Crosswicks Creek and the Bordentown Bluffs are at the edge of marshlands, an area in New Jersey, that was the largest site for Middle Woodland occupation in the Northeast. For at least 8,000 years Native Americans were drawn to the Bordentown Bluffs overlooking the flood plains around the wetland margins, on the banks of the Delaware River. Ancestral groups of the Lenape lived in large gatherings, engaged in hunting, fishing and early plant cultivation.

In the spring of 2021, Mary Allessio Leck, Botanist and Emeritus Professor at Rider University invited me to accompany her with naturalists and conservationists to walk the trails along the Bordentown Bluff edge, 60 feet above Crosswicks Creek. Mary pointed out Hemlocks in the least disturbed woods alongside rare ecological plant communities. I saw beautiful, blossoming Mountain Laurel, Wild Rhododendron, Chestnut Oak, Tulip Poplar, Umbrella Magnolia, Maple Leaf Viburnum, and Indigo bush.

Since then, I have filled sketchbooks and began painting. I am interested in the geology of the bluffs, the exposure of the marshland’s sediment of clay, silt, sand and pebbles, and the various streambed features. In my painting, “On Lenape Land”, deep-rooted tree trunks embody the Earth. Around the periphery I print the nuts, seeds and berries in Black Walnut ink (I make every mast year). “Sedimentary Erosion and Ancient Pathways”, Crosswicks Creek and the Bordentown Bluffs is about the Lenni Lenape trails that formed the basis for early pathways leading to and from city creeks, the Delaware River and the Trenton- Hamilton- Bordentown Marsh. “Acorn, Flour, Clay, Storage” and “Coiled”, integrates my love for the earth, for the development of pottery which began in New Jersey during the Early Woodland Period (c.1000 BCE- OCE). I painted the one Hemlock tree I saw, “On the Bluffs, Overlooking the Wetlands, an Eastern Hemlock”. “Big Bird Creek”, is named after the Great Blue Heron, the Lenape name for Crosswicks Creek. The layers of the earth surround the imagery of people having caught fish and the heron flying overhead. “When the Shadbush Blooms, the Shadfish Return” is a painting about a small tree, called Serviceberry. The flowers appear in early spring, when the shad run up the Delaware River. The berries are an important source of food for wildlife coinciding with the timing of the upriver migration of the shadfish to spawn.

I have a passion for the life of trees and feel a great spiritual connection in acknowledging the land of the Lenape and it’s history. The study of timing in nature, phenology is directing my attention to the changes in habitat for residential and migratory life affecting all species of animal and plant life. The Abbott Marshlands is situated in Lenapehoking, the traditional and ancestral homeland of the Lenape. In my paintings I hope to convey this special, vibrant place filled with a rich tapestry of cultural heritage.