

STRATA AND ROUTES, 1998

In 1998, I was invited to participate in a group exhibit called *Reservation X, the power of place in Aboriginal contemporary art*, that debuted at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and later was shown at the National Museum of the American Indian, New York, NY and the Hood Museum, in New Hampshire. Curators Gerald McMaster and Arthur Renwick chose 7 artists from Canada and United States to participate, they were myself, Nora Naranjo-Morse, Marianne Nicholson, Shelly Niro, Jolene Rickard, Mateo Romero, and Maxx Stevens. Artists were asked to explore issues related to identity and community.

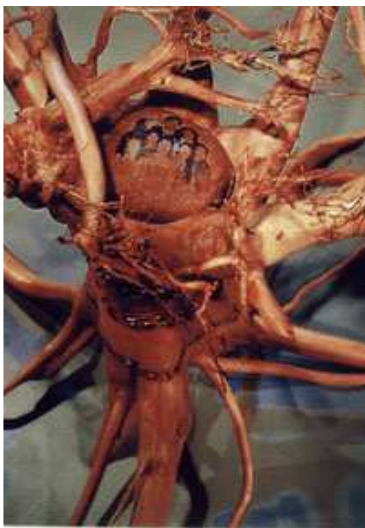


Figure 20, 21. *Strata and Routes*, 1998. Mary Longman. Rocks, cotton wood, fir, rocks, cement, 5 x 6 x 6'

The work *Strata and routes* (Figure 20, 21) stemmed from an examination of Aboriginal identity and place. In researching this topic, I discovered that identity is a highly complex issue that involves exploring multi-faceted concepts and issues. In analyzing some of the factors that shape identity, I began with ancestral roots and past conditioning. An individual's roots and upbringing have a direct bearing on one's values and outlook on life. These involve a layering of experiences where identity is perpetually evolving. The external influences vary, and play a large role in determining lifestyle, and one's choices in life.

Aside from past factors that shape identity, there are also the influences of the 'routes' we travel in life. Places that a person lives influence societal and cultural perceptions. This is an important point, for my routes involved a nomadic experience, living in many different provinces across Canada, and in the Arctic, and in contexts of the urban centers and reservations. These places have influenced the art that I produce, such as the found natural materials that I incorporated in my work and human dynamics that influence my content.

Identity is also constructed externally by others. Representations of a cultural group can influence societal perspectives as well as one's own perception of themselves. With the consideration of the many factors that shape identity, I resolved that I could not address a definitive, generic description of Aboriginal identity, rather I needed to speak from my own personal experience. In the catalogue for *Reservation X*, I stated that there is no recipe for Native identity, nor is there a fixed address for 'Reservation X', because aboriginal identity and community is just too diverse, just like any other cultural group.

The initial inspiration for the form of *Strata and routes* came to me one day when I was walking in the

forest and noted an overturned tree with a large rock embedded in its roots. The tree and rock lived together, grew together, and appeared to have shaped each other. I thought about this co-existence and the connotations of roots, and developed the primary metaphorical image for the art work. On this same day, I stopped to look at strata layers on an exposed bank. I pondered the strata layers in a soil profile, the layers suggesting layers of time, the evolution of past to present, and the present building upon the past. The stratified layers also became symbolic layers of memories and experiences.

The overall form of the sculpture evolved into two rooted tree trunks attached to each other by simulated strata layers, which connected the concepts of the roots of ancestry with the 'routes' of life passages. Ironically, the tree trunks came from two different areas of where I lived, from Shackan, and later the piece was completed in Victoria, BC. The two different types of trees, a cottonwood and fir became one hybrid form, which spoke to the influences of place on identity and also to the dual cultures in which I reside. Nestled within the top of the tree trunk is a large rock on which is imprinted with a photographic image of my family. This reveals the place of family as home. Despite a nomadic lifestyle, home is consistently a place to which I always return, and is where I truly understand the nature of identity and place.