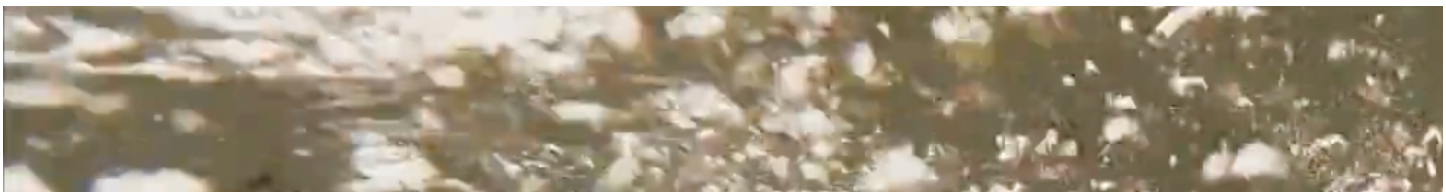


Reciprocal Sacrifice



Interview with Carolina Caycedo by Emiliano Guaraldo, Unruly Natures Journal

December 18, 2025

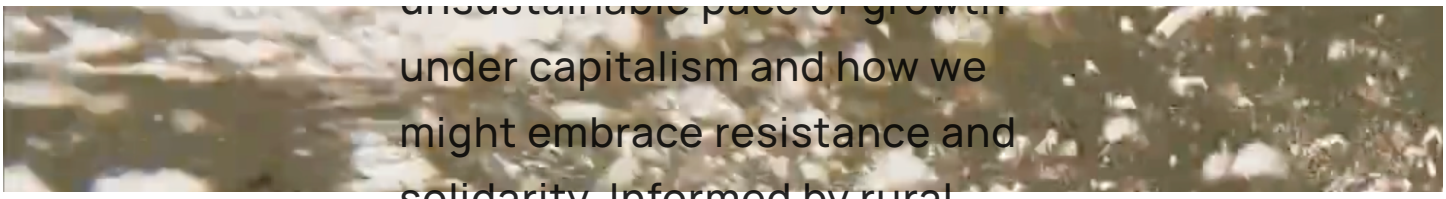
Carolina Caycedo is a Colombian artist born in London and living in Los Angeles. Her murals, books, performances, films, photo-



installations are gateways into larger discussions about how we treat each other and the world around us.

Engaging with issues of water and land stewardship, food sovereignty, and fair energy transition, she inquires into ways of being on Earth that foster sustaining and caring relationships with the natural and built environments.

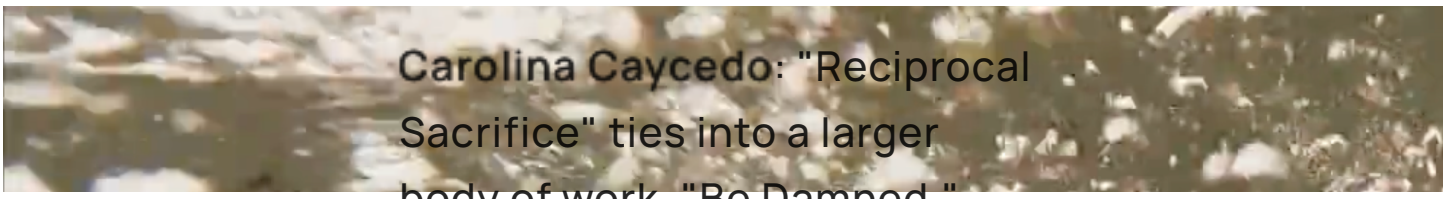
Research and participation are central to Caycedo's work. Through her studio practice



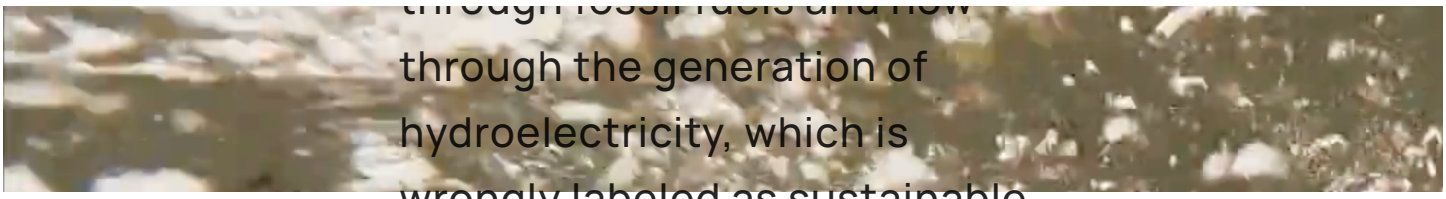
unsustainable pace of growth under capitalism and how we might embrace resistance and solidarity. Informed by rural practices, Native Peoples, and feminist epistemologies, Caycedo contributes to the reconstruction of environmental and historical memory as a fundamental space for climate and social justice.

In this conversation with Unruly Natures, Caycedo discusses her work “Reciprocal Sacrifice” (2022), a film that traces the struggle to liberate the Snake River and restore the ancient contract between humans and salmon.

Emiliano Guaraldo, Unruly Natures Journal (UN): Can you tell us about "Reciprocal



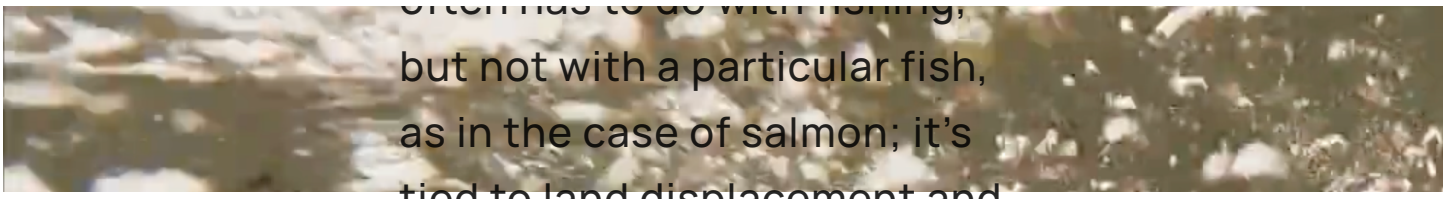
Carolina Caycedo: "Reciprocal Sacrifice" ties into a larger body of work, "Be Damned," that looks at how energy infrastructure in the shape of large hydroelectric dams or mine tailing dams impacts ecosystems and communities across the Western Hemisphere. As a person from Latin America living in North America, it's inevitable to witness how in Latin America large mega hydroelectric dams are being built, while in North America there is a big movement of dam decommissioning, as we could see recently in the Klamath River in Northern California and Southern Oregon. The first thing I understood is that there are these opposite processes happening within the same



through the generation of hydroelectricity, which is wrongly labeled as sustainable or green and clean energy.

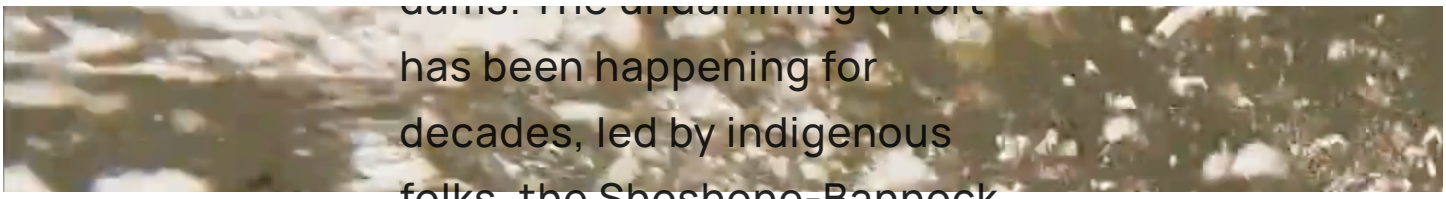
(UN): Why did you choose to focus on salmon and the Snake River specifically, and what did you discover about the human-salmon relationship?

Carolina Caycedo: I understood that unlike other cases and other rivers or basins in Latin America, the case for the struggle to undam rivers here in the Pacific Northwest and in the West Coast of the United States is the impact on salmon populations — a fish that is intrinsically knitted into the cultural identity and relationship between human



often has to do with fishing, but not with a particular fish, as in the case of salmon; it's tied to land displacement and to the loss of fertile lands for agriculture. The main claim for the indigenous, native, and civil society allies to call for the dismantling of the Snake River or the Klamath River or the Elwha River is the claim to save salmon.

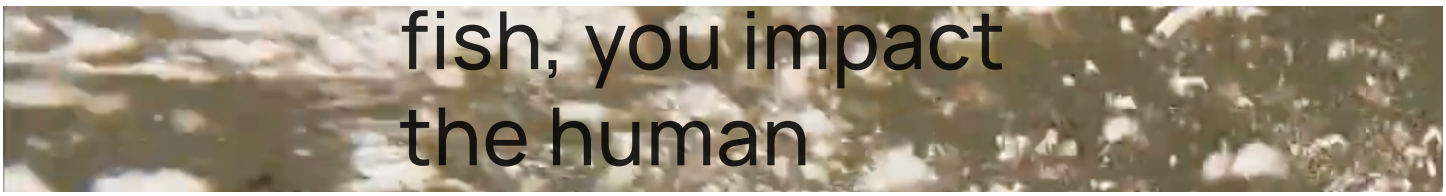
While doing fieldwork along the Snake River in Idaho — the Snake River is a tributary to the Columbia River, which is also heavily dammed, and the Grand Coulee Dam is on the Columbia Basin — there was a big fight and struggle to undam the Snake River. These dams serve both a hydroelectricity purpose and have lock systems that allow the transportation of



dams. The undamming effort has been happening for decades, led by indigenous folks, the Shoshone-Bannock tribe and the Nez Perce tribe, and other civil societies.

Everyone mentions salmon: if we don't bring the dams down, we will see the disappearance of wild salmon in five years. The genetic buildup of hatchery salmon is not as strong and as diverse as wild salmon.

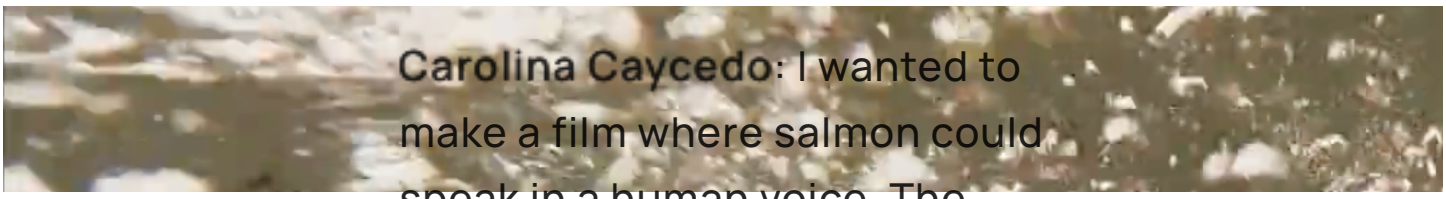
"Reciprocal Sacrifice" precisely tries to convey that the impact is on the relationships



fish, you impact the human community and vice versa.

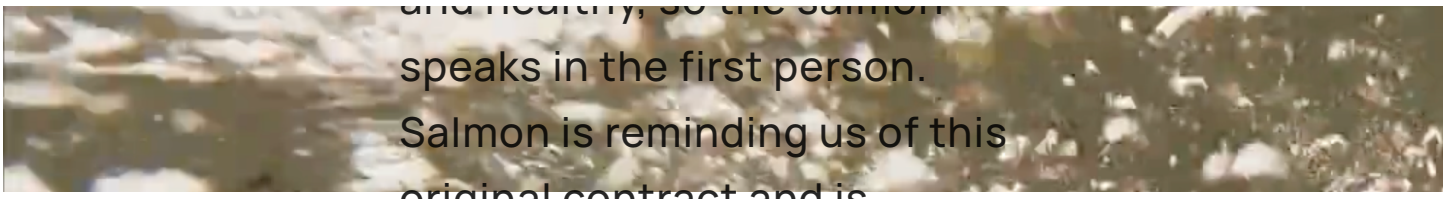
The impacts are pretty much similar, including sickness. The infrastructure affects the fish because in shallow waters or in impounded waters, fish tend to develop illnesses of the gills, and the rise in temperature also messes with their skin. Then when humans eat a sick fish, they become sick too: it's a chain of impacts.

(UN): You made some distinct artistic choices, including giving salmon a first-person voice and using archival materials. Could you elaborate



Carolina Caycedo: I wanted to make a film where salmon could speak in a human voice. The starting question is: If salmon could speak the human language, what would it say to us? We tried to understand the relationships built around salmon, and when I say salmon, there's many kinds of salmon: there's pink salmon, there's the Chinook salmon, there's the Coho salmon.

One story that really stuck with me, which is the one that opens the video, speaks about the natural law: that original contract that exists between humans and the salmon relatives, where the salmon committed themselves to return every year to feed the humans and, in exchange, the



and healthy, so the salmon speaks in the first person. Salmon is reminding us of this original contract and is reminding us that salmon families sacrifice every year to come up the river so that we can take their bodies and feed our own families.

They tell us how when they came every year and there was no dam to stop that travel, the rhythms that made the trees grow, that made people feed, the



got broken. That's the broken rhythm that ultimately speaks about what extractivism does: it breaks the rhythms that sustain life.

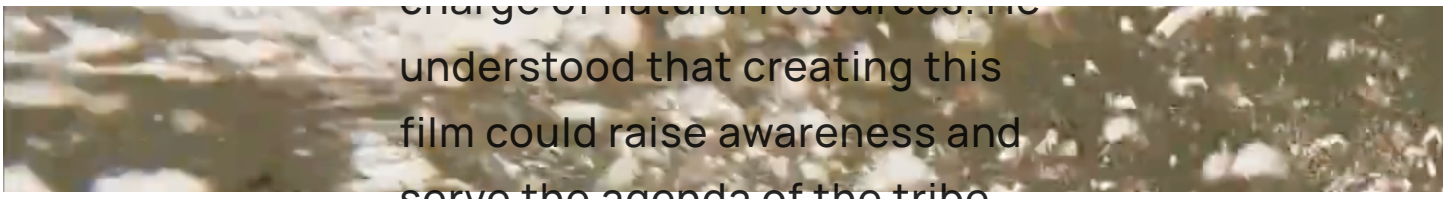
I wanted to incorporate photographs and archival materials because sometimes as humans, we need the visual dimension to understand what has been lost. When you see, for example, how people would build the platforms, how big the salmon were, how abundant



For me, that's why archival images are important: it's a way to build environmental memory, and these photographs in the film serve that purpose, to build and to establish an environmental historical memory of the Snake River.

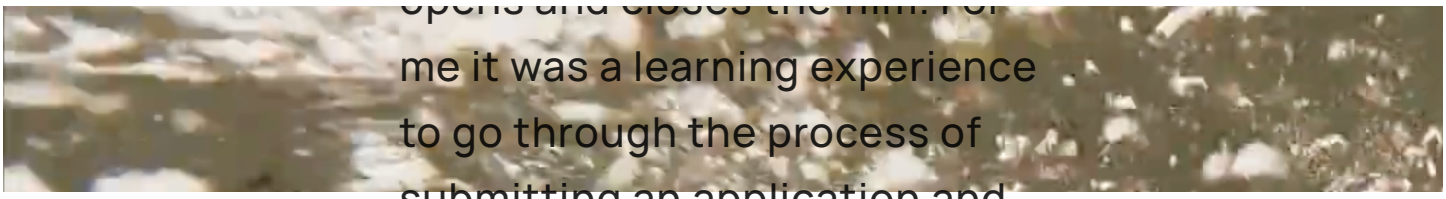
(UN): How did the collaboration with the Nez Perce tribe shape the work, particularly through the use of the Nimíipuu language?

Carolina Caycedo: I think one of the most important aspects of this film is the fact that there is a voice over in Nimíipuu language, which is the language spoken by the Nez Perce, also known as Nimíipuu people. To have that collaboration I had to submit a



charge of natural resources. He understood that creating this film could raise awareness and serve the agenda of the tribe. The application went to the Tribal Council and it was accepted. So, I obtained permission to produce an educational piece. One of the conditions is that this piece has to circulate for free.

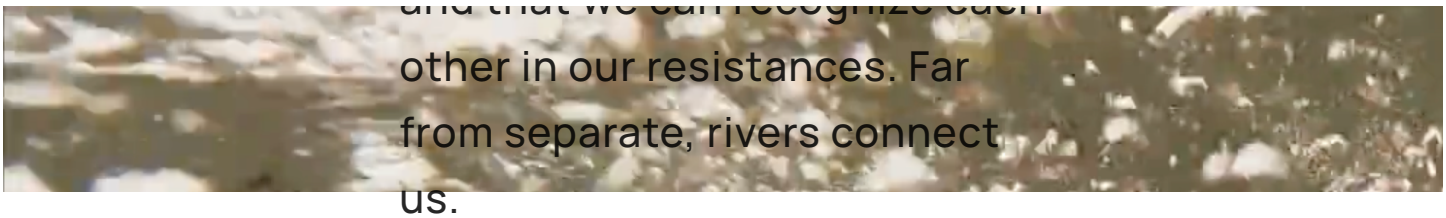
I obtained permission to work with the language program at the Nimíipuu cultural office. And that's how I could collaborate with tátlo, who revised and gave us their input when we wrote the script, corrected some misguidance and misinformation so we could have the correct information that's aligned with the tribe. And then they provided the voiceover, narrating that initial



opens and closes the film. For me it was a learning experience to go through the process of submitting an application and proposal to the Tribal Council, which allowed me to work within their conditions and cultural guidelines.

(UN): What does "reciprocal sacrifice" mean in the current context, and how does this work connect struggles across the Americas?

Carolina Caycedo: My relationship to salmon and the region goes beyond the personal — I think you have to see it in a wider body of work. “Reciprocal Sacrifice” is one of the first works that start to establish deeper connections between the South and the North of the continent of the



and that we can recognize each other in our resistances. Far from separate, rivers connect us.

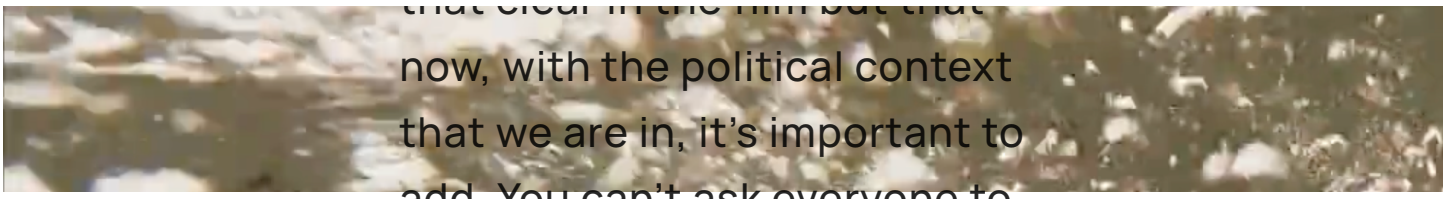
This film was recently showcased in Bogotá in Colombia, where I'm from, and the feedback I received was incredible: it was probably the most well-received piece in the exhibition because people are hungry to learn more about the North and they could relate to it.

"Reciprocal Sacrifice" is one of the first works I've conceived that can tell a story of a



anyone hopefully can relate to it.

The word sacrifice is a complex word. I have learned important teachings from other indigenous people. For example, the Kogi community from the Sierra Nevada in Colombia once told me that to dam a river is to tie a knot in the veins of Mother Earth. When that flow is cut and impounded and dammed, sickness accumulates. In the context of the film, the demand for sacrifice is for those who are in positions of privilege, like most of us in the Western world. That's where that call for reciprocal sacrifice is directed. It would be so unfair to ask



that clear in the film but that now, with the political context that we are in, it's important to add. You can't ask everyone to sacrifice. But for us who are in positions of privilege, I think it's an urgent demand.

12:40

Reciprocal Sacrifice, 2022.
HD video, color, sound. 12 minutes 40 seconds


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