

KATHY LEVANDOSKI  
**Gossamer  
& Ground**



**AGSM**

SEPTEMBER 22 - NOVEMBER 12, 2022

FRONT COVER: *Gossamer & Ground* (Detail), 2018-2022. Photo: AGSM.

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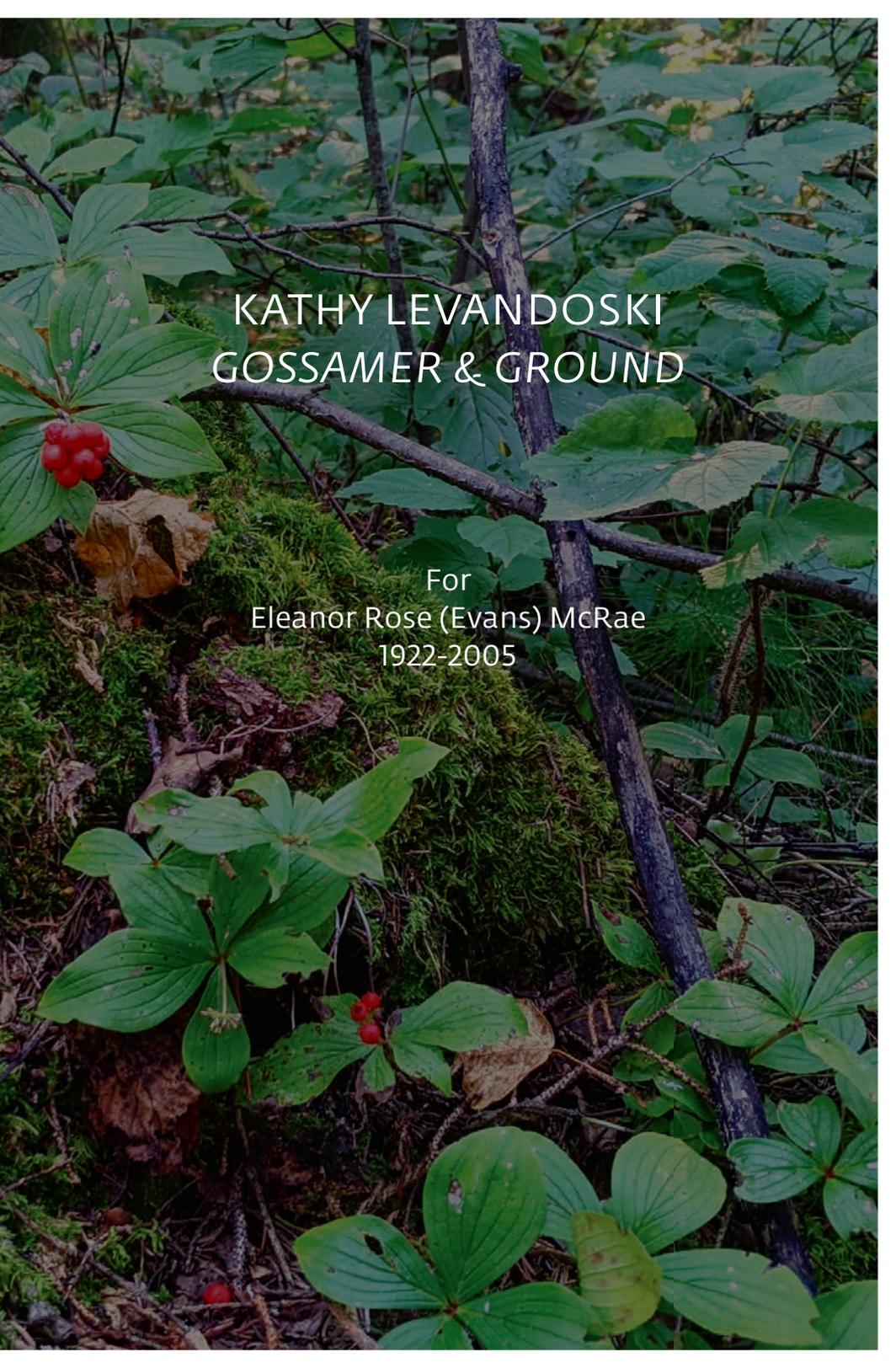
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A photograph of a forest floor covered in moss and green plants with red berries. The plants have large, rounded, green leaves and clusters of small, bright red berries. The background is filled with more green foliage and dark tree trunks. The text is overlaid on the image in white, sans-serif font.

KATHY LEVANDOSKI  
GOSSAMER & GROUND

For  
Eleanor Rose (Evans) McRae  
1922-2005

**But nathelees, somme seyden that it was**

And in addition, some declared, it was

**Wonder to maken of fern-asshen glas,**

Marvellous to make of fern-ash glass,

**And yet nis glas nat lyk asshen of fern;**

And yet glass is unlike the ash of fern,

**But for they han y-knowen it so fern,**

Though since this was nothing new to learn,

**Therefore cesseth her langling and her wonder.**

Those soon ceased their chattering and wonder.

**As sore wondren somme on cause of thonder,**

Some wonder just as deeply about thunder,

**On ebbe, on flood, on gossomer, and on mist,**

And ebb and flood, and gossamer, and mist,

**And alle thing, til that the cause is wist.**

And other things as long as doubts exist.

**Thus langle they and demen and devyse,**

Thus they chatter, wrangle and advise,

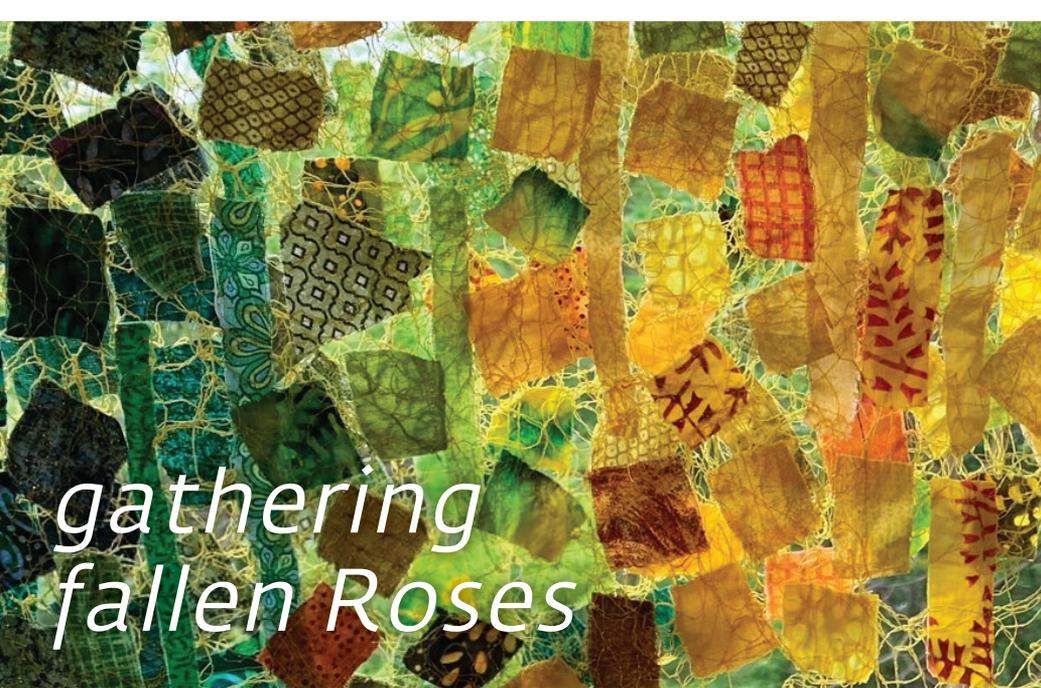
**Til that the king gan fro the bord aryse.**

Till the King from the table deigns to rise.

From The Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer, c. 1387-1400. Lines 253-262.

(Project Gutenberg)

Translated by A. S. Kline for Poetry in Translation (Digital Editions), 2007.



Hidden within the lines of the unfinished *Squire's Tale* is an inconsequential story within a story about telling stories. Marvelling at the magic ring which enables the princess Canace to talk to birds, members of the court muse about everything else that is wondrous. Line 259 also contains the first recorded use of the word “gossamer.”<sup>1</sup> I find it deeply satisfying, the idea that this word—itself alchemical—was born in such a royal and fantastic conversation. From the Old English for “summer goose,” gossamer is a funny noun that elicits more image and movement than object. It is weightless, it is floating, the sun shines through it and sparkles. This is an example of how words can be alchemy, transmuting cobwebs into miracles.

ABOVE: *Gossamer & Ground* (Detail), 2018-2022. Photo: Kathy Levandoski.

Kathy Levandoski has spent her life in the indisputably beautiful landscape of the Riding Mountains in Manitoba. “My environment has been my cradle for most of my life—a comfort, a constant,” she says.<sup>2</sup> The work in *Gossamer & Ground* evolved from a 2016 series titled *Riding the Edge*, featuring panoramic paintings of the Pembina escarpment from the moving vantage point of Highway 5.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, she created a sequel series, *RTE: Departure*, for which she began working with thread and fabric scraps alone, using water-soluble material as a backing, adding gaps and transparency to the tapestries.<sup>4</sup> With the guidance of Chris Cooper, Levandoski’s mentor and the curator of that exhibition (Cooper is also the Art Educator at the AGSM) a selection of long, thin works were hung from the ceiling in an inverted cove. She witnessed visitors to the gallery interacting with those works differently—people moved among them instead of observing them from a distance.

For Levandoski, this was a revelation: to tell the story of a place, she needed to create a space. Building on the 2019 installation to include 80 pieces, *Gossamer & Ground* approaches the expansiveness and the majesty of the



ABOVE: Kathy Levandoski, *Segue* (detail), 2019.



landscape. By using a dissolving backing, Levandoski can bring her materials to the fore, upon which further meanings are expressed. The substance of the work is a collection of object/metaphors: threads, scraps, air, colour. Each in turn touches on the profundity of a home, and the co-immersions of body, memory, spirit, and environment.

A thread is inert until it's put to use, and then it is the scaffolding that holds everything together. Threads are connectors and connections. Supporting themselves by themselves, they are movement and curve against random and angular squares of fabric. An earlier series by Levandoski, titled *Segue*, forwent the fabric all together, resulting in delicate panels reminiscent of coral, plant cells, or geological strata, settling into a dense band below a bubbling surface.<sup>5</sup> The addition of fabric in *Gossamer & Ground*, perhaps counterintuitively, makes the work less weighty than that in *Segue*, randomizing the points of contact so that they are not subject to the force of gravity, but rather to the force of electricity, to current. Levandoski says, "When I first started [*Gossamer & Ground*], I kept thinking about capturing the atmosphere of the sky to the point where I wished I could create the illusion of moisture particles on my face, or the dryness of a hot wind."<sup>6</sup> This is an expressive understanding of

ABOVE: Kathy Levandoski, *Riding the Edge* (detail), 2016.

the space between the ground and the sky. The air is our primordial substrate—easily dismissed, often ignored, here given form. “And, of course,” the artist continues, “capturing the constantly changing colours of both the sky and the land was, and is, paramount.”<sup>7</sup>

Colourful fabric scraps—small, irregular discards—are sorted according to their place in the spectrum, distinguishing the tapestries from one another. In so doing, the journey through the installation feels distinguished in time and space, too. The repurposed materials highlight another kind of alchemy, the oldest sort, which transforms something abundant into something precious. Redirecting attention from the materials towards the process of creating this expansive installation, what emerges is evidence of intense, focused, care. It is a ritual, or ceremony, that endows these material objects with vitality. Alive, these are not passive atmosphere, but active guardians, ancestors, sentries. From this angle, they are reconfigured as emerging from the ground, as blooming.

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Levandoski’s grandparents on both sides travelled from England and Scotland to Manitoba in the early 20th-century. A few decades after their arrival, the Riding Mountain Forest Reserve was set aside as a national park, worthy of preservation as “an island of wilderness surrounded by a sea of farmland.”<sup>8</sup> This properly subverts the idea of “nature as a place where we are not,”<sup>9</sup> which carries with it an implicit acceptance of the terra nullis myth that is embedded in many imperial histories. Wilderness, here, has a closer relationship with the feral than it does with the non-human, because ferity depends on domestication—its opposite—to exist. From the time she was eight years old, hardly a day went by that Levandoski wasn’t riding her horse through the forested mountain, a child both independent and cradled, growing up on the terms of this symbiosis.



IMAGES: Kathy Levandoski *Gossamer & Ground* (Details), 2018-2022. All photos, AGSM.

Levandoski has carried her mother's favourite saying with her through her life: bloom where you're planted. Planted in the Rural Municipality of McCreary, Manitoba, she follows an ethos of generation and legacy. She and her husband have raised three biological children and many foster children, she has built a community garden, founded an ongoing barn quilt exhibition and a music festival.<sup>10</sup> At the age of fifty, after a long career working with children in various capacities, she enrolled in the BFA program at Brandon University. Following graduation, she participated in an intensive, year-long mentorship program with Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA), and has toured her past work around the province in solo and group exhibitions. This all describes a woman who is undeniably busy, but more than that, she is someone who invests herself in things that will persist.

The name "Rose" has been in Levandoski's matrilineal side for many generations, including her mother, Eleanor Rose. She credits her mother for much of her practice, in work and in life. "She taught me about resourcefulness and creating something out of nothing. She also taught me to be a steward of the land and the importance of family. She taught me to sew even when I didn't want to learn."<sup>11</sup> A rose is, of course, also an object/metaphor for dualism. It signifies allure and defense, as well as mortality and longevity. Roses are ephemeral on top, following an annual rhythm, and perennial below, with a lifecycle more like a human's. *Gossamer & Ground* speaks to the significance of these dualities, how to capture the feeling of hot wind on your face, how weightless and strong is gossamer, how a lesson taught to a daughter shaped her second career. The smaller the constituent pieces, the more durable the whole becomes. Things that are fleeting can endure.

This exhibition is universal and individual. So many of us—I would even venture that every one of us—has been enchanted by a landscape. For some, it’s as fleeting as a moment or a bucket-list vacation, and for others, like Levandoski, it’s embedded, primordial reverence. On the other hand, the way we feel that enchantment and what we do with it is determined by forces that affect us during our lives. Levandoski collected these discarded fabric petals because she was raised to be a resourceful citizen. She sewed them together because of lessons her mother taught her. She made them beautiful because of the magic her mother gave her. Talking around the title of this exhibition with me, Levandoski put forward “*gathering fallen Roses*”. She was thinking of her youth and of her mother, and said, “We always had beauty around us.”<sup>12</sup> Here is where we find the personal, the outwardly-directed message, a monument and memorial to Eleanor Rose and those others you and I have lost: a thing that is alive and beautiful does not stop being beautiful when it stops being alive.

-Written by Lucie Lederhendler

1 “Gossamer,” Oxford English Dictionary, 1976.

2 Personal Communication, March 31, 2022.

3 Exhibited in the AGSM Community Gallery.

4 Exhibited in 2019 at AceArt in SHIFT: An exhibition of new work by mentees in MAWA’s Foundation Mentorship Program

5 Exhibited as a part of Healing Through the Arts and Culture at the AGSM in 2019, also curated by Cooper.

6 Personal Communication, Feb 2, 2022.

7 Ibid.

8 Unattributed quote from Parks Canada: [www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/mb/riding/culture/hist](http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/mb/riding/culture/hist).

9 Lucy Lippard, (1997) *The Lure of the Local: A Sense of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York, NY: The New Press. 14.

10 The Eleanor Rose Outdoor Quilt Show began in 2014, and The Harvest Sun Music Festival began in 2008. For more information: [www.eleanorroseoutdoorquiltshow.com](http://www.eleanorroseoutdoorquiltshow.com) and [www.harvestsunmusicfest.com](http://www.harvestsunmusicfest.com).

11 Personal correspondence, May 10, 2022.

12 Personal communication August 9, 2022.

## ASKING FOR ROSES

A house that lacks, seemingly, mistress and master,  
With doors that none but the wind ever closes,  
Its floor all littered with glass and with plaster;  
It stands in a garden of old-fashioned roses.

I pass by that way in the gloaming with Mary;  
'I wonder,' I say, 'who the owner of those is.'  
'Oh, no one you know,' she answers me airy,  
'But one we must ask if we want any roses.'

So we must join hands in the dew coming coldly  
There in the hush of the wood that reposes,  
And turn and go up to the open door boldly,  
And knock to the echoes as beggars for roses.

'Pray, are you within there, Mistress Who-were-you?'  
'Tis Mary that speaks and our errand discloses.  
'Pray, are you within there? Bestir you, bestir you!  
'Tis summer again; there's two come for roses.

'A word with you, that of the singer recalling  
Old Herrick: a saying that every maid knows is  
A flower unplucked is but left to the falling,  
And nothing is gained by not gathering roses.'

We do not loosen our hands' intertwining  
(Not caring so very much what she supposes),  
There when she comes on us mistily shining  
And grants us by silence the boon of her roses.

-Robert Frost, 1915

OPPOSITE: Riding Mountain National Park. Photo: AGSM.



## ABOUT RIDING MOUNTAIN

The current topographical features of Riding Mountain began to form when the Laurentide Ice Sheet, which reached as far south as modern-day central Illinois, receded 12 to 15 thousand years ago at the end of the last ice age.<sup>13</sup> Along with sections of earth that were scraped away by the ice, the meltwater from the glacial retreat created rivers and lakes that cut into the elevated areas of Riding Mountain. Eventually, the meltwater pooled into the prehistoric Lake Agassiz, the size of which was larger than the modern great lakes. Its western shore was formed by the Manitoba escarpment, including Riding Mountain.

135-165 MBP



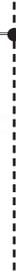
**Beginning 165 million years ago,** the bedrock of Riding Mountain forms from silt deposits in shallow cretaceous seas.

1-2 MBP



Several Glacial periods pass, each taking a cycle of 150 to 300 thousand years.

12.5 KBP



Melting glaciers recede from the Riding Mountain region and the current topography of the region is formed. Vegetation of the area was entirely eliminated during the last glacial period.

13 Arthur, H. Lang. (1974) *Guide to the Geology of Riding Mountain National Park and its Vicinity: History of its Upland and other Scenery*. Ottawa, Information Canada. p. 34.

14 *Riding Mountain Ecosystem Community Atlas*. Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. 2004. pp. 3-4."

After the the end of the glacier melt in the region, the lands not underwater were left void of vegetation, until forests comprised mainly of spruce spread into the region from the south. After about two millennia this forest was mostly replaced by grasses, herbs, and shrubs. Riding Mountain's present form established itself around 2,500 years ago, with boreal species such, pine, tamarack, alder, and fir taking hold, and a reemergence of spruce.<sup>14</sup>

Today, the area holds a combination of grasslands, upland boreal, and eastern deciduous forests.



## ARTIST STATEMENT AND BIOGRAPHY



Firmly grounded by her roots, Manitoba artist Kathy Levandoski is continually looking for the creative edge. The Riding Mountains are her lifelong cradle and enduring inspirational backdrop. Discovering the magic that resides within artistic processes is her constant joy. The treasures that exist within the every day – the extraordinary

within the mundane – like the microcosm in moth-eaten red cabbages, the ever-changing colours and shapes of clouds, or the allure and resilience of light – feed her insatiable muse.

Learning and personal growth are key values for Kathy, and she is, in turn, passionate about giving back to the community from her experience. She is particularly interested in fostering creativity in rural settings. In the past, she has spearheaded and continues to be involved in multiple creative ventures in her community, such as the Harvest Sun Music & Art Society, the Kelwood Arboretum Garden and the Eleanor Rose Outdoor Quilt Show.

IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.

After working in her community, teaching, and exhibiting throughout western Manitoba for many years, in 2004, Kathy enrolled in the Brandon University Fine Arts program. Within this accretive process, research, experimentation, and intuition led her to combine traditional and non-traditional materials. She completed her thesis show in 2013 and received a BFA Honours degree May 2014. Kathy participated in the 2017-18 MAWA (Mentoring Artists for Women's Art) mentorship program. Kathy is currently working on several new projects, two of which are called *A Tea Party for Sophie*, and a body of work called Equinox.

## LIST OF WORKS

### *Gossamer & Ground*

Lace, ribbon, embroidery cotton, and thread  
2018 - 2022

### *Lay of the Land*

Lace, ribbon, embroidery cotton, and thread  
2018

### *Thick and Thin*

Lace, ribbon, embroidery cotton, and thread  
2022

## UP NEXT:

### **18TH ANNUAL MEMBERS' SHOW**

DECEMBER 1 - 17, 2022

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### **EMILY JAN - KALI YUGA**

JANUARY 26 - APRIL 1, 2023

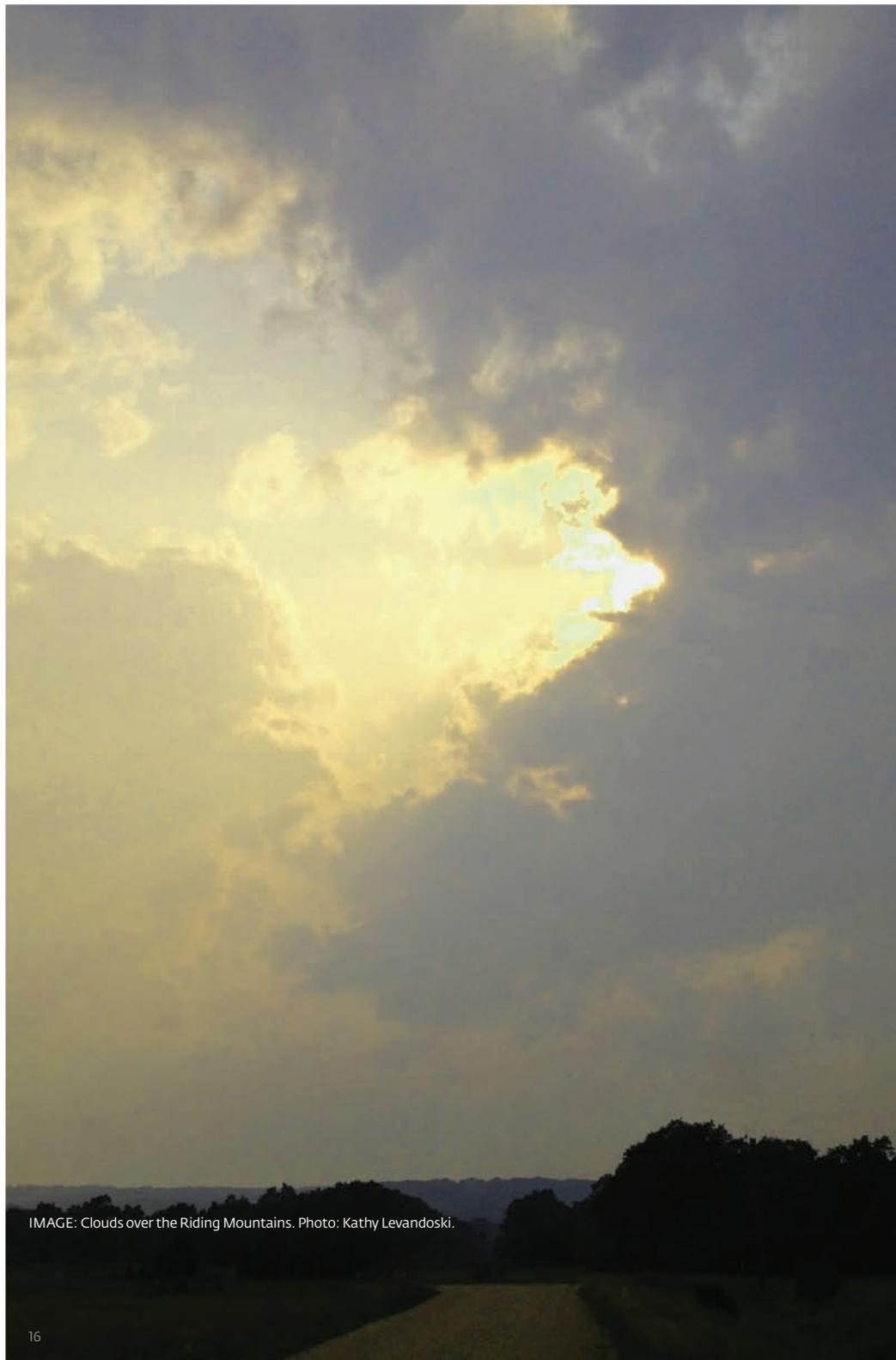


IMAGE: Clouds over the Riding Mountains. Photo: Kathy Levandoski.

The AGSM would like to acknowledge and honour the fact that we are on Treaty Two Territory, the traditional shared land of Cree, Oji-Cree, Anishinaabeg, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

