

Ryan Arthurs
Strata

Information packs into layers of sediment; the mineral strata describe millennia. As the most permanent surface in the natural world, rock formations carry etchings, paint, and the wear of thousands of footsteps. To the trained eye, rock faces read like sentences and paragraphs. The landscape reveals its geologic history.

The accumulation and superposition of narratives and culture is not a seamless process. North America hosts a strange and troubled convergence of societies. The people who moved here in the past 500 years have almost completely covered those who first arrived over 13,000 years ago. Indigenous Americans tell stories of creation and origin; people of European descent tell stories of exodus. Two separate histories cohabit the same spaces.

In this body of ongoing work, I attempt to summarize a multitude of histories, to string together a new narrative through visual elements. The work contains ideas about immigration from Europe to the New World of Atlantic Canada. It imagines challenges of a transatlantic journey, hopes of a better life, free of famine and persecution. It represents months-long oceanic crossing, fear of a new landscape, homesteading to survive the biting Canadian winter.

Since 2015 I have been making photographs between Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Scotland. These islands are situated between worlds, both geographically and metaphorically. They've come to embody the old and the new, spaces where time collapses, where past and present collide. For generations, families have survived on these rocky shores, living between the timeless beauty of the landscape and the hardship it poses.