

Unsettled



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

CURATED BY

Adrian Stimson | 17-29 JUNE 2017

UnSettled

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Queer Arts Festival
2017

CURATED BY

Adrian Stimson

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SD Holman

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Turtle Island was, is, and always will be queer, trans & Indigenous

UnSettled: Foreword

By Lacie Burning

It is well evident within the past, present and the future of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island that Indigequeer people have occupied these lands. That is why when I think of *UnSettled* I know that it plays in the realm, and is connected to the reclamation of our identities, our bodies as they connect to our presence over these lands. This is Native land after all.

To begin I will acknowledge that I use the terms Two-Spirit and Indigequeer interchangeably as it can represent an ever-evolving present in the way that we perceive ourselves. It is important to remember that we all embody our Indigeneity, queerness, and relationships to gender in such an incomprehensibly vast way. Remember that “Indigenous” encompasses hundreds of nations. Remember that the majority of those hundreds

of nations had their own relationships to gender, sexuality, or lack of distinguishing both. Remember we were all loved, that we are loved, and that we will be loved. So it is important to acknowledge individual needs to identify in a way that feels satisfying and to honour our changing bodies, minds, and spirits.

In remembering all this it is always painful that we *still* have to acknowledge the colonial oppression that we have faced and overcome. It is the reason that young Indigequeer Haudenosaunee people cannot accurately pinpoint a place of belonging within our own culture because the point of contact and influence over us was so long held; over 300 years in fact. So goes for many more. Nations that no longer exist today due to genocide. Genocide by heteronormative European

settler-nation states on behalf of the churches and the state combined. Why when we think of gay pride and gay liberation, are we constantly forgotten? The transgender brown and black women are forgotten? The transgender femmes and women of our communities have too long not been held up to the amount of violence they face and fight against daily for the benefit of literally everyone else. If they did, they would be in charge of the world. That will change, that will change.

I do not claim to be saying anything new or revolutionary just to state that our presence and lived realities are matters of fact. We were here and we will always be here. Words are not sufficient so we will continue creating, reclaiming, living, breathing, transitioning, and fucking.

UnSettled is a celebration of our liberated bodies, of our queer ancestors.

Indigequ queer, a phrase coined by Cree artist Thirza Cuthand meaning both Indigenous and within the Queer umbrella. You see Two-Spirit artists from several generations and how they embody their truths within the art world.

Within the term 2spirit is a multiplicity of varying identities that relate to alternative genders/ lack of genders and sexuality. The term itself acknowledges a duality present in the identity — that we exist as two selves or in two worlds of being Indigenous and within the LGBTQ+ umbrella. This ever-evolving present is apparent within *UnSettled*.

In the work of many Two-Spirit artists you can come away with an understanding of how this identity could be alienating to one or the other identity; of being under the LGBTQ+ umbrella,

and of being Indigenous. Throughout time these identities have both been at the end of state-sanctioned violence; for Indigenous people, this was not the case until colonization.

As a young Queer and trans Indigenous artist, I was introduced to the work of Adrian Stimson early on during my studies at Emily Carr University of Art + Design by artist Raven John. Adrian's work was incredibly influential to me and many of my 2S and non-2S peers alike. Being able to work for Adrian during this time was an incredible privilege. You see a large spectrum of artists and people he has met and seen in his long career.

It is with glee and some sadness that we are able to see a conclusive group show of Two-Spirit people for the first time. Sad that the ones who have passed on, like the recently deceased Aiyana Maracle-kenha and Ahasiw. In many ways, it feels they'd carved out such vital space that those debts are impossible to repay. But by continuing to honour them as best we can will be a good way forward. We know they deserved much more.

The exhibition grapples with this and I am honoured to have been present and have learned as a young curator from Adrian Stimson.

"For too long, the absence of representations of Two-Spirit people, art, and being from contemporary popular culture has been equally embedded in hegemonic practices of colonization. With *"UnSettled"* I will explore the art and being of *Two-Spirit artists, and in turn, expose the issues of historical extermination of Two-Spirit people, the lack of alternative aboriginal sexuality and gender in contemporary Western culture/media, the Two-Spirit movement, and future as a part of the reclamation of Two-Spirit identity and practice."¹



UnSettled

By Adrian Stimson

In 1994, I purchased the book *The Spirit and the Flesh* by Walter L Williams, from Little Sister's bookstore in Vancouver. Those were days when being LGBTQI2S+ was still highly unsettling for the majority of Canadians and Americans alike. That was the year the US military under the Clinton administration enacted the "Don't ask, Don't Tell" directive, which allowed gays, bisexuals and lesbians to serve in the military as long as they

didn't say it out loud. At that time, I recall my husband and I were driving across the States listening live to Clinton's speech, it was hopeful yet still required soldiers to be in the closet to serve, an odd acceptance and rejection at the same time. Canada was no better as the Canadian Forces Administrative Order 19-20, Sexual Deviation — Investigation, Medical Investigation and Disposal act was finally repealed in 1992.

¹ Adrian Stimson – *Too Two-Spirited for you: The absence and presence of Two-Spirit people in Western Culture and Media* 2005

A bit better in the sense that Queer service members were no longer subjected to or lived under the threat of exposure and elimination from the forces. It was a time when being Queer was still stigmatized and dangerous for many of us in society; assaults and murder were still commonplace. It was also the time when HIV/AIDS was devastating our communities, fear and death heightened stigma, for many Queer folk, staying in the closet equalled survival, the future looked bleak and there was not a lot in popular culture that reflected the pain many communities were enduring. However there were a few glimmers of hope, through activism, often through artistic expression, the word was getting out about the toll that HIV/AIDS was having on the LGBTQ community and homosexual identity in general. I remember Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe, as well as ACT UP, led the LGBTQ community in fighting back as they contributed to that long road to where we are today, albeit always fragile due to the ignorance and hate of some of those in our communities and in power.

The 90's were also a time when Indigenous queer identity adopted the term Two-Spirit, thus bringing forward the rich and suppressed history of Indigenous Two-Spirited being. While Two-Spirited people have always existed in the Americas, there is also a long history of extermination and suppression of Two-Spirited people. While genocide is pretty indiscriminate,

there is a lot of evidence that Two-Spirit people were specifically targeted due to their influence and power within Indigenous communities.

In the 70's I first saw *Little Big Man*,² a western featuring Dustin Hoffman as Little Big Man and Chief Dan George, a well-loved actor and chief of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. What caught me by surprise and ignited that Two-Spirit flame in me was the character Little Horse, a Cheyenne "Heemaneh", played by Robert Little Star. He was a Cheyenne man who took a woman's role. The movie's depiction was inaccurate, Little Horse was there more for comic relief than actually exploring the roles of the Heemaneh in Cheyenne culture. He was characterized as a drag queen, sashaying, batting his eyes and fanning himself, rather than the feared and revered human beings that they were.³ To this day, Robert Little Star remains an enigma; I have done countless searches to find out his tribal affiliation and what happened to him? To no avail, like our Two-Spirit ancestors, he seems to have been erased from time. I once did a performance called *Looking for Little Horse*, searching the universe for Robert Little Star. I do hope that he is found and takes his rightful place in our amazing history.

The 80's were basically void of any Two-Spirit visual representation. It wasn't until the 90's that we began to see ourselves. One of my first moments in recognizing the Two-Spirited movement was while viewing Dana Claxton's *The Red Paper*, a powerful video that recounts the devastating

consequences of colonialism, turning the tables of oppression through an artistic and Indigenous lens. It is an unsettling view of history that still haunts me. One character in particular was the Blackfoot actor Chris Red Crow, now known as Chrissy Red who is from my Nation, Siksika. In the video, Chris's character "Winket" appeared to me as sexually ambiguous and genderless. In writing this essay, I had the chance to reach out to Chrissy to ask her recollections of being in that video. "I last saw *The Red Paper* a couple years ago but don't have much memory of the production. Dana Claxton had her vision and we followed direction as best we could as it evolved in her mind. Some scenes I found disturbing as a viewer, I'm sure Dana preferred this type of reaction. I worked and volunteered at The Pitt Gallery while Dana was running it and I think that's why she created the Winket character, ageless, androgynous... I liked the ageless part! Lol"⁴ I remember it was a moment when my genetic memory kicked in, Winket felt familiar, their sexuality felt "normal"; a way of being that was known inside of me, accepted and respected by my people, a way of being that thrived and contributed to the well being of all our Nations well before the colonial Christian morality monster that raised its ugly head to smite us all. The 90's were also a time when Two-Spirited Saulteaux artist Robert Houle exhibited *Hochelaga* at Gallery Articul in Montreal, raising issues of Indigenous sovereignty in a place where two colonizing countries French and English fought

for dominance at the expense of the multitude of sovereign and flourishing nations. George Littlechild, who received his BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, now an Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Fraser Valley University, was an influential force in the 90's, he exhibited widely and his work became familiar to me. His decolonization of Indigenous pictorial history changed the way we saw ourselves, giving us pride and courage in talking back to the colonial canon of oppression. Both Robert and George were, and continue to be heroes of mine, they opened up a space in my mind and heart that said, I can do that too! At that time I could have never imagined that both these gentlemen would become mentors and ultimately dear friends. I still see myself as their fan boy, and have to pinch myself when I am in their presence. I am forever indebted to them for their artistic genius and generosity of spirit and friendship.

In 1994, Nation to Nation, an artist-led collective, which included Skawennati Tricia Fragnito, Eric Robertson and Ryan Rice, curated *Native Love*. *Native Love* challenged euro-notions that Indigenous people were without love and the prevailing stereotypes of hunter-gatherers, stoic warriors and savages.⁵ Nation to Nation opened up a space of love where Indigenous artists could express their understandings of what love is to us. Of the many artists, Two-Spirited artists were represented, including Ryan Rice, Aaron Rice, George Littlechild, Gary Godfriedson and

² Directed by Arthur Penn, based on the novel by Thomas Berger.
³ Paraphrased from *Celluloid Indians*, Jaquelyn Kilpatrick Pg.92

⁴ October 15, email reply.

⁵ Paraphrased from Presence and Absence redux: Indian Art in the 1990's Ryan Rice.

Thirza Cuthand.⁶ While I hope that there were other exhibitions that featured Two-Spirited artists, information is hard to come by. I feel that more research needs to be done in cataloging and remembering our Two-Spirited exhibition histories.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Norval Morrisseau. While his sexuality was often not spoken of; his art speaks volumes about his fluid sexuality and sometimes-overt artistic interventions. There are many stories that I have heard and are legendary about his time, being and antics. Through his art you can see his view of sex and sexuality, something not to be feared but embraced. He was a trickster for sure and to this day, there are odd disclaimers when researching his Two-Spiritedness. For instance, I had hoped to include his work in the *UnSettled* exhibition. I found out that the Glenbow Museum holds quite a few of his works, which I requested to view with the intent of getting them to loan paintings that I thought would work with the *UnSettled* exhibition. I found two wonderful paintings with glorious cocks and vaginas. Perfect for the exhibition and to continue that discussion on Indigenous sexuality. However, when it came time to loan, the Glenbow turned us down, citing that they would have to get “permission” from the family. Which seemed suspect to me, as once a work is in a collection, it is usually at their discretion when it comes to loaning works, unless there is explicit instruction not to loan to certain groups or institutions by the artist, for which no such instruction was produced. I decided not to pursue

it further, reluctantly accepting their explanation, yet forever wonder about and remain suspect of the gatekeepers of art. Yet it pains me. Norval’s work, no matter his sexuality or the sexual intent or content, is an important part of Indigenous art history. To remain unseen is unsettling, it is a continuum of that colonial practice of erasure.

My original premise for *UnSettled* was that the term itself has a number of interchangeable definitions. For this exhibition we explored the term as it relates to Indigenous Two-Spirited artists works and identity. Certainly not all definitions apply, the unsettling of the colonial narrative is at the core of the praxis of Two-Spirited artists, and they are the embodiment of their histories, present being, and future hopes.

The term “Two-Spirit” is used by many Indigenous people to describe their gender, sexual and spiritual identity—often inclusive of all LGBTQI2S+—in reclaiming and restoring traditional Indigenous concepts of sexuality, for which there are numerous definitions and understandings is still evolving.

UnSettled deployed artistic and critical discourse to focus on Two-Spirit resilience with work addressing power, representation, sexuality, language, body, tradition, memory, colonial narratives, and knowledge sharing. As LGBTQI2S+ movements posit dismantling the dominant performance of gender binaries and creating equality within a progressive, social justice narrative, there remains widespread ignorance

in the mainstream that respect for gender and sexual diversity is nothing new on this continent. Two-thirds of the 200 Indigenous languages spoken in North America have non-negative terms to describe those who are neither male nor female, speaking to the primacy of multiple genders and sexualities within aboriginal cultures. Being identified as Two-Spirit often meant carrying unique responsibilities and roles within the community, knowledge keepers being one of the most important. Homophobia came with colonization, as the Urban Native Youth Association attests, “The religious dogma of the Residential Schools erased a proud and rich history of Two-Spirit people in most Aboriginal communities. As a direct result of the residential school experience, homophobia is now rampant in most Aboriginal communities, even more so than in mainstream society.”⁷

UnSettled presented work from a Two-Spirit perspective, exploring contemporary roles and experiences, as well as providing a platform for innovation and experimentation at the intersection between the Indigenous and queer art milieus. It was vitally important to give priority to these dually marginalized voices, and to trace commonalities within a contemporary art context. Where the dialogue of activism recites a Euro-centric mantra of inclusion, while systematically excluding Indigenous models, perspectives, and contemporary practice, it is a state of being *UnSettled*.

I believe that the Indigenous art movement is the vanguard of contemporary art. I find it to be the most interesting and engaging these days. While I totally appreciate many art forms and artists, I have a bias toward Indigenous practice. Bias due to the fact that it is great art first, yet also due to our historical erasure and the oh-so-often exclusion by non-Indigenous contemporary institutions and curators. It sometimes feels like a minefield of racism and ignorance. Sadly, I’ve had my share of well-meaning but terribly uninformed administrators and curators who have to make sure their boxes of inclusion are checked. Worse, the notion that we are “welfare art”⁸ and have to be included in order to ease the pain of white guilt. This all gets a bit more complicated and exaggerated when it comes to Two-Spirited artists. Not only do we have to dodge the colonial cannon but also we have to dodge the sex and sexuality cannon as well, even within our own communities. The proof is in the pudding, how many Two-Spirited exhibitions in the past 30 years can you count out, let alone name? They are few and far between. I do acknowledge that there are a number of Two-Spirited artists who are doing very well. Kent Monkman and Brian Jungen are opening doors, challenging notions of contemporary art, and are an inspiration to us all. Yet the diversity and the number of Two-Spirited artists that exist within our communities remains difficult to gauge due to the lack of published exhibitions and or the lack of exhibitions at all.

⁶ Cyperpowwow.net, Native Love overview and essay by Audra Simpson. Please excuse if I may have missed any other Two-Spirited artists represented in this exhibition.

⁷ Urban Native Youth Association, 2 Spirit Collective, Vancouver BC.

⁸ A story once shared with me about a well-known contemporary art gallery in Calgary, one of its board members once referred to Indigenous art as welfare art, that they had to include it as an obligation rather than it being just art. Still boils my blood when I think of it.

However, not to be the downer, I do see a new wave of Two-Spirited artists who are tech and communications savvy, who are breaking down the old barriers and building new roads to understanding the Two-Spirited experience. Many who agreed to be in *UnSettled*.

As a curator, choosing artists for an exhibition is always an unsettling process. There is always the feeling that someone is being excluded. Not purposefully, more often due to circumstance, availability or lack of visibility and yes, what can a budget accommodate. For *UnSettled*, I wanted to throw the curatorial net as far as I could, to get as many Two-Spirited artists to participate within the confines of the space and time available. In the end after searching and talking to many artists, 15 artists agreed to be a part of *UnSettled*, as well I decided to include the works of three artists who have passed, making 18 artists in total. For me it was an exciting adventure in working with the artists in selecting what work they thought would fit with the exhibition, as well as the opportunity to get to know each artist more personally, and be a part of the continuum of building our community. For this essay, I thought that I would share how I came to know each artist, share some insights into their work as well as keep with our traditions of storytelling, coming to know many aspects of our humanity through their art and stories.

In many Indigenous communities, the importance of recognizing those who came before us is not

only important but an inherent part of many cultural protocols and practices. Three of the artists in the exhibition have passed yet their influence on many artists both Indigenous and non-Indigenous is far reaching. For *UnSettled* we brought the spirits of Aiyyana Maracle, Ahasiw Muskegon-Iskew and Mike MacDonald into the space. I personally did not know Aiyyana, yet I knew of her, her performance work was at the vanguard of Two-Spirited expressions. Aiyyana passed in 2016, leaving us with an amazing story of her journey, a Journey in Gender to be specific. She decolonized gender and by doing so helped us all to understand the diversity of Indigenous sexuality and expression. As a multi-disciplinary artist she traversed the many artistic disciplines, yet at the core was storytelling. Her story was one of transformation, medicine, decolonization and knowledge keeping. Two still images, *Strange Fruit* from the Play performance series in 1994 and *Gender Möbius* from Half-breed performance series in 1995 gave us a glimpse into her gentle yet uncompromising and powerful voice. Her advocacy and mentorship of many artists is still felt today. When mentioning her name, you can feel and see the impact she had on people, and they remember her fondly and with the utmost respect. It was an honour to ensure that Aiyyana remains with us and continues to be that voice of resilience and love.

The first and only time I met Ahasiw Muskegon-Iskew was in 2005 while he was the Canada Council's resident New Media curator at Urban

Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg; he died in 2006. It was a brief yet important moment for me, as I knew that Ahasiw was a leader in Indigenous new media/digital arts. His work for the internet not only created a web of knowledge for Indigenous artists and scholars alike, but it opened up a space for us all to explore. It's funny to think that new media was still in its infancy at that time yet Ahasiw was a game changer, breaking the rules and creating new and exciting ways to express Indigeneity on the web and challenging galleries on how to represent it. His mentorship and knowledge sharing is far-reaching and still impacts us today. I curated Ahasiw's work previously, in *Express*, the Articulation series at the Mendel Art Gallery. *Children Shining on the Moon* was a gritty performance that shone a light on the world of the sex trade through the Cree mythological monster, man-eating giant Witiko. Ahasiw was never afraid to expose the horrors that many Indigenous people experienced. Another opportunity to connect with Ahasiw's spirit came when I was invited by the grunt gallery to reimagine one of Ahasiw's works. I chose *White Shame*. I, like Ahasiw, pierced myself seven times, attaching seven feathers to my chest, an act of sacrifice for community, as well as addressing our often violent and disparate colonial histories. It was a powerful moment that made me realize that our spirit is flesh. The marks left on my body by this performance connect us. Ahasiw will be forever a part of me and for all of us who knew him, he is in our hearts. For *UnSettled* we used the

two images from *White Shame*, part of the First Nations Performance Series in 1992. At this point I would like to express my gratitude to the grunt gallery specifically Glenn Alteen for their and his amazing support and use of their archive of images. Both Aiyyana and Ahasiw had strong ties to the grunt gallery.

I did not know Mike MacDonald, but I did visit his garden at the Banff Centre. A peaceful sanctuary for butterflies and humans alike. Known for his video and Internet work, Mike was a warrior for the environment, he planted gardens across the country, giving voice to the butterfly and many flora and fauna. For *UnSettled* we chose the video *Touched by the Tears of a Butterfly* 1995 (Vtape). It is of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, slowly but surely. Mike made us slow down and take notice of these little moments in time, reflecting on our relationships not only with the natural world but also with each other. Transformation happens in many ways, I saw this video as a metaphor for Two-Spirit being, that space of transformation, often from that place of despair and struggle, to that place of beauty and freedom. Mike passed in 2006 yet his legacy will last forever, especially in those gardens and in those tears of the butterfly.

The work of Robert Houle is legendary, he was at the vanguard of bridging the worlds of Indigenous and contemporary art. As an abstractionist he addresses the history of colonialism by using popular images and text, often subverting colonial narratives by using

Anishnaabe text and material culture. Like many Indigenous artists who came out of western institutions during the 60's and 70's, Robert was not only an artist but also had to be a curator and educator. This was due to the fact that many art institutions of that time either refused or reluctantly exhibited Indigenous contemporary art. We had to become our own curators as no one else would do it! Robert was the first Indigenous curator for the Canadian Museum of Civilisation, he has built an amazing resume that continues to grow today, his insight, knowledge of Indigenous art history, criticism and writing enlightens us all. For *UnSettled* we chose an early conté drawing 2007 of a Nude he drew while on a Canada Council residency in Paris. I found the work to be subtle, erotic and full of desire. A departure from the abstract work that I knew, it brought me back to those moments in life drawing class, where the nude body was demystified, celebrated and brought us all closer to our humanity.

Rosalie Favell is another artist who transcends time. Her photographic work often deals with portraiture, often inserting herself in historical themes and traditional compositions. Her portraits are often humorous yet interrogate both the colonial gaze and popular culture. Her enlarged Polaroid *Living Evidence, How could I go on as if it never happened* 1994 examines love and love lost, the black bar over the eyes of a former partner is meant to conceal identity, but does it? Being in love is etched deep in our hearts, photographs can remind us

of this love. Does concealing your love's identity change that love? Rosalie offers us an intimate glimpse into her heart, and how that heart never forgets the evidence of our lived lives. Rosalie has also undertaken a huge project of photographing portraits of Indigenous artists, for which I have posed for three, being a bit of a shape shifter and I hope not too greedy. Rosalie's ability to capture these moments and those of so many other artists is an important archive that is a testament to Indigenous presence, vibrancy and humanity.

Cease Wyss is a cultural powerhouse! I say this as I have witnessed her work over many years. Her advocacy for the environment has manifested in many ways, her tireless work in creating gardens and protecting the Bees who pollinate them, her activism against resource development, especially the many proposed pipelines that challenge Indigenous sovereignty over the land. Cease never ceases to amaze me and inspire me to act. We have had many conversations about Bees (I am a beekeeper) and gardens over the years, we have shared our triumphs and defeats yet through it all, Cease's unwavering desire to be an agent of change is inspiring and a lesson in never giving up. A part of her art practice is bringing the past into the present. For *UnSettled*, Cease created an interactive weaving installation. *Spinning Wool/Two-Spirits-Seius Anus Kwih7aynexw Ihenihent* brought the Skwx-wu7mesh/Sto:Lo historical traditions of weaving into the gallery. Cease was researching this

tradition and originally the Salish Wool dog or Comox dog hair would have been used yet those particular dogs are now extinct. By bringing this interactive installation into *UnSettled*, Cease brings us closer to Indigenous cultural practices and history. The act of weaving is contemplative yet precise, you have to be aware of what you are doing or destroy the work. A life metaphor for us all, to be aware of what we are doing, to pay attention and act in a good way, as the repercussions of ignorance will affect us all. Through the act of weaving, many strands become one, joining us all under one blanket.

I first met Barry Ace through the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective for which he was a founding member. His advocacy for Indigenous curators and cultural producers has not gone unnoticed, his tireless work has advanced Indigenous art and praxis greatly. He, like many Indigenous artists who began their careers in a very racist vacuum, know too well the challenges of representation. I admire Barry, I am often in awe at his many accomplishments; in government, Indigenous organizations and as an artist and collector. He works tirelessly, his dedication to studio practice leaves me exhausted, but in a good way as the work he produces is not only aesthetically beautiful but brings the past into the present using contemporary materials. I did not know that Barry first trained as an electrician, he then switched to graphic arts and has not looked back, or has he? His inclusion of electronic materials like capacitors and resistors that imitate

bead work, creates a beautiful aesthetic harkening back to his M'Chigeeng First Nation traditional practices. *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau*, 2017 is a beautiful bandolier, a pocketed belt for ammunition and a memorial to the murder of Alain Brosseau. Alain Brosseau was a straight man who was murdered because his murderers thought he was gay. This happened in Ottawa in 1989, Alain was walking home after work at the Chateau Laurier, a group of teens saw him, thought he was gay, this due to his well-dressed appearance, chased him, beat him up, then dangled him by his ankles over the edge of the Alexandra Bridge, then let him fall to his death, one attacker saying as they let go "I like your shoes". Barry, who lives in Ottawa, knew this story very well. This Bandolier is made with love, beautifully appointed, it speaks to appearance, how it can be deceiving, how we judge and sadly how we can hate someone based on their appearance. The video recounts the events of that night and the resulting activism that changed in the way Ottawa treated the LGBTQI2S+ community.

I'm going to say it, I had a crush on George Littlechild in the 90's. Well I still do, but it's different. So who didn't have a crush on George? For a Two-Spirited man, to see another Indigenous gay man at that time was enticing. George's work is gorgeous, his use of colour, playfulness, and with a strong message was exhibited widely. His name was well-known. Today, when I talk to friends about the 80's/90's art, George's name always comes up. I remember

seeing him at a gay bar in Calgary, I was always too shy to say hi, he was out and proud, and to this day his art, humble being and humanity continue to shine. For *UnSettled*, three paintings from his warrior series celebrate masculinity, those warriors who stood up and continue to take a stand for the land and environment. George also included the painting *Cree Boy Thrust*, a beautiful Cree man standing with all his glory for all to see. It made my eyes widen, my head to cock, and a smile to form. I giggled nervously thinking, will they allow this in the community space? They better, I thought! And they did.

I first met Michelle Sylliboy in Vancouver; our meeting was to see if she would be interested in participating in this exhibition. I had known of Michelle yet had not met her nor seen her work. She is highly regarded within the Two-Spirited and Vancouver art community, in fact all across Canada. Her poetry and multi-disciplinary work speaks volumes on her life and experiences. I remember meeting her at a small café near Gastown, we did our greetings and introductions, small chat and chat about our careers. I'll never forget a moment when after being very vague about a subject, she directly stated to me, "Do your homework, man". For which I could have been taken aback, yet it struck me, yes! Do your homework! It was a funny moment and every time I start a research project, Michelle's voice enters my mind, do your homework. I thank Michelle for that teaching, the importance of doing

your research and knowing your subject matter. For *UnSettled*, we chose her video *The Art of Reconciliation*, a beautiful and haunting mix of Mi'kmaq text, voice and land textured video that speak to legacies of loss and reconciliation. I remember sitting in the space, watching and listening, being overcome with sadness as the words and video flowed over me, tears followed. Yet I also felt empowered and hopeful as I left; I could feel Michelle's dedication to Mi'kmaq philosophy of non-interference, "allow the process to unfold and support what immerses".⁹ Her gentle nudges will keep us all on the learning path.

I first knew John Powell as a fashion designer. His work and reputation is renowned and part of many theater and opera costume designs of the past. Primarily schooled in textiles, his teachings come from his traditional Kwak'wakw'wakw designs. He is also known for his work in interior and graphic design. I admit, I envy John's taste in fashion, he wears what he makes and what he likes, and what he makes and likes is fantastic! He's always dressed to the nines! confident and full of knowledge. He is also involved in his local politics. In visiting his studio, our discussions turned to local issues, as we both live on our First Nation territories, and familiar stories always come up. What struck me was his knowledge of his people's history, both past and current. This became even more apparent when we started to choose the work for *UnSettled*.

Each of his family members portrait done in his tradition Kwak'wakw'wakw design and language, each portrait telling a story dating back generations, keeping alive the history of his family and people. His entire family portrait series is an incredible archive that brings the past into the present, keeping history alive and vibrant before our eyes.

Wanda Nanibush is a force to be reckoned with! I say this as she is at the vanguard of curatorial practice in Canada and internationally. Her presence at the AGO has changed the gallery, indigenized spaces to give context to history and the long road to Indigenous representation in these oft-colonial spaces. Her unwavering support for Indigenous artists and incredible research on Indigenous rights places her in that realm of knowledge keepers. Her ability to link Indigenous rights with contemporary Indigenous art and the western art canon creates a space for inquiry, reflection and power. For *UnSettled*, the installation *Passive Resistance* 2010 is a work situated on the floor of the gallery, a white canvas reworked to hold the fluid of rice milk, red dye is added, the red slowly but surely absorbs the white. A video of a crow fighting a bullying Raven is projected onto the canvas. The red absorbs the white, it is a metaphor for the state of our colonial relationships, the constant fight to be heard, to resist, to indigenize those white spaces. I love Wanda for many reasons, not only has she curated me in a number of exhibitions but

purchased my and other Indigenous artists' work for the AGO collection. She is a friend, one you can always count on, and one who speaks her mind, challenges the status quo and forever has your back.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan was raised Mennonite after being adopted at two months old. His Indigenous heritage erased, Richard traversed the racist homophobic world, bringing him to Vancouver, where he was able to explore his identity and sexuality. Richard often uses the colours of the pride flag, evoking not only the colour spectrum but also pride in self and community. Richard poses tough yet necessary questions of identity, specifically, how upbringing affects one's relationship to blood relations and communities that influence you. For *UnSettled*, we selected three paintings; *Before the knowing*, *Into the knowing* and *Happy at last*, all perspectives playing with colour and light. They are self-portraits of Richard's coming to know self, the stages of being, coming out of the dark and into the light. The sculpture *My Spirits Soar* is a collage of objects, objects that have both personal and colonial references. The building blocks of the colonial project and how they form identity, identities that we often struggle with, or more likely, that others struggle with. I find it a whimsical piece built upon the King James Bible and Hudson's Bay history books; it's appropriate to have the beer can cock, pointing, interrogating the viewer, the lego building blocks and rainbow stacking rings speak to the child within and the CNC

⁹ Paraphrased from Michelle's web page Teaching Philosophy. <https://msylliboy.wixsite.com/website>

routed yellow cedar with illuminated light bulb speak to his relationship to cultural/ social identities.

Jessie Short is a curator, writer, multi-disciplinary artist and emerging filmmaker. For *UnSettled* her video *Sweet Night* plays with identity, the struggle between urban and rural cultural life, love and the play between genders. As the title suggests, it is a sweet story of coming to know cultural practices and personal sexuality. The juxtaposition creates a tension, asks questions about culture and the personal within culture. Her photograph taken at the Banff Springs, *Family of Light* is an eerie yet erotic moment, the masks are demonic yet the poses suggest loving relationships. I have known Jessie for many years, probably starting at the Banff Centre where so many of our paths first crossed. I have always enjoyed my time with Jessie, reflecting on the political landscape, we both live in Alberta and share similar stories of growing up in this conservative place. It's what shapes us, wakes us up and, like sweet grass, sweetens the air and protects us from those oft-hostile forces.

I first met Dayna Danger at the Banff Centre for the Arts, where she was an intern. I had the opportunity to do a studio visit with her, I was struck by her bold, sexual, sometimes gruesome photographic constructions of domestic life. I would also add humorous, there is a sexual whimsy, like a wink of the eye, you think you get it yet maybe not? Her work puts me in a state of inquiry, I want to know more, like witnessing the accident, and you can't always turn away.

I love the trajectory Dayna's on, I'm a fanboy. It's been very joyous to watch Dayna explore her being, questioning yet full of generosity, humility and humour. As Two-Spirited people, we straddle that line between what we perceive is right and wrong in our communities. Yes there are definite teachings and protocols. Yet we are nations within nations within nations, we are all different and evolving. Which can be culturally challenging when considering notions of Indigenous feminism within the many feminist movements. It's different, now add Two-Spirited being within that, it's enough to rattle any mind. Here enters Dayna, with her four portraits in *UnSettled*, her beaded head masks, kind of like wrestler's masks, more akin to gay bondage gear, open up that mind bending space. What are we seeing? How does it intersect with Indigeneity? Who defines identity? Who is behind the mask? Maybe me? Not only are they looking at us, we are looking at them, interrogating not only our own understandings of our identity but that of our collective Indigeneity.

Ursula Johnson's work consists of 12 drawings titled *Making a mark*, aligned in rows of 4, a video of Ursula weaving a birch bark basket is projected over the drawings. The juxtaposition of the static drawings and dynamic video plays with ideas of moments caught in time and the care and precise process of creation. The line drawings of a human figure sitting remind me of the strips of birch bark as they are incorporated into the basket, slowly building revealing

the care and knowledge that has been passed down through generations of Mi'kmaq history. Ursula has certainly left a mark on the Canadian art scene, winning the Sobey Art award in 2017. Ursula is an accomplished basket weaver in her Mi'kmaq community, she has taken that skill and transformed it for the contemporary art world, in both object and performance. Ursula also has a fantastic sense of humour, her recent performance work played on the commodification of Indigenous arts and crafts through infomercials, specifically *The Indian Truckhouse of High Art*. I recall being in Halifax one year, and by coincidence Ursula was having a fundraiser for her wife Angella Parsons who had recently been in an accident. It was a fun night hosted by Candy Palmatar full of high camp hilarity and heartfelt love and concern for the couple's well being. It was an honour to watch this evening unfold, like the weaving of a basket, the more we come together, the stronger the community.

I recently realized that Thirza Cuthand has been in performance art way longer than I. I may be older agewise yet Thirza is older performance artwise. I have had the great honour of knowing Thirza from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. We both lived there, she longer than I, yet we became bound by that art community. I remember Thirza's work was shown in our performance art class, I was mesmerized. Well beyond her years, Thirza was Unsettling the art world through her provocative works. I believe she was banned from one or more video festivals due to her sexuality and age. Thirza is bold and unapologetic

and very funny. For *UnSettled* we chose her video *2 Spirit Dream Catcher Dot Com*. The play on the dating site meme, from a Two-Spirit perspective, tickles the funny bone! She hits the nail on the head when we hear each profile, the loves, the love lost, the anticipation, the rejection, the dating life. Her casual pose, matter of fact narrative brings us back to the rez and those crazy funny moments, we all have shared. All hail Thirza, the Queen of the Indigequeers!

Vanessa Dion Fletcher's *Menstrual Accessory* performance makes me laugh out loud. I am not sure if this is a nervous laugh or a belly laugh, most likely both. I've known Vanessa since I first saw her work at the Banff Centre. At that time, brave paintings using her menses. Vanessa's work is challenging yet important in understanding women's being in traditional and contemporary life. In fact all our roles, as the colonial male gaze, often adopted by Indigenous men, stigmatizes and controls the female body, often at the expense of Indigenous knowledge systems where women were and are in control of their being, spirit and bodies. In *Menstrual Accessory* performance, using classical feminine hygiene memes, Vanessa takes us back to a place where embarrassment is replaced with confidence. An infomercial that gives us a demonstration of the beauty and colourful palate that is red.

I love Raven John, we are instagram buddies. I enjoy watching her posts, attention to details and whimsy. I've had many opportunities to see and visit with Raven over the years. I'll never forget

the day she came to an opening of mine wearing her raven hat. She was the raven, creator of the world, mysterious, mischievous. Raven never fails to put a smile on my face, reminding me that play is an important part of our human experience. Raven's painting *Two-Spirit Transformation Blessing* 2017, is a self-portrait, a fantastic exploration using her Salish/Stó:lo imagery juxtaposed with their transformed being; breasts, cock and witch's hat exposed under the protection of the rainbow. Raven's talent goes in many directions, she is a visual artist, cultural consultant, mediator, photographer and sculptor. She has worked with Amanda Spotted Fawn Strong in creating sets and puppets for her many animated films. The last time I was with Raven, they hung out while I was making prints at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Playful as ever, they took images of my prints, playing with stop motion, moving back and forth, bringing life to the static image, like the raven bringing life to the world.

UnSettled was an exhibition I am proud to have curated. It was a moment in time that demonstrated the diverse community that we are. The erasure of our history is part of the colonial project, yet it did not destroy our spirits, in fact it has strengthened them. As Two-Spirited human beings we have and will continue to play the roles we are destined for, we are at a point in our collective history that it is imperative to reclaim, show, educate, record, archive and continue to unsettle the colonial project. I remember that day at Little Sister's bookstore, looking at the cover of *Spirit and the Flesh*, knowing I was at the beginning of my Two-Spirited journey. We have all come a long way, yet the road is still fraught with challenges, challenges we are sure to meet head on, given the absolute hope and power that is our Two-Spirited LGBTQAI+ community. Thank you to the Pride in Art Society-Queer Arts Festival, SD Holman, Lacie Burning et al. for their unwavering support for this exhibition, events and catalogue.

—Adrian A. Stimson

UnSettled

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

CURATED BY
Adrian Stimson

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew
Aiy yana Maracle
Barry Ace
T'uy't'tanat – Cease Wyss
Dayna Danger
George Littlechild
Jessie Short
John Powell
Michelle Sylliboy
Mike MacDonald
Richard Heikkelä-Sawan
Raven John
Robert Houle
Rosalie Favell
Thirza Cuthand
Ursula Johnson
Vanessa Dion Fletcher
Wanda Nanibush

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew



Plate 1: Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, *White Shame* from *First Nations Performance Series*, 1992,
Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.

Image on facing page

Plate 2: Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, *White Shame* from *First Nations Performance Series*, 1992,
Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.



Aiyyana Maracle



Plate 3: Aiyyana Maracle, *Gender Möbius* from *Halfbreed Performance Series*, 1995, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.



Plate 4: Aiyyana Maracle, *Strange Fruit* from Play performance series, 1994, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.

Barry Ace



Detail: Barry Ace, *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau*, 2017.

Facing page:

Plate 5: Barry Ace, *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau*, 2017. Digital screen, horsehair, electronic components (resistors, capacitors, inductors, LED), fabric, metal, brass wire, 180.3 x 39.4 x 19.1 cm. Courtesy of Ottawa Art Gallery: Donated by the artist, 2018. Photo: Justin Wonnacott.

ARTIST: Barry Ace



T'uy't'tanat – Cease Wyss



Plate 6: T'uy't'tanat – Cease Wyss,
Sèlus Ánus Kwelh7áynexw Lhenlhént

[spinningWool / twoSpirits]

Weaving a Blanket, 2017, Installation, 24 x 96 inch shawls
(2) together 72 x 192 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 7: T'uy't'tanat – Cease Wyss,
Sèlus Ánus Kwelh7áynexw Lhenlhént

[spinningWool / twoSpirits]

Weaving a Blanket, 2017, Installation, 24 x 96 inch shawls
(2) together 72 x 192 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Dayna Danger

Plate 8: Dayna Danger, *Adrienne*, 2017,
Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 9: Dayna Danger, *Lindsay*, 2017,
Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.





Plate 10: Dayna Danger,
Sasha, 2017,
Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 11: Dayna Danger,
Kandace, 2017,
Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

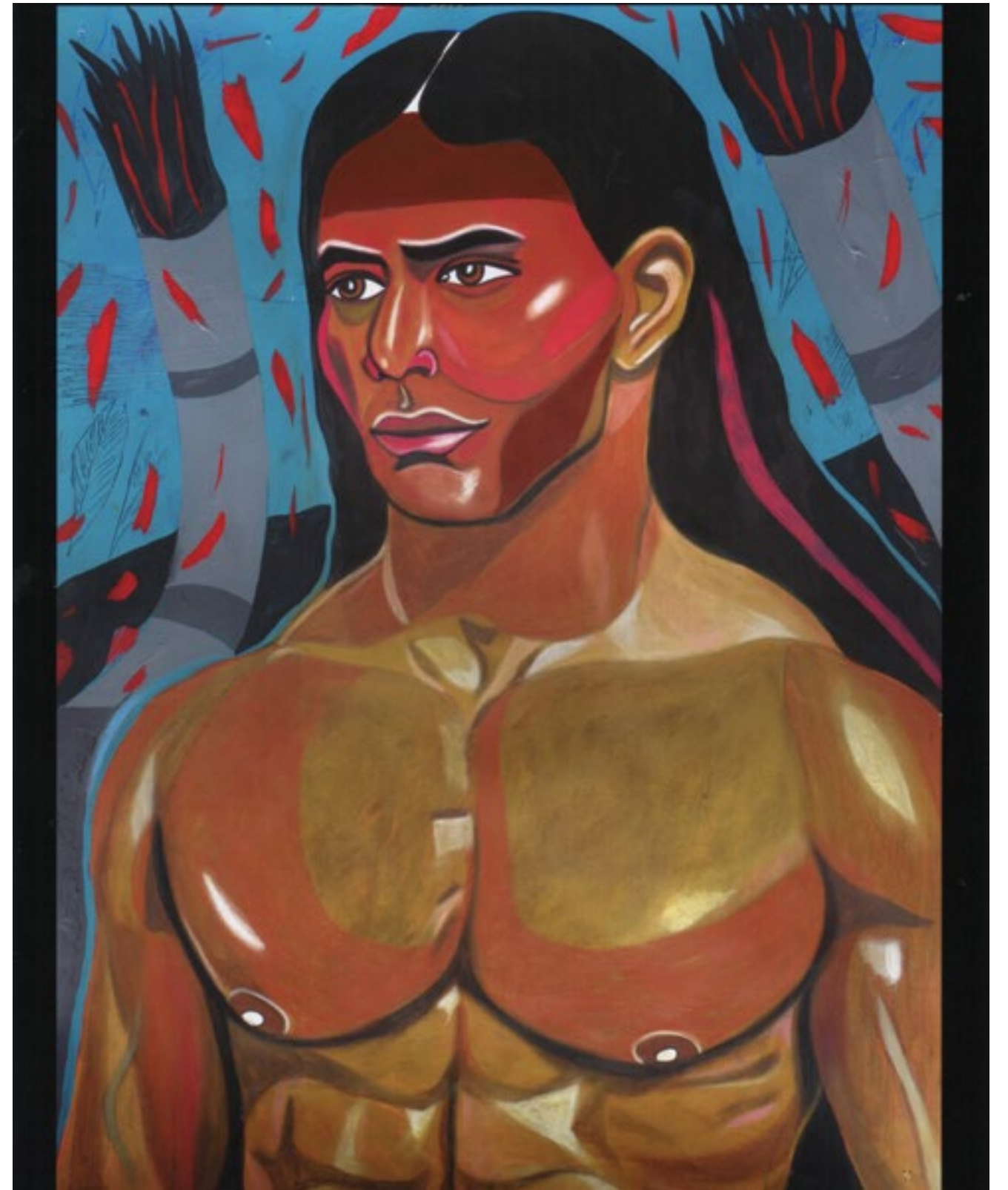
George Littlechild

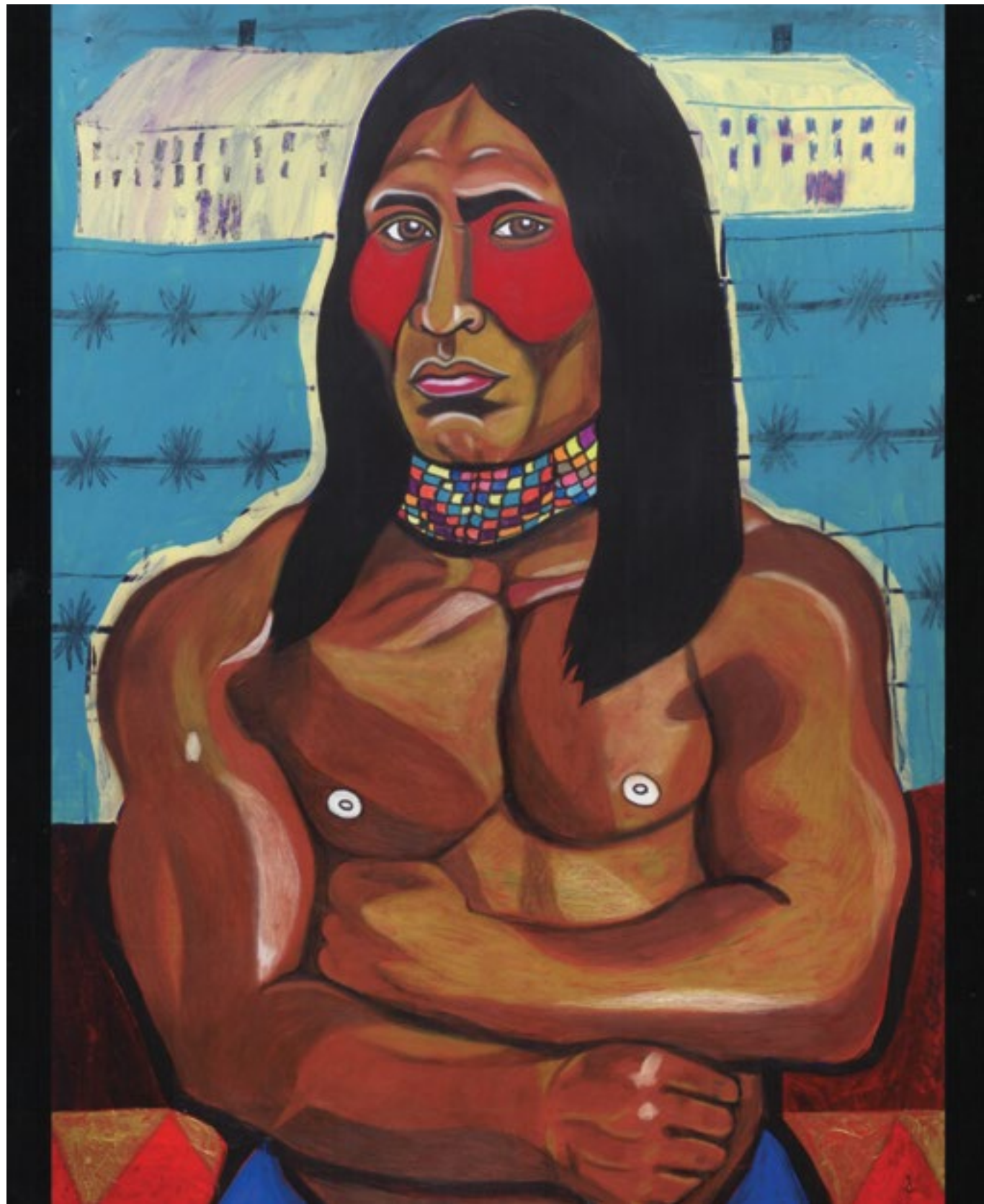


Plate 12: George Littlechild, *Warrior Incarcerated*, 2015, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Facing page

Plate 13: George Littlechild, *Warrior and The Black Snake*, 2015, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist.





Facing page

Plate 14: George Littlechild, *Warrior Indigenous of South America's Sacred Soil*, 2017, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 15: George Littlechild, *Cree Boy Thrust*, 2017, Mixed media, 50 x 38 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Jessie Short



Plate 16: Jessie Short, *Family of Light*, 2016, Photographic.
Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 17: Jessie Short, *Sweet Night*, 2016, Video, 6:53min.
Courtesy of the artist.

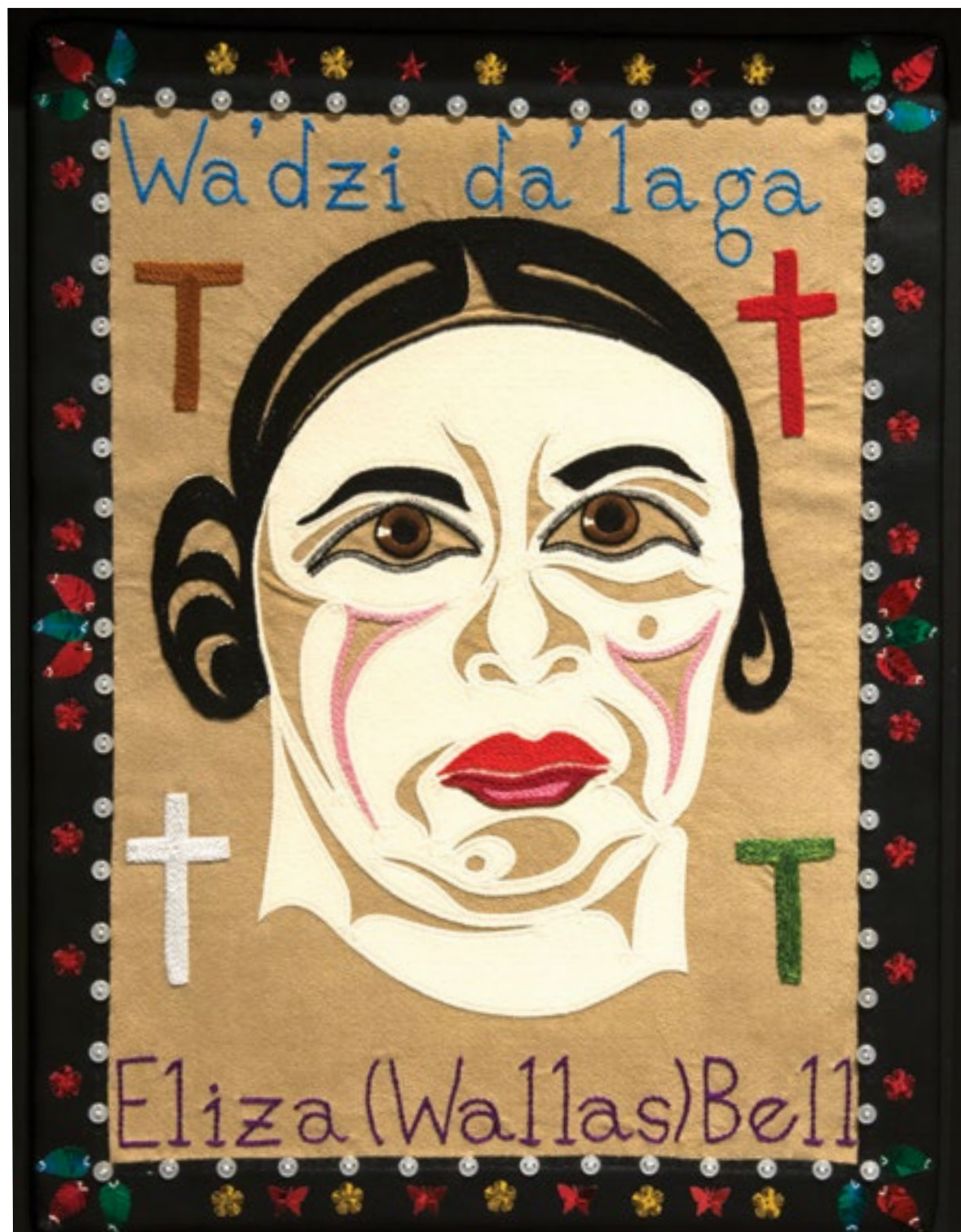


Plate 18: John Powell, *Winidi* (self Portrait), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

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Plate 19: John Powell, *Yam'gwas* (maternal Great, Great Grandmother), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

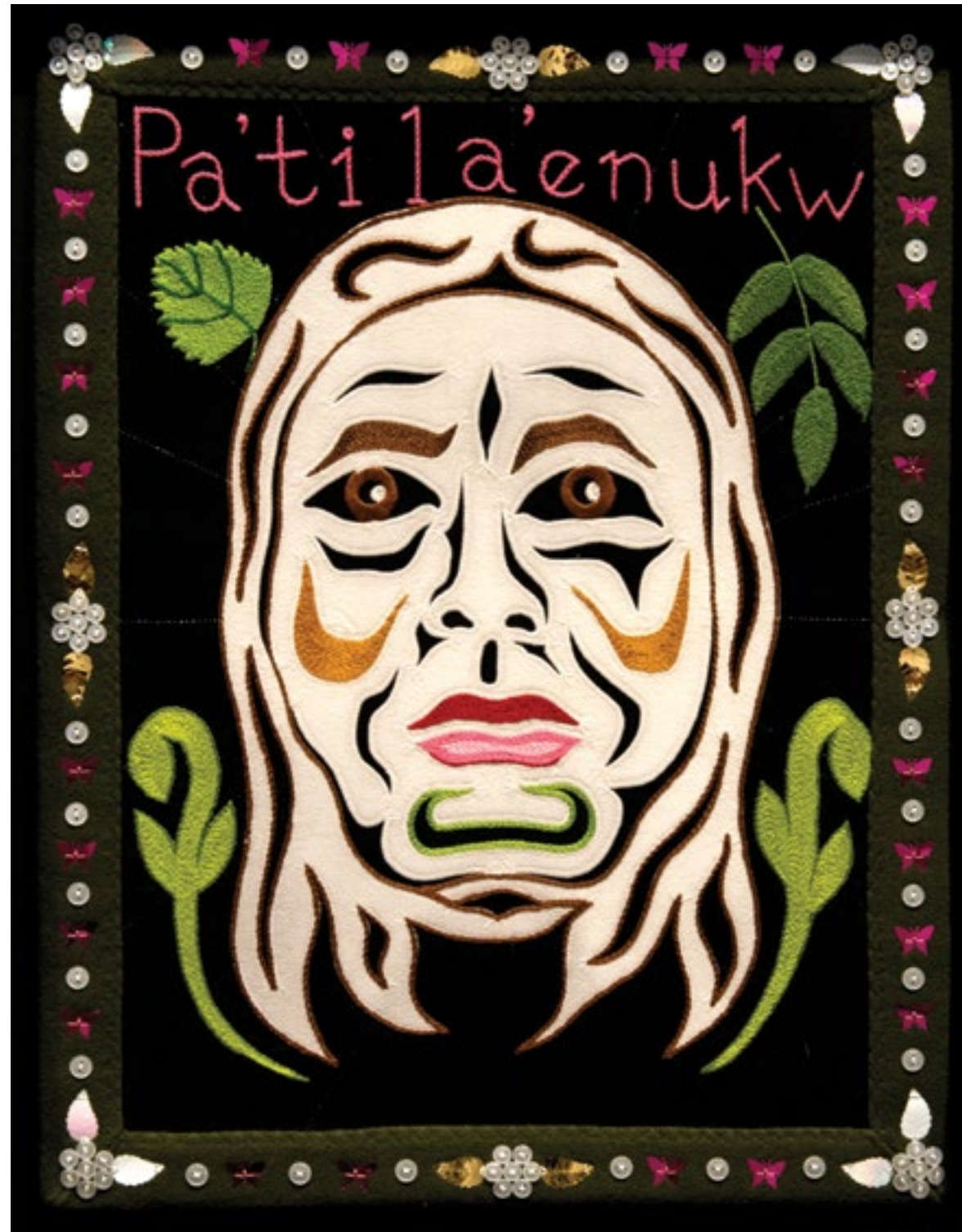




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Plate 20: John Powell, *Wa'dzi da'laga* (maternal Grandmother), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 21: John Powell, *Oo Dzee stah lees* (maternal Grandfather), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Facing page

Plate 22: John Powell, *Patila'enukw* (maternal Great Grandmother), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

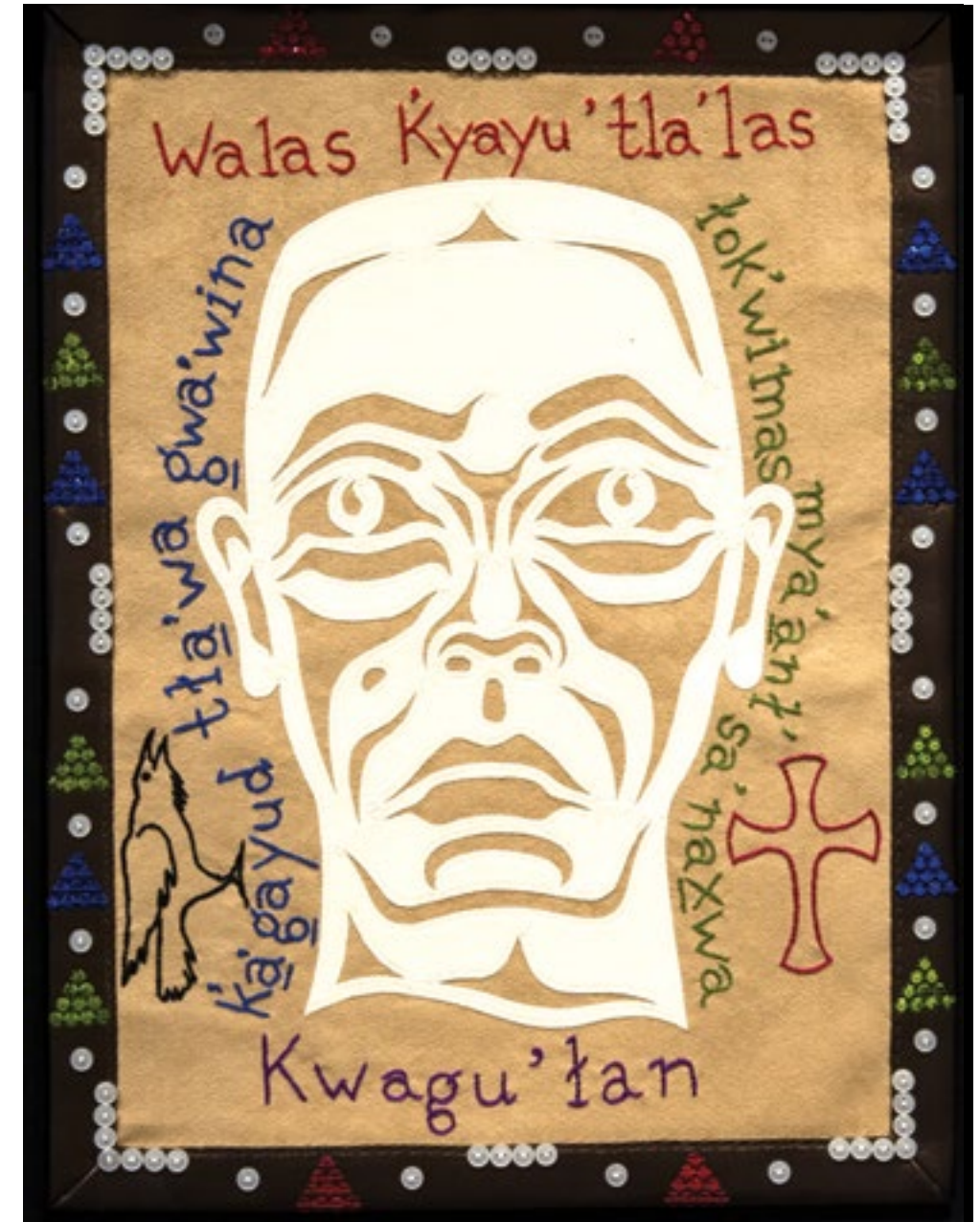
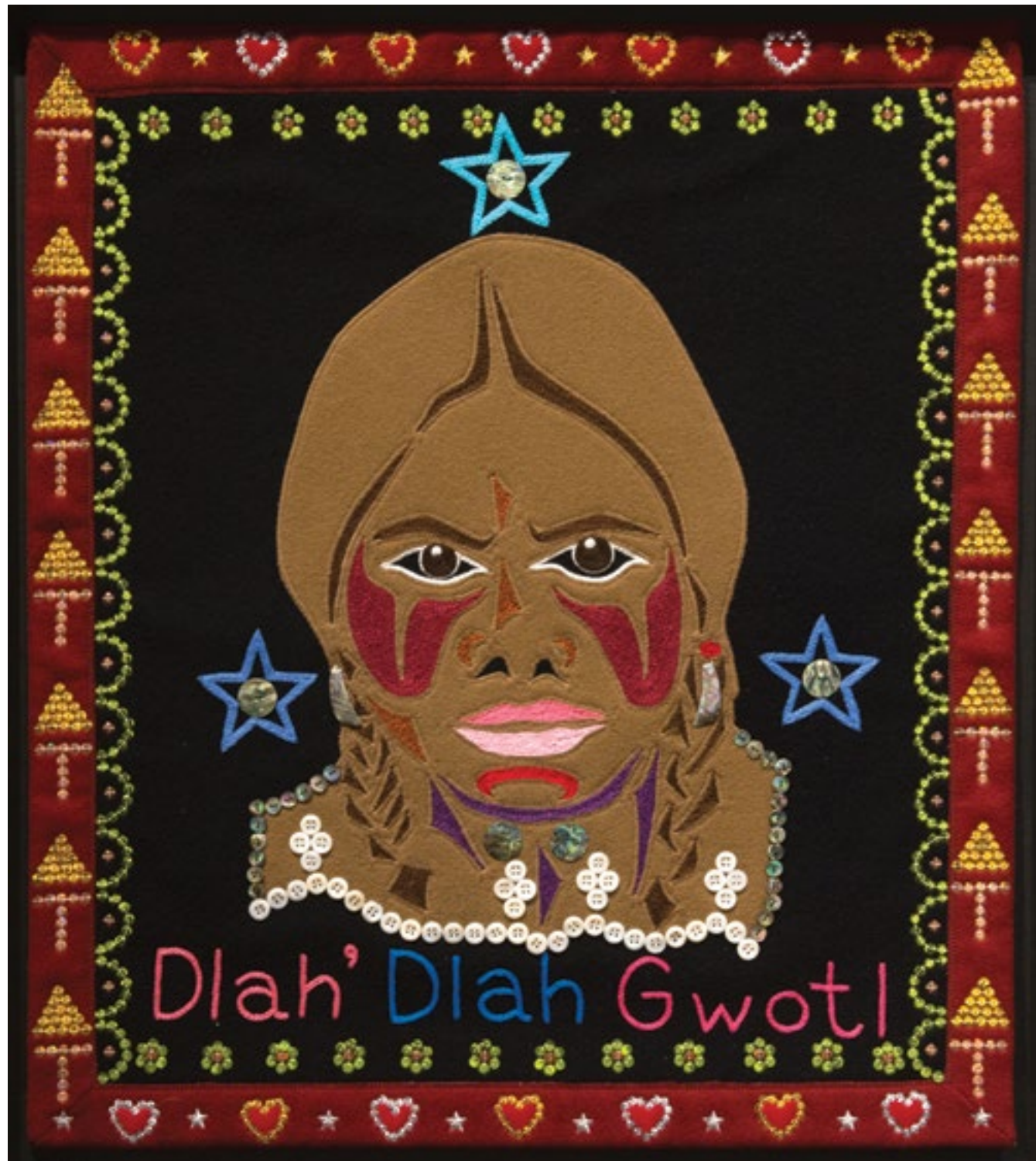


Plate 23: John Powell, *Walas Kyayu'tla'las* (maternal Great Grandfather), 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Facing page

Plate 24: John Powell, *Dlah' Dlah Gwotl* (Grandfather's Mother), 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 25: John Powell, *Mah Q'wa lah oh gwa* (my Grandfather's Aunt), 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 26: John Powell, *Goo Tlah' Lahss* (my Grandfather's Uncle), 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Facing page

Plate 27: John Powell, *Dlah Kwa Gyee lo Gwa* (my Grandfather's Aunt), 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Michelle Sylliboy

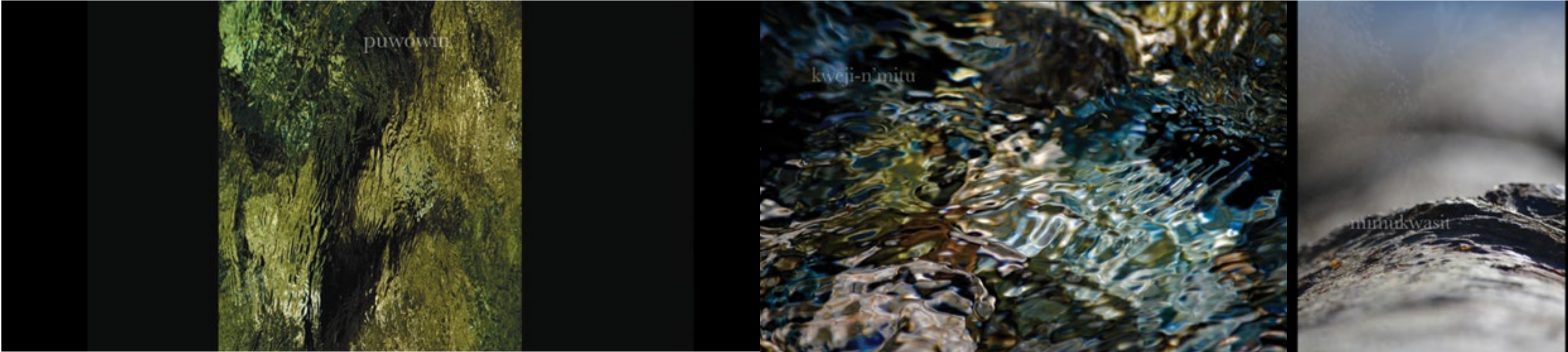
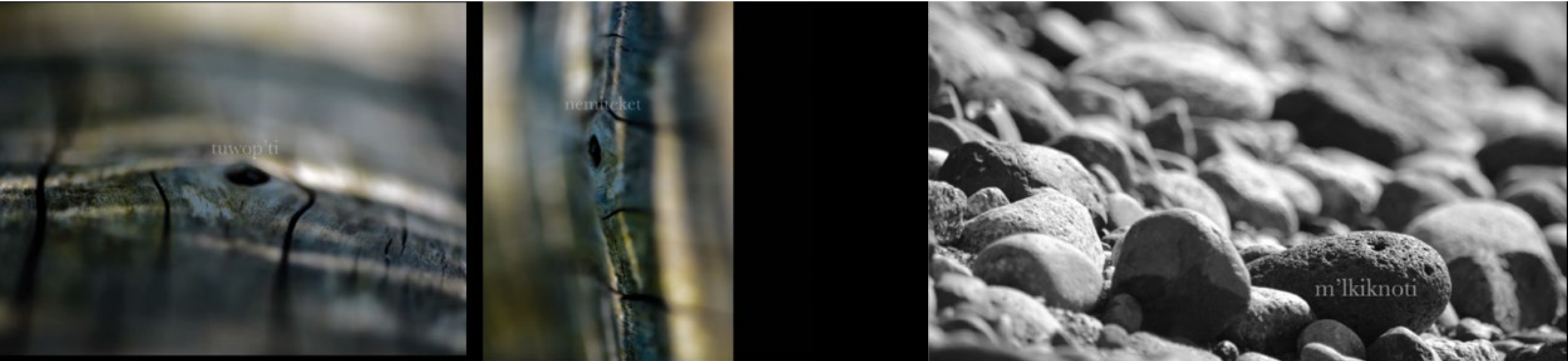


Plate 28: Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

Plates 29-30: Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.



Plates 31-32: Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 33: Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

Mike MacDonald



Plate 34: Mike MacDonald, *Touched By The Tears of a Butterfly*, 1995, Video, 14:30min. Courtesy of Vtape.



Plates 35-38 clockwise: Mike MacDonald, *Touched By The Tears of a Butterfly*, 1995, Video, 14:30min. Courtesy of Vtape.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan



Plate 39: Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *My Spirits Soar*, 2015, Hudson's Bay history book, King James bible, John Fluevog Rigas boots, mannequin legs, laquer, Finn chair, unopened Big Rock beer can, Lego bricks, foam shapes, Band-Aids, spray paint, children's wooden stacking toy, mahogany valet stand, braided roping, CNC routed yellow cedar, light bulb, toggle switch, duct tape, 76.8 x 17.9 x 17.7 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

ARTIST: Richard Heikkilä-Sawan

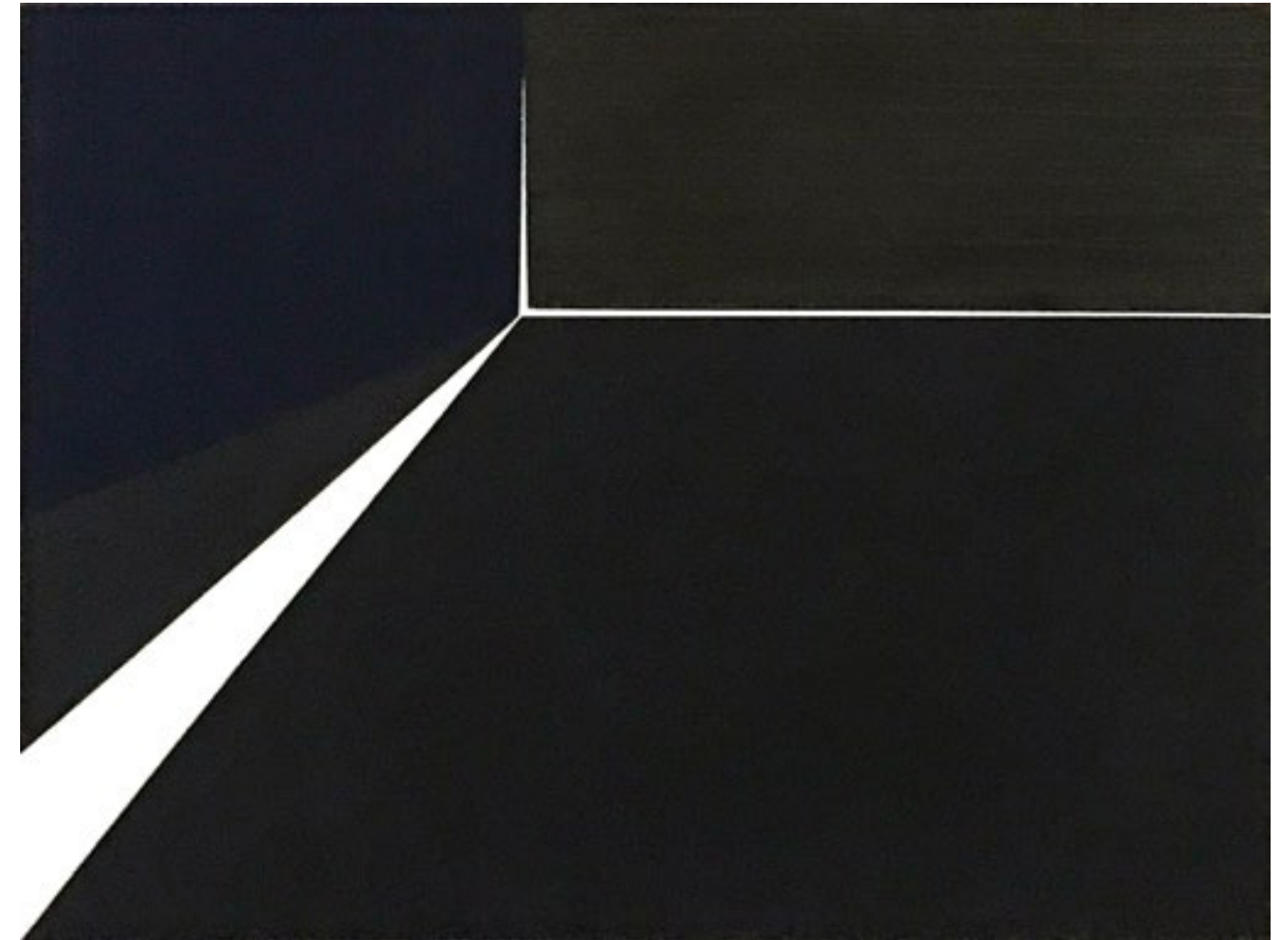


Plate 40: Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Before the knowing* (green, blue, brown), 2016, Oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

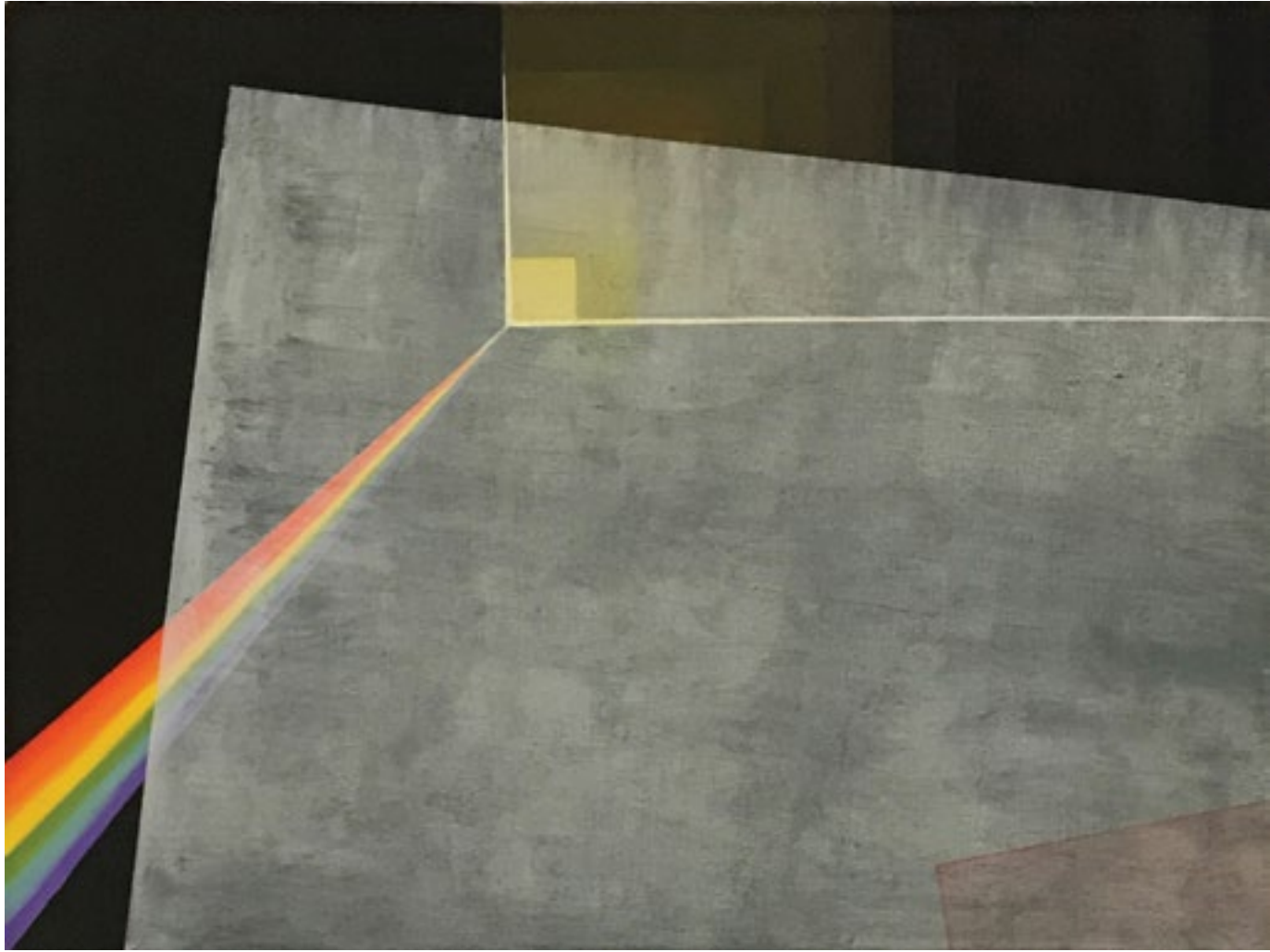


Plate 41: Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Into the knowing*, 2016,
Oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 42: Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Happy at Last*, 2016,
Oil, synthetic polymer on linen, 30 x 40 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

Raven John



Plate 43: Raven John, *Two-Spirit Transformation Blessing*, 2017, Acrylic on paper, 22 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Robert Houle



Plate 44: Robert Houle, *Nude*, 2007, Conté on arches paper, 50 x 71 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Rosalie Favell

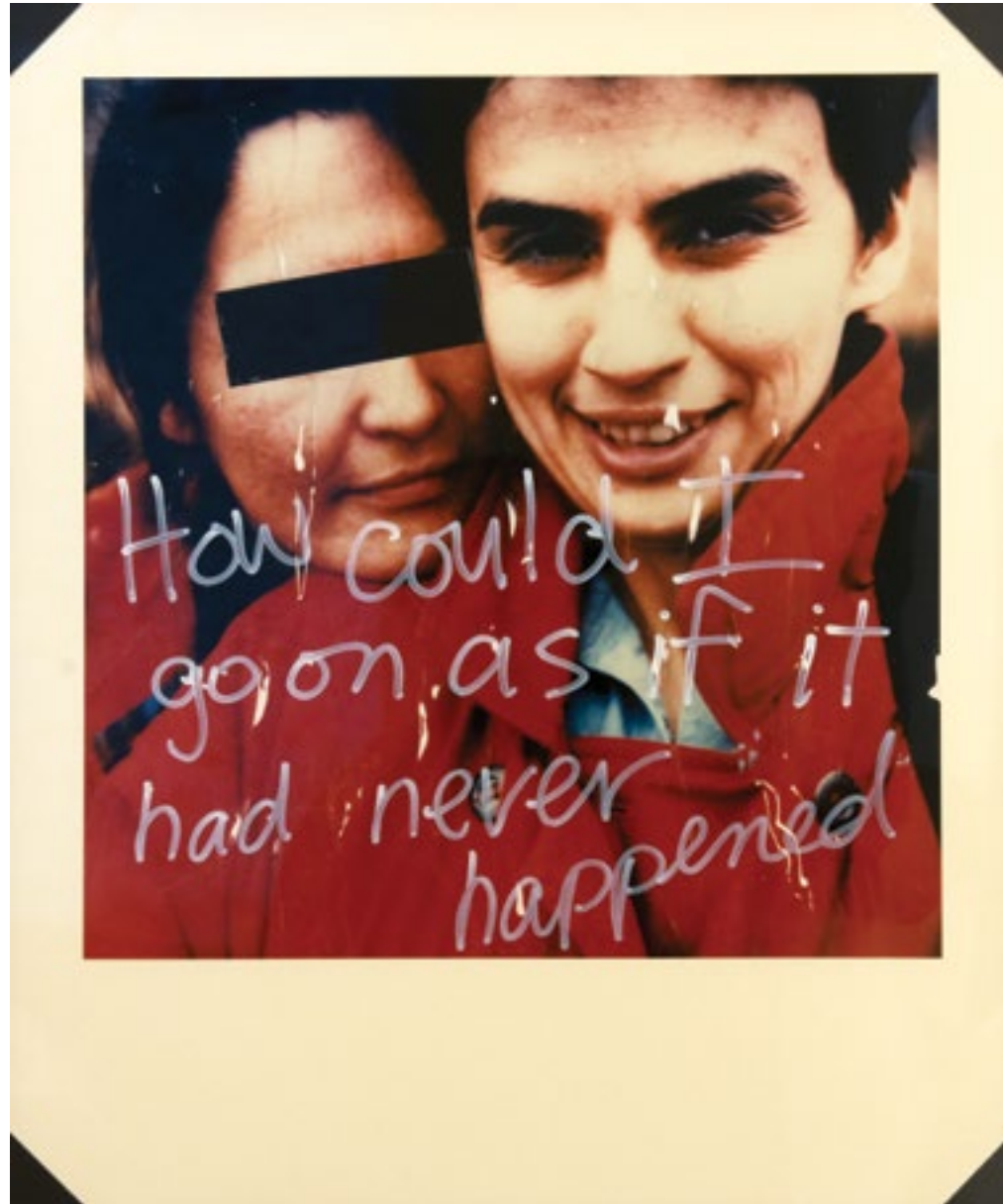


Plate 45: Rosalie Favell, *Living Evidence, How could I go on as if it never happened*, 1994, Photographic, 30 x 35 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Thirza Cuthand



Plate 46: Thirza Cuthand, *2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com*, 2017, Video, 4:56min. Courtesy of the artist.

Ursula Johnson



Plate 47: Ursula Johnson, *Making A Mark*, Drawing and video installation. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 38: Ursula Johnson, *Making A Mark*, Drawing and video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Bleeding Through

By Vanessa Dion Fletcher

I used to dread menstruating, but now, I welcome it, I am relieved and excited by it. The timing has to be just right. I waited in the green room of the Roundhouse, nerves mounting. My white business shorts and collared shirt were bleached and ironed. My pink shoes matched my nails and lipstick; my hair was shorn on the sides with a perfect swoop on top. They called me onto the stage.

Menstrual Accessory is a faux product I created to critically reflect on the social and cultural understanding of menstruation, through a critique of western capitalist profit and repression of menstrual cycles. I reference contemporary trends in advertising and internet culture; mentioning YouTube, Urban Dictionary, Always ads, and infomercials. *Menstrual Accessory* is a

performance, artist multiple, and photo series, where I take on the persona of a white, fem, capitalist, well-meaning product pusher. At the same time allowing my Indigenous, queer, disabled self to bleed through. I would not have been able to make this critique without ceremonies where bleeding bodies are acknowledged out loud instead of quietly hidden. In communities where bodies that bleed are female, male, and everywhere in-between I learned to embrace bleeding. Hearing stories where what is different, unusual, “disabled” is desirable and powerful. In the performance *Menstrual Accessory Product Pitch*, I introduce audiences to this life-changing product. Using humor I invite the audience to join a relaxed conversation about a topic that is often considered taboo. A topic typically experienced as uncomfortable, even shameful.



Plate 49: Vanessa Dion Fletcher, # *Menstrual Accessory*, 2016, Performance, installation, video, 20min. Courtesy of the artist.

"Hello and welcome, I'm so excited to see you tonight at the Queer Arts Festival. Wow, I am thrilled to be part of this exhibition! Everyone has been working so hard, and I just know that nothing will go wrong. I'm here tonight to introduce you to my new product, Menstrual Accessory. Menstrual Accessory is a convenient solution to all your period stain problems. It comes in fantastic colors, including Fluorescent Pink, Electric Coral, and Magenta.¹"

This introduction sets the tone of the performance. I imagine that I'm a daytime television infomercial star thanking a studio audience or a gorgeous femme from a Youtube beauty channel. Perfect timing, perfect presentation of self creates a space for talking about that which is perceived as imperfect.

Maintaining a relationship with the audience through movement is critical. I take the audience with me on a journey borrowing a familiar trope to create comfort in the discomfort. The performance continues with

"...so you're going about your day, you're rocking your white pants, and you get a stain it could be any kind of stain, but likely it's a period stain."

The moment when you're having a beautiful day and a stain ruins it. Here I introduce the cultural and symbolic meaning menstrual blood carries. A coffee stain on your pants is annoying but it does not carry the same significance that a menstrual bloodstain does. These stains have different cultural and social significance; any

body can have coffee spilled on it, but not all bodies menstruate.

"Keep Menstrual Accessory in your purse — maybe it's in your bathroom — maybe you run out to the drug store to grab it in a pinch. Simply apply Menstrual Accessory to your stain covering it with a much prettier color. It's trendy, fashionable, and desirable... unlike your actual period, which is dirty, ugly, and uncomfortable."

In an essay titled *Bloody Woman Artists*, Ruth Green-Cole states "Over time, menstruation has developed a fraught and complicated semiotic, one further influenced by the role of the vagina as sex organ; concerning reproduction, and the censorship involved in exposing body parts" (Green-Cole, R). Menstrual stains draw attention to reproductive abilities. A menstruating body is symbolically understood as a body that can give birth. We desire to control our bodies and how our bodies are interpreted socially and culturally.

"Menstrual Accessory gives you the power to control the presentation of your body, no longer are you tied to the boring brownish reddish maroonish colors announcing to the world you have a reproductive body. Menstrual Accessory is a new way to have fun with your period."

Menstrual Accessory proposes one might feel more comfortable masking the symbolism of the reproductive body with a false façade. There are many examples of using the synthetic to conceal or transform our biological bodies, lipstick, tanning, air freshener, control top nylons, hair dye.



Plate 50: Vanessa Dion Fletcher, # *Menstrual Accessory*, 2016, Performance, installation, video, 20min. Courtesy of the artist.

¹ Excerpts from Dion Fletcher, V., (2016-2019). Performance Text.

“Now let’s take a look at some of the competition. I’m not the only one who thinks the aesthetics of menstruation can be improved through color and pattern...”

The performance is outlined as if I’m doing a product pitch, so it’s essential to address the competition and state why my ‘product’ is better. An Always ad appears on a projection behind me. A thin white person in a short skirt is reached her hands out.

“Always offers powerful protection now in the prettiest of petals...”

A package and open pad appear in the bottom right-hand corner featuring a floral design.

The word protection in menstrual product ads bothers me. We don’t need to be protected from our hair growing long or passing gas. Those are considered natural bodily functions that are managed with more neutral language or humor — the use of the word protection reinforces menstrual shame and stigma.

“I disagree with Always, I don’t think you need to be protected from your body. With Menstrual Accessory you embellish and enjoy.”

Laundry has always been a big deal in my family. One of my favorite childhood memories is curled up in a warm pile of clean laundry as my mom folded it. Piece by piece the warm pile would dwindle as she folded. I would gather all the clothes close to my body, making a game out of who would win, the messy warmth or

organized folds. Then there are the stories my grandmother told of helping a family with laundry for room and board. And finally, the haunting images and stories of children in Residential school in clean, pressed uniforms, making their beds with crisp white sheets.

“You all know the sinking feeling of pulling clean laundry out of the washer only to have your persistent period stains staring you in the face. The emotions of failure flooding over you as you realize — not only can you not control your body, but you can’t even do laundry properly. Worry no more! Apply Menstrual Accessory to the stubborn stain covering it with fashionable color.”

I hold up a pair of large white underwear with a washed-out bloodstain to provide a visual for that sinking feeling. To prepare, I have moved from trying to avoid staining underwear to pouring little puddles of blood onto piles of it. I let them dry and iron them to make sure the stain sets, before washing the underwear, folding all the stained underwear into perfect piles set out on my table.

“Let’s revalue your bloody underwear, pants, sheets, and mattresses. Don’t throw them away, don’t relegate them to “period panties” only to be worn when you’re sure no one else will see them — delight in the rainbow of menstrual representation.”

The top rated definition of “Period Panties” on Urban Dictionary is “Panties that girls wear, that

are not cute, during their period, or menstrual, so they don’t ruin the pretty ones.” Many menstruators will be familiar with this form of regulation and value of period stained underwear. This narrative of how to limit the staining on underwear reinforces the idea that menstruation is undesirable and effort should be made to limit the amount of stained underwear one has. Menstrual Accessory proposes that by adding a synthetic color to your stained underwear, sheets or mattresses, we will no longer be subject to shame or embarrassment of menstruation. It’s an essay to “fix to the problem.” The irony of my faux product is that I am asking you to purchase another product; it still relies on a capitalist framework and menstrual shame and stigma.

“What could go wrong?”

I was asked months in advance by curator Adrian Stimson to contribute a performance to the 2017 Queer Arts Festival exhibition UnSettled. I decided to present Menstrual Accessory as a comedic critique of capitalist profit and consumption of menstruating bodies. As the months drew closer, I charted my cycle to see how it was going to line up. Careful planning does not guarantee a body will menstruate when you want. I prepared by freezing some of my menstrual blood, to ensure that it could be slipping out of my vagina and into my pants at the right moment. Throughout the performance, a deep red menstrual blood stain has been appearing on my white pants. As the performer, I am often unaware of how much the audience can see the stain. At this point, I

acknowledge the menstrual bloodstain, posing so that it will be most apparent to the audience.

“I just can’t control my body. At least not as much as I’d like to, I mean my period tracker says this isn’t supposed to happen for another four days. Who’s ever heard of a 23-day cycle? I’m so embarrassed. It’s my big day, and I’m bleeding through my white pants.”

Here I use the word control.

We want to have agency and self-determination over/with our bodies but as messy biological entities, they are unpredictable. Performing menstruation in Menstrual Accessory means that I carefully plan and attend to the start and end dates of my cycle. I fake my surprise and disappointment that I am bleeding on stage. It’s much easier for me to perform the act of menstruating instead of embodying it in daily life. I have had many surprising moments where I was unexpectedly bleeding. At this point in the performance, I start my demonstration of how to use Menstrual Accessory.

“1. Pick up your color. 2. Check it matches your shoes lips and nails. 3. Apply color. 4. Apply accent color. 5. Now is the time to really get into it, you can use your beadwork and quillwork designs as a reference.”

I sit down on my white stool, knees apart, so the audience has a good view of the growing stain and I apply the Menstrual Accessory to the stain.

“Okay, now that I have Menstrual Accessory on I feel so much better. Let’s get some additional

examples of Menstrual Accessory in action; I've been doing a lot of flying lately and wanting to look professional while traveling I wear white. As luck would have, I got a stain. Luckily, I had Menstrual Accessory with me, and everything was okay. With all the surveillance at airports, I can't imagine what I would have done without it."

The examples of Menstrual Accessory in action come from my desire to perform menstruation in public spaces. I thought of the places or situations that I would be most uncomfortable if someone saw me menstruating and sought out those locations to have photo documentation of Menstrual Accessory in public spaces. Projected behind me are images of myself in Menstrual Accessory.

"The beach is one place I'm often terrified of leaking menstrual blood; with Menstrual Accessory I have all the confidence in the world."

This approach has been used by many artists, one in particular I think of is Terrance Houle's *Urban Indian Series*. Photographs that showed Houle out and about town, in a grocery store and on the bus dressed in Indigenous regalia.

"I spent the summer in Santa Fe and one lovely afternoon around the Plaza; Menstrual Accessory was a lifesaver."

For the final slide, I continue to connect the menstruating body to politics. I pick photographs of a political figure, I photoshop a dark red patch onto their clothing. Then on the next slide, I change the color of the stain to bright pink.

I use political figures for two reasons; one is that they are expected to obtain a high level of 'professionalism' and absolute trustworthiness conveyed through well-maintained wardrobes, hair, nails, etc. This night I chose the Duchess of Cambridge out in a park with princes Charlotte. More recently the image of American politicians wearing white in congress has provided fantastic photos for this part of the performance.

There is a long history of female politicians having their wardrobes being reported on more than their policy. A stained menstruating body calls attention to the expectations that politicians are neutral – unembodied – policymakers. Whether it's taxes on hygiene products or reproductive justice menstruation is also a political issue.

"Now would anyone in the audience like to test the product on this pre-stained underwear? Here is your stained underwear; you can pick the color you like and start decorating. Cover that unsightly stain with those beautiful colors, and if you want, you can use an accent color, the yellow is especially lovely. Anyone else? I have a few pairs you can try."

Remembering that night, I can hear the laughter, the cheers, faces, and the exclamations made during the performance and as people decorated a pair of underwear. Then and now I think about the ways that *Menstrual Accessory* is queer, the ways it is Indigenous. The ways it contributes to queer Indigenous performance art. *Menstrual Accessory* grew out of a series of performances where I was testing how to visualize my menstruation;

how to perform it in public spaces. I wanted to understand the significance of menstruation. I sought to understand the ways people saw understood and made meaning of the sight of menstrual blood. I wanted to know how having a body that is coded as female, that has the potential to produce children can become a target for violence. At a certain point in my process, I narrowed my focus and turned to humor. How could we laugh with a menstruating body instead of at it? How could we find joy in the messy and sometimes uncomfortable parts of our bodies? I have received so many lessons in the power of humor. How a joke can diffuse an argument, bring people together, or cause alienation and humiliation. When I conceived of *Menstrual Accessory*, it was a fake product that claimed to "solve all your period stain problems;" buy another product to make yourself feel better. The irony is that *Menstrual Accessory* has made me and I hope others feel better about their periods. Not through the power of the product, but through the conversation, the laughter, and the spectacle.

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PASSIVE RESISTANCE

By Wanda Nanibush

My work *Passive Resistance* started with a hotel window in Sioux Lookout, a truly courageous crow and an aggressive raven.

From 2005-2007, I was spending every second week up north in Thunder Bay, Rainy River, Sioux Lookout, Fort Francis and other small towns visiting artists for the Ontario Arts Council. I was the Aboriginal Arts Officer and developing the Northern Arts programs from the ground up. I had a consumer grade HD camera (when they still used tape) to take oral applications from people but I was also filming all my flights for a future art project I had yet to conceive. I am in love with making art that uses 'crappy' tech and I get obsessed with filming everything of something not

really knowing why until later. One day was so cold in Sioux Lookout that the locals told me to go back to my hotel room and stay safe and warm.

Bored, I was watching the rooftop on a neighboring building and saw this crow land and start playing in the snow. I quickly grabbed my camera filming with delight the crow's obvious pleasure. This large bearded raven (every raven is a crow but not every crow is a raven) landed on the roof and started to bully the crow into leaving. The raven spread its brilliant wings and pressed its impressive beak into the face of the crow. That little guy just hopped over a tiny bit. The Raven again showed its mighty strength and again the crow just hopped over the tiniest amount. The third



Plate 51: Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*, Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.



Plate 52: Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*,
Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

moment of bullying came and when the crow only moved over a barely perceptible amount the Raven turned and flew off with all its fierce ineffective aggression. I swear to g'che manido that I saw that crow shrug its shoulders (do they have shoulders hahaha). Off it went playing in the snow, not having lost its winter territory.

Years later I decided to use that video in a work called *Passive Resistance*. I kept thinking of how Anishinaabe people are often called passive by other nations because we often choose more peaceful means of resistance to colonialism. I thought about how we are still working on raising our kids as Anishinaabe and still doing ceremony, speaking our languages, and carving out a future where our world still exists. I thought of how homophobia, patriarchy, and racism are all colonial impositions and do not reflect our traditions which were individuality, sex and human positive. I thought of white milk

evaporating slowly into red and I thought of that little crow. We have always thought that the means of resistance matters as much as the ends because what you do to get to freedom is who you are when you get there. And I thought I want to be that crow who plays all day in the snow and merely shrugs off the supposed power of others stronger than them. Turning away and building another space and not allowing colonialism to change our fundamental value system may seem passive because it's non-violent but for me it's the beauty of red turning to white and a crow playing in the snow. After 500 years we have not lost yet.

Artist Biographies

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew (1958-2006)

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew was born Cree/French Métis from the Peace River region in Northern Alberta. After graduating from Emily Carr College of Art & Design and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, he established a practice as a media-integrated performance artist and writer while also working as an arts administrator contributing to opportunities for First Nations artists within artist-run culture, including a two year First Nations arts administration internship at the Canada Council in Ottawa.

His critical writing in Mix Magazine and Fuse magazine addressed many aspects of contemporary First Nations arts practice. His creative works concentrate on examinations of the ways that First Nations history, spirituality, and language influence and operate within contemporary First Nations experience of urbanized street-level fringe culture including the influences of drugs, prostitution, and other forms of criminalization, especially within the lives of those young First Nations people who are forced to negotiate danger, empowerment and, too often, mere survival at these margins.

He was the writer, artistic director and coordination of the collaborative performance project *Asowaha* at the grunt gallery in Vancouver. Prior to that he co-curated, with Debra Piapot, the nine artist collaborative performance series *Nanatowihitowin Acimowina (Healing Stories)* at the Walter Phillips

Gallery at the Banff Centre for the Arts. He has performed at artist-run centres in Vancouver and Quebec City, served on a number of arts juries, recommendation committees, and advisory panels, and was one of the assistant technical coordinators at the Edge '90 Performance and Installation Art Festival in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK.

His project *Isi-pikiskwewin Ayahpikesisak (Speaking the Language of Spiders)* is part of a larger multi-year collaborative production that will be initiated as a World Wide Web screenplay/storyboard (for later production as a CD-ROM and subsequently as an installation) in the Pop, Mass n' Subcultures Residency at the Banff Centre. Support is gratefully acknowledged for this phase of development from the Canada Council Media Arts Computer Integrated Media Program and the Banff Centre for the Arts Media and Visual Arts Program.

On September 26, 2006, Ahasiw passed away leaving his partner Alain Malo, three brothers Jack Macauley, Garry Hachey, Patrick Hachey and many friends and colleagues to mourn. Ahasiw was a brilliant artist, writer and curator who has greatly influenced the Aboriginal arts community, particularly in the development of web-based media arts.



Plate 53: Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*,
Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Aiyyana Maracle (1950-2016)

Aiyyana Maracle was a multidisciplinary artist, scholar and educator, sovereign Haudenosaunee woman and great-grandma many times over. She spent a half-century actively infusing Ogwehoweh art and culture into the Eurocentric consciousness of Canadian society. A powerful activist and advocate on many fronts, her work dealt with a range of issues, from Indigenous land claims to trans identity. Through the fields of performance art, video, theatre (where she was awarded the prestigious John Hirsch Prize for emerging theatre directors in 1997), writing, and lecturing, Aiyyana offered an alternate framework to the prevalent Eurocentric view of ‘gender dysphoria,’ eventually becoming a voice and activist for young trans or gender nonconforming individuals on Six Nations reserve on the Grand River.

Adrian Stimson, Curator

Adrian Stimson, a Two-Spirit artist, was born in 1964 in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. He is a member of the Siksika Nation (Blackfoot Reserve, Alberta), and was raised there. He served as tribal councillor for eight years in the 1990s, leaving afterwards to pursue art in 1999. Stimson studied at the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, Alberta and received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2003. He has since completed a Master of Fine Arts at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

Stimson uses in his art a variety of media incorporating themes of history, gender, and identity. His “Buffalo Boy” performance uses satire to critique stereotypes about Aboriginal people, his installation “Old Sun” explores the legacy of the residential school system, while his “Transformation” exhibit of paintings examines the subject of missing Aboriginal women. Many of his works have been exhibited throughout Canada, and he is particularly known for his “tar and feather” series. Bison often appears in Stimson’s work: “I use the bison as a symbol representing the destruction of the Aboriginal way of life, but it also represents survival and cultural regeneration. The bison is central and very important to all Blackfoot. The bison is also considered as an icon, a food source, as well as the whole history of its disappearance; it is very much a part of my contemporary life” (Canadian Art Magazine, 2007).

Stimson has received honors and awards, including the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal (2003), the Alberta Centennial Medal (2005), and the Blackfoot Visual Arts Award (2009). In 2006, Stimson served as artist-in-residence at the Mendel Art Gallery (Saskatoon). In 2010, he was selected to travel to Afghanistan as part of the Canadian Forces Artists program and lastly, in 2018, Stimson received the Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts.

Barry Ace

Barry Ace is a practicing visual artist and the recipient of the K.M. Hunter Visual Artist Award for 2015. Drawing inspiration from multiple facets of traditional Anishinaabeg culture, he creates objects and imagery that utilize many traditional forms and motifs, endeavouring to create a convergence of the historical and the contemporary. His work can be found in numerous public and private collections in Canada and abroad and is represented by Kinsman Robinson Galleries in Yorkville (Toronto).

T’uy’t’tanat – Cease Wyss

Skwxwu7mesh/Sto:Lo/Metis/Hawaiian/Swiss
Inter-disciplinary Artist Digital Media/installation
Works/Public Art/Community based Engagement/
Dialogues/Storytelling/Medicine Gathering/Sharing
Traditional Knowledge/Cedar & Wool Weaving/Natural
Dye Processes/Creating and building Communities/
Land and Wetlands Restoration and Remediation/
Collective & Collaborative Processes

I am a mother, daughter, sister, cousin, niece and grandmother. I live a rich cultural life in my traditional lands and waters. I work, learn, teach, gather medicines, create art, and strive for a decolonized lifestyle. My work in digital media and plant technology has woven together over 30 years of my involvement in these two practices.

Working with my hands, getting my hands into earth and creating art through ancient cultural weaving techniques is empowering and healing. Singing and sharing stories is a way to bring others into your personal sphere and to share a part of oneself through cultural insights.

I work at staying active and engaged in my practice and I find it connects me to the past/ present/future.

Dayna Danger

Dayna Danger is an emerging Queer, Métis/Ojibway/ Polish artist raised in Winnipeg, MB. Utilizing photography, sculpture, and video, Danger’s practice questions the line between empowerment and objectification by claiming space with her human scale work. Co-opting the visual language of fashion and pornography, she repurposes and challenges perceptions of power, gender, performativity, representation, sexuality, and mixed identities.

Danger is currently based in Montreal, QC while obtaining her Graduate degree in Studio Arts from Concordia University. She graduated with her Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from The University of Manitoba’s School of Art in 2010. Danger held a Visual Arts Studio Work Study at the Banff Centre and participated in Candice Hopkins and Raven Chacon’s thematic residency, Trading Post. In 2012-2013, Danger was mentored by Amber-Dawn Bear Robe and Daina Warren as part of MAWA’s (Mentoring Artists for Women’s Art) Foundation Mentorship Program. Her work was displayed at the New Mexico Museum of Art’s exhibition *New Native Photography 2011* for Santa Fe’s Indian Market in Santa Fe, NM. Danger’s first solo exhibition, *Big’Uns*, was shown at Urban Shaman gallery in Winnipeg MB, June 2014. Danger currently serves as a board member for the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective/ Collectif des Conservateurs Autochtones (ACC/CCA), Canada, since 2013.

George Littlechild

If I were to ask myself why I create the art I do, I would have to answer: “It is what I was born to do. It is my passion, my joy, as my art has been there throughout my life’s journey!”

If I were asked what kind of art I create, I would answer by saying, “It is art that speaks from the heart, the social and the political.”

My art is charged with energy & color, vibrant, magical & thus enabling the soul to travel.

I envision, I rely on the intuitive, the spiritual, the emotional to tell stories through my art. I am a storyteller, a visualist. A conveyer of messages...

I began to create art as a small boy. My foster mother saw that I had a talent at a very young age. She was encouraging, loving... She saw the gift in me. Scribblers were filled, art lessons began at an early age... Art school, exhibitions and books, lectures, and teaching.

In my work, I am committed to righting the wrongs that First Nations peoples have endured by creating art that focuses on cultural, social and political injustices. As an artist, educator and cultural worker, my goal is a better world. It is my job to show the pride, strength and beauty of First Nations people and cultures and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

Jessie Short

Jessie Short is a curator, writer, multi-disciplinary artist and emerging filmmaker whose work involves memory, multi-faceted existence, Métis history and visual culture. Jessie attained an MA degree in 2011 from Brock University where she wrote about contemporary Métis visual culture. After this, Jessie served as the Executive Director of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) from Oct 2012 to Dec 2014 in Toronto. During her time as the National Coordinator, Jessie managed multiple projects to better promote the work of diverse Indigenous artists across North America. Jessie has screened two short films at the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts festival in Toronto (2015 & 2016), and performed in the M:ST Performance Art Festival in Calgary (2016). Jessie currently works as a project coordinator for the Ociciwan Contemporary Art Collective.

John Powell

My Name is Winidi and I am Mamalilikulla of the Kwak’wakw’wakw. I have worked in Design for the last 25 years. My media is textiles. I work a lot in Theatre Costume design, I do clothing on a commission basis. I have also worked with The Vancouver Opera Society. In addition, I have designed a number of Graphics for various First Nations and Non-First Nations organizations. I was Design Coordinator for the Vancouver 2010 Welcome Portion of the Olympics.

I was fortunate to have grown up in my culture and gained much knowledge from our old ones. I value this above all else and I work hard to provide opportunities for the larger non-aboriginal population to learn who we are as Kwakwala-speaking people.

I am a designer primarily. Motivation for my Art is driven by culture. Media is generally textiles. I was schooled in Traditional Kwak’wakw’wakw design, costume design, fashion design (by commission), interior design, and graphic design. I grew up in my culture and I do what I can to help the larger population understand.

Michelle Sylliboy

As an interdisciplinary artist Michelle Sylliboy considers poetry and photography to be her first love. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Sylliboy is a Mi'kmaq artist who was raised in the unceded territory of We'koqmaq First Nation, located in beautiful Cape Breton Island Nova Scotia.

With a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Emily Carr and a Master's degree in Education from SFU, Sylliboy is currently doing her Doctorate Degree in Philosophy of Education with a focus on Curriculum and Implementation at Simon Fraser University. Her educational pursuits are aimed at creating language revitalization by developing a Mi'kmaq Hieroglyphic curriculum using art as the medium.

Her artistic temperament has greatly benefited the community, as she helped the emerging and professional poets and visual artists with the work she did with the West Coast Aboriginal Writers Collective in Vancouver, B.C. She helped raise opportunities for self-publishing and launched *Salish Seas: An anthology of text + image*. As the Art Director, she helped arrange a successful exhibition at Vancouver Gastown's Gallery Gachet which was curated by Tania Willard.

Engaged in the community, Michelle believes in sharing knowledge with others to facilitate meaningful dialogues. Her last curatorial community event in June of 2016 "The Art of Reconciliation" brought together musicians, poets, and visuals artists to address their views about reconciliation at the Vancouver Public Library.

Her contributing piece *The Art of Reconciliation* was a collaborative new work she did with Vancouver Opera Cellist Heather Hays. The words in Mi'kmaq describe the effects of intergenerational trauma, and how it feels to be a child of a survivor. By collaborating with Heather, Michelle was able to bridge two cultures together in a contemporary dialogue through music and poetry. Understanding reconciliation is about understanding our roles as protectors of mother earth and how colonization and residential school shaped our ways of being today. The cello enables the soul to listen in a manner that is non-intrusive while the words and imagery transports you on a subliminal journey. This new work will be witnessed at Read Out Loud in Sechelt for one night only in June and is also part of the 2017 *UnSettled* Two-Spirit curated Festival by Adrian Stimson.

Mike MacDonald (1941-2006)

Born in 1941 in Sydney, Nova Scotia, MacDonald is of Mi'kmaq ancestry. Mike drove across Canada every year working as a video installation artist and gardener in addition to pursuing photography and new media projects. Self-taught, he focused on the environment, incorporating plants and animals in his artworks. He found inspiration in both his aboriginal ancestry and Western sources, drawing from science as well as traditional medicine and ethnobotany.

His works have been featured in exhibitions worldwide at such venues as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona and the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris, France. In 1994, he was awarded the prestigious Jack and Doris Shadbolt Prize from the Vancouver Institute for Visual Arts and in 2000 he received the first Aboriginal Achievement Award for New Media presented at the Toronto imagiNATIVE Festival.

MacDonald's most renowned projects include the butterfly gardens he has planted across Canada since the early 1990s. They are tactile living examples of his devotion to and admiration of the environment.

Inspiration to create the gardens can be seen in his video installation works, most notably in *Touched by the Tears of a Butterfly* (1994). This installation features silent videotape in a loop projected in front of a set of rocking chairs. The video follows the life of a butterfly,

from its existence as a caterpillar until it bursts from its cocoon as a colourful winged insect.

MacDonald has also been recognized for presenting some of the most touching installations on Aboriginal heritage and community. For example, *Electronic Totem* (1987) showcased a stack of five video monitors, one on top of the other, depicting the contemporary life of an Aboriginal community in British Columbia.

Mike's careful, positive storytelling, as well as his tender regard for nature and the quiet goings-on of the butterfly, has built him a reputation as one of the more significant contemporary artists in Canada.

Raven John

I, Raven John am a Native, Feminist, Two-Spirit artist who grew up across the Lower Mainland of B.C. My ancestral name is Exwetlaq, and I am Stó:lo and Coast Salish in origin.

My works encompass my past and identity in many ways, through mere existence, defiance, and the examination of colonialist, patriarchal and classist systems of value in art. I do this by activating space through sculpture, installation and surreality.

I am currently studying at the Native Education College in the Northwest Coast Jewelry Arts Program. I have also Graduated from Emily Carr University in Spring 2017 with a Major in Visual Arts and a minor in Social Practice and Community Engagement.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan

As a Two-Spirit artist and graduate of Emily Carr University Audain School of Visual Art, I work within the realms of painting and sculpture. I also like taking pictures and just simply creating art.

I was born in Vancouver, BC and adopted by a Mennonite couple at the age of two months. As a biracial artist not brought up within my culture, I approach Aboriginal themes from a unique viewpoint having only discovered my First Nations ancestry at the age of thirty-two. This allows me the freedom to take risks not afforded other artists when dealing with issues of race and identity.

I draw upon recollections of my rich experiences when grappling with cultural signifiers of utopia/dystopia, violence/ compassion, and dissimilarity/identity. My art practice speaks to the human condition within these themes.

My interest also lies within the realm of architecture where the suggestion of ambience is generated from the design and construction of form and space to echo functional, aesthetic, social and environmental considerations. Aspects of these notions can be perceived within my work where the viewer's eye can meander through my paintings with places to rest along the way.

My palette is often rich and vibrant. Breaking down an image into geometric shapes of both positive and negative spaces often implementing Gestalt principles, I utilize the science of physiological optics where colour engages an interaction, the colour of one geometric shape impressing upon and affecting the colour of its neighbour.

With this dynamic infused into often culturally current themes, it is my hope that the viewer will walk away from my work with new insight and perhaps changed.

Robert Houle

Robert Houle is a member of Sandy Bay First Nation, Manitoba and currently lives and works in Toronto. As a child, Robert was taken from his family and placed in the Sandy Bay Indian Residential School. He moved to the Assiniboia Indian Residential School in Winnipeg for High School. He received a B.A. in Art History from the University of Manitoba, and a B.A. in Art Education from McGill University and studied painting and drawing at the International Summer Academy of Fine arts in Salzburg, Austria. Robert taught native studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design University in Toronto for fifteen years.

Robert has exhibited widely in solo and group exhibition across Canada and abroad. He was curator of contemporary aboriginal art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization from 1977 to 1981 and has curated or co-curated groundbreaking exhibitions. He has written extensively on major contemporary First Nations and Native American artists.

Robert Houle's curating, writing and teaching has played a significant role in defining indigenous identity. His considerable influence as an artist, curator, writer, educator and cultural theorist has led to his being awarded the Janet Braide Memorial Award for Excellence in Canadian Art History in 1993; the 2001 Toronto Arts Award for the visual Arts; the Eiteljorg Fellowship in 2003, membership in the royal Canadian academy; distinguished alumnus, University of Manitoba, and the Canada Council Residency Program for the Visual Arts in Paris.

He is represented by Galerie Orenda in Paris; Galerie Nicolas Robert in Montreal; and Kinsman Robinson Galleries in Toronto.

Rosalie Favell

Rosalie Favell is a photo-based artist born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Drawing inspiration from her family history and Métis (Cree/English) heritage, she uses a variety of sources, from family albums to popular culture, to present a complex self-portrait of her experiences as a contemporary aboriginal woman. Her work has appeared in exhibitions in Canada, the US, Edinburgh, Scotland, Paris, France and Taipei, Taiwan. Numerous institutions have acquired her artwork including National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (Ottawa), Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.), and Rockwell Museum of Western Art (Corning, New York). Rosalie has received numerous grants and won prestigious awards such as the Chalmers Fellowship, the Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunten Award and the Karsh Award. A graduate of Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, Rosalie holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of New Mexico. She has studied and taught extensively at the post-graduate level. She has worked with grassroots organizations in Winnipeg with Inuit educational groups in Ottawa and Nepalese women's groups in Kathmandu.

Thirza Jean Cuthand

Thirza Jean Cuthand was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, and grew up in Saskatoon. Since 1995 she has been making short experimental narrative videos and films about sexuality, madness, youth, love, and race, which have screened at festivals internationally, including the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, Mix Brasil Festival of Sexual Diversity in Sao Paolo, Hot Docs in Toronto, ImagineNATIVE in Toronto, Frameline in San Francisco, Outfest in Los Angeles, and Oberhausen International Short Film Festival in Germany where her short *Helpless Maiden Makes an “I” Statement* won honourable mention. Her work has also screened at galleries including the Mendel in Saskatoon, The National Gallery in Ottawa, and Urban Shaman in Winnipeg. She completed her BFA majoring in Film and Video at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, and her Master of Arts in Media Production at Ryerson University. In 1999 she was an artist in residence at Videopool and Urban Shaman in Winnipeg where she completed *Through The Looking Glass*. In 2012, she was an artist in residence at Villa K. Magdalena in Hamburg, Germany, where she completed *Boi Oh Boi*. In 2015 she was commissioned by ImagineNATIVE to make 2 *Spirit Introductory Special \$19.99*.

In the summer of 2016, she began working on a 2D video game called *A Bipolar Journey* based on her experience learning and dealing with her bipolar disorder. It showed at ImagineNATIVE and she is planning to further develop it. She has also written three feature screenplays and sometimes does performance art. She is of Plains Cree and Scots descent, a member of Little Pine First Nation, and currently resides in Toronto.

Ursula Johnson

Ursula Johnson, NSCAD Alum, has participated in over 30 group shows and 5 solo exhibitions.

Her art draws upon a variety of traditions from performance, installation, and sculpture, often incorporating the traditional Aboriginal art form of basketry. She is the creator of the 21st Century O’pltek Basket, a subtly non-functional form that utilizes traditional techniques and methods of traditional Mi’kmaw Ash Splint basketry.

Her performances are often place-based and employ cooperative didactic intervention.

Wanda Nanibush

Wanda Nanibush is an Anishinaabe-kwe image and word warrior, curator, and community organizer living in her territory of Chimnissing. Currently, Nanibush is a guest curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario and is touring her exhibition *The Fifth World* which opened January 2016 at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery. The island life allows her to finish upcoming projects including a film called *A Love Letter to My People*, also a documentary on Gerald Vizenor, and a book called *Violence No More* (Arp Press), as well as an anthology of Indigenous Curatorial Writing and more. She has a Master’s Degree in Visual Studies from the University of Toronto and has taught doctoral courses on Indigenous history and politics at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Vanessa Dion Fletcher

Vanessa Dion Fletcher employs porcupine quills, Wampum belts, and menstrual blood to reveal the complexities of what defines a body physically and culturally. She links these ideas to personal experiences with language, fluency, and understanding. All of these themes are brought together in the context of her Potawatomi and Lenape ancestry, and her learning disability caused by a lack of short-term memory.

Dion Fletcher Attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on an international fellowship from the Association of American University Women. While at SAIC Dion Fletcher created the work *Own Your Cervix*, an immersive installation where textiles, pattern, and the athletics of beauty become the backdrop for self-examination in the context of a feminist colonial discourse. *Own Your Cervix* was exhibited at Tangled Art + Disability in Toronto in 2017.

Menstrual Accessory has been performed in Santa Fe, Miami, Chicago, and Toronto. Dion Fletcher looks forward to bringing this performance and life-changing product to Vancouver.

UnSettled Plate List

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, *White Shame from First Nations Performance Series*, 1992, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches.
Courtesy grunt gallery.

Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, *White Shame from First Nations Performance Series*, 1992, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches.
Courtesy grunt gallery.

Aiyyana Maracle, *Gender Möbius from Halfbreed Performance Series*, 1995, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.

Aiyyana Maracle, *Strange Fruit* from Play performance series, 1994, Photo: Merle Addison, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy grunt gallery.

Barry Ace, *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau*, 2017. Digital screen, horsehair, electronic components (resistors, capacitors, inductors, LED), fabric, metal, brass wire, 180.3 x 39.4 x 19.1 cm. Courtesy of Ottawa Art Gallery: Donated by the artist, 2018. Photo: Justin Wonnacott.

T’uy’t’tanat – Cease Wyss, Sèlus Ánus Kwelh7áynexw Lhenlhént [spinningWool / twoSpirits]
Weaving a Blanket,
2017, Installation, 24 x 96 inch shawls (2) together 72 x 192 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

T’uy’t’tanat – Cease Wyss, Sèlus Ánus Kwelh7áynexw Lhenlhént [spinningWool / twoSpirits]
Weaving a Blanket,
2017, Installation, 24 x 96 inch shawls (2) together 72 x 192 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

Dayna Danger, *Adrienne*, 2017, Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

Dayna Danger, *Lindsay*, 2017, Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist

Dayna Danger, *Sasha*, 2017, Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

Dayna Danger, *Kandace*, 2017, Digital print, 60 x 75 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

George Littlechild, *Warrior Incarcerated*, 2015, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

George Littlechild, *Warrior and The Black Snake*, 2015, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

George Littlechild, *Warrior Indigenous of South America’s Sacred Soil*, 2017, Mixed media, 30 x 22 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

George Littlechild, *Cree Boy Thrust*, 2017, Mixed media, 50 x 38 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

Jessie Short, *Family of Light*, 2016, Photographic. Courtesy of the artist.

Jessie Short, *Sweet Night*, 2016, Video, 6:53min. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Winidi (self Portrait)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Yam’gwas (maternal Great, Great Grandmother)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Wa’dzi da laga (maternal Grandmother)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Oo Dzee stah lees (maternal Grandfather)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Patila’enukw (maternal Great Grandmother)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Walas Kyayu’tla’las (maternal Great Grandfather)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 18.5 inches by 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Dlah’ Dlah Gwotl (Grandfather’s Mother)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Mah Q’wa lah oh gwa (my Grandfather’s Aunt)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Goo Tlah’ Lahss (my Grandfather’s Uncle)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

John Powell, *Dlah Kwa Gyee lo Gwa (My Grandfather’s Aunt)*, 2015-16, Mixed media, 26.5 inches by 29.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

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Michelle Sylliboy, *The Art of Reconciliation*, 2016, Video, word, 5:44min. Courtesy of the artist.

Mike MacDonald, *Touched By The Tears of a Butterfly*, 1995, Video, 14:30min. Courtesy of Vtape.

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Mike MacDonald, *Touched By The Tears of a Butterfly*, 1995, Video, 14:30min. Courtesy of Vtape.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *My Spirits Soar*, 2015, Hudson’s Bay history book, King James bible, John Fluevog Rigas boots, mannequin legs, laquer, Finn chair, unopened Big Rock beer can, Lego bricks, foam shapes, Band-Aids, spray paint, children’s wooden stacking toy, mahogany valet stand, braided roping, CNC routed yellow cedar, light bulb, toggle switch, duct tape, 76.8 x 17.9 x 17.7 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Before the knowing (green, blue, brown)*, 2016, Oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Into the knowing*, 2016, Oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches.

Richard Heikkilä-Sawan, *Happy at last*, 2016, Oil, synthetic polymer on linen, 30 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Raven John, *Two-Spirit Transformation Blessing*, 2017, Acrylic on paper, 22 x 30 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Robert Houle, *Nude*, 2007, Conté on arches paper, 50 x 71 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Rosalie Favell, *Living Evidence, How could I go on as if it never happened*, 1994, Photographic, 30 x 35 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Thirza Cuthand, *2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com*, 2017, Video, 4:56min.

Ursula Johnson, *Making A Mark*, Drawing and video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Ursula Johnson, *Making A Mark*, Drawing and video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Vanessa Dion Fletcher, *# Menstrual Accessory*, 2016, Performance, installation, video, 20min. Courtesy of the artist.

Vanessa Dion Fletcher, *# Menstrual Accessory*, 2016, Performance, installation, video, 20min. Courtesy of the artist.

Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*, Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*, Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Wanda Nanibush, *Passive Resistance*, Video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

From the Artistic Director



QUEER ARTS FESTIVAL

When Canada 150 ‘celebrations’ hit the news, my first thought was, more like 500 years of colonization.

As we look back, we look forward and ask, what’s the best way to build a better future for queers? Amplifying the voices of Two-Spirit and Indigeneer artists was the obvious choice. Many contemporary queer struggles focus on transforming gender preconceptions — yet how many know that non-binary gender was once the norm here?

Cree scholar Harlan Pruden identifies at least 130 Indigenous languages with 3-6 gender categories, grouped together under the english word Two-Spirit. It is a specifically Indigenous term, with cultural implications settlers can’t claim as our own. The people who lived these genders were brutally suppressed by colonial heteronormativity, As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes:

...we weren’t “queer”, we were normal. Many of our societies normalized gender variance, variance in sexual orientation and all different kinds of relationships as long as they were consistent with our basic values of consent, transparency, respect and reciprocity. We weren’t “queer” until settlers came into our communities and positioned the “queer” parts of our relationships and societies as defiant, abnormal and sinful.

So I set out to bring a Two-Spirit and Indigeneer curated festival to you. To not just program Indigenous artists, but to give over curation (control) — to give it back. Every year, I invite a curator to select artists for our visual art exhibition; for 2017, I expanded that to all the disciplines.

The highlights included QAF’s signature visual arts exhibition, curated by Adrian Stimson (Siksika), as artists explored historic and contemporary experience of colonial gender imposition.

To that end, there is no foreword by me the Artistic Director — just the voices of the Indigeneer and Two-Spirit artists.

SD Holman
Queer Arts Festival



QUEER ARTS FESTIVAL

The Queer Arts Festival (QAF) is an annual artist-run multidisciplinary arts festival at the Roundhouse in Vancouver, BC. Each year, the festival theme ties together a curated visual art exhibition, performing arts series, workshops, artist talks, panels, and media art screenings. Recognized as one of the top 5 festivals of its kind worldwide (Melbourne Herald Sun), QAF's programming has garnered wide acclaim as "concise, brilliant and moving" (Georgia Straight), "easily one of the best art exhibitions of the year" (Vancouver Sun), and "on the forefront of aesthetic and cultural dialogue today" (Xtra).

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