

## **BLOOD AND STONES, 1996**

The exhibit, *Blood and stones*, held at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery in 1999, was a culmination of works produced over the years that integrated stones. The purpose of the *Blood and stones* exhibit was to revive the medium of the stone, and connect it with past plains aboriginal traditions that utilized stones to record places and events, stories, experiences and ceremonial practises. The term blood in this context refers to ancestry, lineage, relations, memory and life force.

Stone markers left behind on the prairie grasses and cliff faces were traces of the history and cultural practices of Plains people throughout thousands of years. Stones were used for its practical physical properties and as well for its spiritual and metaphysical properties. The dense, physical properties of the stone served well for utilitarian items such tipi rings, fire pits, burial sites, and caches, in addition to items used for tools and warfare. The permanence of the stone also served to trace the history of activity that documented important places, events, commemorations and memorials. The metaphysical properties of the stone served as a medium of communication to the spiritual realm and were found in the forms of medicine wheels, pictographs, petroglyphs, petroforms, sacred boulders, amulets or carved into figures and pipes.



Figure 22. Exploring the shorelines of the east coast. Halifax, Nova Scotia. 1988

The initial interest of working with stones and natural materials was a culmination of many years of exploring forests and edges of water for natural art forms that have served as inspiration for me several works. (Figure 22). I have always been drawn to stones for their visual beauty, tactile qualities, and for the energy they seem to carry. This energy, which I refer to as a metaphysical property, is connected to the concept of the Manitou- the soul, presence, and life in all things, animate or inanimate. Many people at one time or another have picked up a stone that seemed to have a special presence within it. Perhaps it was

taken home and put it in a special place or given to someone special. From Stonehenge in Great Britain, to the sphinx in Egypt, to Ayers Rock in Australia, ancient cultures have understood and harnessed the energy of stones over thousands of years. I have used the stone's natural form in this exhibit of sculpture and drawings to reveal its essence and metaphysical properties. When incorporated into a metaphorical form, I believe that ideally they communicate to the viewer on both a conscious and unconscious level, in the way that the forest's energy stimulates a peaceful and thoughtful feeling in people. It seems to remind us of who we are in the bigger picture of life as we so often get lost in the chaos of human existence.

The origin of this body of work began with a triptych drawing I had done in 1996 titled, *Blood and stones* (Figure 23). The work addressed life and death in a personal stories related to my two brothers and their connecting stories of stones. Before my brother Richard passed away, he carried six stones in a leather pouch in his pocket, each symbolizing one of his siblings. He asked that that the pouch be buried with him. The left panel shows my brother's grave site that I had made for him, and the right panel shows

hands holding six rocks with an X-ray of a heart above showing intricate blood vessels. As a whole, the heart vessels looked like a branching of a tree which connected my idea of blood lines and the family tree. The centre panel shows my other brother Gerry and myself back to back. I recall him stating that given that I was the eldest, I had to be the stone for everyone. My thoughts were that family support needed to be a mutual effort in



Figure 23. *Blood and stones*, 1996. Pencil, 7 x 3 feet.

order to build strong bonds of support. It is similar to the actual structure of stones, whereby each stone is made up of granules of sand that are fused together that ultimately make up its solidity. My two brother's stories were connected visually with electrocardiogram (ECG) graphs, which symbolized life and death.