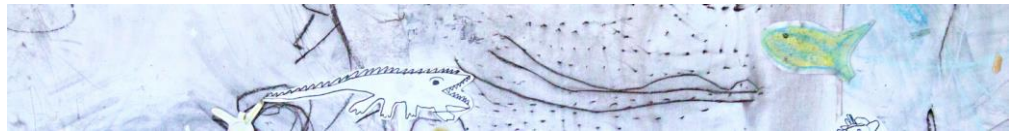


## **The Aesthetics of Walking-With**

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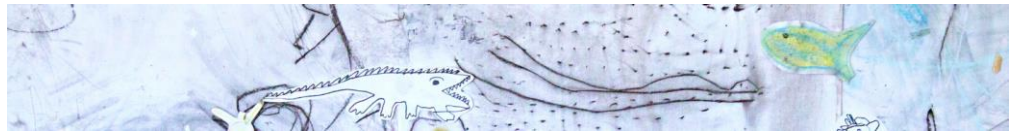


## ***The Aesthetics of Walking-With***

In my role as pedagogist, I, Adrienne, 'walk with' the educators in ways that allow us to carefully examine our pedagogical values and commitments and activate new modes of relationality that enliven the collective life within the Children's Centre. 'Walking with' describes a pedagogical relationship of undertaking a collective journey that moves us beyond what we once knew in search for new understandings. Through this journeying, our pedagogical values and commitments serve as our compass. 'Walking with' requires careful decision making, a profound sense of slowing down and a curious and playful disposition to experiment with new ways of living well as a collective. This processual and experimental work pries openings and creates conditions that compel us to listen to our daily life and notice how the pedagogies we activate are re-shaping our relations and commitments to each other and to our sense of place.

This visual essay composed by Ali Morrow gives insight into the aesthetics of walking and illustrates that *how we walk* with children makes a difference to what is possible. As you engage with this visual essay, I encourage you to pay attention to how the presence of yarn became a companion in our walking and made visible our movements, mappings, pauses and entanglements. Throughout our walks we were compelled by the invitation from a child named Fern who excitedly called out to us "Let's get journeying!" This generous invitation stayed with us and drew our attention to notice that our walks were not marked by distance nor final destination, but rather, what happened in the event of walking is what shaped the experience. The objects and materials that accompanied our walking also played an active role in shaping the collective walking ritual. The backpacks, bear bells, yarn, wooden bowls and baskets for foraging, paper and pens and snacks for sharing posed possibilities and created rhythms of being in motion with ideas as well as opportunities to pause and linger in particular places. In her book *Wanderlust: A history of walking*, the American essayist Rebecca Solnit (2000) writes about how the tools associated with walking make it possible to extend one's self to the world. She describes this further:

The path is an extension of walking, the places set aside for walking are monuments to that pursuit, and walking is a mode of making the world as well as being in it. Thus, the walking body can be traced in the places it has made; paths, parks, and sidewalks are traces of the acting out of imagination and desire; walking sticks, shoes, maps, canteens, and backpacks are further material results of that desire (Solnit, 2000, p.29).

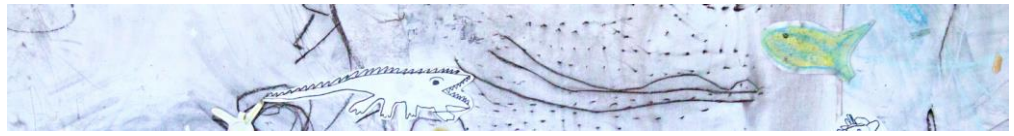


These words resonate with me as I think about how we design curriculum and make decisions about the materials and objects that play a role and allow us to think otherwise about taken for granted practices such as walking with children. The photos and instances offered by Ali's visual essay reveal the richness of nestling into a particular pocket in the forest to draw and create stories with our surroundings, the pleasure of being 'beckoned by berries', and the intense experimentation that is involved in learning to navigate our bodies and negotiate our desires within the collective.



In the Spring of 2021, the Cypress Hollow began as an intentional experiment, an outdoor classroom that is situated within the university campus and on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish Nations. The abundance of outdoor space and the aesthetics of the environment play a significant role in our collective ways of living and learning. Over the summer the community of children and educators in the Hollow take up the act of walking as a form of inquiry into our relationships with each other and to place. Through our slow collective walking rituals, we are afforded opportunities to notice and listen to how particular routes and places in the forest draw us in and invite us to dwell together as we draw, share food, and forage for berries. The distinctive qualities and unique particularities of this place gesture towards us, catching and tugging at our bodies and our thinking like the many blackberry vines and huckleberry bushes we meet along the way.





Inspired by the way Fern encourages us to “journey” together, I, Ali, begin to experience our walks as an active response imbued with excitement yet uncertainty as we negotiate pathways and pauses. Journeying with yarn in particular invites pause and puzzlement throughout encounters and collisions with place. As I ‘*journey with*’ children and yarn I start to notice how the yarn not only marks the path, but also works to make visible the many entanglements and negotiations between moving bodies, ideas, and desires. Sometimes our journeys wind and flow unencumbered, other times there are snares and snarls that force us to linger and think through complex decisions with each other and the surroundings.





***Beckoning Berries***

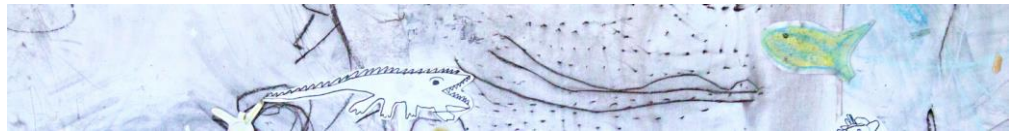


Ali: How do the blackberry vines know where to go?

Emerie: Well, they don't know where they're going, their hearts know where to go.

Townes: I don't think blackberries have hearts.

Emerie: Well, their thorns are their hearts.

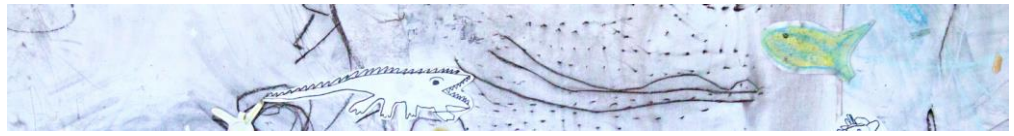


Becoming more familiar with the terrain we walked among, it was well known by all that the thorns of blackberry vines loved to hook onto our clothing, shoes and steps. Reaching out to us, tugging at us with teeny thorns of intensity and a means of unmissable, yet perhaps heartfelt communication.



Though we walk among a multitude of more than human species inhabiting this place, it is the presence of huckleberry bushes that capture our attention. Like the arts, berries in this place “refine our senses”, inviting us into intimate and subtle encounters that provoke and “promote our imaginative capacities” (Eisner, 2002, p. 19). Brushing up against bodies, casting dappled shadows on our skin and dangling tiny, delicious gems that burst in our mouths, huckleberry bushes dynamically shape our collective experience of walking, and relationality.





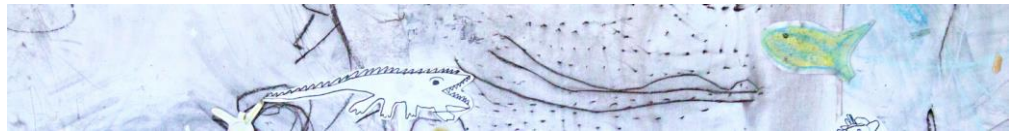
Berries gleam in the bushes. Small, silent 'jewels', as Kelly, one of the educators here refers to them, gesture towards us. Eyes search for encounters that are just the right height, or perhaps tip-toe worthy. Careful, concentrated fingers reach out, responding to juicy invitations. Finding, squeezing, pinching, piercing. Teeth ever so gently testing for ripeness, readiness, berry-ness. Shades and textures informing our thoughts. Is this berry ready for my reply? Mouths and taste buds check, followed by facial expressions that do not hide any delight, or surprise in puckering lips and cheeks. Small hands well versed in just how to hold, cradle, collect and carry as palms, pockets and hats become baskets. Berries trail and spill along our walks, into our ideas and shared sense of connection and relationships. With outstretched, arm-like branches, berries force us to pause, activating affectual interests, and encouraging us to gather, notice, and negotiate terms with and between our bodies, ethics, relationships and the seasonal rhythms of time and place. As our relationships to the environment continue to grow, we begin to cultivate embodied and engaged ways of being together, drawing together, and listening to the language of berries.

One particular place in the forest that has become well known is the 'Moss Room'. A name coined by Emerie, and soon collectively taken up with a fond sense of familiarity among children and educators. The Moss Room is a somewhat small, cradled space nestled in amongst the canopy of the coastal forest. The aesthetics of the Moss Room hold an abundance of soft, spongy moss coverings, trailing blackberry vines and salal bushes. The Moss Room offers us many nooks and crannies, and we sit, squish and settle into drawing, dialogue, and sometimes quiet contemplation. Like the gathering of bodies and berries, the Moss Room holds us here together - holds our thinking and embraces our drawings that begin to live amongst the space.



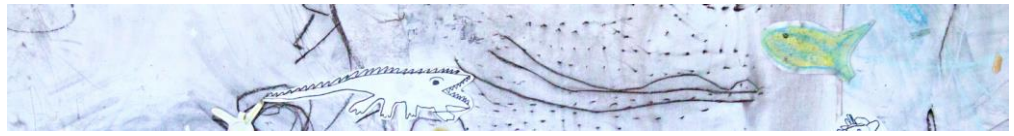






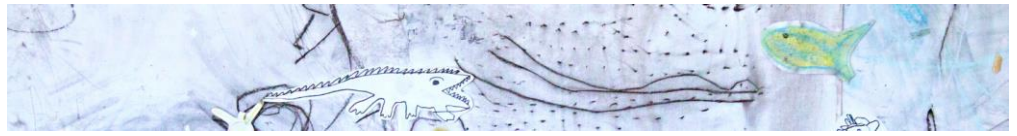
mixing, blending, mashing, mushing, pressing, squishing, grinding, smelling, tasting, sweeping, seeping, tapping, spilling, rubbing, infusing, stirring, squashing, crushing, staining, bleeding, dripping, saturating, fermenting, emulsifying, smearing, smudging

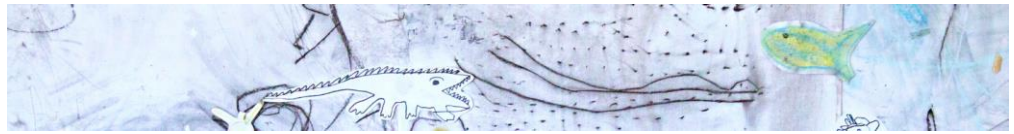






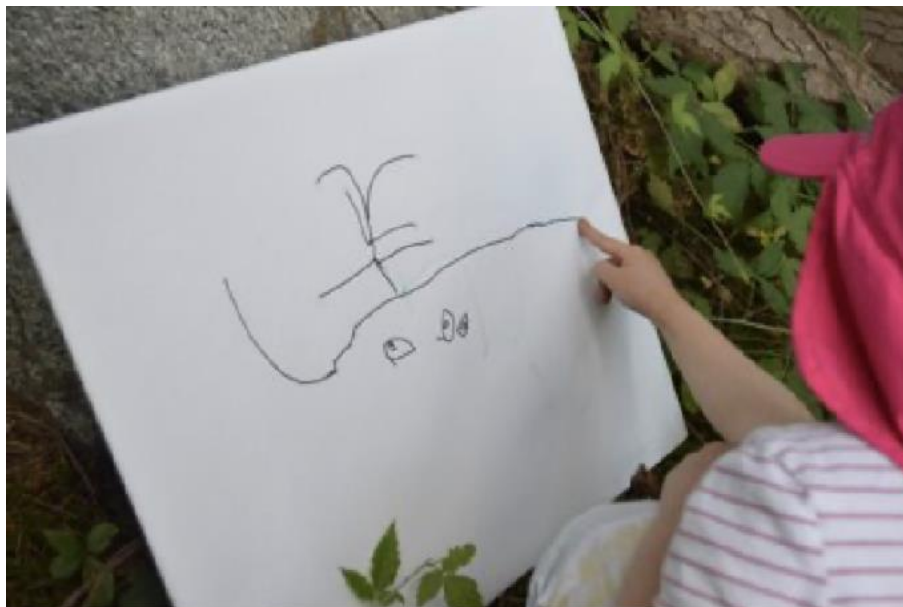




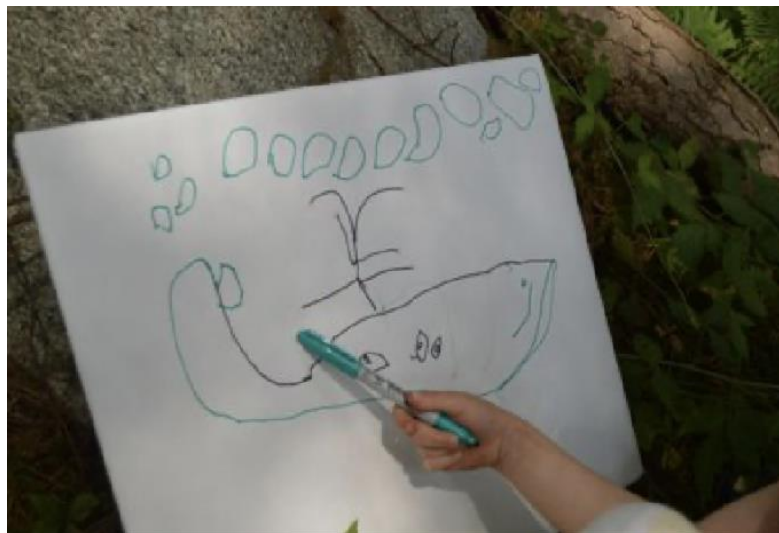
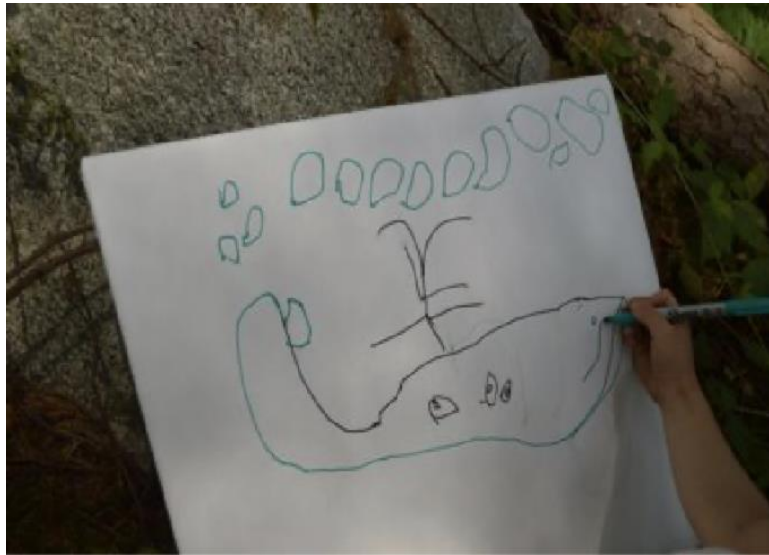
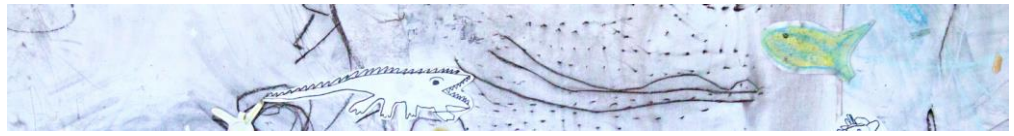


### *Berried ways of being*

Invoking shadows, shades, scents, and textures the Moss Room engages our senses and weaves into our drawing experiences. Drawing here becomes a whole bodied experience, as whole bodied berries are collected, carried, blended, tasted, and pressed into juicy becomeings that bleed onto our paper and stain our skin. Listening and painting with place imbues our papers with pinks, reds, plums, and 'purplish' splotches, sweeps and seeds, while methods of mixing, mushing, grinding and tasting beckons our attention in the same way little huckleberry 'jewels' do. Sticks join the reciprocal dance between bodies and berries as they are picked up and transformed into brushes. Salal berries become a very specific ingredient in paint, or what Nina calls "potion" jars. While Oregon grapes are squished and stripped of their skin to reveal entirely new stains and colours that mingle amongst sour, slippery seeds. What makes these berries so berry-like? And how does this show up in our thinking? Just as our awareness of the unique affordances of the forest and materials emerge and grow, so do the meaning of our drawings, theories and figurations.

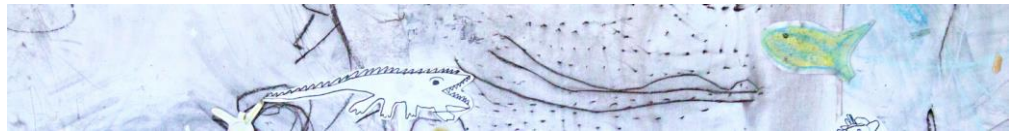






Nina points carefully, explaining to me the lines and shapes within her image. Referencing the yarn and huckleberry bushes trailing along the path, she adds curves and corners throughout our conversation, describing how we arrived at the Moss Room.

Nina: I'm drawing the whole clue. Remember when we go this way, and then it goes to here...First we were here and then we were here. (She points out our main stops along the way to the Moss Room. One at the climbing tree and another at the pay parking meter). And then this way (motioning down) to the Huckleberry Moss Room. Because of the string!



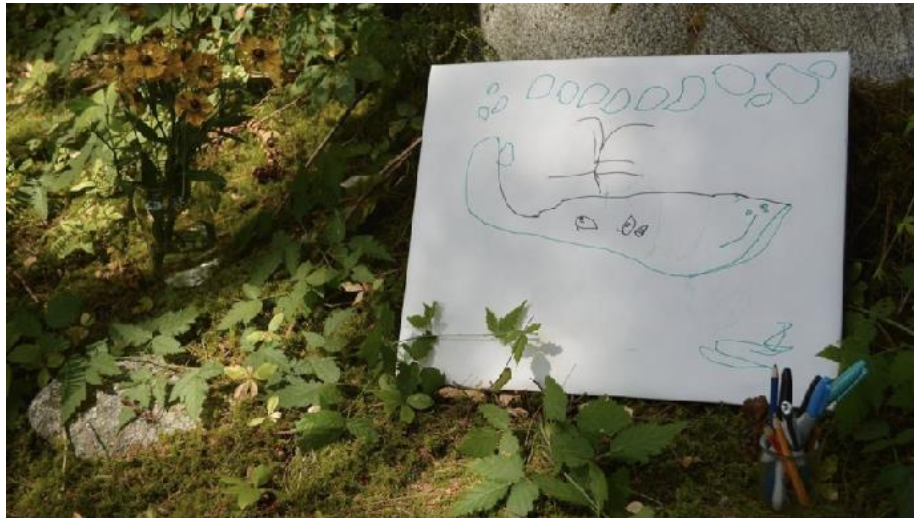
Nina begins to draw multiple green, circular shapes.

Nina: I'm making a lot of moss, the circles.

Attaching a mossy floor in her picture with a long, green sharpie line, she pauses, leaning slightly back.

Nina looks at the line, and her image in a new light.

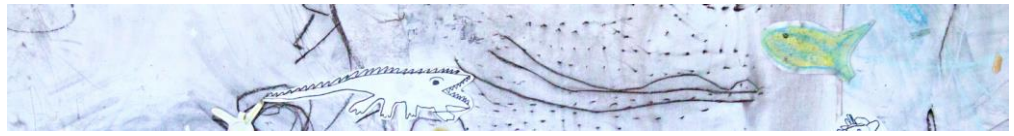
Nina: This looks like a whale. This is a whale now, a humpback whale.



“Now it’s the Humpback Whale Room!” She states.



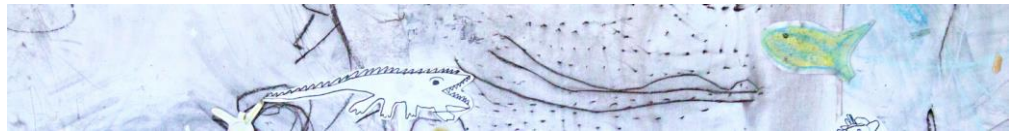




### *Closing Thoughts*

Through our rituals of walking, we made commitments to slow down and notice the mappings, movements and pauses that animated our collective journeying. Through this process, we began to cultivate new relations with particular places and alternative modes of navigating our bodies. ‘*Walking with*’ reflects experiences that move and linger with us, often meandering back into the center, remaining with us beyond the edges of trails, pathways, or pockets within the forest. As we walk, we also ‘*become with*’ place, responding to the movements and affordances of our surroundings, while leaving little traces of ourselves also. Bright red impressions of berry stains and sweeps among children’s drawings and paintings remind us to slow down the next time we walk past huckleberry bushes, or step through catching, trailing blackberry vines, leaning in more closely as we seek tiny invitations, and forage for curious, experimental encounters.





### ***Artists Bio***

Adrienne Argent: Adrienne is a faculty member in the Early Childhood Care and Education program at Capilano University and is the pedagogist at the Capilano University Children’s Centre. In her role as pedagogist, whether she is thinking alongside children, educators or ECCE students she is always concerned with the co-creation of inventive and evolving pedagogies that are situated and responsive to the times we are currently living within. She is grateful to live and work on the unceded, traditional and ancestral lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations people

Ali is a 4th year student in Capilano University’s Early Childhood Care & Education program. She was born and raised on the west coast, growing up on the ancestral, unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Ali holds a deep passion for learning alongside children and attending to contextual lifeworlds through *heart-felt-sensing* and reflective interpretations of lived experiences.

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- E. Elliot. (2002). *Arts and the creation of mind*. Yale University Press.  
 Solnit, R. (2000). *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. Penguin Books.