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Intertwined Histories: Plants in Their Social Contexts

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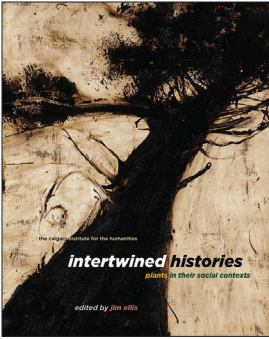
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INTERTWINED HISTORIES: Plants in their Social Contexts

Edited by Jim Ellis

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big stone

*location photographs for the
pre-history of m.n.hutchinson*

m. n. hutchinson

My maternal great-grandmother's family left Norway because of a lack of opportunity. They immigrated to Minnesota but there also found themselves unable to own land, so they moved to Canada, where land was being homesteaded. This initially led them to Big Stone, Alberta, where my great-grandmother, with only her five girls, tried to farm the semi-arid land north of Suffield. They broke the shortgrass prairie and planted wheat but were soon forced off the land by the lack of rain. Their cabin was identifiable by a long double row of caragana, some of which still survive. Later, joined by her one son, they moved to a region of Saskatchewan that was previously settled by relatives and where my mother and uncles were born. Not coincidentally, none of these siblings went on to farm or marry farmers.

Prior to 2009, I exclusively made self-portraits, building a biography that uses both fact and fiction in order to understand and create an identity. This latest series of work draws on my family history. The title of the series—*Location Photographs for the Pre-History of M. N. Hutchinson*—alludes to genealogical and filmmaking research. This sense of research is articulated by the specifics of location and the manner of image making. The rotating panorama camera I use creates time-based still images that rely on the narrative functions of cinema, but it can also map a scene with the same techniques used in forensic photography.

The images forefront the strange mixture of representation and rationality that is inherent in all photography. While *straight* photography reinforces a falsely logocentric perception of the world, these seemingly distorted, counterintuitive representations of space are in fact just as rational, at least in the sense that they flow from strict optical and mechanical structures that are historically considered to be hallmarks of the photographic image.

Genealogical mapping provides a way to see yourself in relation to other kin, although it is the everyday performative articulation of identity that ultimately leaves a residue of a legacy. Interacting with the genealogic specifics of sites allows me to insert some affect into this identity through the embodied act of photography. The photographic act is predicated on being there, being somewhere; even if it is fictive, there is still a sense that this place must exist. It remains a testament to having been present at the places where your ancestors lived, and that can change the way you create an identity.





Location Photographs for the Pre-History of M.N.Hutchinson: Site 19. 36cm x 178cm, archival inkjet, 2009.



Location Photographs for the Pre-History of M.N.Hutchinson: Site 20. 36cm x 178cm, archival inkjet, 2009.