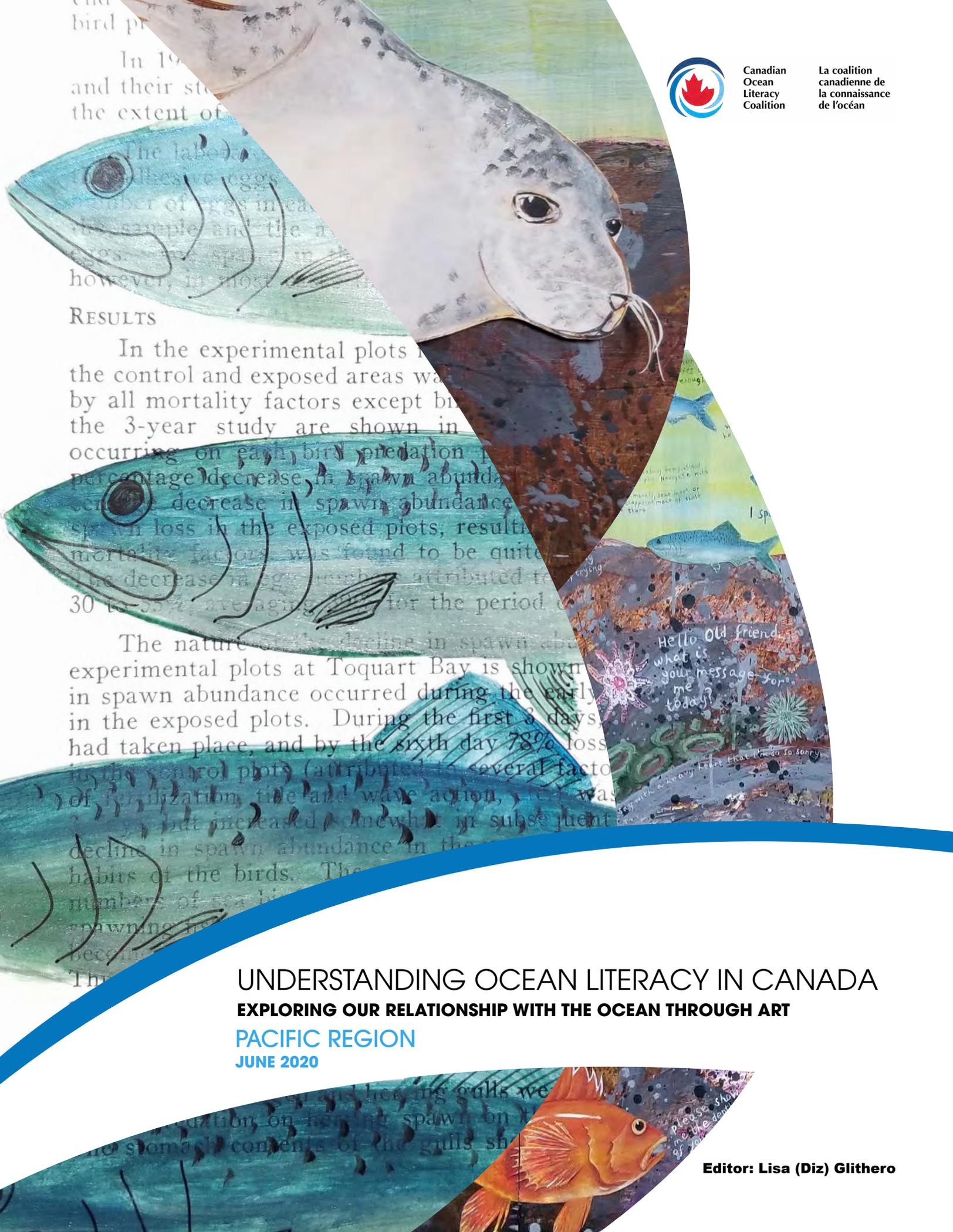




Canadian  
Ocean  
Literacy  
Coalition

La coalition  
canadienne de  
la connaissance  
de l'océan



**UNDERSTANDING OCEAN LITERACY IN CANADA**  
**EXPLORING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OCEAN THROUGH ART**  
**PACIFIC REGION**  
**JUNE 2020**

**Editor: Lisa (Diz) Glithero**



## ROBI SMITH

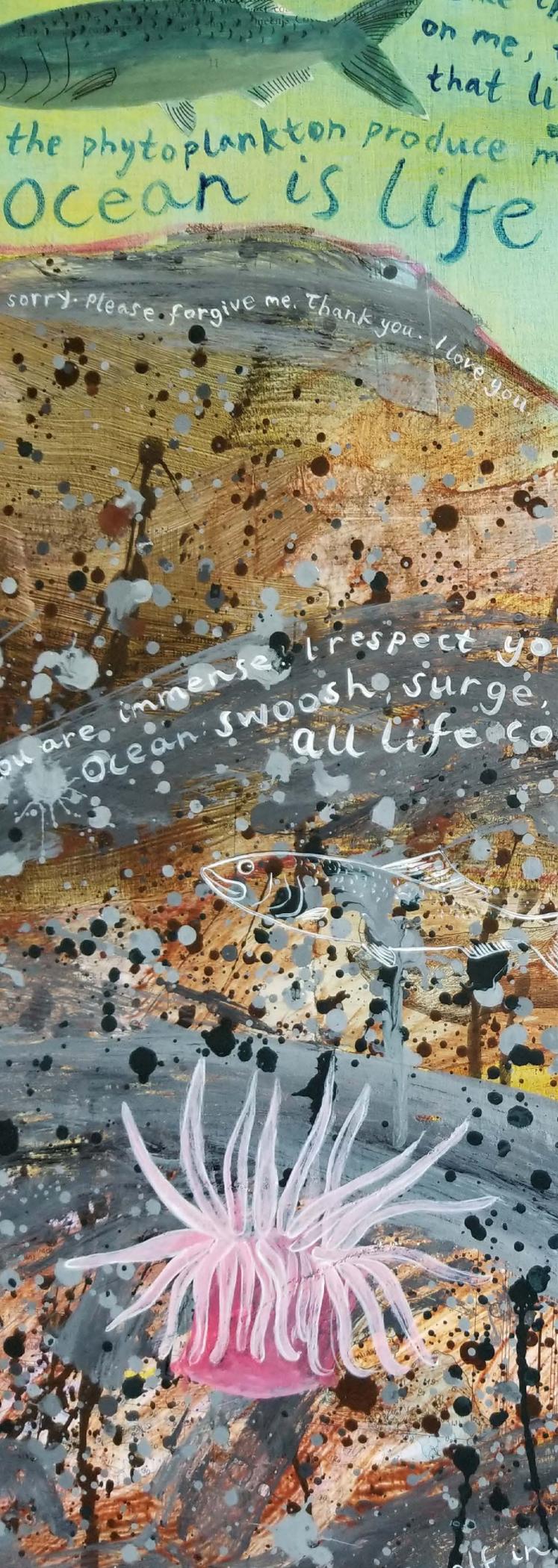
Photo: Keith Jardine

Robi Smith is a visual artist from Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), whose work celebrates coastal ecosystems. For the past 10 years, her practice has focused on community engaged art, including 5 years as artist-in-residence with the City of Maple Ridge, BC. She holds a Masters of Education in Arts for Social Change from Simon Fraser University.

[ROBISMITH.COM](http://ROBISMITH.COM)



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## ARTIST STATEMENT

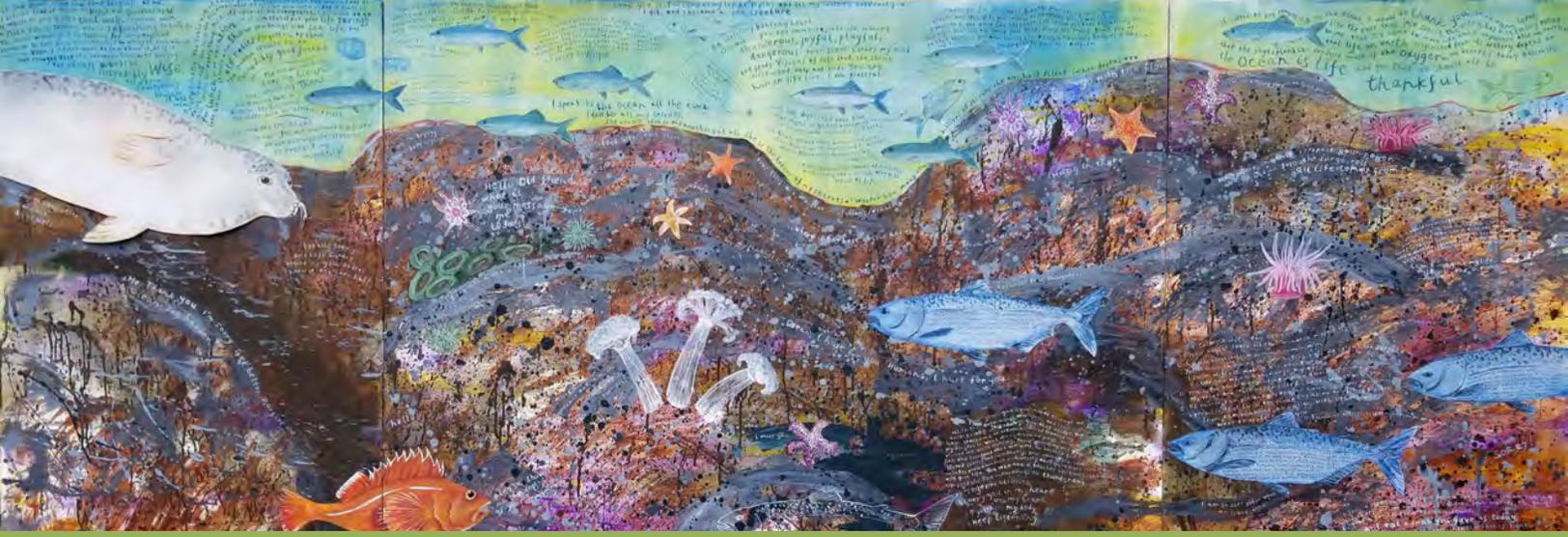
From the outset, I imagined this piece as a mixed media painting of an underwater rocky shoal that, as the project progressed, would become filled with fish, sea stars, anemones, floating jellies, and more. Before COVID-19 hit, my intention was to create the background painting on wood panels and then cut out myriad paper shapes of sea creatures. I would invite people to choose a creature, colour it in and write their responses to the research question: **"If you and the ocean spoke the same language, what would you say to each other?"** Together, we would embed their creature response into the painting.

When the need for physical distancing meant not being able to host face-to-face encounters, I put the challenge out through my website and virtual networks. I posted an image of the background painting and asked the above question. I solicited responses from my e-newsletter subscribers, Facebook and Instagram communities. I also boosted my Facebook post to reach more people in communities up and down the coast. As I received responses, I painstakingly painted the words onto the painting and added sea creatures throughout.

The responses I've received are poetic, questioning, thoughtful, apologetic, deeply personal, and meditative. They include remembered stories and imaginings of what could be. The act of slowly painting the responses onto the artwork has left me feeling both deeply moved and strongly connected to my fellow humans and ocean lovers. Creating the imagery that surrounds the words is a celebration of the beautiful biodiversity that lives just below the surface of our coastal waters here in BC. I have always felt blessed to live here, now more than ever.

\*The finished artwork measures 3 feet high by 8 feet long and is in three panels. The panels will be hinged together so the artwork can open and close like a book, and stand freely on a table.

\*\*There were a total of 42 responses, 38 of which were from female participants.



## IF YOU AND THE OCEAN SPOKE THE SAME LANGUAGE, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO EACH OTHER?

### Go with the flow.

JUDY  
MARCH 29, 2020 MISSION  
FACEBOOK

### Look after each other.

ROB, 65+  
MARCH 28, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
INSTAGRAM

Me: You are immense!

Ocean: yes, but your mind is infinite!

So use your infinite creativity to protect my immensity!

LILLIANNA  
APRIL 6, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
FACEBOOK

### I promise to be thoughtful.

KERRY  
MARCH 28, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
INSTAGRAM

I would be chatting to the ocean about all the cool places its been and the cool stuff it has seen and plan my travels. Like the little turtle that goes into a tunnel/current in a cartoon movie (maybe Nemo?)

DANIELLA  
APRIL 5, 2020 VANCOUVER  
FACEBOOK

### Me: I'm trying.

### Ocean: Keep trying.

NIKKI  
MARCH 28, 2020 PORT COQUITLAM  
INSTAGRAM

Well, I'd apologize for humans in general I think. And thank Mother Ocean for her gifts of calmness and reassurance. Wish it was warm enough to get INTO the ocean right now. I am missing swimming something fierce.

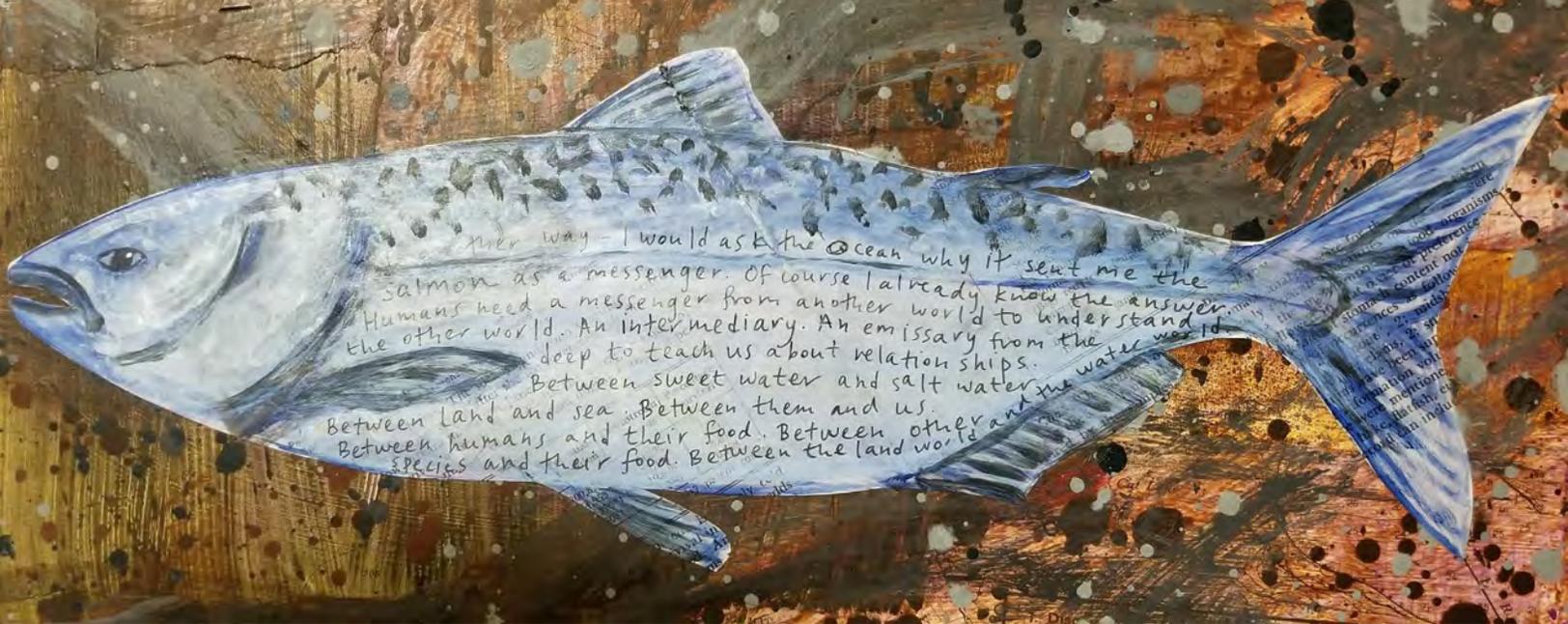
ROSE  
APRIL 5, 2020 VANCOUVER ISLAND  
FACEBOOK

### I miss you.

AMANDA  
APRIL 5, 2020 LADNER  
FACEBOOK

### Please show me the depths of your dream.

LORI  
APRIL 6, 2020 VANCOUVER  
FACEBOOK



I already know we speak the same language. So do we all - that's a given! Humans have always known the ocean's language. These days, though, they have to re-learn it because some of them forget.

In another way - I would ask the ocean why it sent me the salmon as a messenger. Of course I already know the answer. Humans need a messenger from another world to understand the other world. An intermediary. An emissary from the deep to teach us about relationships. Between sweet water and salt water. Between land and sea. Between them and us. Between humans and their food. Between other species and their food. Between the land world and the water world. To be totally astounded by this iconic creature and its giving energy. A Rabbi once told me that Jewish people believe fish offer teachings from the "bigger picture." Water is the "bigger picture." If you understand water, you understand everything. And fish, unlike humans, cannot change their environment. Without a watery home, a fish dies.

CELIA  
APRIL 17, 2020 VANCOUVER  
EMAIL

**Me : Thank you. I'm sorry.  
Get better. Forgive me.  
The Ocean : Try harder.**

ANN  
APRIL 10, 2020 VICTORIA  
NEWSLETTER

**What I would ask how the fish is doing and besides the obvious how can fish and human better live on this earth together. What does the fish know of the water world that he wants to tell me and what I can I tell the fish about our land. There is a lot of devastation but there is hope.**

ASHLEY  
APRIL 27, 2020 HORSESHOE BAY  
INSTAGRAM

**Peace and calm in nature's turmoil!**

BARBARA-JOY  
APRIL 10, 2020 NEW WESTMINSTER  
WEBSITE

**We say to each other: We are one. All is well.**

KATHERINE  
APRIL 11, 2020 VANCOUVER  
NEWSLETTER

**Your tides are massive inhalations/exhalations!**

GABRIELLA  
APRIL 6, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
FACEBOOK





Four years you have moved through me, when the door inside me opens and I approach its uncertainty, it is always you that abides. You have graced me in artwork, swirled through my fingers in wool work, dreamed me in words, visited me while sleeping. Heart wrenching was your call and harrowed was I with grief, for all that you offered freely and abundantly, your movements, your beauty, your abundant biodiversity and how reckless were we with your life. You who are a teacher on living and loss, on sorrow and mourning, on thunderous regeneration. I carry you in my heart, on my heart, within my body. I keep listening.

ERICA  
APRIL 20, 2020 MISSION  
INSTAGRAM

## Hello Old Friend, what is your message for me today?

TAMMY  
APRIL 11, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
NEWSLETTER

**Me: you are immense . I respect your power.**

**Ocean: swoosh, surge, roll. All life comes from me.**

PAULA  
APRIL 12, 2020 VICTORIA  
FACEBOOK

## Where is the best gossip and the best stories in the ocean?

KATE  
APRIL 12, 2020 VANCOUVER  
WORD OF MOUTH

**Ocean, I hurt for you. Humans, I hurt for you.**

NICOLE  
APRIL 12, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
FACEBOOK

## mm hmm mmm / shhhshhhshhhhh/ wOw - thank you

AMY KIARA RUTH  
APRIL 19, 2020 VANCOUVER  
FACEBOOK

I feel a pleasant fatigue from a day spent in the surrounding wilderness. We are motionless on the your still waters, the quiet hiss of a gas lantern the only sound. As I eat a crab you gave us today, I drop pieces of shell into the pool of light and watch them sink slowly, slowly, gone into your dark depths. I am blessed and I am grateful."

FRANK  
MAY 5, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
FACEBOOK

## I am so so sorry for what we have done.

CHRISTINE  
APRIL 19, 2020 VANCOUVER  
INSTAGRAM

If the ocean spoke the same language as me, I believe that it would be kind and good natured. It would be sort of like a cool uncle, or someone with a nice voice, someone who is refreshing to talk to. The ocean would just be looking for company, and someone to talk to as well, it would be willing to talk about anything even if it didn't want to talk about it, or if it just thought that the conversation was boring.

The ocean would be incredibly wise, and know everything, because it has seen everything. You could ask it about your friends, and what the manatees are doing right now.

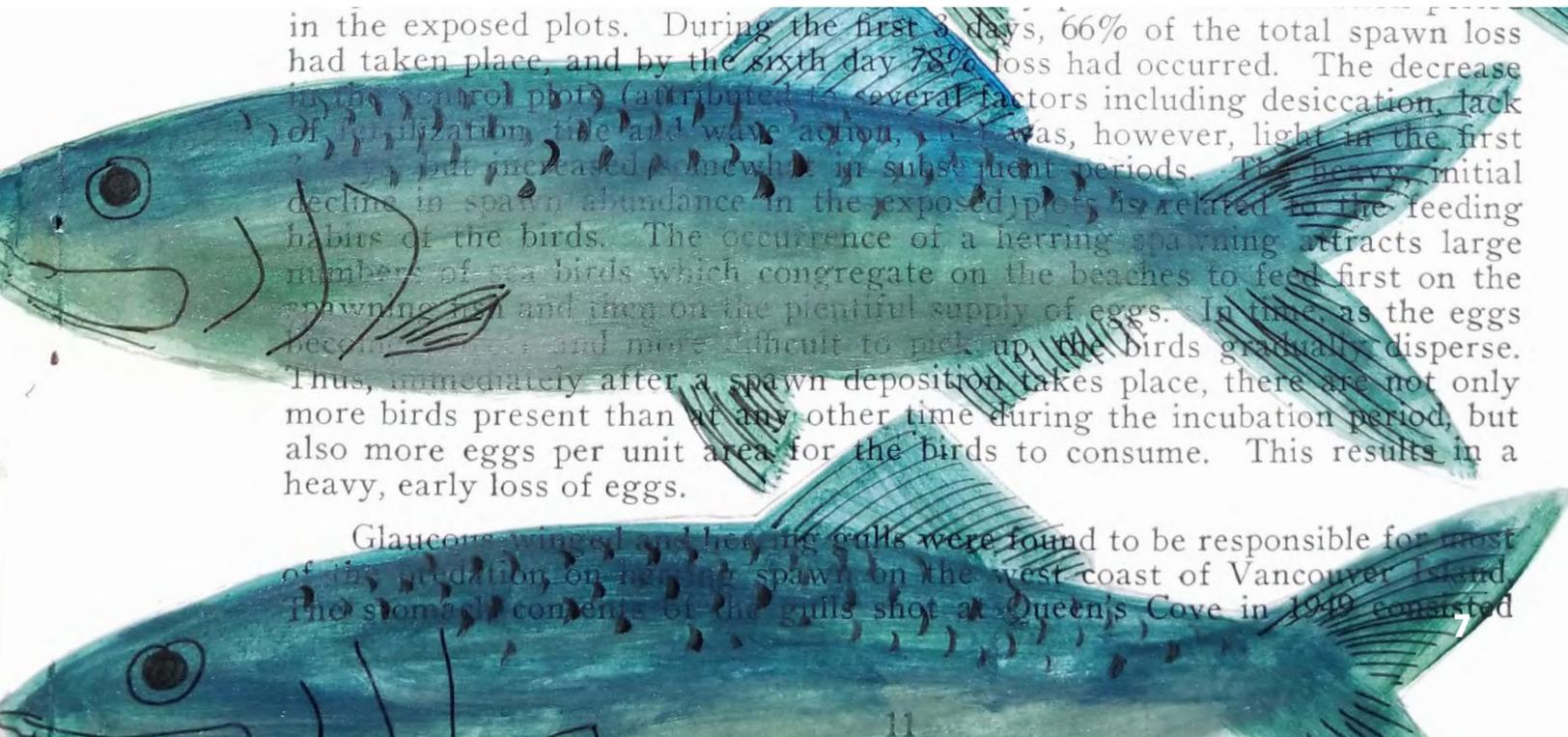
You could ask the ocean what its opinion on a movie is, and it could be your critic for everything. Ask it's opinion on everything, like, where to go for lunch, or on vacation, or if you should put your life savings into bit-coin.

It could also show you things, like sea life, and old relics forgotten by time. The ocean would be an incredibly good friend.

DAVID  
APRIL 20, 2020 POWELL RIVER  
EMAIL

## I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you.

VALERIE  
APRIL 21, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
FACEBOOK



in the exposed plots. During the first 3 days, 66% of the total spawn loss had taken place, and by the sixth day 78% loss had occurred. The decrease in the control plots (attributed to several factors including desiccation, lack of fertilization, tide and wave action, etc.) was, however, light in the first 3 days but increased somewhat in subsequent periods. The heavy, initial decline in spawn abundance in the exposed plots is related to the feeding habits of the birds. The occurrence of a herring spawning attracts large numbers of sea birds which congregate on the beaches to feed first on the spawning fish and then on the plentiful supply of eggs. In time, as the eggs become scarce and more difficult to pick up, the birds gradually disperse. Thus, immediately after a spawn deposition takes place, there are not only more birds present than at any other time during the incubation period, but also more eggs per unit area for the birds to consume. This results in a heavy, early loss of eggs.

Glaucous-winged and herring gulls were found to be responsible for most of the predation on herring spawn on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The stomach contents of the gulls shot at Queen's Cove in 1949 consisted

## I'd say with a heavy heart that I'm so so sorry.

CONNIE  
APRIL 20, 2020  
FACEBOOK

Feel with depth, and over time  
What might be at the bottom of consciousness  
The unseen deep in children's hearts

Look across generations, across centuries  
rather than from one means-end to another  
Unborn generations deserve no less flourishing

Across uncountable waves of evolution  
A constancy remains: life asks to be beheld as life

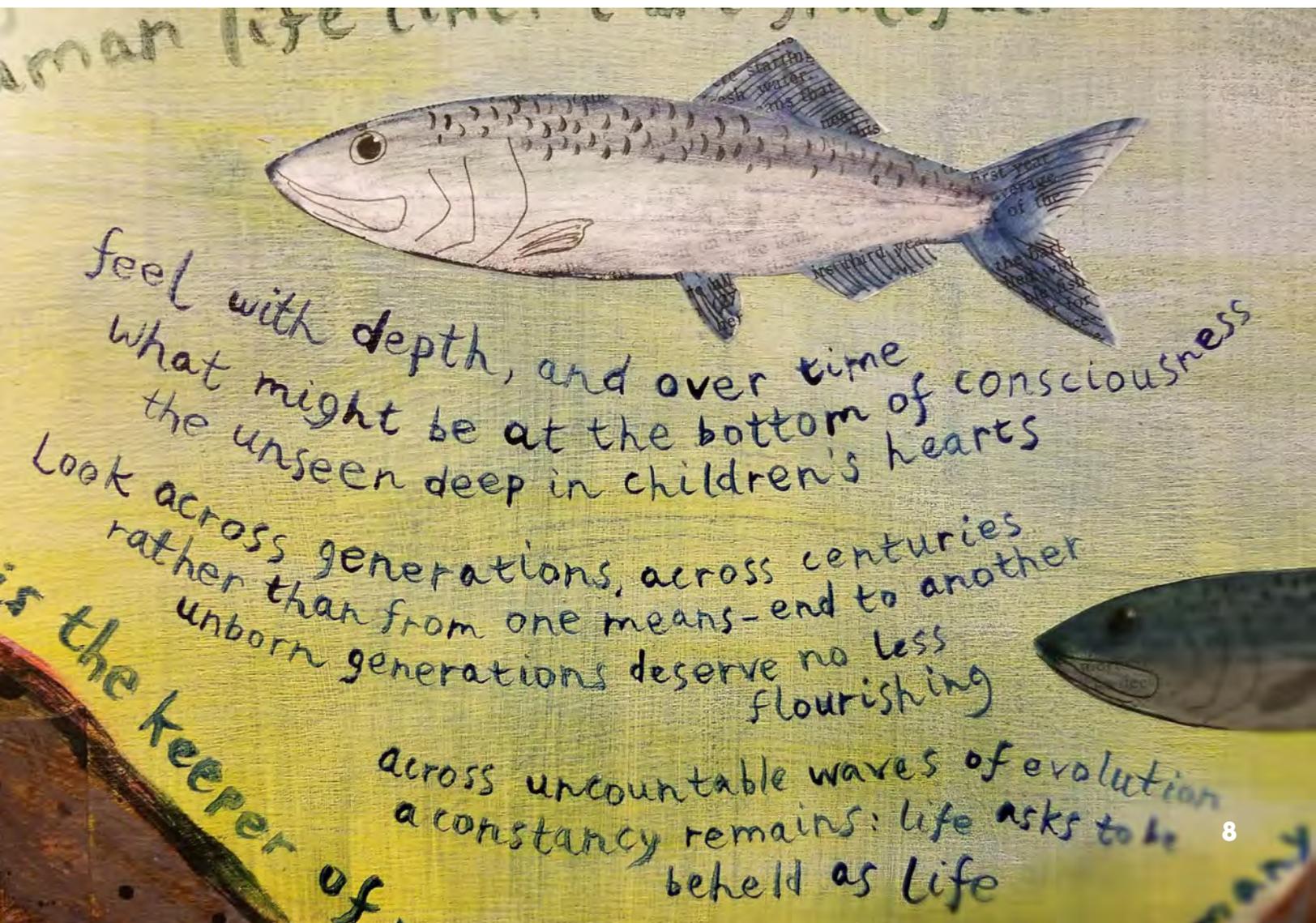
ZUZANA  
APRIL 27, 2020 MAPLE RIDGE  
EMAIL

Be still my beating heart. Ocean . . . You are  
immense, intense, calming, thunderous, joyful,  
playful, dangerous. Your scent clears my mind and  
sends visions of soft sand, sea shells, driftwood,  
kelp and birds  
You are human life line  
I am grateful

JOANN  
APRIL 22, 2020 BURNABY  
FACEBOOK

Thank you for your vast Beauty your loving care your  
ability to provide and Delight your means to make our  
world what it is. It pains me to see what has happened  
but I know that you have the ability to heal and right  
now you are doing just that many are trying to don't  
give up be that Vastness you are Loving You Always  
especially today as I celebrate my birth sending hugs  
from Port Renfrew

DIANE  
APRIL 20, 2020 PORT RENFREW  
FACEBOOK



## I really love you and I hope we are treating you better - I know it has been bad!

SANDY  
MAY 4, 2020 PORT COQUITLAM  
INSTAGRAM

Me: Please be calm so I can cross safely to my island.

Ocean: I don't care about you. Navigate with competence or perish.

In reality, nature has no morals, sentiment, or romance - much to the disappointment of those who rarely commune there.

MARCEL  
APRIL 11, 2020 MUDGE ISLAND  
EMAIL

## Come you said - come to my lower depths and let my coolness surround you. I did and I became a sea creature.

ROSEMARIE  
APRIL 22, 2020 VANCOUVER  
NEWSLETTER

## How much plastic is in you? How much plastic goes in every year?

BEATRICE  
APRIL 20, 2020 VANCOUVER  
FACEBOOK

I do! I speak to the ocean all the time. I tell her all my secrets. She doesn't have to say anything at all. She is the keeper of my secrets ♥ I wonder how many other billions of secrets she has held silent in her depths ♥ ♥ ♥

MEGHAN  
APRIL 25, 2020 SURREY  
FACEBOOK

If I were to say something to the ocean it would be "thank you" on so many levels. Like the fact that just seeing the ocean has a calming effect on me, that it's home to more life than anywhere else on earth, that life on earth originated from its watery depths, or that the phytoplankton produce much of the oxygen we breathe today. Basically, the ocean is life and for that we should all be thankful.

SARAH  
APRIL 19, 2020 VANCOUVER  
FACEBOOK

