

# Tides & Moons: Herring Capital

*Cindy Mochizuki*



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# Introduction

*Tides & Moons: Herring Capital* is a new animated art installation by Cindy Mochizuki that shares memories and stories from Japanese Canadian fishing and boat building families who populated Nanaimo shorelines before World War II.

Throughout her practice, Cindy has developed multi-media installations, fictional audio works, performances, animations, drawings, and social collaborations that relate to Japanese Canadian experiences in B.C and Japan. She works with members of these communities and often includes her paternal family's history both within internment camps and as repatriated Japanese Canadians in Japan after the war.

In the early 1920's Japanese Canadian fishers lived and worked in Nanaimo at Hammond Bay (also known as Kujira Bay), Departure Bay, Shack Island (a way station for salmon and coho fishers traveling north), and Saysutshun. While Nanaimo was known as a coal town for half a century, it also had 43 Japanese herring salteries. Due to the unexplainable abundance of this fish during a short window of time, and a demand for salted herring as an important export to Asia, Nanaimo became known as a herring capital.

Employing memory work, archival research, and oral histories, *Tides & Moons: Herring Capital* brings accounts of the past together with fantastical worlds to encourage new

understandings. Animation, miniature sets, and storytelling props reimagine the complex relationships between salt, shorelines, and marginalized labour.

*Tides & Moons: Herring Capital* is the third exhibition through which Nanaimo Art Gallery asks the question, *What stories do we tell?*

# *Breath, Spirit, Life:* *Cindy Mochizuki's Polyvalent Animism*

—WAYDE COMPTON



*A Group of Six Men Working With Herring, Circa 1928, Kishizo Kimura Fonds, NNM 2010.4.7.1.129*

In his 1972 novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, Ishmael Reed presents an alternate premise for world history in which two opposing forces are in conflict: the Atonists (archetypal monotheists) versus a contagious and free-form impulse called Jes Grew. The former is a stand-in for all hierarchical religions and inflexible ideologies; the latter—a Black phonetic form of “just grew”—represents polytheism and a capacious kind of multiculturalism. Through this symbolic order, Reed suggests that where monotheism tends to repress rival

spiritual systems, polytheism borrows, merges, syncretizes, and mixes when two such cosmologies meet.

One doesn't necessarily automatically connect animation to animism, but in Cindy Mochizuki's *Tides & Moons: Herring Capital* the two concepts seem to touch. The definition of animism—a word whose Latin root means “breath, spirit, life”—is the belief that elements of nature such as weather, water, plants, and animals have souls, and are spiritual forces in their own right. It may or may not include aspects of ancestor veneration, too, as the souls of those before might be accessed through interactions with natural phenomena. There is something of this spiritual feeling in the three modes of animation Mochizuki evokes, two-dimensional illustration, three-dimensional stop-motion, and hand-powered wooden automata. In each we see the interaction of the human and the non-human, the Japanese Canadian workers of the early herring industry on Vancouver Island and the ocean, fish, wood, and other animal harbingers, such as the raccoon. These are given the breath of life and motion in diverse media, suggesting an open rather than closed system of accessing memory; one can enter into relationship with her subjects, and see them return to life, in the repeating action of sequential imagery.

It is also important to note how Mochizuki's project is one of uncovering and animating labour, in a way that very much cuts against the grain of contemporary capitalist alienation of consumers from the relationships of production. Whereas in urban settings especially, but anywhere in advanced capitalist countries like Canada, products arrive in our lives as nearly inert objects, reified and stripped of any sense of the work that went into making them, the work behind the product is what *Tides & Moons* celebrates and highlights. Mochizuki's palette marks the diurnal relationship of her subjects to the land, seas, fish, and natural cycles in a way that draws us in, reversing the commodity fetishism we are used to in daily life where the labours of the body, and their relationships to capital, are made deliberately invisible, or at best deceptively idealized. What Mochizuki animates is not the product, which is what we are used to seeing; she animates the lives of workers of colour who made their way in a white supremacist colony. Mochizuki's focus is one that reveals work as well as the particular tribulations of immigrant labour, including the mysterious fires that burn down Arichika Ikeda's Departure Bay salteries in 1905, and at Satsutshun/Newcastle Island herring camps in 1912, each almost certainly cases of arson committed by anti-Asian vigilantes in a time of organized white supremacist terror in British Columbia.

But the joys of labour are here too. Perhaps most delightful among the animations of *Tides & Moons* is the wooden fish automata, racks

with basic gears and cranks that raise and lower ceramic fish upon an axle. While they recall the ingenuity of manufactured Japanese wooden toys, and entice the viewer to a type of play, there is again a reference to work. To make these fish dance and swim, it is the hand and the physical labour of the viewer that is needed to bring life to the object. The turning of the crank also recalls the cycles of nature. Here labour and nature are awakened in this participatory representation and, in this way, the installation is an open text. The handle is a hand held out like a gesture of welcome, an offer to enter the memories Mochizuki reinscribes. As in the original sense, this work is tangible—to be touched—which bears same linguistic root as *contagion*. As we come out of the Covid pandemic, the meaning of centring a hands-on art brings us back to this most human of the senses, when our hands together build meaning and memory out of art, just as workers build wealth and sustenance out of the cycles of the natural world.

Lastly, Mochizuki's project, like the creative work of so many artists of colour, touches necessarily on history. She re-tells and keeps the memory of times and people often ignored in their moment and forgotten by official narratives of the province. Her extensive work in gathering oral stories, gleaning the written archives, and marking the names, places, dates, and events is brought forward and given life in this installation. As with so many achievements of communities of colour, the discovery of the monumental success of

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FULL SCRIPT OF ANIMATION AND NOTES

the Herring Capital comes as a surprise to those not directly in its lineage, calling into question what counts as history in the standard scripts of Canadian nation building, and indeed what is often left out. In her multidimensional animations, Mochizuki shows us this history, in all its beauty and agony, making it live before our eyes, and informing those who didn't know. In this way art is activism—the latter another word suggesting bringing that which is inert into motion, foment, and change—and Mochizuki's *Tides & Moons* asserts itself as part of a history and community that lives image to image, frame to frame, and breath to breath continuously.



*The Jessie Island No. 2, Jessie Island, and the May-S Boats; Ritherdon Bay, BC, 1928, Kishizo Kimura Fonds, NNM 2010.4.7.1.121*

**ABOUT THE ANIMATIONS:** The painted tableaus are illustrated by hand in watercolour, graphite and ink. The main moving images remain relatively simple much like storybook pages. Tableaus depict moments and scenes of Japanese Canadian life in and around salteries and boat building facilities in the Nanaimo, Satsutshun, and surrounding areas. To highlight certain moments; stop motion animation that has been filmed on green screen is used to frame the foreground—as if the puppets are peering into the memories that play out in the watercolour tableaus.

**ABOUT THE SOUND DESIGN:** Renditions of old fishermen's songs are used alongside sound effects and sound compositions. It was said that the Japanese Canadian fishermen in Nanaimo and Steveston sang old fishermen's songs with the crew when hauling up their loads of fish and herring. Sound design for this animation has been created by Cindy Mochizuki's long-time collaborator Antoine Bédard.

The humming references the shakuhachi version of the 1800 Meiji era poem called The Fishermen's Song. The taiko drumming and chant is a rendition of Tairyo Utaikomi—Fishermen's Song by Akama Shinsui. These very unique sound aspects are performed by Maiko Yamamoto and Sawagi Taiko.

## *Prelude*

**SOUND EFFECTS:** The sound of the sea at night. There is a humming song that haunts the sea. It weaves in and out of the animation.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** We see a glimmering moon reflecting light onto a vast Pacific Ocean. There is the flickering of silver and grey scales—we spot a shoal of herring. Slowly we crossfade to a Japanese Canadian woman working over piles and piles of fish. She fades out.

**TITLE:** *Tides & Moons: Herring Capital*

**SOUND EFFECTS:** The Raccoon makes tiny sounds and gasps.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** A raccoon charts the moon and tides of the ocean on her charts and note papers. She has written the date '1901 Departure Bay' and runs out of her cave to see the unusual amount of herring brought to these shorelines. She gasps both delighted and surprised to see this much herring. The raccoon writes 'some fortune and a fine fleet of boats to be made.' The tiny piece of paper is cast into the sky.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** Two Japanese Canadian men in their finest outfits meet to shake hands. They make a mutual agreement in this way.

**SUBTITLE:** Arichika Ikeda purchases herring salteries from three Japanese business partners named Yoshimatsu Mukai, Takematsu Matsumoto and Katsunosuke Negoro who had already started a salted herring company in 1899 in Departure Bay. Ikeda named his business Awaya and Ikeda Company Ltd. and also ran a reduction plant for oil.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** An image of the salteries across Departure Bay appears as a black and white photograph. We pan through and seagulls fly by.



**SUBTITLE:** February 1905—These salteries were destroyed by ‘mysterious’ fires.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** The black and white image of the salteries is burning. Flames continue to engulf the image.

**SUBTITLE:** In 1905, Kametaro Tsuchiya started a salted herring company with a Chinese company called San Chi Sang Hui built along Nanaimo waterfront exporting to Asia. As of 1903, two Japanese companies, one which was owned by Negoro, sent out 700 tons of cured herring from Departure Bay.

By 1907, herring salteries were set up on Jessie Island in Departure Bay by Rikimatsu Tabata and on Saysutshun/Newcastle by Kasho, Korenaga, Tanaka, Yip Sang, and Takejiro Ode.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Japanese Canadians knee deep in herring use large shovels to place herring into large wooden boxes with the label ‘Canada’ on them. These herrings would be salted and left to dry.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** A shift in time. A rattle of sound. We introduce the Fishermen’s chant.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** An image of a news flash—a report of the tax on salt. Images crossfade into next sequence.

**SUBTITLE:** There was a demand for salted herring from international markets like China where a tax was placed on salt. As a substitute for salt, they used salted herring in their soup broths and as seasoning. The Asia Pacific including Japan, China and Hong Kong received the exports of salted herring from the coasts of Saysutshun/Newcastle and Nanaimo.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** Two seine boats haul a school of herrings up in one scoop of net. A young Japanese man looks down at the water and marvels. An older man admires the catch. Zoom into the following watercolour scene.

**SUBTITLE:** Regulatory policies made sure that only half of a seine boat had Japanese Canadians. They would come to count the number of Japanese Canadian men to a boat.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Japanese Canadian fishermen are being counted at the pier by officials. Racist propaganda and other notices of racism are depicted as documents and papers fly up onto the pier covering the workers. This vignette reveals the racism in B.C. at the time from white supremacist groups such as Native Sons of British Columbia and others who believed the Japanese Canadians were a threat to Canadian industries.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Image of Nanaimo Free Press. An image of fire.

**SUBTITLE:** Fires!—Nanaimo Free Press of July 16 and 18, 1912 reported that four herring camps on Newcastle Island were mysteriously destroyed by fire. Owners identified as Makino, Shinobu, Mase, and Oburi—arson due to the success of Japanese Canadian fishers.

Facilities were quickly rebuilt.

Protection Island was nearby with salteries by Hashimoto, Koyama, Sanki, Sawada, and Ikeda.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** Raccoon runs and he leaves behind a message on the sand.

“By early 1920s Nanaimo which had been known for ½ century as a coal town had 43 Japanese salteries and became known as Herring Capital.”

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Fishermen's song with taiko begins.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION SEQUENCE:** The Japanese Canadian men partake in sumo in their spare time at the Ode Camp. A few younger men play ping pong. A sign indicates 'Ode Camp' which is one of the boat building facilities on Saysutshun/Newcastle

Tired bodies sink into bathtub onsens, here at the Ode Camp; a sigh of tired muscles. Bodies fall asleep in the bunkhouses.

A Japanese Canadian woman, hired as a chef, cooks a supper of a traditional Japanese Canadian fishermen's meal called chagai. Chagai is a tea porridge with rice. She uses green tea with a silver ball and day-old rice. She may be serving this later with BBQ salmon for the workers.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** A Japanese Canadian entrepreneur with a fancy hat nods in approval and walks by the pier as if to admire the success of the community. He inspects and looks around, he is proud. He watches on as boats are being built.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** A boat is raised up into the sky and carpenters admire it. We move to a scene where we are back in the herring salteries and we see 500 pound boxes of salted herring labeled CANADA.

**STOP MOTION ANIMATION:** A multi-generational Japanese Canadian family with elders and young children admire their vast vegetable garden. As we watch the vegetables grow, chickens cluck, and the children carry carrots in baskets.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** We see houses with great big gardens. We pan back to the salteries and boat houses.

## *Ending*

**SUBTITLE:** It was 1941. Herring season started in mid-October but ended December 6. The Ode camp had a party for all of the fishermen, saltery workers, and crew. There was dancing and drinking. It was speculated that a young couple wandered off to the pier and threw a cigarette into the tarred cotton seine nets piled there. Flames grew and took out the bunkhouses, including the Chinese bunkhouse and the women's quarters. The tide was low, and the location had no water. The glow was seen all the way across the strait to Steveston.

Ashes remained where the salteries were.

These local events were dwarfed by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour which spelled the end of work and dreams for Japanese Canadians.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Fishermen laughing and partying with boat builders. We pan to a cigarette or flame on cotton nets. It grows larger and larger to ash.

**SUBTITLE:** In 1942, any existing Japanese Canadian owned salteries around the Nanaimo area were ordered to be burnt down or sold.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Colour change (slightly ominous) Royal Canadian Navy takes the Japanese Canadian boats to be impounded. A few Japanese Canadian boat owners accompany the officers so that their beautifully crafted boats would not be damaged. Some were badly damaged and sank. There is a storm coming; it rains for days—time passes. There is bright sunlight and we have moved to the present day or the distant future.

**SUBTITLE:** During the internment of Japanese Canadians, 1137 fishing boats were impounded by the Canadian Navy, and seized by the Federal government. They were all sold and never returned to their owners.

**STOP MOTION:** Raccoon runs along the shore with determination.

**WATERCOLOUR ANIMATION:** Alongside the raccoon, herring move through the Pacific Ocean. Big sakura/cherry blossom trees bloom. The herring begin to return. A raccoon runs and runs.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Songs and sounds come to an end.

Fade to Black



*A Community Landscape*; Nanaimo, BC, 1928, Kishizo Kimura Fonds, NNM 2010.4.7.1.103

**Cindy Mochizuki** creates multimedia installation, audio fiction, performance, animation, and drawings. Her works explore the manifestation of story and its relationship to site-specificity, invisible histories, archives, and memory work. She has exhibited, performed and screened her work in Canada, US, Australia, and Japan.

**Wayde Compton's** latest book, *The Blue Road*, is a graphic novel for young adults, illustrated by April dela Noche Milne. He is currently working on a re-imagining of *The Argonautika* as a surrealist slave narrative. Compton is the current chair of Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC.

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**TIDES & MOONS: HERRING CAPITAL REFERENCES MANY FORMS OF RESEARCH INCLUDING ORAL HISTORIES, INTERVIEWS, BOOKS, ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS. I WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNIZE THESE REFERENCES IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS ARTWORK.**

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Historical images courtesy of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.

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