

Indigenous Canada: Looking Forward/Looking Back



Living Traditions: Expressions in Pop Culture and Art

MODULE 12



Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory and respects the history, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our institution.

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Module 12 Introduction

Indigenous art and culture is as varied, complex, rich, and vibrant as the people themselves. This lesson celebrates that diversity and examines how Indigenous artists are challenging mainstream understandings of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit expressions in art. As well, Indigenous expressions in pop culture and art have been spaces of de-colonial struggle and showcase the ways in which Indigenous people seek to indigenize, rename, and reclaim histories, cultures, and language.

The 1491s are a group of Indigenous comics who use sketch comedy to comment on social and political issues going on in Indian Country. Utilizing a wry wit and often dark satirical humour, these Native Americans have pushed the boundaries of stereotypical understandings of Indigenous culture. Their performances exaggerate and poke fun at the one dimensional, romanticized, and clichéd representations of Indigenous people.

The 1491s are just one excellent example of how current Indigenous writers, artists, and performers are infusing their contemporary artistic visions into the popular mainstream. Indigenous people continue to thrive and flourish despite colonial attempts to appropriate, assimilate, and colonize. From technology to theatre, this module demonstrates that Indigenous writers, artists, musicians, playwrights, and designers are taking back control of their images and stories—and doing so in powerful, transformative, and brilliant ways.



Figure 1 1491s at Bill Reid gallery of Northwest Coast art, with Bill Reid's famous clamshell; credit: US Embassy Canada

Section One: Indigenous Art

Trading Networks

Across North America, all Indigenous societies participated in various artistic traditions and created culturally distinct works of art. The extensive trading networks allowed artists to explore new and innovative materials. For thousands of years on North America, there were vast highways of trade and commerce that linked communities and enabled intertribal and intratribal trade (Dubin 2010). For instance, these well-established networks of trade had routes carrying items like Coast Salish shell beads and dried fish from the coast into the prairies.

These trade networks also helped to maintain political alliances while fulfilling material needs and wants. Sometimes material wants included items for artistic endeavours. Artists would utilize the materials and technologies as they became accessible and readily available. For example, trading systems allowed inland artists to access novel paint colours made from shells on the coast. In fact, dentalium shells from the Pacific Northwest and catlinite from Minnesota were traded widely all throughout the plains from more than 2000 years (Dubin 2010).

Geographical location, breadth of trading networks, and the distinct worldviews of each nation influenced the type of art that flourished in any given area (Dubin 2010). For example, settled communities like the Iroquoian or Northwest Coast peoples had clan systems that facilitated permanent villages. Unlike many of the Plains Indigenous peoples, these settled communities did not have housing structures that were easily transportable. The large longhouses were permanent structures and



Figure 2 Pipestone (Catlinite) Is a Relatively Soft Clay Stone; Credit: Cariliv

consequently could have substantial, permanently installed monumental sculptures and carvings.

Art Forms Can Vary

Migratory cultures of the Nehiyawak and other Plains cultures, of course, did create art as well. Often art was functional, small, and easily portable. Items like personal adornments, clothing, weapons, and tools were decorated and infused with cultural meanings. For instance, decorated footwear in the form of moccasins or boots known as mukluks had very specific designs connected to each family or tribal group. The beadwork, quillwork, or embroidery could indicate the person's spirit, their spiritual colours, the clan they belonged to, or any creatures that may have spiritual significance to them. From the gorgeous bentwood cedar boxes of the Haida or the intricately woven baleen baskets of the Inupiat, Indigenous art could be as practically functional as they were spiritual and ceremonial (Friesen 2006).

Past is Always Present

Indigenous arts are a potent way of presenting, representing, and passing on knowledge. With contemporary Indigenous art, we understand that the past is always present. Indigenous artists today push the boundaries with new art practices and materials while still retaining and passing on cultural, spiritual, and historical knowledge. The idea in Indigenous art, the past is always present, is exemplified in beadwork and beading. This art medium, still practiced today, has been around for thousands of years on North America in (Dubin 2010). In fact, the oldest known bead from North America was found at an archaeological site at Tule Springs, Nevada. This bead, made of white caliche – a sedimentary rock made of hardened calcium carbonate – is believed to date back to 11,000 BCE (Jernigan 1978 cited in Dubin 2010).

Although each Indigenous group created and decorated objects that were specific to their beliefs and customs, each had a great appreciation for beads. While the majority of beads they used were made from the materials found locally, Indigenous people sought

out imported stones, shells, and bone to make rare beads (Dubin 2010). In some tribes, fashioning and working with beads was a sacred task.

Long before glass beads arrived on North America, Indigenous peoples used both non-glass beads and porcupine quills, either plain or dyed. Quill and beadwork were the primary way that many Indigenous peoples of the Plains, Woodlands, and West Coast decorated every day and special occasion items such as cradles, log carriers, chair seats, clothing, and boxes (Orchard 1984).

Quillwork is especially time consuming and requires great patience and meticulousness. Usually quills are collected from porcupines during the first months of the year. In fact, one porcupine can provide 30,000 to 40,000 quills. Porcupine quills are gathered in three ways – from ones that are killed for food, harvested by throwing a blanket on the back of a slow-moving porcupine, and today quills are sometimes harvested from porcupines killed on the road by vehicles.



Figure 3 Artwork by Brenda Morency; Credit: Brenda Morency

Quillwork

Examples of quillwork have been found from Newfoundland to the Yukon territory. The earliest known quillwork was found in Alberta and dates back to the 6th century. The Mi'kmaq were often referred to as the Porcupine People due to their skilled and intricate quillwork (Whitehead and Museum Nova Scotia 1982).

Both traditions of quillwork and beadwork continue today in a multitude of creative and imaginative forms. Yvonne Walker Keshick, an Odawa artist uses knowledge passed down through the generations to create porcupine quills and birch bark boxes.

Many people see Indigenous quill and beadwork as beautiful works of art, and yet not many people know that beadwork often functions as a means of communication. Bead and quillwork often told a story and could be deciphered in the materials and designs used. Generation to generation, parents and grandparents used beadwork to illustrate stories and pass on knowledge (Congdon and Hallmark 2012, 590). This ongoing collective consists of the language and cultures of past generations and acts at the communal language and memory that is shared within each of our communities.

Beadwork

Teri Greeves, like Yvonne Walker Keshick, is a contemporary artist who uses traditional materials but employs a contemporary flair (see Teri 2008). A Kiowa Indian raised on the Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Winder River Reservation in Wyoming, Teri began beading at eight years old. With encouragement and support from her mother and the women in her family, Teri has taken beadwork to another level (Teri 2016). Like many artists, she brings the past and the present together with her lived experiences.



Figure 4 Great Lakes Girls, 2008" Beadwork by Teri Greeves; Credit: Stanley J. Love/Brooklyn Museum

While some artist's work like Greeves and Walker Keshick relay critical cultural knowledge and ensure the continued vitality of traditional arts, artists like Nadia Myre demonstrate how some beadwork functions as a way to comment on current social realities and events (Nadia 2017). Myre is of Algonquin ancestry and a member of the Kitigan Zibi reserve in Maniwaki Quebec.

Her work entitled Indian Act consists of all 56 pages of the Federal Government's Indian Act mounted on stroud cloth and sewn over with red and white glass beads (Nadia

2017). Each white bead is sewn on the stroud cloth and replaces one letter in one word, while the red beads replace the negative space. Over four years, between 1999 and 2002 the artist asked over 200 friends, family, colleagues, and even some strangers to help her bead over the Indian Act. Not only were others enlisted to help bead, but workshops, beading bees, and presentations were also organized.

This shared community of work speaks to the realities of colonization and to the lasting effects of the Indian Act policies. Enlisting others to help and attaching workshops and presentations to the work speaks to the idea of the power of community. The practice of beading becomes politicized as an art form. These beading and quill working artists continue to celebrate traditional forms of Indigenous art, but also manage to incorporate contemporary materials and ideas.



Figure 5 Baleen basket, 2007; Credit: jomilo75

Ch... Ch... Ch... Changes

Indigenous art has gone through incredible transformations since the arrival of settlers over 500 years ago. Not only have Indigenous artists managed to maintain culturally distinct art forms and content, but Indigenous art has also become a site where Indigenous resistance flourishes. In a realm where settler colonialism continues to insist on the appropriation and subsummation of Indigenous voices, more than ever Indigenous artists are utilizing a diversity of art media and materials to reinscribe an Indigenous presence in the arts. Earlier modules discussed the effects of colonialism on many aspects of Indigenous peoples lives; this module shares some examples of the influences of colonialism on Indigenous art.

Since contact, art of Indigenous peoples has been coveted, appropriated, misrepresented, bought, sold, stolen, and even destroyed (Phillips 2011). For instance,

when the explorers, fur traders, and missionaries arrived on the West coast, they were captivated by the bold and abstract designs of the Indigenous Northwest coast people.

Explorers like Captain Cook and Captain Alejandro Malaspina collected a plethora of items they deemed mysterious and exotic from the Northwest coast demonstrating a fixation that is still evident as these “curiosity” pieces continue to sit in museums and collections in Europe. Items like bentwood cedar boxes that were originally created for practical purposes to hold items such as food, instruments, tools, clothing, and ceremonial objects were coveted by missionaries, explorers, and travelers for their great aesthetic and exotic appeal (Hetherington 2009). During the latter part of the 19th century the establishment of anthropological studies encouraged the classification and study of art objects of Indigenous peoples of North America. Through the European lens of the colonizer, and with minimal understanding of the meanings, Indigenous art objects were then studied and classified out of their cultural contexts.

Classified and labelled, Indigenous art objects were seen as identifying markers for the “evolution and progress” of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous art objects became identified and documented as “primitive” as opposed to European art, which was “civilized” (Phillips 2011).

Truth and Agency

The government really wanted a positive image in that pavilion [Montreal’s world fair of Expo 67] and what they got was the truth. That’s what really shocked them the most. (Seneca artist and curator Tom Hill in Phillips and Brydon 2011, 27).

Expo 67

Let’s begin our discussion about the reclamation of Indigenous art by Indigenous artists and curators and the struggles for recognition in the national and international art world with Expo 67 in Montreal. Called the “Indians of Canada Pavilion” this project was to be a highlight of the 100-year anniversary of Canada’s confederation. Organizers of this celebratory pavilion had expectations of the Indigenous artists to highlight the survival

and resilience of Indigenous people thus affirming the great and beautiful cultural mosaic of a confederate Canada (Phillips and Brydon 2011). However, just as Harold Cardinal's 1969 response to the White Paper motivated and galvanized First Nations nationhood, the pavilion project was also a formative activist movement that vitalized and energized Indigenous artists and curators (Phillips and Brydon 2011).

The exterior of the pavilion relied upon the amalgamation and romanticization of the Plains and Northwest Coast tribes with the use of the iconic tipi for the architectural form and the familiar totem pole to draw in crowds (Phillips and Brydon 2011). As well, the exterior also had artists such as Anishnaabek painters Norval Morrisseau, Carl Ray, and Francis Kagige composing large murals created from their cultural stories and spiritual beliefs. These paintings supplied tourists with the expected and traditional understandings of Indigenous art as they were recognizable as distinctly Indian (Phillips and Brydon 2011).

Parts of the exterior, however, displayed more contemporary and abstract works of artists like Alex Janvier (Dene Suline and Saulteaux), Gerald Tailfeathers (Kainai), and Jean-Marie Gros-Louis (Huron/Wyandot) disrupting the more familiar and comfortable broad public visions of Indigenous art (Phillips and Brydon 2011, 35–36). These modernist abstract pieces of art would alert the world that Indigenous art had the will and the propensity to not only maintain traditional forms of artistry, but also to express indigeneity in a modern context (Phillips and Brydon 2011). Expo 67 brought together a diversity of Indigenous artists, activists, and organizers from across Canada to compete on an international stage with contemporary Western art. According to Tom Hill, Seneca artist and curator, the pavilion project, "brought a sense of the power of the artists, people all of a sudden realized what they could do, as artists, to communicate ideas" (Phillips and Brydon 2011, 37).

Tell It Like It Is

The Expo officials' original intent to present history from a colonial perspective became irrelevant for two particular reasons. The process of a broad consultation across Canada revealed a desire for Indigenous peoples to present a different version history between Indigenous people and Canada. The artists, contracted for Indigenous art were steadfast in their visions for their art and ignored officials' suggestions for more appropriate topics for art pieces (Phillips and Brydon 2011).

This break in the expected narrative of Indigenous art and culture shifted ideas of Indian art from being one that embodied a pure, bygone era to one that emphasized diversity and multi-tribalism. Prior to the Indians of Canada Pavilion, nothing else compared to the project's ability to bring Indigenous artists together from across the country from different generations. While the pavilion did not entirely break away from the colonial patriarchal discourse of the Canadian government, it did act as a catalyst for further examination of the dominant discourse and as a precursor to groups such as the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIAI) and the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) (Phillips and Brydon 2011).

Daphne Odjig

Before examining SCANA or PNIAI, it is vital begin by discussing the influence of artist Daphne Odjig (Odawa/Potawatomi). Described as "Picasso's grandmother" by Norval Morrisseau (cf. Barnes 2017), and known even more widely as the grandmother of Indigenous art, Daphne Odjig was born in 1919 and was originally from Wikwemikong (Manitoulin Island). Odjig's art experimented and pushed stylistic boundaries. As one of Canada's most celebrated Indigenous artists, her work exposed issues of colonization, the marginalization of Indigenous women and children, and other political issues.



Figure 6 Winnipeg Art Gallery; Credit: Mark Goebel

In 1972, her work was exhibited at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. This was a significant turning point, as this was the first time any Indigenous artist had their work exhibited as art pieces in a gallery and not as relics in a museum. Two years later in 1974 she opened the New Warehouse Gallery in Winnipeg, a place that supported emerging Indigenous artists (Lavallee 2014b, 77).

PNIAI

Odjig and six others co-founded the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIAI) in the early 1970s and became incorporated on April 1, 1975. This collaborative group organized and fought for inclusion of their work and other Indigenous artists' work in mainstream Canada (Lavallee 2014a). Original members also included Norval Morrisseau (Anishnaabe), Jackson Beardy (Cree), Alex Janvier (Dene Suline Saulteaux), Eddy Cobiness (Anishnaabe), Carl Ray (Cree), and Joe Sanchez (Pueblo descent, Spanish and German). Although the artists don't often refer to themselves as the Indian Group of Seven, they are often called and remembered as such. In fact, when Alex Janvier speaks of this group, he talks about the collective as the Group of Eight and includes Haida artist Bill Reid (Lavallee 2014a)



Figure 7 Haida artist Bill Reid and Skidegate pole; Credit: Dr. George MacDonald/Simon Fraser University

PNIAI formed during a particularly tumultuous time in history. Then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jean Chretien and the liberal government had just introduced its controversial Indian policy known as the *White Paper*. Political leaders such as Harold Cardinal were not the only ones who took notice. PNIAI fought against the idea that Indian art was merely handicrafts or artifacts to be put in museums (Lavallee 2014a). They worked together to establish credibility and respect as artists who happened to be Indigenous, and together they faced colonial attitudes, racial

barriers, and systemic racism. Alex Janvier discloses that as a burgeoning artist in the 1950s, he was forced to obtain a “pass” or permit from the Indian agent to leave his reserve in Cold Lake to go to art school (Lavallee 2014a).

Restrictive measures such as the inability to travel freely and to participate in the mainstream contemporary art world as equals compelled members of PNIAI to work together to have their voices heard and to challenge the oppressive social and political nature of Canada.

SCANA

Previous modules in this course discussed residential schools and “Red Power”, highlighting that Indigenous peoples were impelled to control their own education and overall destiny.

In 1973, the Manitou Community College was created, which is an art college dedicated to supporting and educating Indian artists in the arts, literature, media, and history. This was the first community college of its kind to be under Aboriginal control (Stonechild 2011).

The creation of SCANA in 1984 was the result of the actions and coalition of Indigenous artists from Expo 67. They were a collective of Indigenous artists advocating for more inclusion for Indigenous artists in contemporary western galleries museums. Their primary aim was to be included in the National Art Gallery (Phillips and Brydon 2011). It was not until 1986 that Carl Beam became the first Indigenous artist to be included in the National Art Gallery’s permanent collection. The first major solo exhibit in the National Gallery by an Indigenous artist was Norval Morrisseau. SCANA’s successor, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, started in 2005, because there continued to be a lack of opportunities for publishing and curating (Phillips and Brydon 2011). Galleries were just starting to work with Indigenous artists and not treating them like curators. Again, Indigenous artists were reaching out, taking control, and having their voices

heard. No longer would they settle for one art show or a one-shot deal. There were many educated people who could curate, but they were not given the opportunities.

The Spirit Sings

“The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples” is an exhibit that can also described as a critical event for the transformation of museum patriarchal colonial policies and relationship with Indigenous people and their art and culture (cf. Lonetree 2012).

The Calgary Winter Olympics of 1986 showcased an Indigenous exhibit housed within the Glenbow museum and sponsored largely by Shell Oil. This exhibit, which showcased over 650 collected items of Indigenous art from other museums across the globe, caused a huge outcry amongst Indigenous peoples, including artists, scholars, and curators. The controversy and subsequent boycott had two underpinnings. The first challenged the universal practices of western museums of using ancestral remains and sacred and ceremonial objects as displays and spectacles (Gosselin and Livingstone 2016, 191–193).

The second controversy involved the Lubicon Cree Nation and their quest to be recognized as the original inhabitants and caretakers of a traditional area of land in northern Alberta. These traditional lands were never officially assigned or surveyed as reserves in the 1900s, and subsequently, without a land base, the Lubicon Cree were never federally recognized as a band. Ironically, Shell Oil was not only the corporate sponsor of The Spirit Sings exhibit but was one of the oil companies benefitting from resource extraction on the traditional territory of the Lubicon Cree. The exhibit provided the Lubicon leaders with the perfect venue to gain international attention. Across Canada this pivotal event changed the approach of museums when working with Indigenous art and culture, including more consultation with Indigenous peoples.



Figure 8 Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion

Reimaginings

There are instances of Indigenous artists working and interacting physically with the land. One example is Marianne Nicolson (Dzawada'enuxw Tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations). Her contemporary expressions of Kwakwaka'wakw concepts reimagines space and time, bringing the past to the present with powerful actions and imagery. In her "Cliff Painting" video, Nicolson's decolonial actions are clearly seen on the dune coloured cliffs. Accessible only by boat, Kingcome Inlet is a lesser principal fjord on the west coast near Vancouver; her traditional Kwakwaka'wakw community sits close, only a few kilometres up the river. Nicolson revisioned and "re"-covered over a fading traditional design with fresh red ochre paint. This "re"-covering of the existing design is imprinted on the cliff in a type of a naturalization process. Nicolson is reclaiming the territory, the space inhabited by her ancestors. In this way, we see a reclamation and revitalization of traditional tribal art within a new contemporary context.

Section Two: Aboriginal Voices

Aboriginal Voices

Indigenous voices come from a diversity of backgrounds and are deeply complex, exploring issues related to personal histories, cultural conditions, and current and relevant cultural events. One such voice is Métis artist Christi Belcourt. Even though Belcourt's images and artistry have won critical acclaim both in Canada and on an international stage, her fundamental belief system is immersed in humility, and her paintings demonstrate the interdependence we have as caretakers of the land. Most recently she has collaborated with House Valentino to create visually dynamic Indigenous-led haute couture, or high-end fashion. Prior to this venture, in 2013 Belcourt began a seven-year-long collaborative venture with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Canada. Like many other Indigenous women, Belcourt often thought about the missing and murdered Indigenous women. To honour these missing and murdered sisters, she reached out to fellow artists, friends, and relatives to help create an art installation that would become a memorial. *Walking With Our Sisters*

(WWOS) memorial art installation was born and became a powerful medium with which to honour these women ('Walking with Our Sisters' 2017). This collaborative art installation includes handmade moccasin vamps (usually the most decorated part, the tops of moccasins) exhibited together to commemorate and honour the missing and murdered Indigenous women of Canada.

Relationships and Community

Prior to the first stop of WWOS in Edmonton, Alberta, in October 2013, Belcourt reached out in 2012 through the vast space of social media and word of mouth and called out for help in creating an installation that would honour the 600 or more Indigenous sisters, mothers, daughters, cousins, and granddaughters in Canada that have gone missing or have been murdered in the last twenty years.

Belcourt sent a call out to everyone across Canada, and anyone who was willing to create an original pair of vamps was invited to participate. The vamps were to be sent to Belcourt for compilation and organization for the collaborative art installation. However, three months before the deadline of July 17, 2013, the goal of 600 pairs seemed unlikely. However, no one needed to worry about the numbers, because in true community spirit the promises to send in vamps were kept. People finished their vamps and sent them to Belcourt in Espanola, Saskatchewan. The final tally came to over 1818 pairs of moccasin vamps created by over 1400 individual artists. Participants from eight different countries and from many walks of life added to the collection.

Many communities across Canada have hosted what is often referred to as a "sacred bundle", and there have been significant benefits amongst the hosting communities. A sacred bundle is a collection of items of a sacred nature, a small or large package that carries with it stories and protocols in which to handle and care for it. A sacred bundle often has knowledgeable caretakers who make sure it is handled in a respectful way. As the bundle is being installed, the volunteers and organizers are swept into ceremony. Throughout the organization and preparations, strong bonds and powerful relationships are formed with the volunteers and participants. For WWOS, often volunteers stayed

long after their shift was over, or they would inevitably come back to volunteer again. This became a testament to the galvanization of community that had been built.

While the focus had not been to create a community within WWOOS Edmonton exhibit, it happened all the same. The main priorities of WWOOS continues to be twofold – to honour the missing and murdered Indigenous women and their families, and to also maintain a safe and respectful place for families, friends, and participants to experience them. Guests included many families and friends of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters. This exhibit demonstrates the power in Aboriginal voice to build relationships and communities on a grassroots level.

Rebecca Belmore

Another exhibit that exemplifies Aboriginal voice is Rebecca Belmore's "Fringe" (cf. Bear Robe 2006). Belmore is an artist living in Winnipeg and was Canada's official representative in the 2005 Venice Biennale, an international contemporary art show. She is an Anishnaabek woman who says that she is "living in the continuously colonial space of the Americas." The Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) located in Winnipeg commissioned Rebecca Belmore for a signature piece to be a permanent installation in the Museum. For over a year, Belmore was set up in Neechi Commons, a community co-op for Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg, to create a gigantic blanket out of more than 10,000 clay beads shaped in part by members of the public, including schoolchildren and elders. Interestingly, it is the excavation process for the museum itself that inspired the work. During the excavation process over 400,000 Indigenous artifacts were recovered from the building site lands, as well as archeological evidence of 200 fire pits. The museum, much like the rest of Winnipeg, is also located on the land full of clay historically called Red River Valley clay gumbo. Belmore used the idea of fire and clay as the premise for her ceramic project. Ironically, pottery shards were amongst the many artifacts found on the site. She came up with the idea of community making the beads with the very land that they occupied. Much like Belcourt, Belmore appealed

to the public for help in creating this public piece. The entire project used the natural clay gleaned from under Winnipeg streets and sidewalks.

Blanket Motif

Responding to the historical significance of the territory, Belmore's projects carried a statement reminding the public that the area has been a meeting place for thousands of years. Centered between two great rivers, Winnipeggers participating in the project may then begin to acknowledge the long history of the original inhabitants of the land. In the physical creation of the clay beads, participants perhaps thought about the history of the land, the people who were here originally, and their relationship with both. Belmore has been quoted as saying she hopes that the act of creating the beads will involve "the act of pressing this clay, this land, and at the same time thinking about the future. The people who help create this blanket or sculpture will leave their trace for those [yet to come]." (Sandals 2014)

Belmore invited anyone who wanted to participate to come to her temporary studio set up in Neechi Commons, to shape and create clay beads. Perhaps related, but certainly not by the artist's admission, the Canadian Museum of Human Rights had come under a great deal of criticism for refusing to use the word genocide in the title of an exhibit that critiqued the assimilative policies towards Indigenous peoples. Belmore's use of the blanket motif outlines the government's genocidal actions of distributing smallpox-infected blankets to Indigenous peoples in the 18th century. This particular blanket represents Indigenous community action and political agency.

What I'm hoping is that the work I'm making will somehow make sense further down the road. I'm hoping it will stand the test of time and somehow acknowledge the land the museum sits upon and the city itself... I think it's really about some kind of acknowledgement of each other, and an acknowledgement that all of us have to live someplace, and that that is complicated in the world we live in today. (Belmore in Sandals 2014)

Community Art

While public art may work to intentionally distance the viewer, it may or may not indicate what it means or how it has come to be. A viewer may not have any idea of the social comment it may or may not be making. Community art such as with Belcourt and Belmore has helped change this. These community works are often about breaking down the barriers between artists and the audience, often wanting and hoping to bring about social change.

Modest Livelihood

Brian Jungen & Duane Linklater's collaborative film "Modest Livelihood" is composed of two silent films and was first presented in 2013 (cf. Freeman 2013). It is a remarkable example of how artists' voices can inspire and explore issues related to personal histories, cultural conditions, and current and relevant cultural events. Born in Fort St. John, British Columbia in 1970, Brian Jungen is a mix of European and Dane-zaa and is from the Dane-zaa First Nation. Co-collaborator Duane Linklater is Omaskêko Cree, from Moose Cree First Nation in northern Ontario and is currently based in North Bay, Ontario. Both Linklater and Jungen are internationally and critically acclaimed artists, and are both winners of the Sobey Art Award for Canada's most prominent contemporary artist under 40, Jungen in 2002 and Linklater in 2013.

These two silent films were exhibited simultaneously at the new Logan Centre for the Arts at the University of Chicago in 2013 under the title called Modest Livelihood. The larger project – a 50-minute film in which we watch as the artists undertake two off-season hunts in the late 2011 on Dane-zaa territory – is derived from the smaller of the two films named Lean. Lean was shot at the Banff Centre in 2012. The film shows both artists hunting off-season on Treaty 8 territory.

Modest Livelihood offers no words from either hunter/artist during the entire film. There aren't any artist statements that accompany the films, nor are there signs that would help audience members interpret the films. Some have critiqued the film for its silence and have said that any controversial arguments or political statements are not heard.

Audiences quietly watch the films, both devoid of conversation and sound, and there are very few physical exchanges or gestures between the men. The action is too fragmented to pursue any kind of narrative. So how does one interpret this film? What understanding can we derive from these pieces? Perhaps we can take clues from the title, Modest Livelihood. Jungen and Linklater's Modest Livelihood is a twist on the infamous notion of a "moderate livelihood."

A Moderate Livelihood

In 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the rights of Mik'maq fisherman Donald Marshall Jr., affirming the treaty rights of First Nations to be able to provide for their families by hunting, fishing, gathering, and trading (cf. Jeffries 2013). It was also decided that First Nations could not pursue any more than a moderate livelihood. Jungen and Linklater attempt to answer the question, "When living in extended family kinship systems, with values of accountability and sharing, where does moderation end and excess begin?"

There are powerful and compelling undertones in their documentary-like film. The title of Modest Livelihood relates to the legalese phrasing of "moderate livelihood" that undermined First Nations Treaty Rights to freely hunt, trap, and fish. Marshall could only sell enough to constitute a "moderate livelihood", and this questionable term became precedent setting. It was a benchmark decision for resource management among First Nations. As Jungen and Linklater hunt, kill, and butcher a young moose, the audience follows along. As they carve up the flesh and bone of the moose, we see a large compressor, cables, and oil pipelines in the background. This scene is a strong reminder of the resource extraction and development that continues on traditional territories often without the agreement of First Nations peoples.

[Hunting] "It's a family thing," Jungen says. "I think for most Indian folks, hunting is really just going hiking, but with rifles." (Whyte 2013)

Connection to Land

What viewers of Modest Livelihood begin to see is an unmistakable connection to the land for each hunter. The hunters travel the land in ease together within the assembled close and intimate scenes. Viewers are alongside the hunters, always there, not participating but yet still observing. The viewer and artist/hunter relationship actually progresses through to the end of the film as Jungen and Linklater begin to clean, skin and carve a moose.

As Jungen and Linklater are connected with the land, so too, are the viewers with the hunters. We are suspended in sustained closeness, and, as such, witness the skill and respect needed for this venture. We are so close to the animal as it is being dismembered and carved that our perspective is almost intimate. As viewers travel and hunt with Jungen and Linklater, the film fosters a feeling of familiarity and connection. It communicates the idea of how Indigenous communities are deeply connected with the land and demonstrates the interdependency that we all share with each other.

It appalls us that the West can ... claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously seek to deny us further opportunities to be creators of our own culture. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of Indigenous peoples' claim to forms of cultural knowledge. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 1).

Conclusion

Of course, Indigenous artists, curators, and the writers who speak about Indigenous art are speaking a new language formed with a new combination of text and visual references stemming from Indigenous territories. We must create and develop an Indigenous language to speak about Indigenous art. Essential elements of reciprocity, kinship, relational accountability, responsibility, connection to the spirit world through ceremony, mnemonic devices, memorialization of

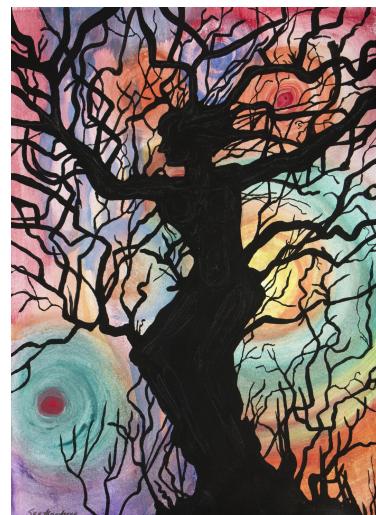


Figure 9 Artwork by Brenda Morency; Credit: Brenda Morency

events, and understanding of protocols work to create a language of critique to transform and centre Indigenous concerns, worldviews, and perspectives.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith states,

Franz Fanon's call for the indigenous intellectual and artist to create a new literature, to work in the cause of constructing a national culture after liberation still stands as a challenge. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 29)

Credits

- Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 1. 1491s at Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, with Bill Reid's famous clamshell; Credit: US Embassy Canada; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/us_mission_canada/8497448455/in/album-72157632882124470/
- Figure 2. Pipestone Quarry Rock Pile; Credit: cariliv; CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cliving/4775410083/in/photolist-27C99S-8gZe3v-5CwaeV-8gZe3B>
- Figure 3. Artwork by Brenda Morency; Credit: Brenda Morency; Permission received from artist
- Figure 4. "Great Lakes Girls, 2008" Beadwork by Teri Greeves; Credit: Stanley J. Love/Brooklyn Museum; License: CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>; URL: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/186543>
- Figure 5. Baleen basket, 2007; Credit: jomilo75; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jomilo75/466861635/in/photolist-HfH5G-HfLPP-HfMGx-HfMbi/>
- Figure 6. Winnipeg Art Gallery; Credit: Mark Goebel; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sangre-la/3068028686/in/photostream/>
- Figure 7. Haida artist Bill Reid and Skidegate pole; Credit: Dr. George MacDonald/Simon Fraser University; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfupamr/6002964381/in/photostream/>
- Figure 8. Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; Permission received from artist; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
- Figure 9. Artwork by Brenda Morency; Credit: Brenda Morency; Permission received from artist

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