

As I learn these stories, I ingest my genealogy, so it becomes memory, tying me to my land. Infused with the breath of my ancestors, songs filter my blood, knit my bones, prick my skin with sweat. The poetic meaning of genealogy, whakapapa, 'to stir the earth' is transferred through my dance.

This *Mitimiti* I am making, dancing, recreates itself, in many iterations through different lifetimes. Though the physical form of *Mitimiti* the show births in Auckland in 2015, I know its futurity will eventually see lands as far away as Lenapehoking, New York City.

My wairua (spirit) leaps off Te Reinga, the departure point, towards Turtle Island. I have whakapapa links there, to Ruatēpūpūke II (my father's wharenui at the Field Museum in Chicago) and Paikea (the Whale Rider, a carved ancestral tekoteko) stored privately at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Though my ancestors reside in other lands, I am living proof that their children, and their children's, children's children, have not forgotten. We will return.

Tenei te mihi kia koutou te whanau

Aku tipuna aku rangatira

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa

Emily Johnson

I'm a choreographer and I make performance installation. I am from a very small town on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska. I'm Yup'ik on my father's side, and my Alaska family is from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. I share this because it's where I'm from, and it's also where my work is from: the physical place of Alaska, and the confluence of my heritage and performance work.



Catalyst

I view our bodies as everything: culture, history, present, future at once. I'm trying to make a world where performance is a vital part of life, where it's an integral connection to each other—our environment, our stories, our past, present, and future.

I do see dance in everything and everything as dance—you sitting reading, birds migrating, construction outside—and I think about how the dances I make are in conversation with these already existing dances in the world. It's this conversation between the performance and the rest of the world that is exciting to me. How do my performances exist in relation to the harvest of salmon? In your memory? In the world of the everyday? The sublime and the boring, normal, or even nasty evil parts?

For the past seven years I have making a trilogy of works, *The Thank-you Bar*, *Niucugni*, and *SHORE*.

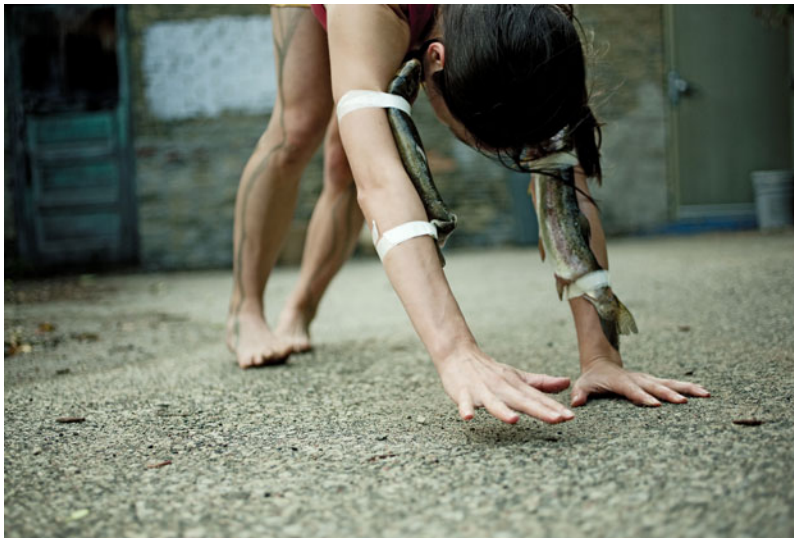


Photo 1. Emily Johnson. Research and press for *The Thank-you Bar* by Emily Johnson. Photo by Cameron Wittig.

This trilogy is a response to displacement—to feeling disconnected from place, people, ceremony, and tradition. It began with a personal work, *The Thank-you Bar*, which I created in the midst of a deep longing for my home in Alaska. The truth is, I miss more than my home. I miss the large family gatherings where we come together to harvest and put up our salmon, to butcher the moose my dad hunted. These gatherings include intense work, but in that work there is tradition: knowledge (how to smoke your salmon strips just right); the passing of knowledge (my young nephew learning to do what I did at his age); food, of course, because we always eat together; stories; jokes; drama. We share the work, our time together, and then through the year we share the bounty. This is the kind of tradition I miss. I need to connect with people, with communities and place. My work is the way I do this.

The second work in the trilogy, *Niicugni* (which is a Yup'ik word that means “pay attention”), moves beyond the personal, beyond the stage, to include stories from other performers and participation by local members of each community (in sewing fish-skin lanterns, eating salmon, and in the performance). *Niicugni* tunes our attention and asks us to recognize one another, to acknowledge our ancestors, and the land and communities we all come from. How do we listen to one another? To the land? Can this listening be a way to actively engage and connect not only with the present (where we are and who we are with), but also the past and future?

SHORE moves these questions out into the world. *SHORE* is equal parts performance, story (in the form of a curated reading), volunteerism, and feast. These equal parts of *SHORE* place the emphasis on gathering and on each other and remind us of the possibilities, of the histories—known and unknown—embedded in each of us and in each place. Know where you are and who you are with. This is ceremony. This is tradition. This is why I made this trilogy of work.

Our recent *SHORE: Feast in Lenapehoking* (New York City) was held on the banks of Newtown Creek, at North Brooklyn Boat Club. People gathered, bringing food to share and the recipe of the dish they brought. To me, the feast of *SHORE* is a process more than it is an event. I think about time beyond our time together because I think, for example, about the future of Newtown Creek (a notorious creek for its history as a massive shipping creek, as a superfund site, as a place of ecological shift). I think that gathering on its banks, canoeing on its waters



Photo 2. *SHORE* in Lenapehoking (NYC), Feast at North Brooklyn Boat Club. Photo by Ian Douglas.

helps us to become into relationship with it—for some to begin to care for; for some to continue to care about—its future. Of course, some feast participants don't develop a relationship beyond the one experienced moment with this creek, except that maybe the next time they are over the Pulaski bridge that spans the creek, or maybe the next time they read of the creek in the paper, or simply drink a glass of water, a memory will be sparked. This too, is relationship.

I think of oysters. Of their past harvest from all the waters/estuaries of Lenapehoking. That Lenape people depended upon these oysters as a main food source. That settlers, those invading and those invited, harvested them by massive, heaped amounts. That oysters have always brought people to the water, to harvest, to eat, to celebrate I'm sure.

And here we were. On the banks of Newtown Creek. Shucking oysters. There is something to be said for bringing oysters to this place, for sharing them again in this location. I think of the rotation and shifts of abundance—from an abundant, healthy food source to an abundant, overly harvested food source, to scarcity, to demise, to waste, to a “specialty” food, to farming, to the efforts of organizations like Billion Oyster Project who are working to reintroduce 1 billion oysters into the estuary by 2030. Oysters may someday be back, plentiful. Can you imagine eating an oyster from New York Harbor? From the East River? The *SHORE*: Feast day held on Newtown Creek in April 2015 was one day of a long and continuing relationship between people and oysters, water and land of Lenapehoking.

It continues. We intertwine our activities with each other, with the land. I am asking, through *SHORE*, through this trilogy, that we cycle into each other and the land, that we pay attention, that we recognize our responsibility as active participants—as we gather to eat, as we gather to work and share resources, as we gather to listen to each other's stories, as we gather to experience performance.