

BETRAYAL AT BABYLON

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:9 KJV)

Keith Langergraber's *Betrayal at Babylon* presents the biblical Tower of Babel as the imagined industrial dystopia of a western mine and ghost town. The Old Testament narrative, in an attempt to explain the phenomenon of language variation around the world, describes a people who speak one language and build a tower trying to escape a great flood. While researching this project, Keith Langergraber travelled several times to Bralorne, a once-booming and now defunct mining town near Lillooet, BC which is now occupied by just a handful of people. There, Langergraber discovered two wooden arks constructed and left at the townsite by one of its residents in the 1960s. He also discovered stories from the Lil'wat (Mount Currie) people about a terrible flood from which they were saved through the creation of a driftwood raft.¹ These intersecting narrative elements provided Langergraber with a point of departure into mythic tales of the landscape, the impermanence of place, and the fragile and transitory nature of language in the development of collective histories.

Looking at the complexity of human language and myth-making, Langergraber worked with Carl Alexander, an elder from the Nxwísten (Bridge River) Indian Band near Lillooet to explore traditional place names. In his original *St'át'imcets*, Alexander offered a personal account of the impact of industry—dams, forestry, mining and the railroad—in the region. Translated to English by linguist John Lyon, these stories are included within the accompanying publication, *The Professionals* (Burnaby Art Gallery, 2016).

Langergraber's film *Double Negative, Double Whammy* (18 min., 2016) follows a gang of meteorite hunters in search of a legendary tektite meteorite. The object, which is on display in the gallery, begins to distort time, space, and communication between the characters, descending them into conflict. Driven by the notion of an apocalyptic sublime and set within the context of a western/disaster film, the tale reaches its conclusion with the grammatical double negative, "Guess there's nothing that doesn't come to an end sometime"; an ominous statement when considered within the context of current struggles over BC's natural resources. Through these works, Langergraber addresses the inadequacy of language in conveying the scale of both natural and industrial environmental catastrophe.

– Jennifer Cane