

The **Northern Exposures**



Janusz Wrobel

Travelling through the Canadian landmass differs from flying over or driving across it. It's like getting bewildered in the time-space of abstract dimensions. Each day, my mind focused on the different, transparent aspects of the conquest of giant rock surfaces by progressing layers of Life. Ground becomes the Petri Dish of nature processes with the widest range of scales.

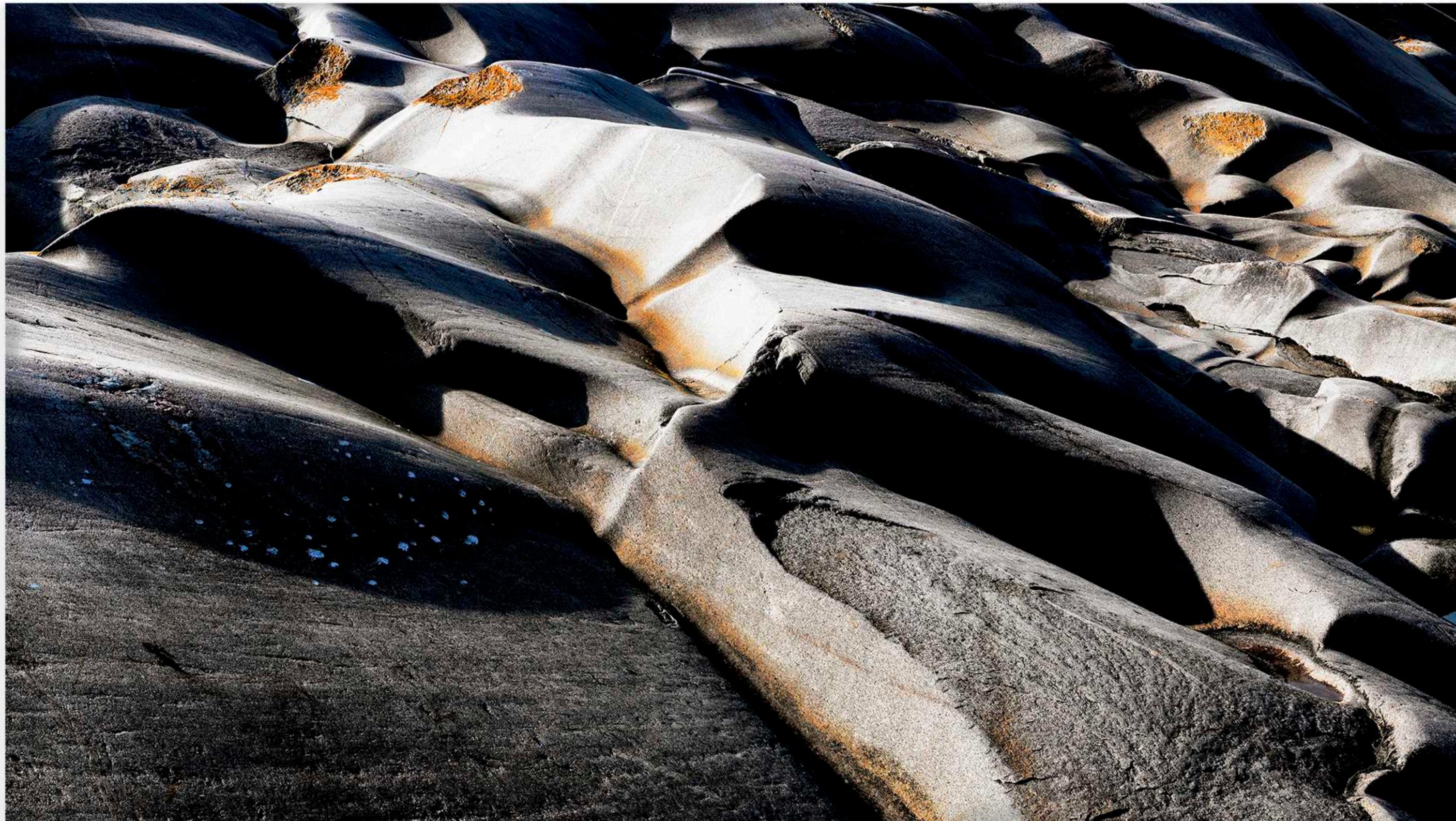
Paddling for days, time became a space of references. The bedrock became what remains of the oldest, tallest, and longest mountain range in the planet's history. The lichen, a symbiotic fungi and algae marriage, reminded me that has changed little in hundreds of millions of years. Chewing rock, creating a foothold for bigger plants to follow. The starting path of processes recreating plants' living conditions after each ice age. The pesky mosquitoes became part of the food chain that allowed me to have fish for my supper. The evening sky, the harbinger of the next day's weather.

Each day trip through the geological eons and the sense-making.

Different, more retrospective thoughts emerged, confronting what I knew, learned, with what was in front of me. The plant life on the rock surface materialized out of thin air. Life, as an orchestrated web of relationships, was all symbiotically united in securing its collective foothold on the common ground. Converting sun energy into new molecular bonds, the solid matter.

Calculating the energy requirements of molecular bonds was part of my education. Back then, in a lab, it didn't occur to me to apply the math principles to natural processes. It wasn't in the books I had studied. What I started seeing all around, there it was, in fact, a methodical and massive entrapment of sun energy excesses into the biomass. The beautiful is what matters.

Beauty means many things. It inhabits the mind of a beholder.

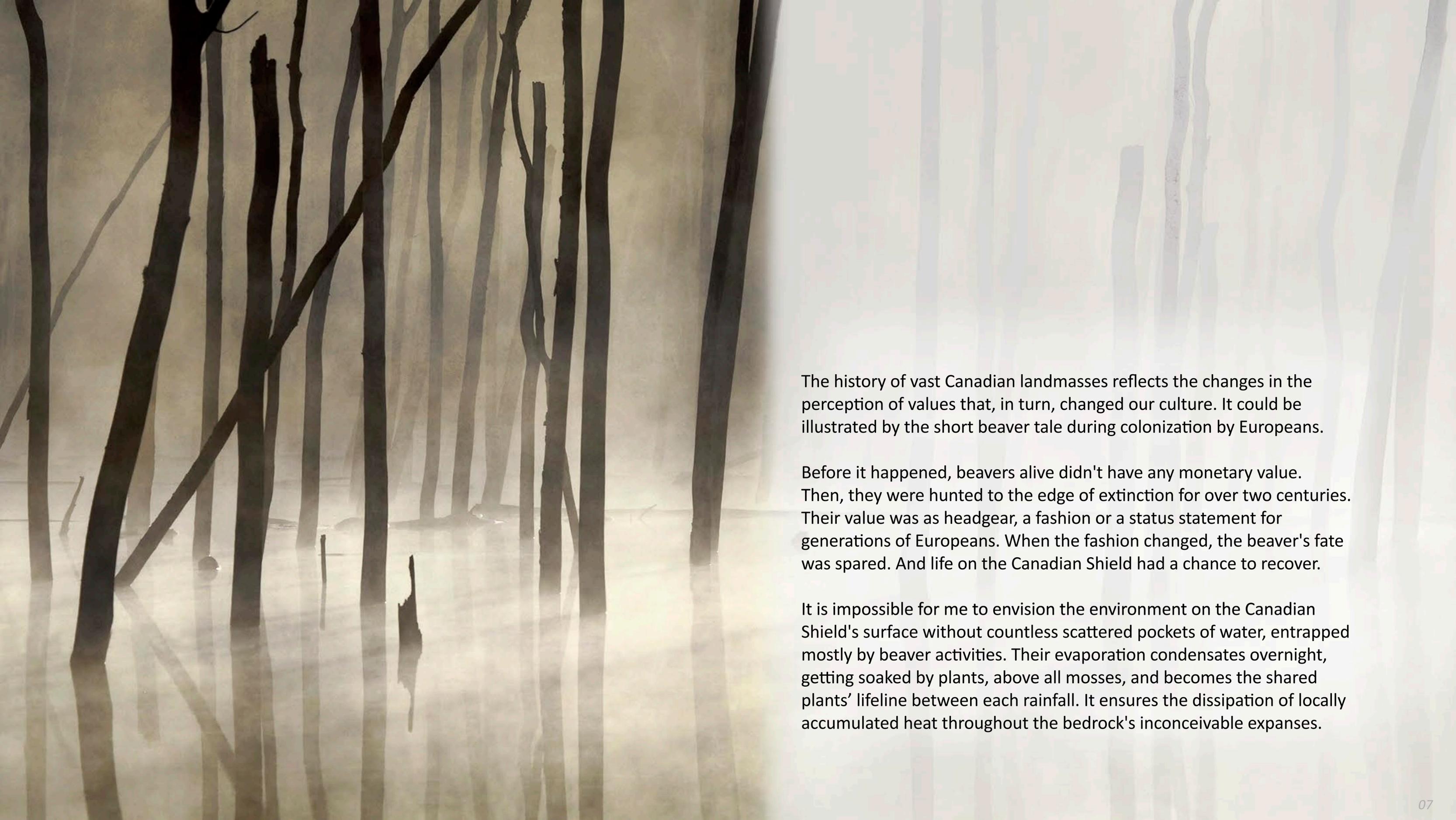












The history of vast Canadian landmasses reflects the changes in the perception of values that, in turn, changed our culture. It could be illustrated by the short beaver tale during colonization by Europeans.

Before it happened, beavers alive didn't have any monetary value. Then, they were hunted to the edge of extinction for over two centuries. Their value was as headgear, a fashion or a status statement for generations of Europeans. When the fashion changed, the beaver's fate was spared. And life on the Canadian Shield had a chance to recover.

It is impossible for me to envision the environment on the Canadian Shield's surface without countless scattered pockets of water, entrapped mostly by beaver activities. Their evaporation condensates overnight, getting soaked by plants, above all mosses, and becomes the shared plants' lifeline between each rainfall. It ensures the dissipation of locally accumulated heat throughout the bedrock's inconceivable expanses.







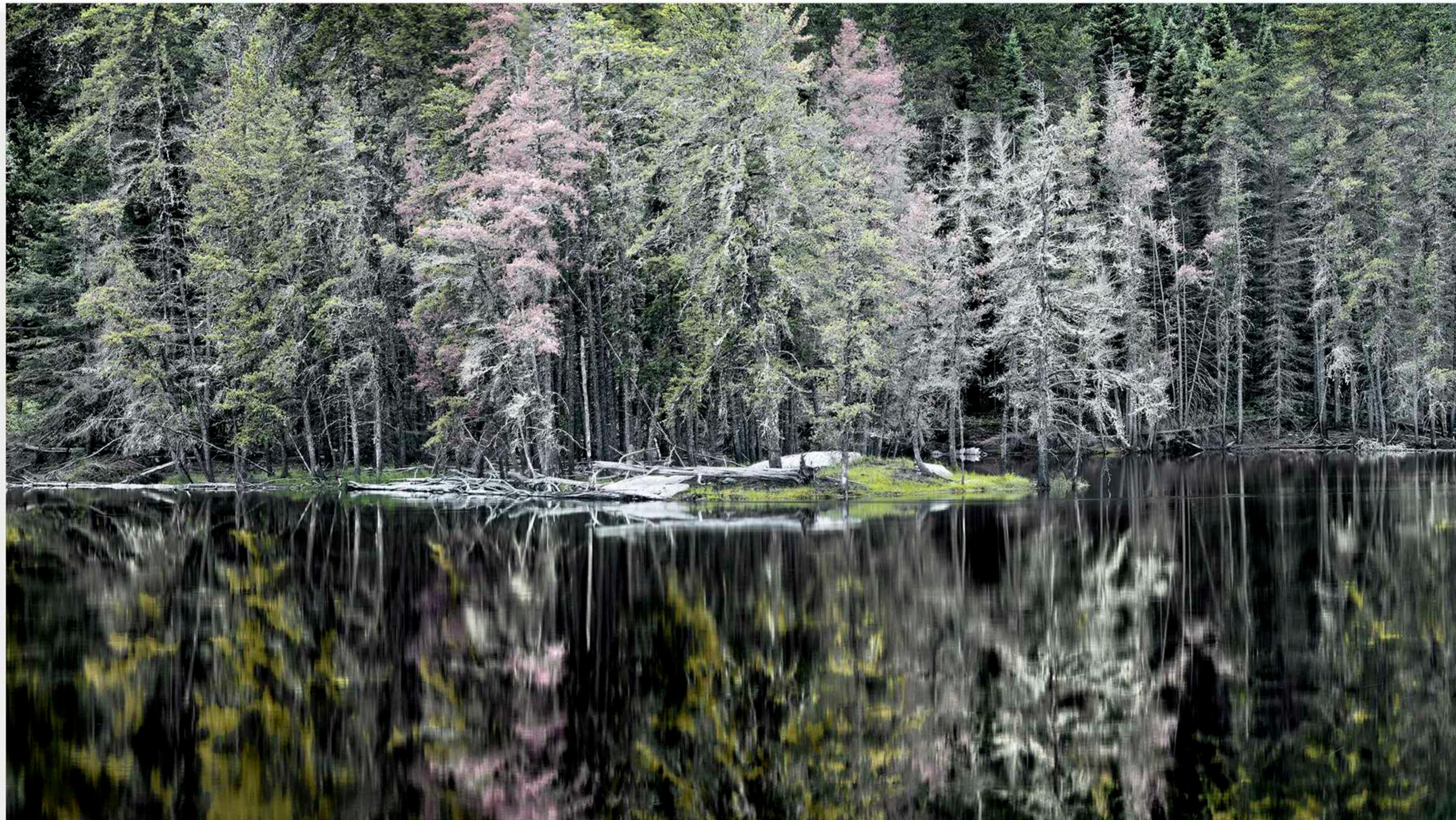
Morning Creek (9)



Morning Bog (9)



Frosty Bog (6)



Boreal Shoreline (9)



Boreal Nocturne (9)



Denison Falls (6)





Golden Stairs (3)



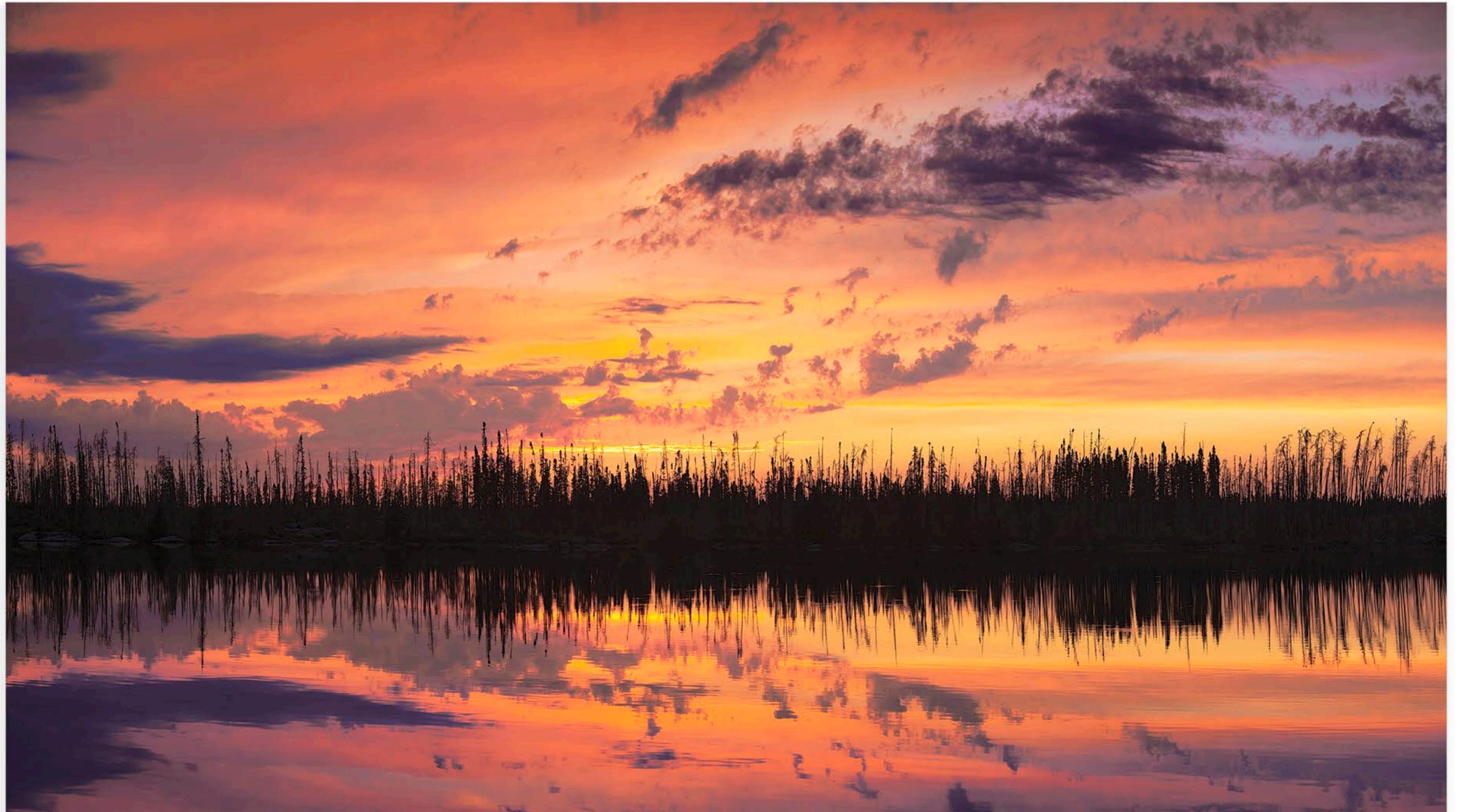
The hubris of the human mindset charts unpredictable pathways to follow. My idea was to have adventures. Later, to understand better the history of the native and the new Canadian populations. In other words, to form relationships with them. But it became different, and far more personal.

It's all about a value system that makes sense. And about the pain knowing that many places I got to know intimately are torched by now. Or might be so. I paddled for many days along the pathway of one fire. I remember sitting on a shore with a light evening breeze. Listening to the deafening sound of falling trees. One after another. This sound has haunted me ever since.



Anthropocene (3)





Fire #3 (6)



It might take a lifetime to find out what's most important in it, often too late to apply. The little things on large scales that have maintained the world, which I might try to change for no reason, are just like that. Interactions of the biological and physical worlds begin on the molecular level, but they change continents. So, I savour moments witnessing how Life harnesses the flow of energy with water phase change for own protection. A lesson for facing rapid changes of physical conditions. I have grown to see the beautiful in what warrants my existence.

The vast stretches of land, with biomass harnessing and storing in the pickle-like conditions, might be beyond the human imagination. As such, The Hudson Bay lowlands alone might store more carbon than the yearly emissions on the whole planet. It is like travelling through the forgotten Garden of Eden. Aware that it is also a land of low-hanging fruit. Logging, power generation, and mineral extraction are tantalizing prospects for a civilization obsessed with access to the finite store of resources. The future claims on the massively growing debt obligations.





