

Index for *Fish Story* Memphis 2013
Portfolio of artifacts and art works by Aviva Rahmani

Fish Story Memphis began as a story about what restoring fish habitat might mean to surviving human impacts on our ecosystems: the Anthropocene era. Memphis, home of Elvis and the blues, is critically located between factory farms North and dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico South, in the third largest watershed in the world on the sixth largest river. The story local fish tell us is that our world needs to pay more attention to saving our common environment than extracting fossil fuels and perpetuating unsustainable behavior. *Fish Story* was created as a model for other sites by Aviva Rahmani, working with Dr. Eugene Turner and Dr. James White.

Fish Story Memphis was an experiment in what I call trigger point theory the impact of climate change and the habitat restoration that may mitigate that impact. I conjectured that reconnecting the Wolf River (diverted by the Army Corps of Engineers) to the Mississippi River could have critical bioregional impact. We began researching that possibility, the relationship to other problems and how it might be a paradigm for other sites by canoeing a remote section of the Wolf May 4, 2013. Our goal for that trip was to see how restoration work is bringing back that formerly severely degraded system. The global implications were then discussed May 11, 2013 in the public webcast, "Connecting the River Dots." (<https://vimeo.com/67578327>) – Aviva Rahmani

Fish Story was initiated for "Memphis Social," curated by Tom McGlynn, franchised and supported by apexart. Artifacts from *Fish Story* Memphis include:

- I. Over 80 posts on Rahmani's "Pushing rocks" www.ghostnets.com website blog since November 2012, with almost 11,000 page views as of June, 2013.
- II. 3 articles including a soap box for the Public Art Review by Rahmani and a front page visual shot by Katie Maish for the Memphis Commercial Appeal culture section written by Frederik Koepfel.
- III. 1 room size installation for the Hyde Gallery, Memphis College of Art with 1 9.5' x 28' painting on paper and 1 participatory map 5' x 40'
- IV. Almost 100 cut-outs of individual fish.
- V. 7 13" x 19" encaustics of the river tributaries.
- VI. 4 video tapes: 1 from Crosstown Arts of my proposal in December 2012 for what *Fish Story* hoped to accomplish; 1 by Kathleen Sweeney for Rockethub crowd-funding; 1 by Edward Valibus of playing The Anthropocene Game and the participatory mapping exercise after the game at Crosstown Arts, May 7, 2013; and 1 of a 1 hour public webcast between NYC, Memphis and Greece *Connecting the River Dots* to radioactivity and fracking May 11, 2013 with Ruth Hardinger, Eve Andre Laramee, Aviva Rahmani, Yvonne Senouf and Dr. Eugene Turner, video taped by Edward Valibus (<https://vimeo.com/67578327>).
- VII. 20 art photographs (some as a collaboration between Turner and Rahmani), short films and audio (by Turner) of local fish habitat and ecosystems.
- VIII. A set of instructions for The Anthropocene Game (see Appendix I) and 1 hand-out, in the Hyde Gallery installation, about the math of how carbon emissions might be offset by restoration, calculated by Dr. James White (see appendix II).



Figure 1. In this shot, the help of other artists from "Memphis Social" and Dr. Eugene Turner from the *Fish Story* team made a difficult installation possible. Text under photograph reads, "Artists working together – (bottom from left) Soulmaz Khazrael, Aviva Rahmani, Sarah Ahmad and (sp.) Gene Turner with (on ladder) Babette Shaw and Rob van der Schoor – install Rahmani's "Fish Story" at the Hyde Gallery on South Main." Just as the concepts behind *Fish Story* depended on collaboration, the potential for global restoration depends on a whole community effort.

1. Views of the Mississippi River (images from December 2012).



Wolf to Mississippi 1



Wolf to Mississippi 2



Wolf to Mississippi 3



Wolf to Mississippi 4



Wolf to Mississippi 5



Wolf to Mississippi 6



Wolf to Mississippi 7



Wolf to Mississippi 8



Wolf to Mississippi 9

Figure 2. Views of the Mississippi and surroundings where its tributaries should meet the Wolf River, shot during a reconnaissance trip for *Fish Story* in December 2012. The Wolf was diverted by the Army Corps of Engineers. *Photographically observing the river was a way to research how diverting tributaries might also be connected to the down river impact of factory farms and fossil fuel production in the Gulf of Mexico.*

“Wolf to Mississippi #1, 3, 6, 7, 9,” available as limited fine art editions.

2. Maps, prints and encaustic paintings on paper (13"x17") prints of aerial tributary views as they flow into the Mississippi River.

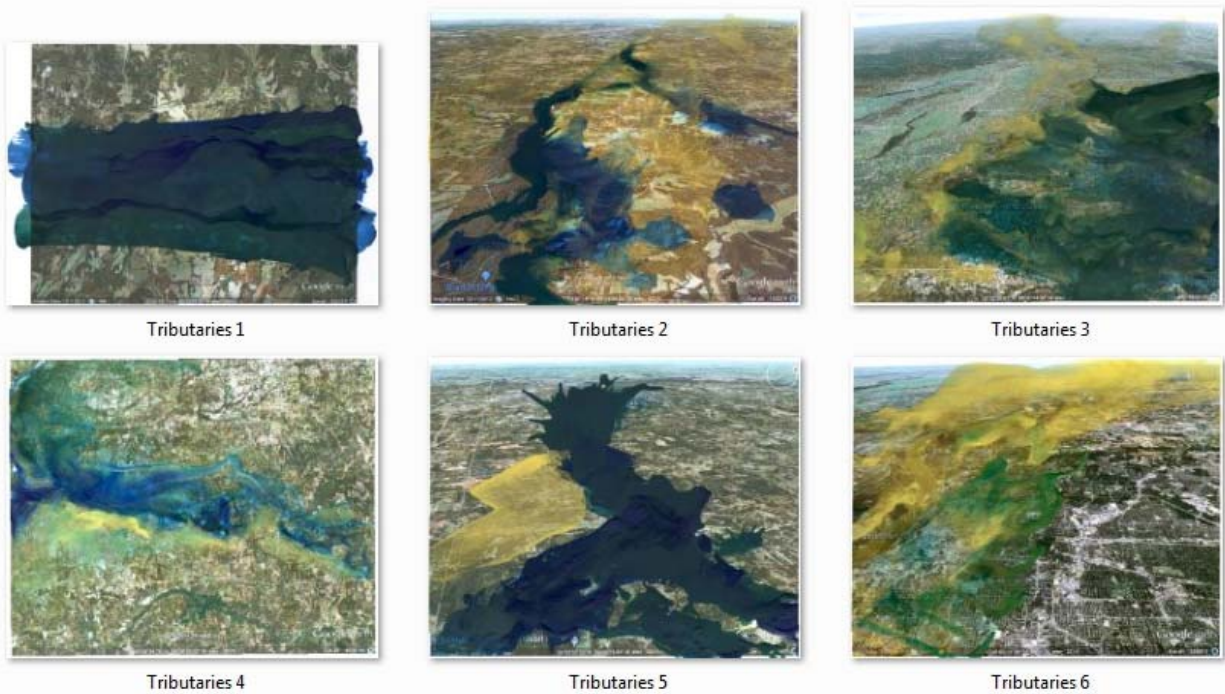


Figure 3. These encaustics on Google map prints were created to understand how water might flow from the Eastern tributaries to the Mississippi River if water were unimpeded. Encaustic is one of the most ancient and permanent mediums. The heated liquid encaustic wax flows like water, filling in the paper surface as geologic time might fill in land terrain. *Created in my tiny city apartment, in winter, with minimal ventilation, the paintings became exercises in negotiating limitations our future world may present to us all.*

3. Photographs of the Wolf River shot during the *Fish Story Memphis* river canoe trek from the Wolf River to the Ghost River.

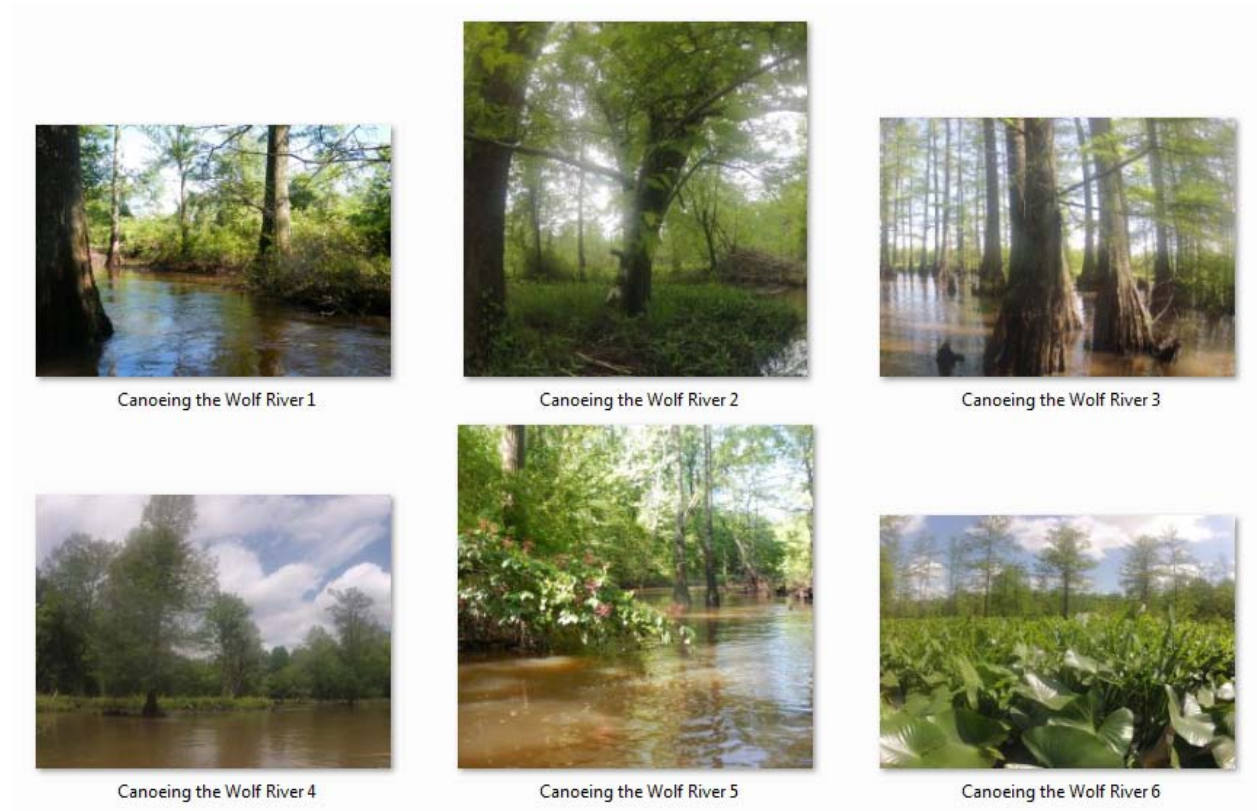


Figure 4. The Ghost River is so named because it is easy for people to be lost forever in its vast, featureless expanse.

Views of the Wolf River were shot from a canoe by Turner in collaboration with Rahmani as they traversed the Ghost River system towards the Mississippi River at high water. Rahmani directed then edited the shots. *Our trip took four hours on May 4, 2013 with eight guides from the Wolf River Conservancy who were pioneer blazing a new trail through the wilderness. I spent two months training for this endurance performance event despite struggles with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. The effort seemed analogous to what could be required of all humans to survive the Anthropocene.*

4. Participatory map from workshop after playing *The Anthropocene Game* with other artists, a number of prominent local environmental leaders, Rahmani and Turner. Detail below from Memphis Social Facebook page of *The Anthropocene Game* participatory mapping.

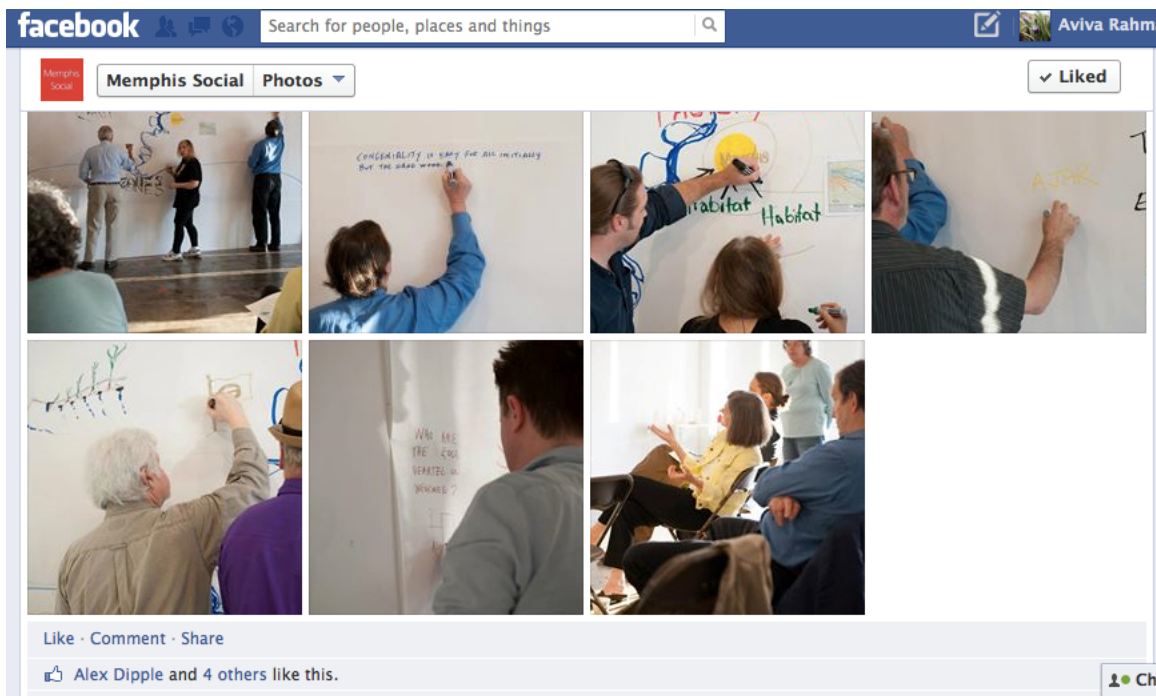


Figure 5. A goal of this event was to visualize and embody how fossil fuel use, dead zones, tributary diversion and other problems might be inter-related self-destructive aspects of human behavior. Artists and leaders of local environmental organizations came together with the *Fish Story* team to explore what strategic connections and gaps needed to be identified to effect resilient conservation. See appendix for instructions to play *The Anthropocene Game*.

Documentation: video by Edward Valibus, stills by Katie Maish.

5. River painting, 9.5' x 28' black scroll (Acrylic paint on archival paper), mixed media surround installation work exhibited with photos from the canoe trip, the participatory map generated by The Anthropocene Game and the mathematical hand-out on how much carbon emissions might be off-set by radical habitat restoration based on White's calculations.



River Painting in Installation 1



River Painting in Installation 2



River Painting in Installation 3



River Painting in Installation 4



River Painting in Installation 5



River Painting in Installation 6



River Painting in Installation 10



River Painting in Installation 11



River Painting in Installation 12



Anthropocene Game in Installation 1



Anthropocene Game in Installation 2



Anthropocene Game in Installation 3

Figure 6. Detail shots of the Hyde Gallery installation seen from left to right in the room.

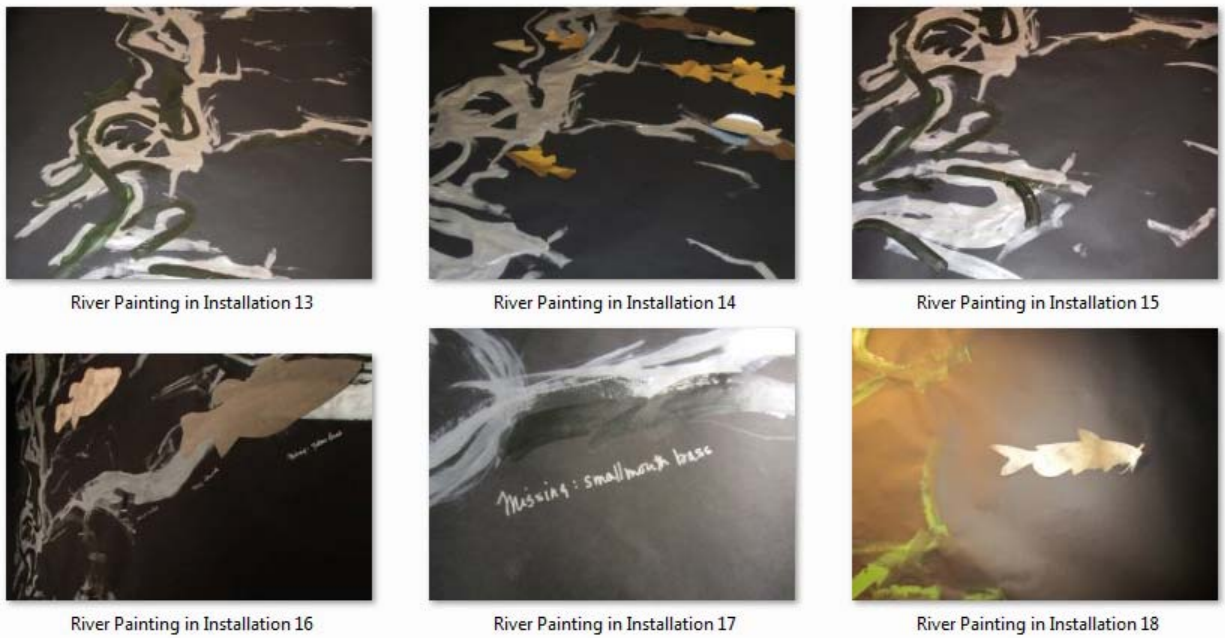


Figure 7. Hyde Gallery Memphis College of Art Installation for Memphis Social with a portion of the participatory map from the workshop, instructions for The Anthropocene Game and photos taken on the Wolf River. Shot of children viewing the work from the Facebook page of Lester Merriweather, one of the 70 participating artists in Memphis Social. *I wanted the beauty of the paint and the fish to draw people into the complex issues of our times.*



Figure 8. Work in progress details with "lost" fish that had been created for the installation. The 9.5'x 28' river painting of how the Wolf connects to the Mississippi was created in a small room in Manhattan, New York, one five foot section at a time and then shipped as a roll to Memphis by Federal Express. Federal Express is based in Memphis, but "misplaced" an additional box of small fish and the 7 encaustic paintings intended for the installation. The installation was completed without the small fish or the encaustics. *I took that as the perfect metaphor for how large corporations routinely destroy the food web other creatures and humans depend upon and indicated where they might appear in the system as "missing" species (16, 17).*

6. Several dozen fish silhouettes, representing over 16 species in a variety of 18 rare papers, including one of banana pulp, recycled from the banana industry.



Figure 9. Some of the small fish apparently lost to the installation by a Federal Express glitch. In this shot they were placed in the painting on the floor in Manhattan before shipping to Memphis. Later, they were "found," and sent back by Federal Express. The fish arrived back in Manhattan the installation was dismantled. *I thought that was a parable for restoring habitat to bring back diversity to degraded water systems. We can replace lost fish, but not necessarily in the same places those species might best inhabit.*



Figure 10. Detail of river painting without fish.

Appendix I:

Anthropocene Game

Crosstown Arts Gallery, Memphis, TN.

6:30 PM May 7, 2013

There will be a time limit

Fish Story, @ Memphis***Memphis is the center of the world: a trigger point for positive change***

We are in the Anthropocene, the era when humans have come to dominate every aspect of life on earth. But no living species evolved yet to cope with this level of rapid change. Talk alone doesn't solve these problems. Tonight, I invite you to seek new knowledge, by engaging in a variety of ways to address these problems.

We are interested in redefining public art as personal and to enhance community accountability to bioregions and environmental justice. We must develop strategies to catalyze the overlapping constituencies and effect ecosystem resilience.

1. There is a center marked on the floor. Your goal is to become part of a team that will control that center.
2. Call out the names of factors or agencies making the Anthropocene.
3. Make teams based on logical coalitions between those factors.
4. Each team will try to muscle into that center circle.
5. Try to physically (but respectfully and gently) control the center of the room with your team.
6. Physically push people out of the center or pull people into your team to reinforce your control of the center while calling out what your team represents. Do not use excessive force.
7. When I call time, stop moving. Let go of your team and trying to control the center. Find a place to be seated and close your eyes to think about what you just experienced for five minutes, while I sing you a song.

The Anthropocene Game was designed for *Fish Story @ Memphis* and first played on Martin Luther King Day, at Gasser Grunert Gallery, Chelsea, New York City.

The Unknown

As we know,

There are known knowns.

There are things we know we know.

We also know,

There are known unknowns.

That is to say

We know there are some things

We do not know.

But there are also unknown unknowns,

The ones we don't know

We don't know.

—Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense, at a Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing (resurrected from DOD archives by Slate)

Note: footage from the Crosstown Arts Gallery event evening May 7, 2013 was shot by Edward Valibus.

Appendix II:

Fish Story Memphis

Scientists have confirmed that carbon dioxide levels in the air have reached 400 parts per million. Off-setting that rise would require people to green the earth by an additional 36% by 2030. Without such drastic measures, most species, including humans will not survive. The easiest way to change that is to restore degraded ecosystems. Everyone on this earth can participate in that work. Memphis may be a critical place to begin.

Globally, we emit about 10 BMT/yr of carbon (billion metric tons per year) in Fossil Fuel burning and deforestation. In 20 years, that would mean about 200 BMTs. There are about 550 BMT of carbon in all plants above ground, and 1,500 BMT below ground (in soil carbon), so you need to add about 2% to the living global biosphere every year to offset the above. In 20 years that would mean you need to add 36% to the living biosphere to offset Fossil Fuels and deforestation, or you'd need 1/3rd more biosphere in 2030 to do the offset. Its less if you can figure out a way to speed up the transfer of carbon form the living bits to the soil carbon pool. – Dr. James White, *Fish Story* team

Fish Story Memphis is about how the causes and effects of global warming are affecting fish as indicator species for habitat and water quality. Memphis is a critical ecoregion: in the third largest watershed in the world, along the sixth largest river, South of factory farms and North of dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico. The Wolf River may be a bioregional opportunity to effect large landscape restoration. Reconnecting the Wolf River to the Mississippi may be the first step.

Read more about the Fish Story journey here: <http://www.ghostnets.com/blog.shtml>