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Nature: Shaped by Water

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NATURE

...and these rolling heaves of the prairie – they are so much like the swelling waves of the Sea, that the ocean is constantly in my mind. The Ocean! The grand, The Boundless, The magnificent! Was not these vast prairies once thy Bed? Why are they so like thee? Thou great emblem of Eternity!

— Matthew C. Field, 1840

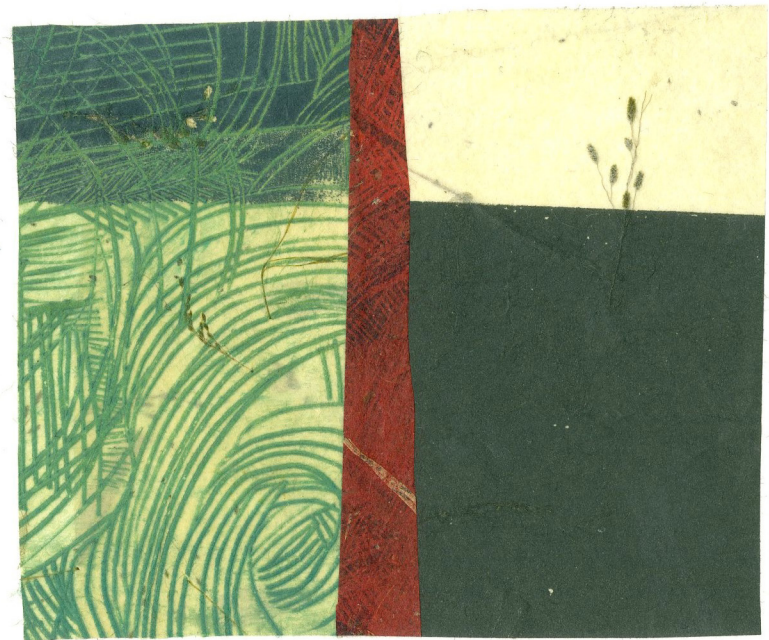
OPPOSITE PAGE

Limpets (detail)

Mary Allison Kay

SHAPED BY WATER

For thousands of years, waves of cultures crossed the seemingly timeless plain — by foot or prairie schooner — unaware of its ancient past. The metaphor of “rolling heaves of the prairie” as swelling waves took on new meaning when science proved that this great Sea of Grass was once the bed of a shallow ocean teeming with corals, clams, and sponges. The prairie landscape had long secreted clues to its genesis, with springs, rivers, caves, and waterfalls channeling through limestone forged from the shell and bone of primordial sea life. The calcified remains still nourish the grass that purifies the water and sustains the immense frames of the massive beasts of land. Without water, there would be no flint, no bison, no springs. The eternal prairie is born of the eternal sea.



Ocean Grain
Mary Gordon