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## Mining—On the Horizon

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# Mining—On the Horizon

by Sara-Jeanne Bourget



## About the Artist

Sara-Jeanne Bourget's drawing and printmaking practice is led by a fascination for the tactile and metaphorical richness of handmade charcoal. Working primarily with naturally sourced charcoal that she makes following a set of self-given rules, she inquires how a deep-seated awareness of materials is rooted in the intimate knowledge of their provenance, fabrication, and uses. Bourget (b. Levis, QC) holds a BFA in Studio Arts from Concordia University (2015) and an MFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design (2019). She is currently a sessional faculty member in the Audain Faculty of Art at Emily Carr University.

# Mining—On the Horizon

*Sara-Jeanne Bourget*

*There is a point where artist too must take responsibility for the places and things they love, a point at which the colonization of magnificent scenery gives way to a more painfully focused vision of a fragile landscape and its bewildered inhabitants.*

—Lucy Lippard

## Vertical Horizons

In her book *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West* author, activist, and curator Lucy Lippard explores narratives of land abuse by industry and human actions (2014). She suggests a shift in the experience of the landscape, from horizontal to vertical, by investigating the extraction of resources as a means to erect and build. Lippard critiques the vertical absences of matter (mines, pits, and holes) as consequence of the rapidly expanding modern world. Yet, the experiential verticality of landscape also confronts conventions of picturing the land that romanticize the horizon. It emphasizes the intertwined stories of the underground world, its movements, fractures, liveliness, impenetrability, and so on. Verticality calls attention to the many surfaces we stand on and the natural geological features that challenge our movements above ground.

How can artmaking examine systems of resource extraction in mindful ways? Considering the ramifications of extraction and the consequential re-shaping of land occurring through mining, is there a way to potentially harness the detrimental effect of mining on earth/land by re-directing it to the actual process of artmaking?

I explore the term mining firstly to avoid appropriating language and concepts belonging to indigenous methodologies. Understanding the role of extractivism in forging Canada as we know it is paramount. Canada is a geological map of potential resource extraction, which benefits settler-colonialism at the cost of indigenous land and livelihood. As I acknowledge my identity as a white woman of settler descent, I understand the land I live, work, and extract from is stolen—I cannot ignore the role of

extractivism in forging my identity, and therefore in playing a role in my art practice. Mining is directly linked to capitalistic modes of production that power our relationships to places and things. In my own practice, I am challenging the capitalistic norm through my engagement with materials and sites. By avoiding industrial manufacturing and producing my own mediums, the origin of materials and limits of their use become evident. I want to appropriate mining first by acknowledging my vertical experience of the sites I engage with. I extract my materials, in-site/fully, by looking down at matter on the ground. I dig in my own drawings as a means to extract new representation, which in turn allows for new forms of knowledge to emerge.



Figure 1. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne *Dust Standing Over its Eventual Sediments*, 2018. Installation view of handmade charcoal on Fabriano paper, 60 x 95 in. each.

### Erosion / Accumulation

*Dust Standing over its Eventual Sediments* (2018) is an elaboration into the physical, vertical and impenetrable experiences of a site (see Fig. 1). It is the material depiction of fragile, yet durable, sandstone monuments that have been subjected to erosion for millennia.

The rock monuments sit in their own sediments, which have slowly accumulated at their foot; they imply timelines beyond the imaginable. Most importantly, they stop bodies from moving forward, from expanding horizontal imagination.

As I was drawing *Dust Standing over its Eventual Sediments* (2018), I climbed a ladder up and down, faced the wall of my studio, dealt with gravity as dust and sediments fell from my charcoal being pressured by my hand onto the paper. I engaged with the unimaginable timeline of geological erosion, by experiencing it through my own body.

Drawing with charcoal mimic's geological erosion: charcoal sticks are transformed into dust that either forms an image or falls on the floor. The drawn image is a thin layer of dust, which memorializes a site. The deposit on the floor is accumulated matter that slowly piles up over time.



Figure 2. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Collection of Charcoal / detail*, 2020.

### Fossilization

Natural carbonization, like fossil formation for instance, goes beyond any human timeline. Only the thinnest layer of carbon, the residual organic matter left from a once lively being, resists decay. In contrast, this natural process of carbonization can be manipulated through the little control I have over a campfire (heat and pressure), expediting the conversion of wood into charcoal (see Fig. 2). On various sites, the fallen branches are transformed into charcoal sticks. Thereafter, I crush this newly formed material into fragments while drawing. The residue that forms an image is dust on a surface that recalls fossilization.



Figure 3. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Feus Débris II*, 2020. Detail of handmade charcoal on Stonehenge paper, 30 x 22 in.

*Feus Débris II* (2020) is the drawn version of a small sample of my collection of handmade charcoal, each drawn by itself (see Fig. 3). They become fossilized versions of their slowly decaying bodies through drawing. The process of drawing each stick and archiving their unique specificity speaks to an archeology of matter. The objects extracted from a site and transformed by hand are the mediums, tools, record, archive, and subject. Through their metamorphosis, each charcoal stick is being mined to form a new version of itself.

### Mining / Eruption / Formation

The word mining can also be defined as the process of looking for new information.<sup>1</sup> Following that logic, *Speck II* is unearthed from *Speck I* through a slow mining of the visual information (Fig. 5 and 4). It is a way to excavate a new representation, to unveil an untold story, a hidden reference.

Black dacite is a newborn rock that was spit out of the ground by a volcanic eruption, 100 years ago in Lassen National Park, California, where I documented the resting rocks on the ground. In the black rock, speckled with white feldspar mineral

crystal, is written an event: blast and destruction. Carefully extracting each speck through drawing allows for their re-localization in space, as extracts of powerful energies: not unlike stars in the night sky, lights from a topographical view of a city, microscopic beings, or molecular intricacies.

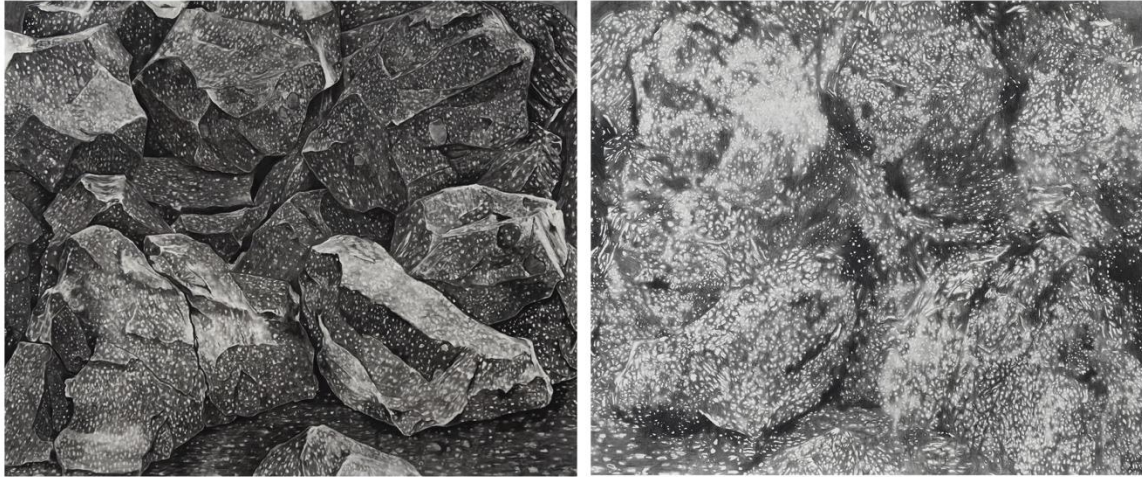


Figure 4 and 5. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Speck I & Speck II*, 2019. Detail of handmade charcoal on paper, 42 x 36 in.

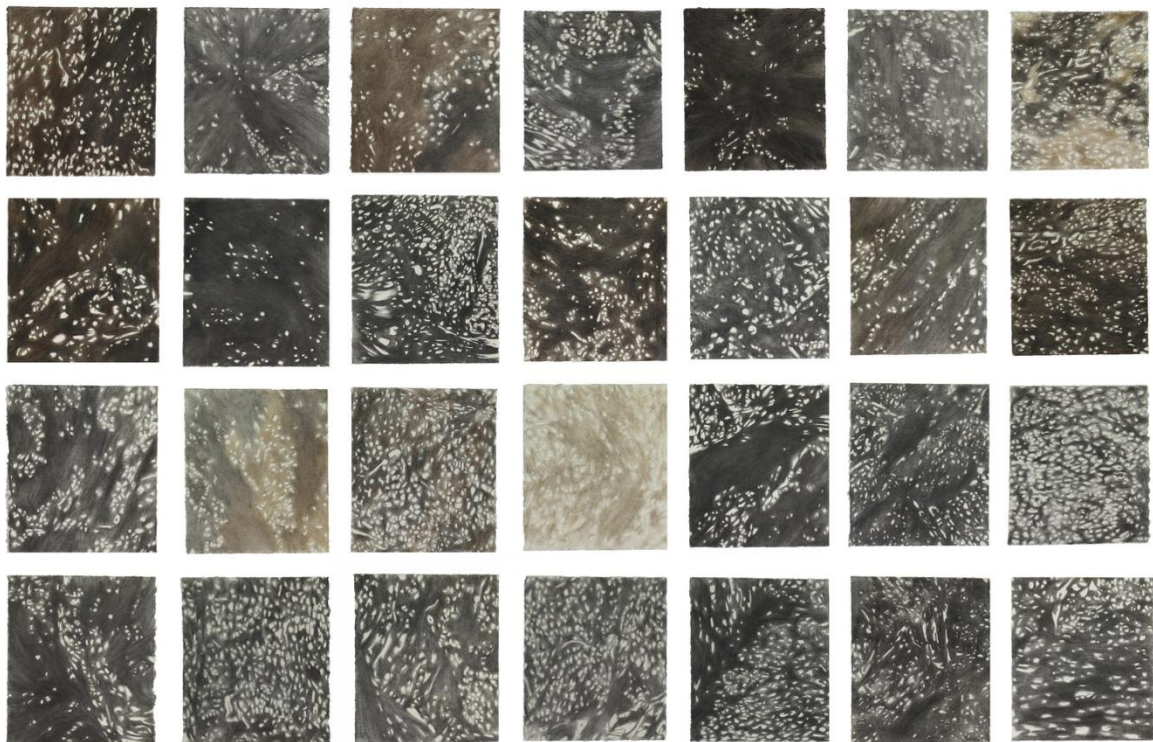


Figure 6. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Essential Variations*, 2019. Detail of ongoing series. Handmade charcoal on Stonehenge paper, each 7 x 8 in.

In the ongoing project *Essential Variations* (2019), each image is drawn with a unique handmade charcoal stick (see Fig. 6). Each of these sticks affects the image, which is unearthed from a previous drawing (see Fig. 5). The specificity of the charcoal, its hues—from brown to blue, its texture—from hard to soft, its quality—from unequal to unusable, play an important role in the formation of new representation, which in turn speaks to the richness of the material. In each stick are potentialities waiting to be exhumed. Each 7 x 8 in. drawing questions their dependence on the reality they are extracted from. They're all samples of a larger whole.



Figure 7. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Samples*, 2021. Handmade charcoal on Stonehenge paper, 30 x 22 in.

### Drilling / Sampling

Core samples are meant to show what is otherwise invisible—as a way of examining compositions of the Earth's many floors, usually leading to industrial mining. The drilling that occurs on site is invasive, producing a (core) hole: an absence.

Core sampling as a drawing strategy, as seen in *Samples*, takes into account the land and material as an accumulation of many things: matter, resources, histories, and experiences (Fig. 7). It is not a traditional glorification of a landscape, but rather a

focused examination of a sliced view, which reveals its details. It highlights the dichotomy between how we imagine the land and how we consume it.

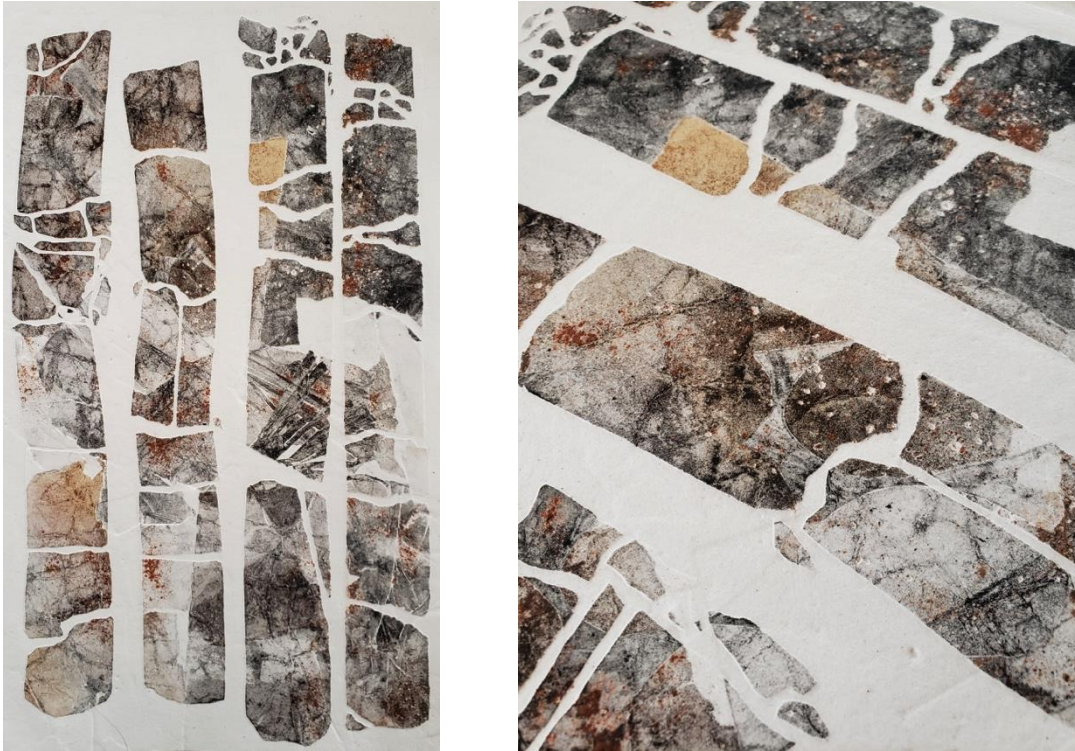


Figure 8 and 9. Bourget, Sara-Jeanne. *Core Samples* and detail, 2021. Charcoal monotype with handmade charcoal and crushed rocks on Stonehenge paper, 8 x 13 in.

The same strategy is used in the formation of the charcoal monotype *Core Samples* (2021) (see Fig. 8 and 9). With this technique, I use recycled charcoal drawings to become print matrix, sprinkled with crushed rocks from a nearby site. They are transferred using the high pressure of a printmaking press. Printmaking is similar to drilling for core samples, using mechanical assistance to reveal the inner structure of matter: breaking to build up. *Core Samples* (2021) speaks to the positive and negative, the absence and presence, the hole in the ground, the matrix-record-stamp-fossil as it survives decay.

### Pressure

Mining for new representations is a quest to consume my own drawing practice, which reflects my belonging to a historically loaded extractive relationship to nature. The process of mining is both exploitative and fertile, as it encompasses the duality between

conceptual and physical realities. I appreciate and love the amazing sites I am lucky to explore and experience and enjoy the material it provides me with. I hope that my work can somehow reflect that richness—but more importantly, call greater attention to the pressure that we are facing as the earth’s resources are exponentially depleted.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* defines “mining” as 1: “the process or business of working mines” 2: “the activity or process of searching through large amounts of information for specific data or patterns” (“Mining”).

#### References

Lippard, Lucy. 2014. *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics and Art in the Changing West*. New York: The New Press.

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