

WATERSHED

THE FLOW OF TIME THROUGH PLACE

ALISON BERRY 2016

“OUR SENSES ARE SKEPTICS,
AND BELIEVE ONLY THE
IMPRESSION OF THE MOMENT,
AND DO NOT BELIEVE THE
CHEMICAL FACT THAT THESE
HUGE MOUNTAIN CHAINS
ARE MADE UP OF GASSES AND
ROLLING WIND...ALL THINGS
ARE FLOWING, EVEN THOSE
THAT SEEM IMMOVABLE.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Watershed: (1) The geologic boundary within which water flows into a common body, also the boundary between divergent systems. (2) A metaphoric boundary in time that divides contrasting social or cultural conditions.

The glistening waters of the Esopus Creek flow here now, in this ever-fleeting present moment. But the water has not been here forever, nor the rocks and clouds. Through vast spans of time they have come to be what they now are, flowing out of the past, and into the future. Nourishing the landscape through cycles of fire and ice, the waters have endured. Here fantastic animals have evolved and flourished, only to become extinct. Here a variety human communities have named and claimed the land, hunted animals and grown crops, competed for wealth, power and resources. Here forests have been razed, and have grown again. Here there is still starlight, the rustle of leaves, the smell of earth. Now the waters of the creek flow way beyond their original banks. Dammed up in the Ashokan reservoir, diverted through miles of tunnels, they have become a wellspring for the multitudes in New York City. Here is the story of this place, as it evolves and flows through time.



PANEL 1 - About 4.6 billion years ago, our solar system and our planet formed from a cloud of interstellar dust. In a spectacular collision with a smaller planet, the young earth melted and splashed out rock to create our companion moon. Iron and heavy elements sank to the core, creating the earth's electromagnetic field. Asteroids and comets bombarded the smoldering crust, bringing water, which gradually covered the planet with oceans. Continents pushed up above the sea, and later, mountain ranges began to rise while rivers fed the marshy Catskill Delta. Tiny purple bacteria metabolized carbon and sulfur, slowly changing the atmosphere. And here in this place, 375 million years ago, a meteorite smashed out a 6-mile wide crater. Today, Panther Mountain rises from its center and the Esopus Creek traces the contour of its rim.

Life grew in the warm seas. Soon blue-green bacteria could metabolize sunlight and exude free oxygen, changing the atmosphere again, and forming the protective ozone layer, which absorbs lethal UV radiation. Then life could also grow on land. Creatures emerged from the sea and evolved to crawl, walk, and fly. Dinosaurs grew to fantastic sizes, and flourished here for millions of years. Then, 66 million years ago, everything changed. A large

meteorite crashed into the earth. The ensuing inferno killed most living things, and afterwards clouds of ash blocked sunlight, causing desolate cold and starvation. Only a few species survived.

Millennia passed as mountains rose and glaciers formed. New species evolved and grew large. Huge mammals, warmed by woolly coats of fur, roamed the cold terrain. Gradually humans arrived, hunting the animals for food in a frozen landscape. As the glaciers retreated, the largest animals mysteriously disappeared, leaving the land to their smaller cousins.

Humans prospered as the earth warmed, and families grew into tribes. Here in this place, the humans named themselves *n'Lenape'wak*, My People, and their land *Lenape'hokink*, Land of the Lenape. The people found beauty and nourishment in the world around them, and shared their knowledge by telling stories. They told the story of a Great Spirit, who had a vision of space filled with stars and a sun and moon, and of the earth alive with plants and animals. The Great Spirit created the four directions of space and four spirit keepers of creation. But a long winter came upon the earth and brought all living things to the brink of starvation. The animals begged the crow

with his melodious voice and rainbow plumage to fly up and ask the Great Spirit to stop the snow. The Great Spirit did not have that power; so instead, he gave the crow the gift of fire to warm his friends. As the fire stick burned on the long journey home, it blackened the crow's rainbow plumage and burned his melodious voice to a harsh caw-caw. But the animals were saved.

Evil then came into the world. The wicked horned serpent appeared and fought with the great toad, keeper of the waters, slaying him and releasing a great flood upon the earth.

PANEL 2 - The waters rose until all but one mountain peak was covered. A strong hero saved the animals by making a raft from the branches of a tall cedar tree. Then, with some soil from the old earth, he created a new earth on the turtle's back. There, a great shimmering tree grew up, and sprouted a new man and a new woman, later known as the people of the turtle's back. The first winter on earth was bitterly cold and the animals were very hungry, so the bear gave her large body as food to save them from starvation. Afterwards, the other animals gave themselves to humans as food in honor of the bear's sacrifice. The Lenape people lived here hunting and growing crops for centuries. Then strange boats arrived from across the ocean and their world changed.

PANEL 3 - In 1609, Henry Hudson sailed into the river that would later bear his name, employed by the Dutch East India Company. Seeking trade routes and profitable resources, the Dutch laid claim to the land and named it Nieu Nederland. They brought domestic animals, firearms, alcohol and European diseases, and began to trade with the Native American inhabitants.



PANEL 4 - Sailing further up the Noort Rivier (now the Hudson River), the Dutch East and West India Companies established outposts such as Wiltwijk and Nieuw Dorp, focused on the lucrative beaver fur trade. The Dutch called the Lenape people the Esopus Indians, because they lived near the Esopus Creek. As the settlers continued to seize the best farmland, the Native Americans became angry and fought back against European encroachment. In the course of these conflicts, named the Esopus Wars (1659 to 1663), the Lenape burned Dutch settlements and the Dutch burned Lenape crops, eventually starving them into trading land for peace.

In 1664 the British wrested Nieuw Nederland from the Dutch, and renamed it New York. Wiltwijk was renamed Kingston. Under British rule, large tracts of land were granted to colonists, on the condition that they had also purchased it from the native people. In the Lenape culture land was owned collectively, so the Native Americans may not have understood European law regarding private property. They accepted paltry sums, often under duress. The 2 million acres of the Hardenbergh Patent were sold for just 200£ by the Lenape sachem Nanisinos, who signed with his mark, the turtle. Queen Anne granted the patent in 1708 to Johannis Hardenbergh

and his shareholders, some of whom hid their true identities. It had been arranged by the Governor of New York, the Queen's cousin, Lord Cornbury, a colorful character who liked to dress up in women's clothes and was chronically in debt. He is suspected of taking bribes to secure the grant. Patent holders aspired to the European model of Landed Gentry, living on rents from tenant farmers. New York grew slowly compared with bordering states where farmers could buy land outright.

The Revolutionary War began in 1776, and the colony of New York became an American state the following year, with its capital at Kingston. But not all New Yorkers wanted independence. Here upstate, wealthy landlords backed the revolution, fearing that Britain might revoke or tax their land grants. Poor tenant farmers tried to remain neutral; whoever ruled, they would pay a landlord. Downstate in New York City, many wealthy merchants remained loyal to their British trading partners, while the poor clamored for liberty in hope of a better life. Native Americans fought for the British, though by 1750 about ninety percent of their population had been killed by disease, starvation or violence. When the first presidential election took place in 1789, only white male property owners had the right to vote.



PANEL 5 - By the 19th century, many large land grants had been divided and sold in smaller parcels, and the owners looked for ways to turn a profit. The economy was based on the three Ts - Tanbark, Timber and Tourism.

Tanneries were built near the stands of hemlock trees, the source for tanbark, which contains tannin. Hemlock trees grew in abundance on the slopes of Mount Tremper. Finished hides were shipped down river to Philadelphia or to New York City. The largest tannery in Ulster County was built at Edwardsville (now Hunter) by Colonel William Edwards. It flourished for 30 years until all the Hemlock trees were cut, leaving a denuded landscape of stumps and rotting carcasses. The tannery closed and the sudden loss of jobs was a great hardship for the community.

Timber was harvested throughout the Catskills and sawmills sprang up along the many waterways. At Saugerties where the Esopus Creek flows into the Hudson River, industry flourished. Valuable hardwoods were cut for building homes and furniture. A paper factory processed softer woods such as poplar and birch, and the charcoal industry consumed whatever was left.

Tourists came by river and train to enjoy summer holidays away from the hot and crowded metropolis of New York City, whose population exceeded one million by 1880.

By the late 19th century, steam power had revolutionized the speed of travel and transport of goods. Railroad barons made and lost fortunes building tracks. The Livingstons ran steamboats up and down the Hudson River, holding a monopoly until 1824. Now farmers could send perishable goods to the city for sale, shifting from subsistence to a market economy. Towns such as Boiceville, Shokan, Brown's Station and Olive Branch grew up along the railroad, only to be flooded or relocated when the Ashokan Reservoir was created.

By 1830 the European American population had grown to almost 2 million in NY State, and relations with surviving Native Americans remained contentious. The Indian Relocation Act was passed Under President Andrew Jackson, mandating the forcible removal of all Native Americans from eastern lands. The remaining Lenape people were marched along the infamous Trail of Tears to Oklahoma or to Ontario.



PANEL 6 – By the dawn of the 20th century, resources such as tanbark and timber had been drastically depleted. In 1885 New York State had passed the Forest Preservation Act, banning logging in some areas. As the last trees were felled, logging companies fled Ulster County without paying the taxes they owed, so the county seized their land instead. The county in turn owed taxes to NY State but had no cash, and so a deal was struck. Assemblyman Cornelius Hardenbergh championed the creation of a state park, which would allow the county to trade land to NY State in exchange for back taxes. Thus, NY State came to own 41% of what is now the 700,000-acre Catskill Park. Mandated to remain forever wild, the Catskill Park opened to the public in 1904. Also, under the 1886 companion law, NY State began paying property taxes to local towns on state lands, an important source of revenue for rural communities.

With the end of logging, New York City looked to the Catskills for another more important resource – water. The Board of Water Supply was established in 1905, and empowered to appropriate land under eminent domain law. Despite angry resistance from Catskill communities, dams, reservoirs and aqueducts would be built to supply water to the

thirsty city. The Ashokan Dam and Reservoir were completed in 1915, flooding towns and fertile farms along the Esopus Valley. Workers called “Sandhogs” arrived to build a network of huge subterranean tunnels that would channel water underground from the watershed to spring from urban faucets.

In addition to clean water, the Catskill Park and Ashokan Watershed now provide habitat for many wild animal species, shunned from agricultural and urban areas. Trees again forest the mountain slopes, hosting owls and eagles. Spruce trees planted near the reservoir protect the water from contamination from rotting deciduous leaves. Each year our companion moon moves a bit further away from planet earth. Far from urban lights, the night skies are dark. In the vast glimmer of starlight, we may perhaps contemplate the source and unity of being.



PANEL 7 – In the 21st Century, after four hundred years of growth, New York City is the nation’s largest metropolis, a community of about 9 million people. Known for the best tasting water in the region, the city draws one billion gallons per day from the Catskill Delaware Watershed, pumped through underground tunnels (shown in blue and white dashed lines). The Ashokan Reservoir, fed by the Esopus Creek, has its own watershed within the Catskill Delaware system, and it alone supplies 400 million gallons per day. While water may truly be the lifeblood of the City, the surrounding ecosystem is an essential part of the biochain that sustains our living planet.

Alison Berry © 2016

ALISON BERRY- Alison Berry’s cartographic paintings present a conceptual geography of ideas and information, revealing a landscape of shared knowledge and cultural history. Her work visualizes a contemporary “known world” based on scientific respect for the laws of nature, and explores the relationship between natural history, human society, technology, and the environment.

This project, created specifically for the Emerson Resort and Spa, focuses on a particular place on the planet, now known as the Ashokan Watershed, and questions how it came to exist in its present state. From the formation of planetary conditions conducive to life, through the evolution of complex human societies and technology, the work considers the flow of time, the inevitability of change, and the connection between human culture and the biosphere.

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Visit the lobby to experience *Watershed: The Flow of Time Through Place* by artist Alison Berry. Berry's painting explores the evolution of the Catskill region and the waterways that contribute to New York City's water supply. The series of 7 adjoining panels, created with acrylic, ink and pigment on Evolon microfiber mounted on linen, are 36 inches high and total 49 feet in length.

Watershed is the first piece in the Emerson Resort and Spa's new curated art collection. The art collection reflects the mission of the Emerson Resort and Spa as well as the spirit of Ralph Waldo Emerson that immersion in nature is restorative. The collection was curated by the design studio, CAMA Inc. of New Haven, CT and reinforces the Emerson Resort and Spa's belief in the healing power of nature.

Photography: Adam Reich

Paintings © Alison Berry

Design and production: CAMA Inc.