

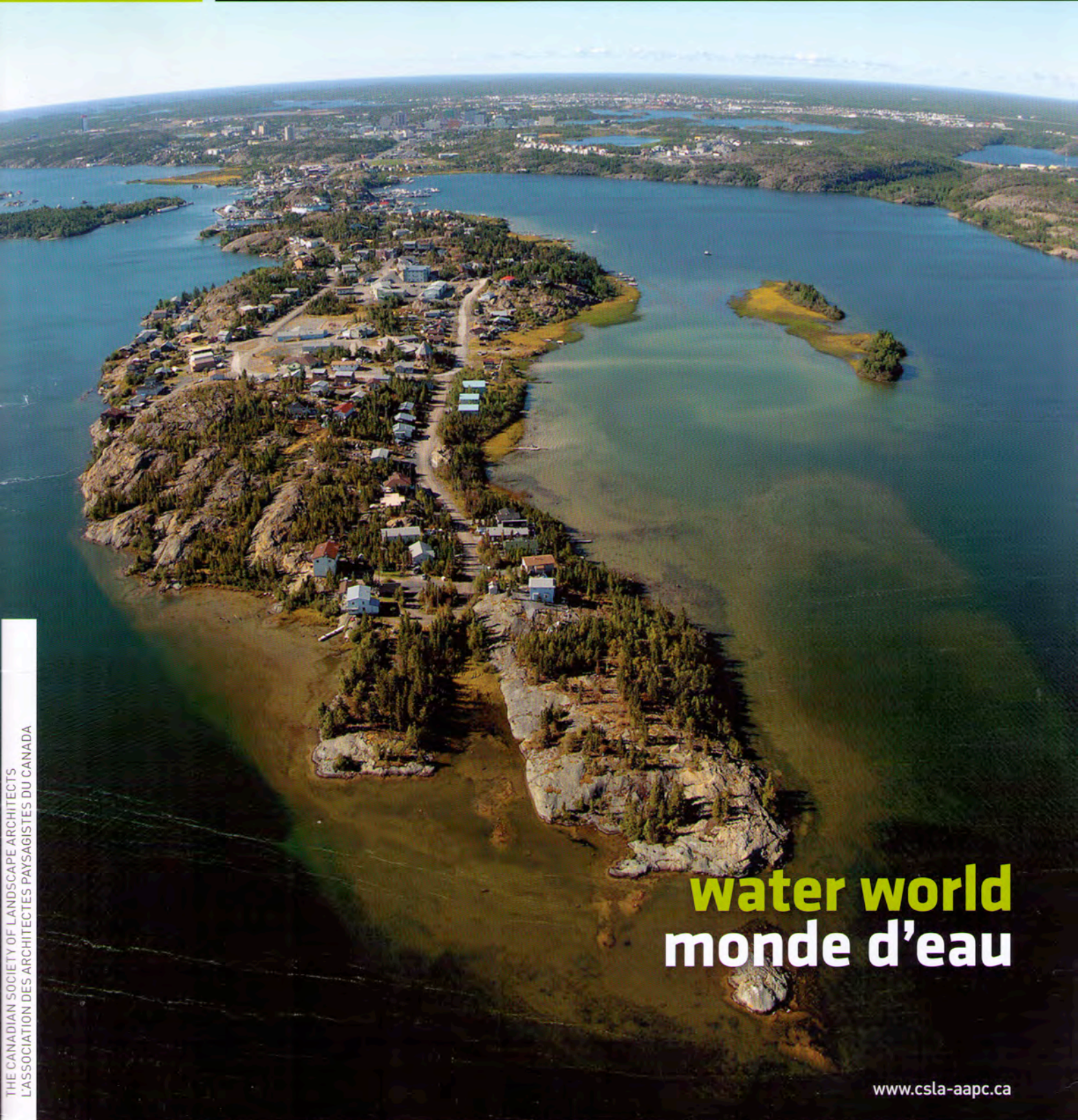
# LANDSCAPES

LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE  
IN CANADA

# PAYSAGES

L'ARCHITECTURE  
DE PAYSAGE  
AU CANADA

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**water world**  
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BRENDA J. BROWN

# SOUNDINGS

## WINNIPEG RIVERS AT BREAK-UP

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### LE CHANT DE L'EAU / RIVIÈRES EN DÉBÂCLE À WINNIPEG

[www.csla.ca](http://www.csla.ca)

Brenda J. Brown s'attache à interpréter les phénomènes de l'écosystème du paysage à travers la conception et l'art. Chaque projet appelle une démarche et des médias différents. Le projet *Spring Ice* a grandi pour inclure cinq installations sonores et vidéo, ainsi que deux nouvelles compositions musicales.

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**SOON AFTER** I moved to Winnipeg in 2006, I became intrigued by the annual ice breakup on the three rivers that meet here - the Red, the Assiniboine and the Seine. It seemed to me that Winnipeg's spring really comes with river ice break-up, however sudden, dramatic or protracted it may be. Yet despite the importance of this event - this great harbinger of spring - most people rarely experience it directly. (It was only later that I connected the breakup to another, often ominous, aspect of northern rivers: spring floods.) On late winter and early spring walks along the Seine, I was enchanted by the season's subtle and not-so-subtle sounds, and I imagined that each river's character would correlate to a rich vocabulary of breakup sounds. So was born my idea for the project that became *Spring Ice*.

#### SOUNDS, NOT SILENCE

For the past several years I have been particularly interested in landscape sounds - how they can be revealed *in* landscapes and what they can reveal *about* landscapes and their ecosystems. Sounds are not only a neglected aspect of landscape experience, they are also indicators of ecosystem health. My research focuses on ways to reveal and interpret landscape ecosystem phenomena through design and art; different approaches and media are appropriate for different projects. *Spring Ice* became a collaborative venture that grew to include five sound and video installations, and two new musical

compositions and their premieres. These manifestations were distillations of countless hours spent stalking Winnipeg's rivers with recorders and cameras, months of editing and composing, seemingly endless searches for the right poems to set to music, and orchestrations of technology to make it all work.

#### STALKING THE RIVERS...

I stalked each river, studying and recording its sometimes hard-to-catch phenomena. In *Ice: The Nature, the History, and the Uses of an Astonishing Substance*, Mariana Gosnell identifies three major phases of river ice breakup: the pre-breakup, the drive, and the wash. These phases, though generally sequential, are not necessarily neat. Pre-breakup can go on for weeks or longer. Small fractures in the ice cover lead to ice sheets that float downstream, eventually breaking into floes. For the stalker, the pre-breakup is a time of quiet waiting, of subtle comparisons, of discoveries of small, large and growing cracks, of slow drips in temporary caverns. In the drive, presumably so named because it resembles a cattle drive, groups of large, white, creaking and groaning objects are on the move. Floes can slam and ram into river banks to form monumental ice piles or they can rise majestically into the air only to fall down and break - all of which can make for thunderous crashes. As the blocks and floes are churned and ground with the river's downstream flow, the shoreline stacks become increasingly varied, reflecting divergent origins and histories. The wash generally takes away any ice still connected to the shore, cleaning up (or washing) the river. This is the time for candled ice - individual crystals formed when the sun melts the impure ice between them. The closest thing I know to the magical tinkling of candled ice is the sound of the marimba.

“I stalked each river, studying and recording...” | « J’ai arpenté chaque rivière pour l’étudier et prendre des notes... »

These common characteristics are naturally expressed differently on each river, as the three differ in size, origin, shape and course. Some fascinating aspects of spring ice do not fit any of the above categories. For example, well past the Seine’s wash, after cold nights I sometimes discovered a thin white ice on that river’s surface that shrank and broke with loud long creaks and cracks as the morning warmed.

They say the break-up is different every year. Certainly it was different in 2008 and 2009, the two years I so closely observed. Most obviously, the waters of the Red were much higher in 2009, shaping mammoth floes and the ice blocks that dwarfed those curious souls who came to the river shores to investigate and marvel. Yet my best recordings of candled ice on the Red were made in 2008.



1, 2, 3

1 RED RIVER 2 ASSINIBOINE RIVER 3 SEINE RIVER |  
1 LA RIVIÈRE ROUGE 2 L’ASSINIBOINE RIVER 3 LA SEINE  
PHOTOS BRENDA BROWN

#### EVERYDAY ENCOUNTERS

Although I had originally planned to create installations purely from sounds, I began to wonder if people would "get it"; moreover, the ice forms were visually fascinating. And so I investigated how sounds and images could enhance one another. I created five videos ranging from 12 to 55 minutes long, each focusing on another aspect of breakup: ice intact, chasms and drips, the '09 drive, the candled ice drive, and the Seine. In 2010, timed to coincide with that year's breakup in late March and April, the videos were installed in downtown Winnipeg and at three University of Manitoba sites. Because encounters with the video installations were meant to be incidental,

4 FILMS PROJECTED ONTO THE FLOORS OF MAIN ENTRIES TO THE RUSSELL BUILDING 5 THE ENTRY OF THE PLUG IN INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART 6 THE STAIRWAY OF ENGINEERING 2 BUILDING | 4 FILMS PROJETÉS SUR LE SOL DU PAVILLON RUSSELL, 5 ENTRÉE DU PLUG IN INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART 6 L'ESCALIER DU PAVILLON D'INGÉNIEURIE 2 PHOTOS BRENDA BROWN

everyday occurrences, visuals in the two main entrances to the J. A. Russell Building were projected onto the floor, and in the Engineering 2 Building, onto the prominent stairway. The downtown installation in the entry of Plug In Institute for Contemporary Art involved two projections, and was intended to be seen and heard primarily from the street.

The sounds were also an integral part of an extra-ordinary, singular concert event. On March 31, in Eva Clare Hall of the University of Manitoba's Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music, *Spring Ice* by Richard Festinger and *winter is when snakes* by Michael Matthews premiered. For both works, my recorded breakup sounds became, in a sense, an additional, integral instrument.

Together, the concert and installations celebrated the rich phenomena of the ice breakup in places where it was far from our sight and hearing. I wanted to bring it close, to create something arresting and revealing that draws attention to the power, wonder and intricacy of this luminous and aurally beautiful event.

"Sounds...are a neglected aspect of the landscape experience..." | « Les sons...sont un aspect négligé de l'expérience du paysage. »

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**Three short videos:**

<http://www.bbldar.com/engvimeo.htm>

<http://www.bbldar.com/pluginvimeo.htm>

<http://www.bbldar.com/jarvimeo.htm>



6 CREDITS EXHIBIT INSTALLATIONS WERE SUPPORTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA'S FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE ARCH 2 GALLERY (NEIL MINUK, DIRECTOR). ADDITIONAL SUPPORT CAME FROM DAVID WITTY (THEN DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE), TED MCLACHLAN (THEN HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE), DOUG RUTH (THEN DEAN, FACULTY OF ENGINEERING), AND ANTHONY KIENDL (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, WINNIPEG'S PLUG IN INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART). IN PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION AND INSTALLATION OF THE EXHIBIT THE ASSISTANCE OF YOSHIHIRO YABE WAS ONGOING, VITAL AND INVALUABLE; JOE KALTURNYK'S AND KAILI BROWN'S HELP WAS ESSENTIAL IN FINAL STAGES. MATTHEWS' *WINTER IS WHEN SNAKES*, A SETTING OF A POEM BY DENNIS COOLEY, WAS PERFORMED BY SARAH KIRSCH, SOPRANO; BRONWEN GARAND-SHERIDAN, OBOE; DEENA CRIER, PIANO; AND EDVANY KLEBIA SILVA, CELLO. FESTINGER'S *SPRING ICE*, A SETTING OF POEMS BY 12TH CENTURY JAPANESE PRINCESS SHIKISHI AND SAICYO HOSHI, AND THE AMERICAN A. R. AMMONS, WAS PERFORMED BY SARAH KIRSCH, SOPRANO, AND OLEG POKHANOVSKI, VIOLIN.

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