

Cyborg Salmon

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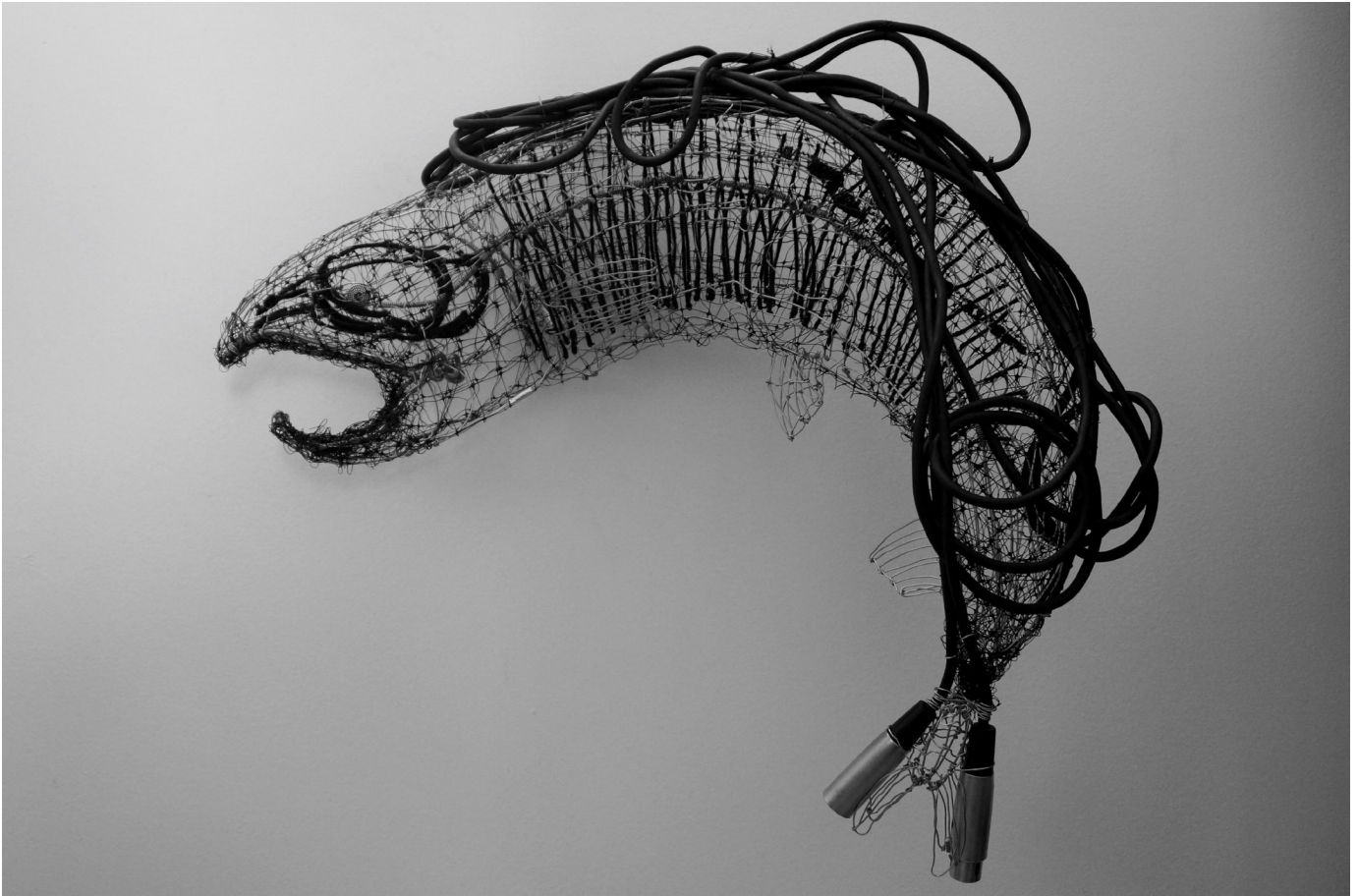
This figurative sculpture invites the viewer to reconsider the boundaries that presumably exist between organic life and artificial technology; nature and culture. By bending wires, tubes, thread, and netting into the body of an Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), this work attempts to convey the species' biological dependence on the technical and social ingenuity that facilitate its existence in Lake Ontario and adjoining tributaries.

The Atlantic salmon that currently inhabit Lake Ontario are not genetically akin to the stocks that first entered Lake Iroquois, the primordial basin of Lake Ontario, by sea during the post-glacial period. Following their adaptation to freshwater, these early aquatic predators became a dietary staple for local inhabitants, and a predominant trade good for Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Seneca and Mohawk, Anishinaabe and other First Nations societies that later settled along the local shorelines. Moreover, their continued abundance facilitated the expansion of the town of York in the late 18th century, after the site's founding loyalists recognized the economic "potential of the country from a piscatorial" (Dunfield 1985: 74) perspective.

Throughout the following century, the region's Atlantic salmon population declined as a result of overfishing by commercial and recreational fisheries, and due to processes of land clearing that removed the species' spawning and nursery sites. Local dams and mills were also effective barriers that eradicated the species' standard prey and impeded their annual migration to spawning sites (City of Toronto, 2012). By 1896, these combined pressures caused the lake's Atlantic salmon population to be declared extinct; a status that was rescinded in 2006 when the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources, initiated the 'Atlantic Salmon Reintroduction Program for Lake Ontario', also known as 'Bring Back the Salmon.'

While the Bring Back the Salmon project aimed to establish a self-sustaining Atlantic salmon stock in the region, it overlooked the artificiality of the stock's management and its biological dependence on human social and technological interventions. The salmon eggs, juvenile fry, and smolts that are released into local waters are genetically engineered to maximize the stock's diversity. Their rearing, transportation, and release are carried out by joint institutional and community programs. The constructed ecosystems that sustain the stock continue to be monitored and managed by habitat restoration projects. They are what Carolyn Glass describes as 'artificial progenies:' the products of hatcheries "that address the symptoms, but not the cause of fish decline" (2010: 47).

In reading Donna Haraway's persuasive essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" I have come to observe how the image of the postmodern cyborg now extends to the salmon body. Atlantic salmon are, in essence, 'boundary creatures,' partially organic signifiers of an existent and imaginary cybernetic world "for which [humanity is] responsible" (Haraway 1991: 2). Their biological activities simultaneously operate as expressions of injurious anthropogenic contamination and technological ingenuity. In short, these creatures are "cybernetic organisms, hybrid[s] of machine and organism" (Haraway 1991: 149) whose "lived social and bodily realities" break down crucial boundaries and create the potential to re-imagine humanity's "joint kinship with animals" (Haraway 1991: 154).



Materials: metal wires, thread, plastic netting
Dimensions: 1'2" x 6" x 2'8" (actual size of adult salmon)

Works Cited

- City of Toronto. *Fishes of Toronto: a guide to their remarkable world*. Toronto: City of Toronto, 2012.
- Dunfield, R.W. *The Atlantic Salmon in the History of North America*. Halifax: Department of Fisheries and Oceans, 1985.
- Glass, Carolyn. "An Evaluation of the Reintroduction of Atlantic Salmon to Lake Ontario and its Tributaries." Master's Thesis, Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo, 2010.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.