of a photo should be positioned along one of these lines.

If photographers want to take this technique to the next level, the image frame can be divided into thirds *both* horizontally and vertically (see diagram on the opposite page). This creates a grid of nine equal rectangles with four intersecting points. When the main subject or point of interest in a photo is placed on any of these intersections, it creates a visually pleasing composition.

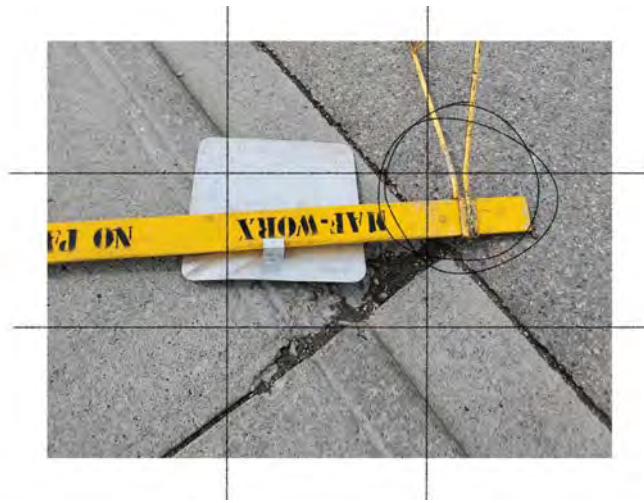
Single Point – Single point involves a composition where there is just one point of interest in an entire image. Use this technique when you want to add interest to an otherwise dull or plain composition. This singular point of focus is usually quite small and high contrast to the rest of the image. Placing the single point in the middle of the image will provide a strong balance and placing it on one of the rule-of-thirds intersections will create a more visually dynamic photograph.

Horizon Lines – Horizon lines are a very important consideration in any photography composition. When an image is broken up by a dominant line across the frame, this line is often a horizon. The horizon line is especially important to identify when composing an outdoor photograph, particularly in landscapes. The horizon line can stabilize or “ground” an image because of its relation to the land we stand on. Similarly, because horizons appear completely flat when viewed from a distance in real-time, horizon lines in photos are most visually appealing when at a 180-degree angle; however, this is not a hard-and-fast rule.

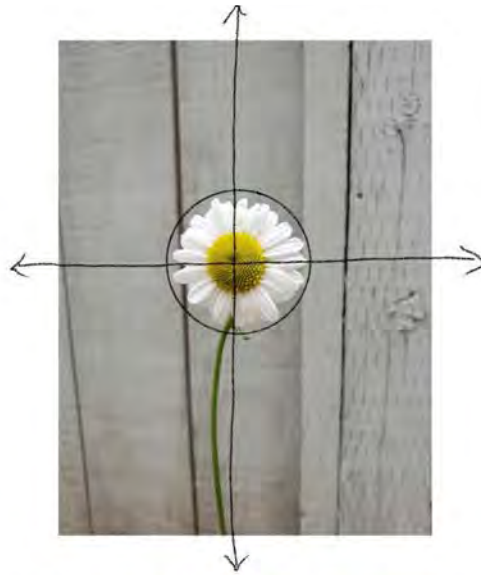
There are many ways to use horizon lines when considering compositions. It can be used to create contrast, provide balance, provoke tension, or to simply divide up a single frame. Exactly where a photographer places the horizon line in an image can have a significant effect on the composition and its impact on the viewer.⁴

Developing a strong knowledge of composition is key to taking good-quality photographs. The above-mentioned techniques are just a few core concepts to become familiar with but there are many more techniques that can be found online (See Resources).

RULE OF THIRDS



SINGLE POINT



HORIZON LINE




⁴ “A Beginner’s Guide to Basic Photo Composition,” *Expert Photography*, accessed May 31, 2020, <https://expertphotography.com/a-beginners-guide-to-composition/>.

Instructions

- Step 1 Start by brainstorming some story ideas in journals. Participants should begin to think of subjects and natural environments that they will be able to access within the two-week timeframe given to them to take photos. They should consider the current season and weather conditions which may influence what habitats or environments they might like to focus on.
- Step 2 Once participants have completed some brainstorming exercises and have reviewed the compositional techniques, they can begin taking photos. Encourage participants to write down corresponding thoughts in their journal as they take their photos.
- Step 3 Participants can choose to take daily photographs, or they can take multiple photos in just a few photography sessions. They should aim to take at least five photos per week, but it is encouraged they take more so they will have more compositions to choose from at the end of the two weeks.
- Step 4 Remind participants to experiment with lots of different compositions. The five to ten final photos presented should be easily differentiated from one another, meaning they have varied compositions and show a creative exploration of the subject(s) or environment(s) being photographed.
- Step 5 At the end of the two weeks, have participants compile their strongest compositions that tells a visual story, and print off their selections as 5 x 7-inch or 8 x 10-inch prints.
- Step 6 Participants can choose whether they want to frame their prints individually or compile them into a book-style portfolio.
- Step 7 Have participants present their final photographic narrative to the group, identify the intent of their story, and explain how the narrative aligns with the theme of land and habitats.



Natural vs. Urban...
Featuring the colour **YELLOW.**

Yellow flowers 



Contrasted with
Yellow urban objects

Less of a
linear
narrative...
and more
of a contrast
Comparison.







Discussion Questions

How did you approach making your compositional choices when taking your photographs? In the final works you selected, do you think the compositions you decided on were intentional? Or were the compositions happy accidents made by experimenting with different camera angles?

Can you identify which of your compositions are following the rule of thirds? Which are using the single point technique? Can you find the horizon lines in your photographs?

After completing this activity, what do you notice about the compositional choices made in the works of Liam Kavanagh-Bradette and Nahanni McKay?

What knowledge have you learned from this exercise that you can use when making artworks in other mediums?

Variation

Instead of having the narrative of the project be open-ended, participants can be assigned a particular word to base their photographic narrative around. Assign words like *impact*, *adapt*, *change* or *protect*.

VOCABULARY

Acclimate - respond physiologically or behaviourally to a change in an environmental factor under controlled conditions.

Adapt - become adjusted to new conditions.

Black (Colour Theory) - black is the absence of colour (and is therefore not a colour) *Explanation: When there is no light, everything is black.*

Camera obscura - a darkened box with a convex lens or aperture for projecting the image of an external object on to a screen inside, a forerunner of the modern camera.

Candid [photo] - relating to or being photography of subjects acting naturally or spontaneously without being posed.

Change - make (someone or something) different; alter or modify.

Composition - the way that people or things are arranged in a painting or photograph.

Dark - (of a colour or object) not reflecting much light; approaching black in shade.

Ecosystem - a system, or a group of interconnected elements, formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their environment.

Endangered species - a plant or animal species existing in such small numbers that it is in danger of becoming extinct, especially such a species placed in jeopardy as a result of human activity.

Habit - an acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary.

Habitat - the place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows.

Habituate - make or become accustomed or used to something.

Impact - a marked effect or influence [of one person, thing or action on another].

Light - pale, whitish, or not deep or dark in colour.

Nonrenewable resource - of, relating to, *non-renewable energy* : energy resources that are exhaustible [depleted and cannot be replenished] relative to the human life span, such as gas, coal or petroleum.

Organism - an individual animal, plant or single-celled life form.

Portrait - works of art that record the likenesses of humans or animals that are alive or have been alive. The word *portraiture* is used to describe this category of art.

Protect - keep safe from harm or injury. Aim to preserve (a threatened species or area) by legislating against hunting, collecting or development.

Renewable resource - of, relating to, *renewable energy* : energy obtained from sources that are virtually inexhaustible and replenish naturally over small time scales relative to the human life span.

Reuse - use again or more than once.

Recycle - to treat or process (used or waste materials) so as to make suitable for reuse: *recycling paper to save trees*.

Shade - a colour, especially with regard to how light or dark it is or as distinguished from one nearly like it. *Example: 'various shades of blue.'*

Shadow - a shaded or darker portion of a picture.

Staged [photo] - planned, organized or arranged in advance (often of an event or situation intended to seem otherwise).

White (Colour Theory) - white is the blending of all colours and is a colour. *Explanation: Light appears colourless or white. Sunlight is white light that is composed of all the colours of the spectrum. A rainbow is proof. You can't see the colours of sunlight except when atmospheric conditions bend the light rays and create a rainbow.*

[Vocabulary definitions are simplified and/or paraphrased; spelling is Canadianized for print purposes.]

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