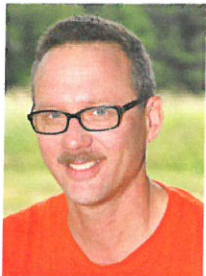




## A Q&A with Artist Peter Edlund, creator of *Crow-Land-Butternut-Tree-River-in-Little-Summer-Place*



AS PART OF THE MACDOWELL COLONY'S CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION IN 2007, visual artist Peter Edlund was commissioned to create a painting for the south portico of the Peterborough Town Library. Edlund's mural depicts the local confluence of the Contoocook and Nubanusit Rivers in a visual translation of the native Algonquin names of these tributaries. The painting was installed as a gift from the A. Erland and Hazel Goyette Fund and MacDowell, further extending the special relationship between the Colony and the library, which also houses a growing collection of books and films generated by MacDowell artists. The following interview with Peter Edlund guides viewers through the mural and interprets the work through the artist's eyes.

### What does the title tell us?

*Crow-Land-Butternut-Tree-River-in-Little-Summer-Place* is a group of phrases strung together. The first two, "Crow-Land" and "Butternut-Tree-River," are the possible translations for the name "Contoocook." The third, "in-Little-Summer-Place," is the possible translation for "Nubanusit." Nubanusit has a second possible meaning, "Sloping-Bank-Place," but I did not include this in the title. I did, however, add the image of sloping banks in the mural at either end. Crows, butternut trees, and a forest in high summer foliage are the focus of the mural.

### Why did you use the color blue?


I chose the blue color first, because it was the traditional color

of porch ceilings; and second, because I wanted to make a scene that gave the viewer a sense of otherworldliness, like a dream or a distant memory.

### Why did you use silhouettes in the mural?

Because we don't know a great deal about the Native peoples who preceded us — and even less about their languages — I wanted to convey the feeling of incompleteness. We know only the basic outline of these people and their languages. Like a silhouette, which gives us only the outline of an object but not the details, my painting offers the viewer a similar point of view.





*Crow-Land-Butternut-  
Tree-River-in-Little-  
Summer-Place, oil paint  
on aluminum panels,  
2007, by Peter Edlund.*

#### **Why is the mural facing West?**

After a great migration thousands of years ago toward the East, the American Indians believed that they came from the West. They also believed that when they died, they returned to the West. To honor their tradition and their return home, I oriented the mural perspective to be looking westward.

#### **Why is there a dead tree in the mural's foreground?**

It is a symbol that the people and their language are gone.

#### **Why did you include lilies, lady's slippers, Indian pipes, and dragonflies?**

While I was at The MacDowell Colony painting this mural, I was influenced by the plants and insects I saw around me daily, which is why I included them in the painting.

#### **Why is there a mountain in the painting?**

On the far left side of the mural is a depiction of Mount Monadnock. I love this mountain. Even though you can't see it from downtown Peterborough, you can see it from MacDowell.

#### **How do we know about the Native people who lived in this area?**

We know about the American Indians and their languages because of a very few people who befriended them and wrote down their languages. There are only a handful of books and papers from

the 17th and 18th centuries that document the Native words and languages. Most settlers from Europe found the American Indians a hindrance to their lives and made every effort to get rid of them. Some people of European descent, however, thought their culture was important. They tried to save what they could by writing things down hundreds of years ago. All we really know is that these cultures were part of a great system of human society and interconnectedness in North America that archaeologists date back at least 10,000 years. Today, descendants of the American Indians are trying their best to carry on their stories and history and to revive their dead and dying languages.

#### **Why was this project important to you?**

I have been exploring the meaning and translation of American Indian names through my work since 2005. When I heard about MacDowell's Centennial projects, I saw an opportunity to expand, yet remain faithful to, the work I was already doing. During my first residency at MacDowell in 1997, I was told that the Native people of the area never lived in Peterborough; they only came here to do their ceremonies because the place was too powerful to live in. I felt that power in the summer of '97, and I never forgot it. This project is an expression of honor and respect to the American Indians who once inhabited the area and a thank you to The MacDowell Colony and the town of Peterborough for all the creative good that has come out of my time spent here.

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