

“Tranquility and Connection”: Newcomers to Canada Showcase their Nature Experiences through Photography



A PHOTOVOICE EXHIBITION

2025 Exhibition Catalogue

Featuring works by:

Hakim Hakimi | Hozan Shwan Ali | Jinhua (Sophie) Yan
Nehad Abdulkader | Rika Amagai | Suhrab Seerat | Time

ABOUT THE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

Photovoice is a participatory research method that empowers individuals to document and share their experiences through photography. In this project, participants were asked to use their photographs to illustrate how they connect to nature in Niagara parks and conservation areas. We recruited participants through a survey we conducted in local areas and by connecting with the Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre and Brock University's International Students Association. After participants submitted their photos, they discussed the meaning of their photos in individual interviews. We also reviewed the photos as a group and categorized them into themes.

The project's most prominent thematic focus was conveying the beauty and inspiration the photographers took from their nature experiences; these photos often highlighted water features, tree-framed vistas and paths, and single trees. A second group of photos conveyed the beauty of landscaped nature, where structures like bridges, memorial plaques, or fences blended into the landscape, implying a harmony between humans and nature. A third theme arose in photos that highlighted differences between the Niagara landscape and what might be found in similar parks in the photographer's home of origin. Several photographers were overwhelmed by the lushness of the landscape compared to their home countries, which are dominated by desert.

An interesting discussion arose about landscape preferences; most photographers preferred a more "natural" landscape, but a few expressed preferences for a more "orderly" landscape (e.g. removal of unruly branches) or a preference for more amenities (e.g. a playground, more benches, more trash bins).

Overall, photographers expressed delight and pride in the natural beauty of the Niagara region. They named specific places they would recommend to visiting family or tourists - and it was important to them that there be no litter when visitors arrive! Finally, this explanation would be remiss not to mention the overwhelming sense of gratitude photographers felt to have access to Niagara's inspiring natural beauty.

CONNECTING WITH NATURE'S BEAUTY



The beginning of autumn.

- Time



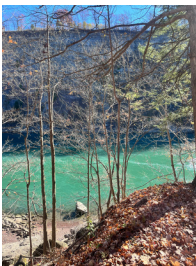
Walking along the forest trail, I was surrounded by rustling leaves and the fresh scent of nature.

- Rika Amagai



The branches are in the sky. It mixes sky and branches to a supernatural view. Sky and trees together offer a complete view of nature.

- Time



This shows the fall trees on a beautiful fall morning. Showing trees at the start of fall, branches are already bare. Behind, there is beautiful water.

- Time



- Nehad Abdulkader



A tree means life starts. You have blue sky; this means hope. The tree has no leaves and is naked, but life will start again, so we have hope.
Don't see a naked tree; see the blue sky and the green grass. Don't see the negative things. Be hopeful and see the good things.

- Hozan Shwan Ali



Watching the changing colors of the trees reflected over the lake was truly inspiring. It felt as if nature was painting a masterpiece just for me.

- Rika Amagai



When someone sees this green blanket, they feel their eyes cooling. This feels like Mother Nature.

- Time



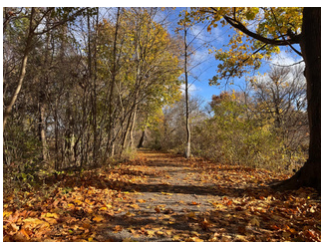
This is a beautiful area. You see every color. It makes you comfortable. You can walk for many, many hours. You can put on your music and enjoy the area.

- Hozan Shwan Ali



Balls Falls: We really enjoyed the moment that we spent. I was feeling that I am living my dream. It's a beautiful place and I just take out my phone and take this picture to share my feeling and the beauty of the nature. Nature is the art of God.

- Suhrab Seerat



When I see trees, sky, or water, I feel very deeply. Fallen leaves on the ground are part of the death of trees that autumn imposes on trees.

- Hakim Hakimi

THE MEETING OF NATURE WITH HUMAN STRUCTURES



I saw this from the bridge. The same good feeling – the trees, the water, the nature.

– Suhrab Seerat



In this photo, the trees show nature as a sign of the earth's strength.

– Suhrab Seerat



The water, combined with the trees, makes me feel relaxed. I really love it! A lot of tourists didn't know about Dufferin Islands. There are some hiking trails you can take with your family. It's really good!

– Suhrab Seerat



– Nehad Abdulkader



This staircase is simply a way to satisfy the basic need to access the park...it's very interesting for me...because I'm used to the Chinese way, which would have been a higher degree of artificial alteration, like accessible elevators and beautiful staircases. I've been spoiled. I saw this. and I thought, it's simple, but it does the job.

– Jinhua (Sophie) Yan



This photo shows the human skill in beautifying nature.

– Hakim Hakimi

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT HERE – AND WE LOVE IT!



The most notable difference is the level of untouched nature I've experienced in Canadian parks compared to those back in my home country, where there is generally a higher degree of artificial alteration in park environments.

– Jinhua (Sophie) Yan



In my second year in Canada, my connection with Niagara Glen has deepened— I will now also explore outdoor bouldering in this district, extending my hobby to this bouldering-friendly park. I think this shift reflects a growing sense of security and belonging, both with Canada and with this beautiful natural space.

– Jinhua (Sophie) Yan



For some, it may just be a tree in a local park, but for the family of the person it's dedicated to, it means so much. It's a way to feel connected to our ancestors. This kind of tribute is not very usual in my culture.

– Rika Amagai



I can't remember the last time I saw a handwritten sign in parks back in my home country. I appreciate the thoughtful approach to preserving untouched nature here.

– Jinhua (Sophie) Yan



Watching the tree dedicated to someone who passed away, while local people walk their dogs nearby, makes me feel that they, and I, are all connected. It feels as though we are all embraced by nature.

– Rika Amagai



Seeing all the trees dedicated to the victims of 9/11 was heartbreaking, but at the same time, it felt like they now rest peacefully in the embrace of beautiful nature, even though not all the victims were from Niagara. This kind of dedication is not something I often see in my culture.

- Rika Amagai



When I saw this nature I remembered the country we came from, its beauty was very different, there in Egypt where there are ancient monuments and the Arabian Desert

- Nehad Abdulkader

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS AND GUESTS FOR SUPPORTING THIS PROJECT



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**NIAGARA
PARKS**



Niagara Peninsula
CONSERVATION
nature for all



Supported by a Brock
exchange grant





Hozan Shwan Ali

Hozan Shwan Ali came from Iraqi Kurdistan to Canada in 2023, her lifelong dream since childhood. She came to Canada with no knowledge of English and reached Level 6 proficiency in just 1.5 years! She loves that Canadian people are very friendly and kind, and it is a country of cultures, languages, and races from around the world where all people are equal under the law. She believes no country can rival the beauty of Canada's natural landscapes.



Jinhua (Sophie) Yan

Sophie Yan is a University of Toronto graduate and a newcomer to Canada since 2022. Passionate about nature, she has developed a deep love for bouldering and the outdoors.

Nehad Abdulkader

Nehad Abdulkader, 50, is a single mother of 5 children from Syria. Because of the war in Syria, she moved to Egypt and then arrived in Canada about two years ago. She works as a seamstress and does hand embroidery (contact 365-880-2655 for more information). As an amateur photographer, she loves the wonderful natural scenery in Canada. She also loves the Canadian people and says she "will never leave it".



Rika Amaga

Rika Amaga is an international graduate student from Tokyo, Japan. She moved to Canada in September 2024 and is currently living in St. Catharines with her family. Her interest in the project grew from her love of spending time in Canadian parks and nature.



Suhrab Seerat

Suhrab Seerat, originally from Afghanistan, has always been inspired by the natural world. He believes that nature is more than just scenery—it's a vital resource for humanity. Through his photography, he highlights the deep connection between humans and the environment, encouraging others to see nature not just with their eyes, but with their hearts.



Muhammad Zaman (Time)

I'm Muhammad, a newcomer to Canada from Pakistan. I'm a student, and I enjoy all outdoor activities!