OF BORROWS AND BRICOLAGE:
IMAGINING THE WATER, PLANTS, AND PEOPLE
AT ABBOTT FARM MARSHLANDS

By

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This thesis uses *objet trouvés* to reveal the hidden aspects of the landscape that enrich the layers of information assembled in traditional mapping. Part one maps, diagrams, and measures factual information concerning Abbott Farm Marshland’s history. This is accomplished through typical site analysis of physical changes as traced through natural and anthropogenic change. Part two of this thesis explores *objet trouvés* and provides a case study example. In part three, using the information assembled in part one and part two, along with material gathered from the site, I create a series of bricolage art pieces to express personal interpretations of the site.
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“She also shared the stories held by those plants, their origin myths, how they got their names, and what they have to tell us. She spoke of beauty.” ¹

This thesis would not be possible without the women who took their time to share their knowledge, stories, and wisdom with me. I would like to first and foremost thank my thesis advisor Kathleen John-Alder for guiding me, challenging me, and supporting me for several years. Through your teaching, I have been gifted with a newfound way of viewing and loving the landscape. It is a type of appreciation I will always turn to as a future designer. Thank you to my thesis committee Holly Nelson and Arianna Lindberg for believing and supporting the art I yearned to create. Thank you to Mary Leck and Pat Coleman for inviting me into their marshland and sharing the beauty it holds. Thank you to my roommates Adriana Hall and Yat Chan for giving me the strength to finish and for putting up with all the plants and salvaged objects I would lay out on our apartment floor. Thank you Mona for being my person. Thank you to my sisters Denise, Jessa, and Hannah for giving me a space to relax. And of course, thank you Mom loving and encouraging me.

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¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding sweetgrass; Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 44.
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**Introduction**

Maps help reveal the landscape. For most, maps are the quintessential method of imagining or visualizing the factual data of the landscape. Landscape architect James Corner, for example, states maps serve as factual interpretations of reality that effect our understanding of all spaces. Yet at the Abbott Farm Marshlands, a series of tidal and non-tidal marshes located in Hamilton Township, New Jersey, there are hidden treasures, stories, and histories that are lost when the landscape is interpreted only through the lens of facts.

Abbott Farm Marshlands was first introduced to me in a spring 2019 Praxis studio led by professor Kathleen John-Alder. At first, I was underwhelmed with my initial impression of the site: it seemed like just another trail through a simple vegetated marshland. As the class explored the marsh, collecting stray pieces of colorful, smooth glass along the water and striking red leaves from the trees, I began to understand how intriguing Spring Lake actually is, and how the muddy uneven path around Spring Lake acted as the portal into a cacophony of hidden worlds: the way the highway noises in certain areas sometimes overtake the sound of chirping birds; the way vegetation unintentionally frames old buildings, the way infrastructure knits the community and the marsh together. Other remnants of history, like a grand staircase descending from the eroded bluff, and oddly formed built structures by local residents revealed tiny hidden worlds embedded in the almost dizzying and chaotic nature of the marshlands. Ultimately, Spring Lake’s intriguing mosaic of landscapes drew me to explore alternative ways of representing the marsh’s rich natural and culture history. The marsh was more than what it seemed.

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To unveil the unseen in the marsh, I decided to pursue an argument presented by the anthropologist Paul Shepard, and explore the potential of *objet trouvés* to reveal unnoticed aspects of the landscape. Shepard defines *objet trouvés* as natural or discarded objects that catch the eye and were not necessarily created to be art but presented as such. By taking these found objects from the landscape to create something new, he argues, the maker of the *objet trouvés* places metaphoric meaning onto objects, which, in turn, influences our perception of these everyday objects.

Using the notion of *objet trouvés*, as presented by Shepard, I argue that it is possible to add additional layers of metaphor and meaning to the narratives told by traditional mapping. Using Abbott Farm Marshlands as a ground for this study, this thesis will map the marsh’s history and ecology; examine the importance of *objet trouvés* through the notion of gift giving as expressed in one case study of this type of making that already exists within the marsh; and gather materials (*objet trouvés*) from the site to create a series of bricolage art pieces that express my personal interpretations, and the meanings I attach, to the histories embedded in the marsh.

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Methodology

To explore the potential of objet trouvés to reveal a deeper understanding of the marsh, this thesis begins with study of literature pertinent to each part of this thesis; the map, the objet trouvés, and the bricolage.

To explore the potential of maps to detail factual information, this thesis uses maps to deconstruct and layer the history of Abbott Marsh. Prior material collected by student colleagues in a 2019 praxis studio at Rutgers University, conducted by Kathleen John-Alder, serves as the basis for this research. I supplemented this documentation of tidal flow and rise in water elevation over time, roads and housing, sewer and water infrastructure, and plant community locations with additional information on site history provided by the Abbott Farm National Historic Landscape Interpretive Plan, compiled by Hunter Research, in the application of Abbott Farm as a National Historic Landmark. Information from the Plan is used extensively to illustrate anthropogenic change and changes in natural processes over time.

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4 I looked at readings regarding the power and purpose of maps and visualization with Rethinking Mapping by Rob Kitchin, Martin Dodge, and Chris Perkins, “The Agency of Maps”, with James Corner, and Peter Hall’s article Critical Visualization. I heavily relied on Paul Shepard’s article on “Objet Trouvés” and supplemented this with other literature related to things, gifts, and nature such as Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory”, Claude Levi-Strauss’s The Savage Mind, and Robin Wall Kimmerer’s Braiding Sweetgrass. My understanding of the bricolage and creating one was influenced by case studies analyzed in Daniel Wojcik’s “Outsider Art, Vernacular Traditions, Trauma, and Creativity”, and John Beardsley’s book Garden of Revelation.

Fig 1: Aerial Map tracing each site visit

In addition, I walked the site with the botanist Mary Leck and the Patricia Coleman, Director of Friends for the Abbott Marshlands, to learn more about the site’s indigenous plant communities and the use of these plants by the Lenni Lenape. During this walk, I collected plant material for use in the construction of several objet trouvés, photographed the site, and noted these observations on maps. Additional site visits were undertaken to reconfirm this information, locate historical structures, and collect additional plants the Lenni Lenape may have used for the subsequent construction of three objet trouvés (figure 1).

Before creating each objet trouvé, I loosely planned each piece’s message and the location where it would be displayed on the site. To assemble the brisolage from the objet trouvés I collected, I learned different weaving patterns and methods for eco-printing fabric.

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6 The Lenape can also be referred to as the Lenni Lenape or Delaware people. Lenni Lenape (also spelled Lëni Lenapé, Lene Lenape, or Lenne Lanape,) translates to “men of men” or “ordinary people”. I chose to use the spelling “Lenni Lenape” as most materials and modern sources I referenced refer to the indigenous tribe as such.
History

As illustrated in the mapped timeline (figure 2), from the late archaic to late woodland period, the indigenous people of the Delaware River area, the Lenni Lenape people, populated the marshlands. They used the landscape cyclically, traveling from location to location through the marsh based on a schedule surrounding the flora and fauna of the Delaware River. Artifacts dug from excavation sites along Abbott Farm marshlands suggest that hunting and gathering proved to be the main source of food. The earliest physical evidence of any sort of consistent farming appears between A.D 900 and 1000. Notable changes to the floodplain, specifically how the land was terraformed by the Lenape people, are early signs of farming.

Ceramic diversity and presence of triangular projectiles associated with the Middle and Late Woodland era enable archaeologists such as William Schindler to argue the indigenous

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Fig 2: Historical timeline of Abbott Farm Marshlands

7 Hunter, et al. Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark, 3-7
people of these eras had permanent settlements, relied primarily on fishing and gathering of shellfish, gathering carbohydrate rich roots and tuber found around marshes and swamps, and they domesticated crops such as maize. The location of archaeological excavation sites is noted in grey along with the current locations of plants within the marsh the Lenni Lenape were most likely knew and utilized (figure 3).

Fig 3: Historical overlay of indigenous people at the Abbott Farm Marshlands

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9 Ibid. 5
1642 was one of the earliest documented interactions between the Lenni Lenape people and the Europeans, specifically, the Swedish. The Swedish partitioned the land and created a border to define the northern limits of their holdings, and they purportedly did not cross between their settlements and indigenous settlements. The first Europeans to settle lands within the vicinity of the Abbot Farm Marshlands were English Quakers wishing to create a safe haven for members of their religious sect. To this end, two Quakers, Edward Byllynge and John Fenwick, gained control of settlements along the Delaware River. Settlement patterns and land development was defined by rivers, creeks, and pre-existing trail networks created by the indigenous people\textsuperscript{10}.

Settlements along the bluff overlooking Watson’s Creek and Crosswicks Creek, which flow through Abbott Marsh, occurred in the late 1670s. The rich, well-drained soils of the marshes and meadows below these farmland plantations supported an abundance of flora and fauna. The creeks provided access to river routes for transportation of goods. One notable settlement includes George Hutchenson’s log house on the bluff overlooking Watson’s creek. This property was later acquired by John Watson. Later, in 1708, his brother Isaac Watson replaced the original log house with a large stone house that is still there today. During this period of colonization, a notable change to the landscape occurred in 1777, as indicated by a map survey, with the creation of an artificial reservoir used for fish storage. The reservoir is known today as Sturgeon’s Pond. The marsh also figured prominently during the American Revolution. In the winter of 1777 at the height of the Revolutionary War, George Washington, fearing the British would invade New Jersey through Philadelphia, scuttled a small fleet of boats stationed at

\textsuperscript{10} Hunter, et al. \textit{Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark}, 64.
Crosswicks Creek (as seen in the dotted line in Figure 4, a diagram conveying a historical overlay of the colonial to present-time use of the marsh). 11

The next major change to the landscape occurred in the 1830s, with the construction of the Delaware and Raritan Canal, and the Camden and Amboy Railroad. The success of such infrastructure led to Trenton’s transformation from a market town to major industrialization center.

The construction of the Canal impacted the drainage of the lowlands 12. All drainage from the marsh was deflected into Crosswicks Creek, whereas Watson’s Creek continued to drain directly into the Delaware through a single culvert. By 1900, however, the Delaware and Raritan Canal began to run at a deficit, and it halted operation in 1933. Today, the canal towpath serves as the route of the River Line. The portions of the canal that remain serve as a source of drinking water and recreation.

In 1843, archeologist Charles Conrad Abbot, whom the marsh is later named after, was born. Roughly twenty years later, in 1867, he acquired land within the marsh and called the property the “Three Beeches”, aptly named for a cluster of trees. 13

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11 Ibid, 64-81.
12 Ibid, 103-113.
13 Ibid., 151.
Abbott is best known for numerous articles on the flora, fauna, geology, climate, and presence of indigenous peoples of the marsh he frequently walked. His naturalist and romantic view of this landscape, coupled with his curiosity regarding the site, fueled his interest in archaeology. Building on the knowledge he acquired from his collection of indigenous artifacts, Abbott wrote the “The Stone Age in New Jersey”, which appeared in the *American Naturalist* in 1872. In these early archaeological writings Abbott theorized the existence of what he called
“glacial man” in artifacts he was finding. Through the artifacts he gathered, he suggested there were three distinctive ancient, overlapping cultures within the marsh; a paleolithic culture of “Stone Age” artifacts, an “argillite” culture characterized by the hunting and gathering artifacts, and a “modern Indian” culture he tied to the Lenape people14.

The timeframe of indigenous settlement that Abbott constructed from gathered artifacts garnered attention from other academics, who, in an attempt to prove Abbott wrong, excavated and studied areas of the marsh. Through an intensive study of Abbott’s collection and evidence, including the recovery of human remains from the archaeological sites, Abbott’s theories about the paleolithic man were eventually proved wrong. Most to all of the artifacts found within the marsh were instead attributed to the Lenape people, with some additionally tied to early European immigrants.15

By the 1860s, in conjunction with the industrialization of Trenton, the area surrounding and within the marshlands shifted from the production of agricultural produce to commercial merchandise. Extensive clay mining operations cut into edges of the exposed bluff. The need to transport mined products led to further dredging along Crosswicks Creek. The creation of a trolley line opened the land north of Watson’s Creek bluff for development16.

This period of industrial development was followed by the creation of “Broad Street Park”, a picnic ground located at the end of a trolley line that transported from central Trenton to the blufftop fields above Abbott Marsh and lowlands below. Visitors descend from the top of the bluff by means of terraced stairs, to a constructed body of water named Spring Lake. The park, later renamed “Spring Lake Park”, boasted a variety of passive and active recreational amenities.

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid, 103-113. Both the extensive archaeological excavations and the artifacts recovered were integral in the subsequent 1976 registration of Abbott Farm Marshlands as a National Historic Landmark.
16 Ibid, 103-113.
such as boating, fishing, and theatrical/musical performances. The park’s creation laid the groundwork for many of the paths and features seen today, such as the allee of willow trees along the lake. In an effort to draw larger crowds of people, in 1907 the trolley line company supported the development of “Broad Street Park” into the “White City Amusement Park”. Visitors arrived by trolley, walked down the street to the casino building, which served as an entrance into the amusement park. Concrete cast iron stairs at the back of the casino, remnants of which are still in existence today, led visitors down the bluff to the lake. All the buildings were painted white, a trendy move in the early 1900’s that took direct inspiration from the World Columbian Exposition. In its heyday, in addition to the casino, the amusement park boasted a carousel, scenic railway, gondola rides, and several built attractions like a “Mystic Maze” and flume ride. The amusement park was short lived, and later shut down in the 1920s (figure 5).

After the amusement park closed, the land lay vacant. In 1922, Nick Innocenzi and Company erected a concrete block manufacturing plant, which notably “must have had a profoundly damaging effect on the pastoral character of the marshlands and Spring Lake”. In an effort to preserve marshlands and control rampant development, the Broad Street Civic Association formed in the 1930s. The Association purchased 77 acres of land around the lake with the goal of building a large apartment complex, which was never realized. Later, the John

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17 Ibid, 95-103.
18 The World Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893 and was heralded for its grand display of scientific and technological innovation. All the buildings were given white facades for several reasons. One was architect Daniel Burnham’s “City Beautiful” movement which turned to neoclassicism and Beaux-arts inspiration to invoke a sense of classiness and unity in the city. Another reason was to allow for light to reflect off the white paint so the light show at night could shine brightly. The amusement park at Spring Lake followed the trend of painting their buildings white as a way of increasing their grandeur in a similar fashion to the 1893 World’s Fair.
A. Roebling’s Son Company acquired an additional 330 more acres of land – all of which was eventually turned over to Mercer County's care. In 1957, Roebling Park, a designated wildlife refuge and passive recreational area, was established.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Fig 5: Postcards depicting the White City Amusement park in its heyday.}\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 95-103.
\textsuperscript{22} Images are courtesy of the James Colello and the Hamilton Township Public Library Local History Collection with archival and graphical retouching by archivist Thomas Glover.
The Existing Analysis

Fig 6: Aerial map of proposed site showing existing conditions

Fig 7: Aerial map of the proposed site

The primary study area for this thesis, as highlighted in red in figure 6, and closer in figure 7, encompasses freshwater tidal and non-tidal marshes, ponds, swamps, and woodlands. Of the roughly 600 acres, 317 acres belong to John A. Roebling Memorial Park, a designated wildlife refuge and passive recreational park. The bluff to the north, a steep eroding incline, separates the Spring Lake Area from the surrounding residential area. (Figure 8) The construction of the I-295 and the NJ-29 highway follows the alignment already laid out by the Delaware and Raritan Canal and effectively separate this section from the other parts of the Abbott Farm National Historic district. The highway also physically separates Sturgeon pond from the Delaware River. Additionally, sewer and water lines, a coal-fired power plant, electric transmission lines, and a

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waste landfill impact the southern half of the marsh. (Figure 9) The topographic map indicates the marsh sits in the areas of lowest elevations. Minute shifts in elevation, however, impact the hydrology and thus the plant and animal communities. (Figure 10).

As revealed to me by botanist Mary Leck, no matter the time of year, Abbott Marshlands is always teeming with life. Her extensive research on seed dispersal and its impact on the marsh’s flora has informed the conservation of the Abbott Farm Marshlands. Figure 11 and figure 12 illustrate the annual growth cycles, *Typha latifolia* (cattails) and *Zizania aquatica* (wild rice) key plants to both the Lenni Lenape and the existing marshlands. In essence, these plant cycles are a testament to how, despite the numerous disruptions to its surroundings, the Abbott Farm Marshlands is resilient and here to stay.
Fig 8: Topography of Abbott Marshlands and its surrounding area.

Fig 9: Infrastructure map of Abbott Marshlands and surrounding area

Fig 10: Plant communities map of Abbott Marshlands and its surrounding areas
Fig 11: Annual growth cycle of Typha latifolia (cattail)
Fig 12: Annual growth cycle of Zizania aquatica (wild rice)
Part 1: The Map

The mapmaking process ultimately strives to represent the landscape, and thus translates reality into points, lines, and shapes. According to geographers Rob Kitchin, Martin Dodge, and Chris Perkins in their book *Rethink Mapping*, cartographers seek “to reduce error in representation and to increase map effectiveness.” Accordingly, the resulting maps seek to minimize distortion in the communication of data. Kitchin and others go on to explain:

"An emphasis upon the map as representation, for example, is also often strongly associated with the quest for general explanation, with a progressive search for order, with Cartesian distinction between the map and the territory it claims to represent, with rationality…"

In this sense, maps are forms of representation that seek to objectively make sense of the world. But this act of rationalization is not as objective as it seems, since humans set the rules for representation. As argued by the landscape architect James Corner in the essay “Agency of Mapping”, for example, maps do not just physically represent knowledge; they have the power to create meaning through the ways they actualize information, and thus project a “mental image into the spatial imagination”. As Corner further argues, this spatial projection gives maps an agency that impacts the understanding of space through its ability to act as the mediator between reality and reality related concepts, like landscapes. Kitchin and others explain it this way:

"Maps are of-the-moment, brought into being through practices (embodied, social, technical), always re-made every time they are engaged with; mapping is a process of constant re-territorialization. As such, maps are transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context-dependent."

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25 Ibid, 2.
26 Ibid, 2.
28 Ibid, 206.
In other words, whenever readers interpret the symbols that comprise a map — interact with it — the information is always being “remade”, implying that the individual determines what they see and how they see it. Thus no matter how objectively a map is made, its intention and interpretation will differ from person to person.

In this understanding of mapping, it is clear that maps have their own agency and also grant agency to the individual. Looking at the Abbott Farm Marshlands, maps and the mapping of site conditions like plant communities, infrastructure, and topography, provide important information — have agency — on the physical form of the site and its connections to its surroundings. This information is also a time specific form of narration that affects the way people view their terrain. Accordingly, both Kitchin and Corner argue the power of mapping should not be overlooked and left unchecked. Kitchin, for example, views this power as an ideology inherent in the ability of maps to “lie” due to the choices and “decisions that have to be made during their creation, and through how they are read by the user”. Just as maps have the potential to reveal new connections between data, maps have the potential to influence our understanding of data because of any unknown social or political agenda attached to each map. Because of this level of agency, Corner explains there should be an insistence on “equality of importance amongst mapping actions (techniques), mapping effects (consequences), and maps themselves”. While it is impossible for maps to remain neutral, as there will always be a story to tell, Corner argues cautious measures should be taken to make sure maps can be read in such a way that the individual can distinguish the narrative a map hopes to perpetuate in order to see the particular truth being disseminated. Essentially, maps are never neutral and one must take

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30 Ibid, 2.
31 Ibid, 9.
32 James Corner, The Agency of Mapping (na, 1999), 205.
accountability for the ideology inherent in the maps they create, as the process of mapping and its arrangement of data have the power to change the way people view and believe in their terrain.\textsuperscript{33}

Here lies a call to action to rethink the ways we map. Mapmaking and research focused on replication, scales, themes, and points and lines are simply not enough to illustrate the intricacies of a wider world. Physical mapping alone, no matter how layered and complex in its abstraction of information, can never fully express the way humans interpret and make sense of the world. There are qualities of the landscape that cannot be captured in the “of-the-moment” ideology that Kitchin described earlier. These qualities, like the hidden treasures I saw on my various site visits, are what I believe are missing from my initial mapping of the marshlands. I wanted to see why Mary Leck saw beauty in the marsh and how she found it in the seed dispersal of plants like \textit{Typha latifolia}.

To take accountability for the power of my maps, I decided to explore another way to envision the landscape that gives almost complete agency to the viewer rather than the map. This approach, following thoughts expressed by the philosopher Umberto Eco in his theory of “open work”, examines the collaboration between the viewer and the artist (cartography, designer, or bricoleur). Modern art, he states, has an “‘openness’ based on the theoretical, mental collaboration of the consumer, who must freely interpret an artistic datum, a product” which has already been imbued with the “full emotional and imaginative resources” of the creator \textsuperscript{34}. In this case, there is intentional ambiguity to an artwork that requires a level of “suggestiveness” that relies heavily on the collaboration between the viewer and how they interpret the artist’s work. \textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Umberto Eco. \textit{The Open Work}. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989, 9, 11-12
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 9
To implement this sense of “open work” through an exploration of experimental mapping is where the *object trouvé* comes into play.
Part 2 : Objet trouvé

Fig 13: Abstraction of Mary Norton's Borrower in the Abbott Marshlands

Where words fail, things do not. Everyone can understand the idea of an object. Objects carry a physical presence and are finite, tangible things that are often universally understood. According to literary historian Bill Brown, a thing is unique because of its ability to be circulate through people’s lives and tell their stories. When an object is acquired, people look “through” it to see what they reveal about “history, society, nature, or culture” – essentially what they disclose about human nature. At its core, the thing represents a human’s desire to make contact with the real – to materialize meaning. In this case, the meaning of the object relies on an individual’s experience, ethics, values, and comprehension of both medium and message.

Imagine adding another layer of significance on top of a pre-existing object. This exploration of spatial interpretation and contextualizing is what cultural anthropologist Paul Shepard refers to as the objet trouvés. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, an objet trouvé is a “natural or discarded object found by chance and held to have aesthetic value”. It can refer to naturally formed objects or “man-made artifacts that were not originally created as

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art but are displayed as such” 39. As argued by Shepard, an objet trouvé is more than the collection of pressed fall foliage or old bike parts because, when taken into possession by a new human being, these found objects begin to perform differently. By taking these items home and bringing them into the artist’s life, these objects “may speak not of their literal meaning”, or their intended purpose, but reflect whatever symbolism the artist imbues40. Depending on their assemblage — depending on the sole placement of the object in the landscape — these treasures take on additional metaphors and added meanings.

Imagine the implications created from making something new from something borrowed. The bricolage, the artistic process of creating new solutions with existing materials, is the assemblage of the objet trouvé into meaningful, interactive works. According to Levi-Strauss, author of The Savage Mind, when the bricoleur surveys their creation and “engages in a sort of dialogue with it,” they survey the possible answers these found objects can offer them 41. Thus, the bricoleur skillfully creates new objects and meanings while redefining the myths surrounding these fragmented and salvaged objects. As a result, there is a unique juxtaposition between the possible, existing history of a found object and the new imbued meaning placed by its new owner. In that dichotomy of old and new, past and present, exists the possibility of a completely new and innovative ways of viewing these assembled art pieces when placed in the context of landscape environments.

Further enriching this idea of layered meaning and newfound birth is the site specificity of the object trouvés and its ability to contextualize the added layers of meaning in relation to the object’s surroundings and to other objects in those surroundings. The relationship between other

39 Ibid.
objects and the terrain are quintessential to understanding what each layer of significance can reveal about nature, culture, or society. Consequently, because the *objet trouvé* is site specific, depending on the type of space, there are different levels of interaction. There is the relationship shared between the bricolage and the physical surrounding, and the bricolage and the social community.

The resulting push and pull between bricoleur, bricolage, the surrounding environment and social community, as noted by Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, becomes a form of gift giving forged from the connection shared between nature and the individual. A gift, she writes, is “something for nothing” and cannot be sold 42. The same is true, I argue, when a salvaged item is found and repurposed and recontextualized into an *objet trouvé*. By placing these everyday items within a specific site, the bricoleur essentially returns nature’s favor by giving the object a new life. At the same time, the bricoleur returns something new and presents a gift to the surrounding community. And whether it be on an individual or community level, the ways people interact with this bestowed gift will determine its significance and worth.

When I look at Abbott Farm Marshlands, I see the remnants of history, the sounds and beauty of nature, as the site’s gifts to us. (Figure 14) Indeed, spaces like the ruins of the White City amusement park staircase and physically built bricolages can easily be seen as gifts. But the sound of the highway buzzing far in the distance or the sound of woodpeckers hard at work are the often easily overlooked gifts we are blessed with receiving. It is, as Kimmerer describes, “…human perception that makes the world a gift” 43.

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42 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass; Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants* (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 27
43 Ibid, 30.
Fig 14: Physical and non-physical objet trouvés in the Spring Lake area

The many ways found objects offer a redefined understanding of purpose is the exact reason bricolage is such a strong visualization technique. As noted by the geographer Donald Meinig, effective landscapes cannot be contrived without a synthesis of the cumulative past, present, projected future, and intent. Landscapes are “…a great exhibit of consequences” as they culminate the very essence of life on earth 44. They are the physical manifestation of politics, social ideologies, and trends as all human events must take place, whereas “…all problems are anchored in place” 45. When recontextualized back into the landscape, the bricolage of objet trouvé provides new meanings and ways of seeing that traditional mapping often overlook. As a way of visualizing the terrain, found objects act as anchors in the landscape that allow users to experience the past, present, and innovative, artistic future, as well as redefine space.

44 Meinig, Donald W. "The Beholding Eye: Ten versions of the same scene" in The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical essays (1979): 44.
45 Ibid. 47
Case Study

Off the beaten path of Spring Lake is a bridge constructed of spare wooden planks, fallen branches, and rubber coated wires (figures 15 and 16). The bricolage bridge was built by a local resident who frequents the marshlands. Aerial imagery reveals evidence of its construction as far back as 2014. As seen in figure 17, the local resident - the bricoleur has continuously added, altered, and fixed his bricolage bridge, following physical changes within the marsh.
Located along a tidal inlet, the bridge connects the path surrounding Spring Lake to the service roads constructed for vehicles maintaining the powerlines. The bridge is announced with a welcome mat stapled into the mosaiced, wooden floor. (figure 18). Often seen at the entrance of a person’s house, the physical welcome mat is a cheeky invitation to this alternate world or perhaps the alternate home created by its bricoleur. Once past the welcome mat, visitors enter the rickety wooden bridge and are forced to slow down and inspect their surroundings. There are electrical cords, that bind together a makeshift banister made of fallen branches, metal poles, and salvaged 2 x 4s. The wires, wrapped around wooden remnants of the site, serve as reminders of the marsh’s proximity to the surrounding suburban landscape and the industrial wastelands – the powerlines, garbage dumps, and sewer plants - that have been constructed over the course of history.

At a certain point, the banisters disappear and the walkway opens to a “deck” where the wooden planks blend with the vegetation of the marsh. In the middle of the deck, a padded, folding chair resides. It is not the most comfortable place to sit, but it beckons the visitor to pause and rest for a bit. The chair tells people this is not a bridge meant exclusively for getting

Fig 17: Changes in the bridge between 2014 to 2021
from point A to point B; rather it is an observation
deck that brings people onto the water to overlook
this pocket of the marsh. As the wooden planks
creak underneath the visitor’s feet, it is not a
reminder to be safe, but instead a reminder that the
visitor is only a few inches above the gently flowing
stream. As a bricolage of found objects, this bridge
successfully invites visitors to pause and truly
marvel at the marsh and the gifts it provides.

This assemblage of objects is a
quintessential example of the unique ability the
objet trouvé, as Paul Shepard argues, to represent
the complex, and rich, relationship of people to their
surroundings. If the bridge is the bricoleur’s attempt
at understanding his landscape, then each storm or
high tide that tears down a part of the bridge is the
marsh’s attempt to respond and provide another
layer of meaning. As the bricoleur and the marsh
continue this song and dance, the rest of the
community who visit the marsh are the recipients of
their show. Unknowingly, their reaction and
reception to each other, as seen in the construction
of the bridge, is an amazing gift. If it was revered as

Fig 18: Welcome mat found at the "entrance" of this transient space
trash, most likely the maintenance crew would have torn it down already. Instead, the community’s response to the bridge is one of wonder. As a result, although not outwardly advertised, it continues to grow and change with the marsh. It is the marsh’s little secret, tucked away in a corner that only the true explorer can find. Essentially, it is a reward to those who venture deep into the marsh past the thicket of vegetation and through the mud. Through this secret acceptance, the bridge is valued by the bricoleur, the community, and nature.

Fig 19: Electrical cords used to bind scrap wood pieces together.  
Fig 20: Corner of the bricolage bridge where the "observation deck" opens up to the marsh.
**Part 3: Bricolage**

The bricolage bridge is absent from any formal map or historical overview of the Abbott Marsh. It lives for the community today and stands as a way of experiencing whimsey in a similar way the White City Amusement park once sparked joy for visitors of Spring Lake. It also provided the catalyst for my *objet trouvés*, and my desire to use materials from the marsh to capture, connect, and bridge time and space.

Starting with picking up whatever caught my eye, I built my collection of found objects—such as the specific plants the Lenni Lenape may have used—with each site visit. I sought to organize my collection of specimens and salvaged items in relation to where I found them spatially. To understand and categorize the objects and data in front of me I turned back to mapping. As Kitchin suggests, mapping as representation is often “strongly associated with the quest for general explanation, with a progressive search for order”[^46]. Because of my familiarity and comfort with the ways mapping conveyed information, I used mapping as a way of retracing my journey of collecting—my path (figure 21). Through the sole act of collecting, the physical objects gathered have revealed my journey through the marsh in that specific time through mapping. By overlaying the location of the acquired item to their location, I begin to blur the lines between mapping and *objet trouvés*. I begin the process of bricolage—the process of using something existing to repurpose and to create new meaning.

After pressing each leaf to preserve its beauty, I moved to gathering whatever yarn, rope, or thread I had lying around my house. By restricting myself to using only what was nearby, I was able to immerse myself in the role of the bricoleur, an artist who only creates or repairs

items with found objects. I became the borrower by taking what I needed from the site and my home. I became the bricoleur by recontextualizing my collection into something new.

Each bricolage piece came with its own message in regards to the relationship between nature, the community, and myself. Daniel Wojcik, a folklore professor at the University of Oregon, believes the bricoleur’s process is essential to the artform. Recycling salvaged pieces and bringing them back to life allows for a physical and emotional reassembly of oneself 47. As a result, the process of creating each piece acted as a form of therapy for me in my time of Covid isolation. I was attempting to create collaboration and connections in a time when we were discouraged from being around others and encouraged to isolate in solitude.

At the same time, the material quality of objects and their reconstruction align with the psychology of collecting. Psychoanalyst and an art historian, Werner Muensternberger explains, “at a time when helplessness coincides with hopelessness and anxiety… security is sought

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47 Daniel Wojcik, "Outsider Art, Vernacular Traditions, Trauma, and Creativity." *Western Folklore* 67, no. 2/3 (2008): 189-190.
elsewhere. The notion of symbolic substitutes is but a short distance”\textsuperscript{48}. Muensternberger
believes collecting is pathological and inherently ingrained within humans. When the infant is
separated from their mother and realizes what it is like to sometimes be alone, the infant may
substitute a blanket or teddy bear as a source of temporary comfort. When translated for adults,
acquiring new objects also provides a sense of temporary relief from feelings of fear, loneliness,
or uncertainty. However, once the feeling of comfort fades away, the collector must continuously
supply to their collection to negate any unwarranted anxieties.

In the case of bricolage, while “objects in the collector’s experience, real or imagined,
allow for a magical escape into a remote and private world”, the objects alone are not enough\textsuperscript{49}.
As the bricoleur, the act of collecting alone was not enough to reconstruct myself from a sense of
loneliness created because of Covid isolation. The act of bricolage became method of creating
the connection to nature and the community I desperately sought. Essentially, the process of
creating each piece was a way of weaving myself into Abbott Marshlands, creating a relationship
with the marsh, and rebuilding my relationship with nature.

\textsuperscript{48} Werner Muensterberger. \textit{Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives.} Princeton University Press,
2014,18.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 15.
Creation

In total, three bricolage pieces were created and displayed at the marsh.

The first bricolage was made to bring people to the top of the staircase located at the entrance of the Spring Lake area (figure 22). My goal with the piece was to make people question the very staircase they stand upon. At the moment, the grand amusement park staircase lays in ruins and sticks out as an oddity within an otherwise peaceful looking marsh. However, this bricolage uses texture, familiar objects, and plants to flip that narrative and represent Spring Lake as the chaos, the cacophony of the active, and the true mystery of the area and everything surrounding it, like the staircase, acting as one woven, intertwined landscape. As a physical interpretation of an aerial map, I used the pale, neutral colors seen in the staircase to represent everything surrounding the lake and employed color and chaos to represent the lake. As a woven tapestry, the obscure oddities within the piece are the found objects within and around Spring
Lake. Using a variety of yarns that reminded me of certain plant communities and landscapes I witnessed within the marsh, I wove a combination of found materials and yarns to create a retelling, and remapping, of a site’s history.

To start, I built my loom and strung the “warp”, or the vertical string that runs across the whole piece. The weave is what runs horizontally and in between each string along the warp (figure 23). When it comes to the weave, essentially only four types of techniques were used throughout the entire piece.

- **Tabby weave**: The most basic type of weave that lays flat and gives horizontal tension that ties everything together.

  To represent flatter landscapes like the asphalt of the suburbs or the parking lot and dirt paths at the Spring Lake’s entrance, I use the tabby weave. Consequently, this weave also act as stitches that adhere the found objects to the tapestry map.

- **Rya knots**: This knot resembles the tassels or fringe that hang loose. Depending on the size of the tassel, the rya knot create a flowing or fuzzy texture.

  In areas meant to look like the tops of trees I shave the patches of rya knots to make them fuzzy. To represent how the landscape extends further than what the tapestry shows, longer rya knots hang loose at its base.

- **Loop stitch**: This technique takes yarn and weaves it loosely between the warp to create loops of various sizes.

  To interpret the bluff leading down to the marsh I wanted a way of conveying how close the topography lines are as seen on a typical map. The loop stitch translates the build up of topography through a vertical abstraction of height and repetitive forms.
• Soumak: Soumak is a way of incorporating chunkier materials or roving, loose cotton fibers, into a series of wraps that can resemble braids.

Roving allowed me the space to experiment with combining fibers with plants. I dyed some cotton fibers with crushed leaves of goldenrod and other dried leaves, then wove the roving into the tapestry with the soumak technique. The chunkiness of the roving let me hide small asters into the fibers as well, thus blurring the lines between material and salvaged object.

Fig 23: Progress photos capturing the process weaving materials and salvaged objects on the loom.
Fig 24: Circular bricolage woven into the vegetation around Spring Lake.

Fig 25: Circular mapping exercise completed in Spring Praxis 2019.
As seen in figure 24, the second bricolage piece also abstracts Spring Lake. This piece takes inspiration from another piece completed in the 2019 praxis studio at Rutgers University by everybody in the class. The piece from the praxis studio uses a circle to represent Spring Lake as a void and the small pieces of paper that surround the circle represent the class’s interpretation of the landscape surrounding the lake (figure 25). Each of us made a set of rectangles - some with found materials and some painted with water or plants from the site - that were then curated around the void.

With that said, the second bricolage piece also looks at Spring Lake as a void. The weaving and assembly of plants around the empty circle are meant to represent the diversity of plant communities within the marsh and where they may be found in relation to the lake. The goal was to emphasize how rich the marsh truly is. However, this richness is not just in relation to plant diversity. It also speaks towards a richness in paths or areas to explore other than Spring Lake. As a reading of the landscape, the viewer can start at any point of and follow along its curve. Consequently, viewers can look at the tangents created by the lines of the plants and link areas together across these imaginary spokes around the circle.

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50 Spring Lake circle exercise image courtesy of Kathleen John-Alder. The following students participated in the creation of the Spring Lake circle exercise: Samantha Moss, Axel Gonzalez, Yat Chan, Kelley Forsyth, Jolean London, Mouli Luo, Evan Eden, Eric Graber, Alexis Lo, Sophia Trinidad, and Adriana Hall.
The third bricolage (figure 26) steps away from weaving and instead emphasizes the magical qualities of the plant specimens collected. Kimmerer describes the Western tradition that recognizes a hierarchy of being – where humans are on top and the plants are on the bottom. But the in “Native ways of knowing”, humans have the “the least experience with how to live and thus the most to learn” from the earth\textsuperscript{51}. Glenn McCartlin and Jim Rementer’s piece on *Lenape Indian Medicine* further explains the relationship and importance plants have to the Lenape people in the following \textsuperscript{52}:

It was believed that these were placed here for their use by Kishelêmuònk (the Creator of us all). It was also believed that each type of plant had its own spirit. The practice was to address not only the Creator when gathering medicinal herbs, but also the spirit of the plant to be gathered.

\textsuperscript{51} Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding sweetgrass*; (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 47.
Plants and the Lenape people share an intimate relationship where each honors the other’s life. Therefore, the piece was intended to accentuate the historical use of certain plants utilized by the Lenni Lenape through the plants themselves.

Using a process called eco-printing, I draw the natural dyes within the leaves of certain plants using ferrous sulfate and stain scroll-like panels of fabric. In addition to this, small channels located at the tops each panel are filled with dye powder. When it rains, the dye flows from the channels and stains the fabric of each scroll, essentially covering the cloth with the natural dyes of the plant specimens. This is to represent how the community of Spring Lake reconstructed the space into a restored and protected series of tidal and non-tidal wetlands. Moreover, the physical changes that transform the bricolage requires nature’s participation, as the color shift can only occur in the rain. The resulting transformation accentuates the presence of natural processes and illuminates how Mother Earth has changed the marsh over time alongside the changes imposed by the surrounding community. There are certain aspects to the marsh that only nature controls – like the ways seeds dispersing through the wind or through water’s current have slowly populate the marsh with more plants.

To start this final bricolage piece, it was imperative to research and collect plants in the marsh the Lenni Lenape may have used. With the guidance and resources provided to me by botanist Mary Leck and historian Patricia Coleman, experts on the Abbott Marshlands, I was able to learn and locate the many species possibly utilized. George Hill’s *Delaware Ethnobotany* revealed how the Lenape people used each plant I collected. Whereas, Mary Leck’s writings on the seedbanks of plants present within the marsh coupled with her comprehensive list of Hamilton marsh plants aided in specifying the exact names of the plants gathered. Figure 27,
relies heavily on cross referencing each piece of research to pinpoint each leaf or flower’s story.53

Fig 27: List of the plants imprinted on the fabric bricolage. Each plant was utilized by the Lenni Lenape and is present at the marsh.

Fig 28: The process of wrapping the fabric and plants into bundles

Eco-printing is able to draw out the natural dyes within the leaves and flowers of living and pressed plants. Using ferrous sulfate as a mordant, a natural dye fixative, I soaked each leaf in the solution and placed it on the fabric. Afterwards, as seen in figure 28, I tightly wrapped the fabric and plant bundles with twine and let them simmer in water for four hours straight. The beauty of this process is tied to the uncontrollable results these natural materials will have on the fabric. No matter how hard I tried to remain in control - no matter how much I attempt to ensure the dyes will show - the natural materials I chose have their own authority and will produce their own uniqueness.
**Curation**

An integral component of the *objet trouvés* is tied to the idea of embedding the art into the landscape, thus allowing for a dialogue between bricoleur, nature, and the community to take place. For this reason, with the permission of Kelly Rypkema and the Tulpehaking Nature Center, located in the marshlands, I was able to install each bricolage into the landscape and leave them there for approximately a week. We planned my installation to line up with a marsh clean-up event on the 27th of March 2021. By doing so, I was able to gauge the initial reactions people had on the collection.

With the first bricolage piece, I was able to place it at the top of the grand, amusement park staircase where the steps blend into the erosion of the bluff as seen in figure 29. The branch the tapestry hangs on was a salvaged branch from the site propped against one of the trees growing out of the bluff. As I watched people from afar, I noticed that one family approached the staircase and the smallest child ran up to point at the piece blowing in the wind.

*Fig 29: The tapestry bridge placed at the top of the steps*
With the second bricolage piece, I did not have an exact location in mind. Rather, I wanted to focus on what the emptiness and transparency of the circle in the middle could frame. Depending on where the bricolage is and what can be seen through the middle of the piece can change the ways views look at the marsh and its surroundings. Figure 30 is the bricolage woven between branches and placed in a tree. My goal with the piece is to frame several landmarks in the horizon that juxtapose each other as a reminder of how the marsh lives alongside a bustling industry. Ultimately, the piece questions why the view in the middle is there and what that view says about its surroundings.

With the third bricolage piece, I wanted to place the fabric panels in an area that spoke to the plant and people relationship the Lenni...
Lenape shared with nature. I wanted a space where people relied on space and nature and are aware of the plants around them. As a result, I chose to hang the fabric panels along a part of the path in which the roots of a tree act as a “natural” staircase from the top of the bluff to the bottom of the marsh. Here, the growth of semi-exposed tree roots resembles the steps of a spiral staircase. By relying on the tree steps to traverse the space, this area of the marsh asks for people to consider the whimsey of nature and the gifts it provides. Therefore, placing the bricolage panels along the steps promotes a deeper conversation about nature’s changes, gifts, and our relationship with it.

A little over a week later, April 4th 2021, I went back to the marsh to pick up each piece and to see how nature and the community responded to each piece. Knowing it rained heavily throughout the week, I eagerly raced to the fabric panels first. As I climbed the makeshift root steps, I immediately noticed that both bricolage panels were no longer blowing in the wind. One panel simply laid on the ground where it once hung. However, the other panel located further up the bluff had been completely torn down by the wind and onto a fallen tree. The rain had successfully dyed the fabric (figure 31) but perhaps the tempest winds wanted to bring the pieces closer to the ground plants grow from. Figure 32 shows a before and after of nature’s response.
Fig 32: Before and after of nature’s response to my bricolage panels.

I next went to collect the circular bricolage, which I had propped up in a tree, just above the water of the marsh, in a way that framed the powerlines. While there was not much physical change, there was a non-physical change. Nature’s gift of rain coupled with the proximity to the water imbued the bricolage with the smell of murky, marsh water. For me, this was once again a reminder not to overlook the gifts we cannot touch.

Finally, I went to check on the tapestry bricolage. As I climbed the amusement park staircase to retrieve the bricolage located at the top of the steps, I passed a fisherman using the steps to stretch. He saw me get close to the piece and take pictures of it and asked me if I knew “Why they put that there”. I revealed that the they in question was me and the purpose of this thesis. In turn, he revealed that he had seen the other bricolage pieces throughout the marsh on
his walks around Spring Lake throughout the week and that they had prompted him to search for more. Elated, I asked him what he thought of all the pieces. The fisherman paused and descended the steps on his way out before throwing out that “It felt like they were always there”. I remember feeling my heart swell and I know his answer will forever stick with me.

At that moment, through the one interaction alone, it solidified how the community viewed the Abbott Farm Marshlands. To the community who frequent the marsh, who walk the muddy paths around Spring Lake, the site is refuge and a companion with its own beating heart. People know the marsh changes; that things like the foliage on the trees come and go or that spaces like the bricolage structures shift with nature. Despite the changes, people keep coming back to the marsh, cleaning it up, taking care of the space, entering the space and living in its wonder.
Conclusion

“It is human perception that makes the world a gift. When we view the world this way, strawberries and humans alike are transformed”\textsuperscript{54}.

Along the journey of completing this thesis, there were many moments I felt lost. I questioned the validity of my work and the validity of experimental mapping through \textit{objet trouvés}. After researching how maps and collections function separately, I saw how they are both ways we attempt to understand our world. Therefore, the synthesis of the two felt almost natural. The act of bricolage – the act of making and synthesizing meaning – has brought me closer to the Earth. I help nature’s gifts in my hands and wove myself a path out of my own isolation. Each stitch brough forth a collaboration between nature, the community, and myself.

When the fisherman told me the work I installed “felt like they were always there”, I remember finally feeling like a part of the community who frequent the marsh. That moment was the proverbial acceptance into a circle of people who all saw beauty in the marsh some way or another. My brief conversation with the fisherman gave validity to the bricolage pieces I installed. And in that moment I understood the immense, emotional power of the \textit{objet trouvés}.

Like something old, something new, and something borrowed, the bricolage pieces created a new, experimental way of viewing a familiar landscape. The emphasis of looking at the marsh’s qualities and landmarks as gifts presents a sense of endless adventure within the seemingly mundane or often overlooked. This form of looking at factual information and enhancing the data not only influences the scope at which others view the site but how the bricoleur- the designer- looks at the land.

\textsuperscript{54} Robin Wall Kimmerer, \textit{Braiding sweetgrass} (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 30.
The opportunity to experimentally map Abbott Farm Marshlands has blurred the lines between factual data and personal reflection. It is worth mapping the *objet trouvés* in the landscape. The inherent connection of material objects to humans has the same qualities maps have in bridging abstract and reality. However, where mapping remains in an “of-the-moment” state, the *objet trouvés* taps into a temporal nature laden in the landscape. By layering the information brought out by bricolage to the information laid out by mapping, I was able to kindle a newfound love for Spring Lake. Through revealing the gifts of nature, I was able to empathize with the land.

This sort of empathy with the terrain is necessary for designers to create meaningful landscapes that can represent or support a community’s needs. It is one thing to understand the worth of certain landscape features for designing, like what provisions Spring Lake create or how topography of the bluff has impacted ecology. But it is an entirely different concept to recognize what of the landscape is of value to the community. The amusement park staircase is more than a seemingly dilapidated set of steps. Through a historical analysis and through the lens of gift giving, it is an important remnant that now lives alongside nature and is a characteristic that makes the marsh unique. To find the *objet trouvés* in the landscape is ultimately an effective, additional layer of the mapping process that can create a deeper connection to the individual, to the community, and to nature.
Bibliography


