

DECOLONIZING CURATORIAL PRACTICE: ACKNOWLEDGING INDIGENOUS
CURATORIAL PRAXIS, MAPPING ITS AGENCY, RECOGNIZING IT'S
AESTHETIC WITHIN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN ART

by

Jaimie Lyn Isaac

B.A., The University of Winnipeg, 2005
M.A.C.M.C., The University of Winnipeg, 2009

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Decolonizing Curatorial Practice: Acknowledging Indigenous Curatorial Praxis, Mapping Its Agency, Recognizing Its Aesthetic Within Contemporary Canadian Art

Submitted by Jaimie Lyn Isaac in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

The degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies .

Stephen Foster, FCCS Creative Studies

Supervisor, Professor (please print name and faculty/school above the line)

Margo Tamez, IKBSAS CCGS (Unit 1)

Supervisory Committee Member, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

Ashok Mathur, FCCS Creative Studies

Supervisory Committee Member, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

Ruthan Lee, FCCS Critical Studies

University Examiner, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

External Examiner, Professor (please print name and university in the line above)

April 7, 2016

(Date submitted to Grad Studies)

Abstract

For decades, Indigenous art, artifacts and objects have had a contested history within galleries and museums. This is because Indigenous material culture was collected, interpreted, displayed and described through a Western colonial ideology, without Indigenous consent, intellectual or cultural contributions. The history represented in galleries and museums was deficient and perpetuated harmful myths and systemic racism. In order to substantiate change and demand for Indigenous leadership, it is necessary to understand the reality of the Indian as a dehumanized population, whose voice and knowledge in historical narratives has been systematically undermined, undergrounded and dismissed. More than 150 years of ‘education’ in the residential school systems, and forcible separation from Indigenous cultural traditions in ceremony, life ways and language, has affected more than seven generations.

In the late 60s and early 70s Indigenous peoples en masse united to confront the disconnection from their cultural knowledge and language, and became a time of cultural resurgence and Indigenous renaissance. Indigenous Curatorial Praxis developed to assert, advance and frame Indigenous art as contemporary and relevant. By providing an historical context for its development, my main thesis seeks to identify and acknowledge the agency and aesthetic of Indigenous curatorial praxis and methodology.

Indigenous curatorial practice is a stream of contemporary curatorial practice and this research seeks to recognize Indigenous methods embodied within the larger practice. This thesis inquires what it means to decolonize and Indigenize museum, gallery, and exhibition spaces and demonstrate how Indigenous curatorial contributions have affected the Canadian artistic landscape. The contextual genesis of my philosophy is rooted in a

framework of Indigenous knowledge, decolonizing methods and my Anishnaabe-
Indigenous familial, curatorial and artistic knowledge.

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Dedication and Miigwetch

I would like to say miigwetch to Indspire, Manitoba Arts Council, Sagkeeng First Nation Education Authority and CIBC for their monetary awards, bursaries and support.

I would like to say miigwetch to Indigenous artist and curators for their courage, stories, and inspiring the next generations. I dedicate this thesis to the ongoing rigor and creativity of those working within the Indigenous art and curatorial fields.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis will frame my analysis of pivotal exhibitions as modalities expressing methods and aesthetics of Indigenous curatorial praxis and also to signal their significance and contributions towards a more Indigenized Canadian art history. The primary goal of this research is to locate Indigenous Curatorial Praxis historically, address its agency, and identify its unique aesthetic within a broader contemporary curatorial practice. The inclusion of Indigenous art, culture, theory and perspectives began to have a presence in contemporary Canadian art because of this important and burgeoning artistic praxis. I will respond to the research questions through utilization of specific Indigenous, visual, cultural, social, and historical frames. In order to understand how major exhibitions changed and enhanced Canadian art history, what needs to be understood is how the intersection of Indigenous movements and the emergence of Indigenous curatorial contributions have affected the Canadian artistic landscape. The core methodologies and methods I use to gather evidence and to analyze are: literature, the literal vestiges of exhibition evidence; curatorial/museology theory; decolonial and Indigenizing scholarship; and field research. My experience in the field conveys my methodological influences, which relate to topics in chapters that are discussed in a decolonial, culturally responsible, relevant, respectful, and ethical manner. As method and methodology, I shift from of first to third person positionalities as I relate to the topics through paralleling decolonizing and Indigenizing narrative structures.

The methodology for this thesis is interdisciplinary in nature and includes in the body a literature review of relevant theoretical, historical texts; analysis of art exhibitions through reviews, press ephemera, art catalogues; and fieldwork to put theory into practice

and to reflect on my own curatorial praxis as an Indigenous curator/artist. Analysis is done through and from an Indigenous perspective with respect to privileging Indigenous scholarship. The literature review will consist of exhibition catalogues, museum and gallery practice theory, and contemporary art criticism by leading national Indigenous curators outlining curatorial methodologies concomitant to Indigenous decolonization, global Indigeneity knowledge, and cultural and critical studies. The research also examines exhibitions that haven't yet been deconstructed from a curatorial perspective and Indigenous framework.

While the majority of the research will focus on a literature and case study analysis of more well-known exhibitions and curators, it will also reference artistic projects I have worked on that support Indigenous theoretical methodologies of curation praxis. My past work and projects have helped inform my thesis research around Indigenous art criticism and curatorial practice that utilizes interdisciplinary methods, theory and modes to relay broad ranging issues from historical to neo-colonial oppression and activism to appropriation in the fashion industry. As field research I include my curatorial practice, referring to projects from within my own practice as curator, artist and researcher that align with related exhibitions and criticism. It is an overall study of Indigenous curatorial practice by others in the field, past and present. The geographical terrain of this research will mostly reference work in Canada with some exceptions to global theoretical and philosophical scholarship and exhibitions. The transnational links are integral to illustrate because colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples is based on global social, political and economic imperialism of Eurocentric interests and ideologies.

Note on Names and Terms

I use Native, Native American, Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indian interchangeably where appropriate to honor and acknowledge the identifications preferred by the authors and artists quoted, referenced and referred to in the context of their theoretical, political and cultural foundations.

“Praxis is not only the ‘process by which theory and methods are enacted, practiced, embodied, or realized’, ... praxis is connected to advocacy that is tied to confronting, remarking, pointing to, disrupting... coloniality... Indigenous praxis seeks to engage personal and collective stand-points of affected Indigenous peoples as a grounded theory and an analysis of history, power, and knowledge, the genealogies of theorization we’ve inherited, and this genealogy is its own standpoint” - Margo Tamez, 2014.

Chapter 2. Centering Indigenous Curatorial Praxis

Indigenous Curatorial Praxis is a mode and methodology that frames Indigenous art through an Indigenous determined lens. As Indigenous curator Ryan Rice explains, “the curatorial process is...to bring forth our story, our issues and our concerns and assists the artists with telling their story, through their artwork and exhibitions,” (*Visiting* 14). Indigenous curatorial practice engages interdisciplinary methods and methodologies to mediate and channel complexities within Indigenous cultures. It is central in this research to deconstruct essentialist and discipline-based biases underpinning the contemporary gallery system and traditional curatorial practice. Strategies for decolonizing and resisting contemporary gallery and art historical practices as well as incorporating Indigenous methodologies both in theory and in practice form an important aspect of the research.

Indigenous curatorial praxis not only works to critique but also in accordance with the more traditional curatorial role, to map the art scene, categorize, conserve, acquire and capture the issues that motivate creation today as well as reflect on the past. Indigenous Curatorial Praxis exercises cultural protocols, epistemological frameworks, the politics of sovereignty and nationhood that inscribes methods to both decolonize and Indigenize the gallery, museum and exhibition spaces - may they be actual or virtual. A third crucial area of Indigenous curatorial practice is to advocate for Indigenous art collections and continued acquisitions. These facets of Indigenous curatorial practices responded to the insurgency and resurgence of Indigenous arts and aesthetics as methods/methodologies. Indigenous curatorial practices enforced an embodied rejection of the hegemonic limited regimes and colonial authoritarian representation of ‘Native’/

‘Indian’ art.

This research deconstructs and re-contextualizes Indigenous Curatorial Praxis by analyzing pivotal exhibitions including exhibitions of specific artists, criticism and literature that have been important to the meaningful dispersion and development of Indigenous contemporary arts and ideologies. This thesis focuses on the interdisciplinary roles within Indigenous curatorial methods and recognizes the impact and causality on contemporary Canadian art. Through re-thinking curation behaviors with an Indigenous lens, curatorial qualities assume positions of educator, activist, artist, collaborator, lobbyist and community liaison. A curator within these roles translates Indigeneity and asserts decolonizing methods.

The creative role of Indigenous artist as curator in contemporary art is notable as it adopts interdisciplinary strategies and hybrid practices. In essence, Indigenous curators throughout their careers and in specific exhibitions have utilized anti-colonial as well as Indigenized modes of curation, and curatorial mediums through film, new media and technology, text, community engagement and cultural insertion.

Within this research, I will privilege the Indigenous curators and trailblazers who have challenged colonial/imperialist pedagogy and hegemony in the museology field, curation discourse and practice. I assert that Indigenous Curatorial Praxis has its own designation in the process in rising up to challenge and confront the extensive history of misrepresentation of Indigenous art. Indigenous curators and scholars started the process of decolonizing and indigenizing the museum and gallery arenas by shifting Western paradigms, addressing first the privilege of Western superiority and positionality, and then finding ways to work within the western curatorial model from an Indigenous

contextual framework. However, in some cases, Indigenous artists and curators completely broke free of the western constraints and created Indigenous spaces that honor and are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being within a self-determination.

2.1. Indigenous Curatorial Purpose

The convergence of contemporary art into an interdisciplinary practice has provided an opportunity for Indigenous methodologies, with respect to traditional cultural knowledge, to develop into a contemporary curatorial praxis, which energized a critical historical social justice consciousness of Indigenous Peoples. The developing Indigenous Curatorial Praxis stimulates a non-binary dialogue and de-normalizes the dominant paradigm within the gallery system through a process that advances a decolonizing framework.

Historically, museums were apparatuses for propagating mythologies of Western colonial power. Exercising power by the display and exhibition of appropriated knowledge, artifacts and bodies of tribes decimated or colonized (L. Smith; LaDuke; Root 107-8) served to justify and legitimize resource (land, water, air) appropriation/exploitation for capitalist agendas by influencing and controlling visual media as ‘evidence’ of unsophisticated and dehumanized culture without knowledge. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Western constructs and modes of display developed colonial representations of the ‘Other’ within museums that were instrumental in forming

and perpetuating stereotypes, reductionist¹ discourse around primitivism, and the discipline of studying and classifying the ‘Other’. Ruth Phillips contends that exhibitions throughout history, such as *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow Museum, that portrayed Indigenous art and culture without Indigenous consultation or control, aroused paramount questions about power and authority of representation which became another motivation to mobilize a future and process of change towards Indigenous agency in museums and galleries.

A social historical narrative is important to reflect on and consider when framing the purpose and significance of Indigenous Curatorial Praxis. In consideration of this past, the need for Indigenous Curatorial Praxis is demonstrated. 1967 marked the year, at the Montreal Expo Indian Pavilion, when Indigenous curatorial practice emerged out of necessity and right to re-imagine, reclaim and re-write history through Indigenous determination². The political and social landscape in Canada at that time underlined the upsurge for self-determination and cultural empowerment.

Concurrent to Indigenous-determined political and social movements, a resurgence of cultural Indigenized agency re-emerged in the consciousness of Indigenous People and a broadening of mainstream awareness. On the artistic terrain, by asserting Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous curators began to establish a decolonial positionality

¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith contends that Indigenous peoples were not considered to be people, and therefore not acknowledged with contributing to research, other than to be the subject of speculation (59).

² For example, Expo 67, *Land, Spirit, Power* and *Indigena* exhibitions

by subverting colonial knowledge, regimes of truth, and the patriarchal gaze in museums and galleries as evidenced in the exhibitions that will be explored further.

2.2 Protocol and Law

It is appropriate within this research to follow developments by a chronological timeline through history. As an Indigenous methodology, and Anishnaabe protocol, I honor the Elders and in this context, the research will honor the senior Indigenous curators through a reflection of their work, as well as give recognition and gratitude for the foundation they lay for new generations of Indigenous curators to continue their valuable work within current environments of curation. The research will embody the voice of Indigenous curators and advance critical exhibitions that have impacted contemporary Indigenous Art.

Although there are many exhibitions and curators that have been integral and effectual to the development of an Indigenous Curatorial Praxis, the scope of this Master of Arts thesis research has been tailored to provide an overview with specific attention to the key historical elements. It is not the intention of this research to create a comprehensive historical treatise, but rather to provide an historical context for the development of a contemporary Indigenous Curatorial praxis and aesthetics as it resonates within contemporary art. The thesis follows a timeline that: 1) aligns cultural and artistic themes with social and political movements; 2) highlights major exhibitions in history that identify Indigenous curatorial praxis; and 3) aligns activist and political movements with Indigenous contemporary arts.

There have been critical Indigenous curatorial and artistic developments that correlate and connect to major social movements. This thesis addresses the following exhibitions: *The Indians of Canada Pavilion* at Expo 67; *Indigena* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization; *Land Spirit, Power* at the National Gallery; and *The Spirit Sings* at the Glenbow Gallery and I then trace links between corresponding social and political movements.

This research emphasizes the development of Indigenous art history through an analysis of critical exhibitions. Activist and social movements have shaped and influenced contemporary Indigenous aesthetics, creative production and reception. The intersection of art and activism has had long lasting effects on critical, cultural and political arenas. The research will underline examples of how artistic and social movements pressurized governmental policies to support the growing field of Indigenous contemporary arts and curation, drawing particularly upon work by Phillips, as well as Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly. Indigenous artists and curators advocated for the government bodies and arms of the government to develop funds to support Indigenous art production and view Indigenous art as significant cultural capital. The late 1990s and early 2000s evidenced these effects with rapid development and engagement in the arts sector. The emergence of Aboriginal consulted and led programs, institutions, festivals and governmental infrastructure started to support the culture of Indigenous curatorial practice and contemporary Indigenous arts.

These organizational shifts would aid in controlled dispersion of Indigenous art, in creation, production, exhibition, collection and publications in Indigenous led galleries and in contemporary non-Indigenous public art galleries and museums. Some examples

to spotlight are The Canada Council for the Arts, The Banff Centre, Urban Shaman Gallery, and the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (among others), with attention to key personnel, programs, and events that allied with Indigenous arts, specifically curatorial concerns.

This research will examine exhibitions that deal with difficult and sensitive knowledge, notions of reconciliation/conciliation as it relates to policies of colonization, the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada, and the missing and murdered women in Canada. The focus will be how curatorial methods treat sensitive knowledge and experiences. This research will also explore current movements in curation practice that converge artworks from artists of settler and Indigenous backgrounds to address issues affecting Indigenous peoples and Canadians alike in consideration of intercultural collaborations.

It is crucial to understand the issues that arise today in relations between Non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples within the larger complex of political, cultural, social, and economic areas with paralleled exhibitionary representations. The convergence of non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists in dialogue together reveals diverse perspectives, inclusive agency and participatory decolonizing strategies. Curatorial methods that express a decolonizing trajectory often include community collaboration and participatory actions, which involve people outside the arts world. There are exhibitions and artistic projects focused on in this research that generate modes of inclusive dialogue towards decolonization through participatory education models with community, empowered agency and engagement. The conclusion presents a short summary of conclusive best practices and a desire to continue the research on Indigenous Curatorial

Praxis. The conclusion will address questions and important practices that the thesis was not able to address because they stimulate an awareness of the future work necessary in this field. It reflects on the need for an ongoing process of investigation of Indigenous curatorial practice within a more comprehensive, larger and dynamic Indigenous art history.

The exhibitions selected bring together representations from curators and artists, whose artistic practices mix traditional and contemporary elements to identify their place in Canadian art, historically and contemporarily. The curation honors, celebrates and conflates these binaries and complexities within larger cultural contexts. The selected exhibitions tell stories of cultural nationalism, sovereignty, nationhood, survivance, resistance, decolonization, identity and cultural reflexes that help us question, and perhaps alter, social relations, schisms and perspective. Overall, the exhibitions analyzed encouraged understanding and culturally diverse dialogue, were catalysts for diverse knowledge production, and promoted and celebrated artistic excellence and legacies.

Chapter 3. The Museum and Gallery: Representing Indigeneity

in a Colonial System

This chapter will present an historical context for the development of an Indigenous Curatorial Praxis. An historical narrative informs the significance of Indigenous Curatorial Praxis; it is essential to reflect on how Indigenous arts and culture has been disseminated and digested in museums and galleries before Indigenous institutional critique and Indigenous stewardship intervened. To provide context to this history, I must engage in a critique of museums and galleries as contributors to knowledge, regimes of truth and the colonial gaze of Indigenous representation. Through a decolonizing methodology, it is essential to first acknowledge and recognize how the systems of representation have been colonized through dominant cultural models that formulated grand meta-narratives³ and myths about Indigenous Peoples that are still believed by dominant culture today. Modes of display and colonial representations of the ‘Other’ within museums were instrumental in forming and perpetuating stereotypes, discourse around primitivism, and the discipline of studying and classifying the ‘Other’.

There is a long legacy of Indigenous representation in galleries and museums that has influenced our society as a whole on many levels, reducing the complexities of Indigenous cultures as over-simplified clichés, colonized narratives, and myths. In considerations of heritage preservation and collections, if museums and galleries are

³ Meta-narratives have informed misleading ideas, stereotypes and legitimates oppression of the Other historically and currently, with accounts in history, education and within popular culture, film, music, art and fashion (Inglis, David and John Hughson 141; Lyotard 1984).

understood from a humanist concept, meaning that humans and nature can be understood by their manifestations and production (Kreps 47) then the power and control of interpretation and language describing these manifestations are integral in the transmission of culture. In the “Manual of Curatorship,” Cannon Brooks stresses that the “process of collecting cannot be considered separately from the cultural characteristics of the society undertaking it” (qtd. in Kreps 47). Brooks’ notion underscores the demarcation of colonial mindsets that formulated reductionist narratives of Indigenous cultures perpetuated in museums and art history. In art historical representations of Indigenous arts, conceptual maps and colonial language form a relatable construct and visual language that has become iconic and indexical.

Mainstream society now has fixed ideas, habits of thinking about Indigenous Peoples that are normalized and based in colonial hierarchies of classification prevalent in social, economic, cultural, political and religious domains. Meanings and myths are constructed by systems of representation and are reinforced by the larger societal conceptual and language systems. These networks are challenging to dismantle, disrupt and change because of their pervasive, hegemonic and interest-based nature. Cultural theorist Lucy Lippard explains that “overemphasis on static or originary identity and ‘notions’ of ‘authenticity’ imposed from the outside can lead to stereotypes and false representations that freeze non-Western cultures...” (12). The misuse of wearing ‘headdresses’ and perpetuating the romantic ‘stoic Indian warrior’ are all too familiar examples of demonstrating static constructs, notions and stereotypes in contemporary popular culture visible in Hollywood films, fashion, music and literature. In *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*, Shari M. Huhndorf argues that

cultural and discursive practices operated as a “primary impulse” to distance themselves from the conquest of Native America and to “stabilize racial hierarchies that their ‘new’ more ‘liberal’ arts claim to repair” (Tamez, 2015, *email*). The effects of colonialism are profoundly systemic which continues in contemporary Indigenous life. Racism still permeates the public consciousness and knowledge systems of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, inflicting oppressive, self-hatred and hostile conditions. Representing Indigenous Peoples as ‘less than’ and as specimens to study drew a divide between Indigenous Peoples and the mainstream dominant culture, which served to ‘justify’ colonial oppression in all its forms, “in short, if the poverty and social chaos apparent in Native American communities in 1700s and 1800s could be shown to be based in biology rather than colonialism, then the United States would be absolved,” (LaDuke 77). There are ideological parallels between the Canadian and American racialized constructs and discourse of primitivism and modernism; Eurocentric modern arts and Indigenous artefactual primitivism.

Museums were apparatuses for displaying Western colonial power, the power of providing knowledge through the appropriation and display of objects and artifacts of colonies decimated, dominated and/or colonized. For example, the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London England, which exhibited the spectacle of the world, conjured exotic visions and notions of the primitive ‘Other’. The Great Exhibition emphasized the industrial progress and discoveries of the world by displaying the wares of imperialism and British colonial power. The exhibition was thought of as a spectacle to marvel at the Industrial revolution and the bounty of goods collected from exploration, some of which were Indigenous art and objects incased in foreign displays. In her book, *Art and*

Taxidermy: The Warehouse of Treasures: Conquest, Appropriation, and Cultural Difference, author Deborah Root attributes the historical museum's practices as predatory and cannibalistic:

Museums exist to display booty and power...wetiko psychosis is manifested in mainstream, commodified culture. Colonialism has always involved the transfer of objects as much as the control of human beings and territory. People subject to cannibal economies were transformed into units of labor, and their bodies were moved around and set to tasks not of their own choosing. People died for no good reason. Their possessions – some of which belonged to individuals, others to associations and communities – began to move toward the European centers of power. The colonizers decided for reasons of their own which objects were worth money to the colonizers, some because they were considered grotesque, and some because they were classified as “beautiful.” (107).

Anthropology and ethnographic disciplines promoted the ‘ethnographic gaze’; they collected, codified and represented Other cultures, with an exploitative superior lens. With Anthropology as the voice of knowing from the colonizer, Indigenous theorist Audra Simpson argues that “knowing and representing the ‘voices’ within those places required more than military might, it required the methods and modalities of knowing, in particular: categorization, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation, and ethnography” (146). In the 18th and 19th centuries, imperialism and colonization spread throughout North America. To assert and assist their political and economic interests, anthropologists and curators had interpreted Indigenous Peoples through the lens of Social Darwinism, placing them at the bottom of the hierarchy, as sub-human and

primitive.

The author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that these methodologies, practices of knowledge within these disciplines, were about colonial power and domination, and she asserts that, “Imperialism and colonialism are the specific formations through which the West came to ‘see’, to ‘name’ and to ‘know’ Indigenous communities” (60). Many of the largest and most revered museums are the beneficiaries of colonial looted materials. As Smith indicates, looting was justified through discourses of European benevolence, or in other words, ‘doing good’. ‘Saving’ and ‘preserving’ Indigenous material belongings, for the purpose of “rescuing artifacts from decay and destruction” (61). Smith argues, the “form of imperialism which Indigenous peoples are confronting now, emerged from that period of European history known as the Enlightenment” (58). Edward Said’s notion of “positional superiority” includes the idea that “knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed” (Said 7). Knowledge, objects and peoples were collected to be studied, speculated upon, and presented as foreign and novel representations of the Other. The justification of stealing as Smith has criticized was that these were not people capable of, or interested in, taking care of their own produced cultural goods.

As well, the Western widespread belief was that the imperial and colonial governmental policies of genocide were going to succeed and therefore these “rare” and “vanishing” cultures had to be salvaged for collective knowledge in history. Historian James Clifford focuses on “ethnography as a science which was a form of culture collecting, which highlights the way that diverse experiences and facts are selected,

gathered, detached from their original temporal occupations, and given enduring value in a new arrangement” (231). As cultural objects are taken out of context in their new arrangements, they are renamed and repurposed for the enlightenment, spectacle and gaze of the Westerner’s insatiable hunger for knowledge and novel world outside themselves. Paradoxically, Cannon Brooks’ statement that ‘collecting must be viewed within one’s own cultural contexts’ can also be perceived that learning and basing beliefs about other cultures different from the viewer’s own, reveals more about the contemporary cultural and political background in which the viewer exists, than that of the cultures on display (Kreps 27).

Indigenous peoples maintain contentious relationships with knowledge producers within educational institutes and museums, such as Harvard University and The Smithsonian because these places still possess collections from looted Indigenous cultures, including sacred objects and human remains. In these institutions of coloniality, Indigenous curators are faced with not only having to reframe and rewrite false representations but also work within those systems that illegitimately possessed Indigenous materials and bodies for their collections of study and display. The relations between these institutions and Indigenous curators working within them are fraught with justified tension. In her analysis of Indigenous methodologies in *Red Pedagogy*, Indigenous scholar Grande asserts, “the historically turbulent relationship stems from centuries of use and abuse at the hands of ‘whitestream’ prospectors mining the dark bodies of Indigenous Peoples,” (233). In relation to ethics of collections and artifacts, Smith contends that Indigenous property, human remains and cultural material still housed in collections, public and private, are often classified in the name of the collector

and have become the focus of Indigenous Peoples' attempts to reclaim ancestral property (61).

3.1. Ethical Issues and Authority

It is important to understand the ethical issues that arise today in relation to the ownership and display of many Indigenous objects because these problems are often linked to the circumstances in which they were collected. An Indigenous contemporary or customary cultural objects has multiple meanings that are deeply embedded and connected to cultural identity within social, political, ceremonial and economic paradigms. Communities maintain connections to objects that hold layers of meaning and sentiment relevant in the past, present and future. Art history and art criticism should learn from ethnological museums that, as Indigenous curator, artist and scholar, Sherry Farrell Racette argues,

Indigenous Peoples have radically different ideas about the items that rested on their shelves. The widely held belief that many objects have their own life force and power was the most fundamental difference, although the manner in which that belief is manifested and respected through cultural protocols varies greatly from nation to nation, community to community (41).

On the other hand, when cultural objects have connected people to their cultural history, ancestors, ideologies and language through these very channels of representation, there then lies a necessary inclination for Indigenous people to curate and tell their own familial stories, tribal knowledge and histories.

3.2. Note on Repatriation

There are many repatriation and restitution disputes globally. The very idea of repatriation of objects from a museum's collection to the culture to which they originated from threatens a museum's holdings and reputation. Researching the provenance of the objects can reveal unsavory and inequitable histories not otherwise noted on the didactic or labels. The success of repatriated artifacts opens the door to liquidating a museum's collection or serious re-examination of the very vision of the museum's worth. Discourse around issues of museum practice, criteria, ethics and value mushroom when questions of restitution and repatriation are broached. Repatriation is an area of deep significance, substantial research and action but cannot be contextualized in this thesis; however it is relevant to mention the current environment Indigenous curatorial praxis is working within and against. The effectual harm and repression of Indigenous representation by colonial systems of knowledge is still in progress and Indigenous curatorial praxis works in an uphill battle to resist and develop.

These issues are important to consider in regard to the multiple roles of Indigenous curatorial stewardship and the multi-faceted areas of responsibility. It is challenging for Indigenous curators working within these very systems that have perpetuated the representation of 'Indianness' and their materials as dead or dying, archaic, romanticized, or villainized. In *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson argue that, "We can no longer assume that historians, anthropologists or curators are, or should be the sole authoritative producers of narratives about the past" (6). To more accurately and ethically reflect an artistic community, sharing of authority with relevant organizations and knowledge keepers not only strengthens but also

broadens a knowledge base to legitimize, authenticate and substantiate these reflections.

Chapter 4. Art and Activism: Artists and Curators as Agents of Change

In view of the unbalanced history of Aboriginal representation in the galleries, museums and colonial meta-narratives, the curatorial process necessarily shifted as Indigenous curators contributed to the dialogue, advocated for Indigenous cultural material and arts, and advanced the importance of embodied and traditional knowledge, ontology, epistemology and protocols. As Indigenous senior curator Lee-Ann Martin, indicates, “[Indigenous] retelling will necessarily privilege Indigenous insights, values, practices, and ways of knowing. We must reflect back our stories, to see ourselves more firmly in the world so that we can dream the future” (*Wordplay* 107). This chapter will explore art and visual culture in Indigenous activism. It will provide a timeline that aligns cultural and artistic tendencies with social and political movements, by specifically highlighting pivotal exhibitions that have shaped and influenced Indigenous curatorial praxis and Indigenous contemporary art. The timeline will provide a significant parallel historical narrative relating Indigenous Curatorial praxis and aesthetics to activism and resistance. This chapter will also identify and mention specific self-determining movements within infrastructure, and organizational developments that supported Indigenous arts leadership vis-à-vis advocating, funding, and creating a place and space for inclusion.

Indigenous curatorial practice emerged out of necessity and right to re-examine, re-claim and re-write history through Indigenous determination through exhibitions; Expo ‘67 *The Indian Pavilion, Land, Spirit, Power and Indigena*. As these exhibitions demonstrated, Indigenous curators began to assert not only Indigenous people producing art but also Indigenous knowledge in museums and galleries. The fight for Indigenous

human rights, culture, land, space and resources has provoked waves of uprisings, rebellions, riots, occupations, armed combat and peaceful demonstrations in demand for change. Within the social, environmental, political, religious and economic domains, these issues are brought to the fore and momentarily subject to media, public and governmental attention. Art exhibitions provide a public forum for these issues to be debated, appealing to the public and politicians to reflect and respond in order to create new policies in hopes of transforming socio-cultural-political circumstances. Thus, Indigenous artistic and curatorial projects have worked as agents of change to confront realities and provoke acknowledgement from the dominant society's perspectives and social consciousness.

4.1. Political Movements and Their Impact on Representation and Art

The inclination to offer a contextualization of Indigenous curatorial methodologies surfaced, and in turn, this drew correlations of major social movements to major exhibitions and highlighted relevant artwork. The political terrain in Canada would determine the status of art and culture for Indigenous communities because the Indian Act legally controlled what Indigenous Peoples could do; every part of their lives was determined by the oppressive legislation, such as mobility on and off reserves. Government agents required a pass for Indigenous peoples living on reserves to go beyond the physical gates of the reservation boundary...precluding artistic "ideation".

These broad spectrums of living and human expression inclusive of education and art were greatly restricted before the Indian Act was amended. In 1951, Canada's Indian Act was amended so that the compulsory enfranchisement and the ban on important

cultural ceremonies like the potlatch and Sundance were dropped (Berlo and Phillips 280) and Indigenous People secured the right to vote in 1960. These changes happened from Indigenous people mobilizing their political will and empowering their communities to revitalize, connect and return to traditional ceremonies and practices, cultural identity and connection to the land. This was an important moment in history as it is related to Indigenous art and its slow ascent into the larger art world.

In 1967, Canada's 100th anniversary of Confederation, Expo 67 and Montreal's World Fair, were produced to host multicultural pavilions. One of these was *The Indians of Canada Pavilion*; this was the first time that Indigenous People were officially included and involved in the visual representations of their culture, and formed an emergence and precedence for self-determination. However, the Indigenous representatives had to work within and against a system steeped in imperialistic and hegemonic philosophies systemic in Western consciousness. The paternalistic tone of the Expo 67' *Indians Pavilion* is evidenced in the Expo 67' official guide prose:

In all parts of Canada, Indians have discussed and helped to share their exhibit. Indian painters, carvers and other artists have worked to translate the concept, which evolved into a form of significant expression. Through their exhibit, the Indians of Canada speak to fellow Canadians and to the other peoples against the background of Man and his World. Primarily the Indian people want to present the problems with which they are faced by involvement in a modern technological society, and to affirm their will to preserve the traditional moral and spiritual values of their forefathers. This is a positive expression of Indian thought. While

the Canadian Indian approaches the Expo 67 Theme in terms of himself and of his own world, the subject is a common experience of Man (Morency, *expo67.php*).

The pavilion officials shaped and controlled the discourse with colonial and stereotypical overtones. Canada's violent history of destroying Indigenous peoples' ties to the land, family, place, homelands, and community were moderately glossed over in the texts presented. With international audiences in mind, master narratives of a nationalist identity presided, working to oversimplify Indigenous cultures and struggles, pan-Indigenize and perpetuate stereotypes. However, the *Indians of Canada Pavilion* was a pivotal exhibition in Canadian art history, as it was the first exhibition involving Indigenous People. It has been thought of as the genesis of Indigenous curatorial practice because it was the first time Indigenous people were included and contributed in the representation of their cultures in a major international exhibition.

Seneca artist and curator, Tom Hill recalled, "The government really wanted a positive image in that pavilion and what they got was the truth. That's what really shocked them the most" (Phillips 27). To the public's surprise, as art historian and curator, Ruth Phillips explains the Pavilion was, "in contrast to earlier exhibitions, the installations affirmed the contemporary value of cultural difference and the survival of traditional values and beliefs in the face of great odds" (27). The Indigenous artists envisioned, reframed, remembered, claimed and represented their truths amid a colonial framework. Their stories of cultural resistance, survival, celebration had a presence but also they tried to be as candid about realities Indigenous People faced at the time, and how colonialism had affected them on many levels.

The Indians of Canada Pavilion still had some major challenges and drawbacks in regards to language, tone, male gender bias, and dealing with government paternalism of the 60s, but, in spite of that, Ruth Phillips explains,

in the years since Expo 67 many Indigenous people involved...identified the experience as a formative moment in the development of an activist Indian cultural politics. The project forged a sense of common purpose among the participating artists, organizers, and activists across Canada, and the experience left a legacy of self-confidence and a sense of possibility (29).

An overarching resonance from the Indian Pavilion was the importance of Indigenous distinction, active identity, and diversity among Nations, self-determination and productive resistance. The significance of the cultural and political landscape at the time and following Expo 67 corresponded both to how the art world and the public metabolized Indigenous arts and the aesthetics Indigenous artists were producing. From the essay "First Nations Art and the Canadian Mainstream", esteemed curator and writer, Carol Podeworny writes that in

the early '60s, Canadian First Nations art became a significant and highly visible part of Canadian culture in the eyes of both the general population and some individuals in the art community. The increased visibility may be attributed in part, to the social conditions of the period which favored for First Nations peoples specifically, an increase in social activism and, for the Canadian population at large, and increased sense of nationalism (23).

4.2. Transnational Indigenous Movements and Artistic Agency

Although the focus on this thesis is mainly Canadian, the late 60s and 70s bore radical political activism, cultural resurgence among international relations garnering world-wide coverage. 1968 was a year for global resistance. Indigenous groups got organized and many countries saw riots, occupations and armed resistances. In 1968 the US Congress passed the American Indian Civil Rights Act and The American Indian Movement (AIM) formed which later held armed occupations at Wounded Knee, Alcatraz and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Headquarters. In Canada in 1969, Indigenous peoples' rejection and just criticism of the contested 'White Paper' from the government to dissolve the Indian Act formed another impetus to unite politically and respond a year later with the 'Red Paper,' which refuted the proposed plans (Anderson and Robertson 158-67). These acts of critical mass organizations received national and international prominence which then generated focus on environmental concerns, land entitlements, basic human rights, inequalities and injustices that destabilized the imagined North America and aided in breaking down notions of the vanished and stereotyped Indian.

These movements had interconnected and intertwined activities, responses, influences and consequences. Artistically, these movements stirred a responding aesthetic and agency. In 1973, Norval Morriseau and Daphne Odjig formed the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation, alternatively known as the Indian Group of Seven, with artists Alex Janvier, Joseph Sanchez, Jackson Beardy, Carl Ray and Eddie Cobiness. Senior Métis curator, Cathy Mattes curated a show called *Frontrunners* at Urban Shaman Gallery and Plug In Institute in Winnipeg, 2011 that focused on the collective, saying in a *Canadian Art* interview that

[PNIA] were facing a lot of challenges; they didn't just want to develop a market, they wanted to be seen as contemporary artists and for their work to be seen in a contemporary art context. Otherwise they were being relegated to museums where their work was seen more as ethnology than contemporary art. They really just wanted to come together to have a louder voice and to reach out to emerging Aboriginal artists (McLaughlin, *Frontrunners*, canadianart.ca).

Mattes' exhibition *Frontrunners* exhibition revisited the strength of the PNIAI's artistic movement and challenged the contemporary Indigenous art community to recover and honor this history within their own practices as well as remind the art world of its importance. A very memorable community feast was held at a gallery adjacent to Urban Shaman bringing together the local arts and Indigenous communities to celebrate the exhibition and PNIAI's legacy.

The work that PNIAI/Indian Group of 7 produced changed the way people were viewing Aboriginal people and art in the 70s and beyond. Daphne Odjig and Norval Morriseau were thought of as the founders of the new artist movement called the Woodland Style of Art or Anishnaabe painting, which not only influenced many artists to come but also was later 'accepted' into the Canadian art history canon (Berlo and Phillips 229). During this time, however, it was still difficult for Aboriginal People to exhibit their work in galleries; they were being excluded from contemporary art. In a conversation with curator Bonnie Devine, artist Daphne Odjig recalls being coolly dismissed by a gallery owner thus prompting Odjig to open up her own gallery (Devine, "From", 28). To foster the voices of Indigenous artists and provide a space for inclusion and exhibition, Daphne Odjig took matters into her own hands and organization. In 1971,

Odjig had opened a print shop and craft store and later expanded it to create the New Warehouse Gallery, which was the first gallery owned and operated by a person of Aboriginal heritage in Canada (WAG 2014). Faced with the challenges of exclusion, Odjig saw opportunity and self-determination not only as her destiny but also those of her colleagues and a whole new generation of artists to follow. Odjig's vision and deliberative undertaking in creating space enforced yet another act of positive resistance of the mainstream superiority and exclusivity of the art world. The largest most expansive exhibition to honor the PNIAI was *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc* (2014) at the MacKenzie Art Gallery curated by Michelle LaVallee. More than 40 years after the PNIAI's career pinnacle in the art world, LaVallee aptly designated it a "retro-active exhibition", an exhibition that rightly "should have happened 40 years ago" (13). With a re-staging or re-curation of what could have and should have happened, LaVallee reasserts their presence and contribution into art history as well as poses a critical stance to amend curatorial practice and enact curatorial interventions. The 70s retro-stylized catalogue is extensive, offering eight essays and 120 color images of the artwork and archives. The exhibition featured quotes from each of the artists about their work and perspectives. The exhibition toured across Canada to finally acknowledge the PNIAI's achievements on this scale, bringing to the fore an Indigenous Canadian narrative distinct from the Canadian Group of Seven still tirelessly touted in major galleries in Canada.

In 1988, 21 years after Expo '67, Calgary hosted the Winter Olympics and to help mark this event, the Glenbow Museum hosted an exhibition called *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First People*. It was an 'historical' survey of Aboriginal visual culture that assembled 650 examples of art from museums around the world. It

featured objects made by Indigenous peoples that were owned and loaned from North American and European institutions, mostly appropriated objects collected during the early years of European contact. The exhibition was also sponsored by Shell Canada, which at the time was engaged in exploiting natural resources on the land belonging to the Lubicon Cree, a group that had been struggling for half a century to settle a land claim with the Canadian federal government. Indigenous People from all over Canada united to protest the exhibition, sparking a major controversy around the world (Phillips 48-9). In a Canadian Indigenous newspaper, *Windspeaker*, Dan Dibbelt noted that at the opening, “A crowd of around 150 protesters gathered at the entrance to the Glenbow Museum to march peacefully under the careful watch of city police”(2). The impact of the exhibition is explained by Cherokee museologist Karen Cody Cooper in her book, *Spirited Encounters; American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*.

The exhibition was a watershed for North American Indian/museum relationships. Had it not been for the Lubicon boycott, which drew worldwide attention and created a call to action to which Canada responded in an enlightening fashion while the world watched, positive changes in policy and practice regarding First Nations (Indigenous people throughout the world) would have been, I believe slower and not as extensive as the progress that has been made since the exhibition's protest (49).

Questions of power and authority to represent cultures arose and became another motivation for mobilizing a future and process of change towards Indigenous agency in museums and galleries. In a *Canadian Art* magazine interview, Lee Ann Martin and

Rebecca Belmore discussed her performance *Artifact #671B*⁴ where Belmore sat “immobile, as an artifact, in -22c weather for two hours on the frozen ground outside the Thunder Bay Gallery to protest the *Spirit Sings* exhibition in solidarity with the Lubicon Cree protestors” (Townsend-Gault 117). Belmore recalls,

The call issued by the Lubicon Cree Nation to encourage people to respond to the hypocrisy of this supposedly celebratory exhibition and its relationship to the Olympics screamed at me... This call to action was a significant moment for me. I could not ignore the reality that objects made by our ancestors were vastly more desirable to the world than dealing with our present-day existence (Martin, “Out”, *canadianart.ca*).

Belmore’s work contributed to political change but also it “was important for opening up Canadian authoritative museums and galleries to interpretations that challenged mainstream art history and deeply affected the making, display, and teaching of Canadian art (history)” (Cronin and Robertson 4). Indeed, activist and social movements have shaped and influenced contemporary Indigenous aesthetics, creative production and reception, and vice versa; exhibitions provoking activism as evidenced with the *Spirit Sings* exhibition. Painter and politically engaged artist, Alex Janvier responded to the *Spirit Sings* exhibition with a striking abstract expressionist painting, *Lubicon*. It directly addressed the political and economic issues that affected the Lubicon Cree peoples and specifically the extraction of oil from their lands by Shell Corporation, who was also sponsoring the *Spirit Sings* exhibition. To further exemplify his anti-

⁴ Or also called Exhibit #671B (the number, an inside joke, is the Ontario Liquor Control Board’s number for a favorite local brand of cheap wine).

assimilationist position, throughout the 70s, Janvier signed his work with his treaty number and subtly titled his works with political undertones as an act of resistance (Berlo and Phillips 229).

Art and activism as a unified practice has been a powerful engagement in provoking critical dialogue, agency and societal analysis. In the realm of art and activism, cultural producers (artists, curators, writers) have become facilitators of agency, or agents of change. Through their artwork they empower the viewer to reflect, to act, and to respond. Commitment to community activates social movements that have been seeds to cultivate creativity. The contributions of the Indigenous arts movement laid the ground for Indigenous artists today who are researchers and activists who are telling a story, seeing the world, interpreting the world through an Indigenized, growing decolonized lens. The Indigenous arts movement also made clear that the intersection of art and activism has had long lasting effects on critical, cultural and political arenas. Artistic activism deeply engages with the politics in materiality of the art making and the tangible and intangible products reflect that message with very real geopolitical consequences (Cronin and Robinson 4).

Towards the turn of the century, within critical theory and art in Canada, projects exploring a national identity 'crisis' emerged to focus on Aboriginal representation, sovereignty, globalization of neoliberal capitalism, gentrification, exile, land claims, precarious environmental concerns, resources, labor and social inequalities (4).

In 1990, in the Mohawk territories of Kanewake, near Montreal had an armed standoff lasting for 11 weeks, known as the Oka Crisis, between the Mohawk community members, including woman, children and men who banded together, against over

thousands of police and soldiers. The Mohawks were fighting for protection of their land and the burial grounds of their ancestors, as they barricaded and shut down roads to stop the development of a golf course, which would have destroyed a significant Mohawk burial ground. Indigenous people across Canada showed their solidarity through protests, occupations, road and rail blockades and disruptions. This incident revitalized Indigenous People's will to resist and a responsibility to nationhood (Gord Hill 71).

The OKA Crisis reverberated deeply in the hearts and minds of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people across Canada. The cultural clash formed political entanglements and fractured relationships among Canadians. The majority of the media framed and cast Indigenous peoples as criminals. The political unrest and social upheaval was what Indigenous artists channeled as they created work that contributed to issues of race politics, identity and political action in response to their surroundings and circumstance.

In 1992, two years following the OKA Crisis, *Indigena*, a groundbreaking exhibition which took place at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and curated by Indigenous curators, Lee Ann Martin and Gerald McMaster, came at a time when Canada was celebrating an anniversary. The 125th anniversary of Canadian confederation galvanized Indigenous artists, once again amassed as provocateurs to raise consciousness of colonial hegemony using their art practices to advocate and present social justice efforts. Indigenous politician George Erasmus spoke passionately and truthfully at a conference called "Towards 1992," when he said,

What are we going to celebrate? I don't like what has happened over the last 500 years, 125 years. I couldn't do much about it, the majority of the people in this country couldn't do much about it. But what are we going to do in the next 500

years? What are we going to do in the next 10 years? So that, when the year 2000 comes around, there are some differences...! (Canadian 8).

His statement at once generated a sense of nationalism and provoked fellow Canadians toward change. The curators provided a theme in response to his question, “This is the year to celebrate, but let us be clear about celebrating for the right reasons. The Indigenous nations of North America were once considered “vanishing”. Indeed several Indigenous nations were obliterated by ethnocide and genocide. Yet we endure. That is worth celebrating” (21). *Indigena* was the first of its kind at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in that it featured Indigenous curators, Indigenous artists and Indigenous writers. *Indigena* activated Indigenous artistic sovereignty by challenging the idea of professionals speaking on Indigenous peoples’ behalf and encouraged Indigenous art professionals to be heard. The curatorial premise was to hear Canadian Indigenous perspectives on historical injustices of colonialism specifically around Columbus’ 500th anniversary.

Indigena included artists, Kenny and Rebecca Baird, Carl Beam, Lance Belanger, Bob Boyer, Joanne Cardinal-Schubert, Domingo Cisneros, Joe David, Jim Logan, George Longfish, Mike MacDonald, Lawrence Paul, Edward Poitras, Jane Ash Poitras, Rick Rivet, Eric Robertson, Luke Simon, Lucy Tasseor, Nick Sikkuark. The exhibition produced a catalogue with a poem by Joe David; a statement from Indigenous leader George Erasmus; a curatorial introduction; and, six critical essays from Gloria Cranmer Webster, Alootook Ipellie, George E. Sioui Wendayete, Loretta Todd, Alfred Young Man, and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. In addition, each artist portfolio included biographical statements, artist statements and images. *Indigena* was interdisciplinary focused within

the exhibition and also reflected in the catalogue, including performance, paintings, installations, videos, poems and photographs that portrayed cultural survival through Indigenous values and knowledge.

Many artists concentrate on issues of perspective regarding historical events that have been previously ignored or overlooked by European-focused historians.

They not only bring these events into sharp focus, but also attempt to provide a resolution to the problems. Thus, art functions as an expressive outlet for ideas of change, with a re-evaluation of history as the artist's primary objective. In this rewriting of history, many artists transcend local, Aboriginal-specific issues to address global concerns of human and ecological devastation (19).

Indigena invoked not only a spirit of resistance, passion and renewed sense of presence but also a responsibility to revise and think critically about Canadian and Indigenous history. The critical writing from Indigenous writers and thinkers, as well as exhibiting the Indigenous artists involved, was important in cultivating an evolving critical regionalism and narrative that confronts realities and asserts legitimacy, multiplicity and complexity in contemporary culture. Jane Ash Poitras, in the *Indigena* catalogue writes, "Real power is...about empowerment and transformation" (167).

The crisis in OKA and resistance movements in history have been powerful stimuli and catalysts for art production, art criticism and groundbreaking exhibitions.

Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin relayed, "the events at OKA created more racism on the one hand, but also caused more people to want to understand," (Nemiroff 210).

Obomsawin's film, *OKA* premiered in the exhibition *Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* with curators, Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and

Charlotte Townsend-Gault. 1992 would prove a particularly fruitful year for Indigenous art. *Land Spirit Power* exhibited the work of 18 artists; Carl Beam, Rebecca Belmore, Dempsey Bob, Domingo Cisneros, Robert Davidson, Jimmie Durham, Dorthy Grant, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Faye Heavyshield, Alex Janvier, Zacharias Kunuk, James Lavadour, Truman Lowe, James Luna, Teresa Marshall, Alanis Obomsawin, Kay WalkingStick and Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupton.

Land Spirit Power brought together interdisciplinary work in film, installation, sculpture, performance, paintings and mixed media. *Land, Spirit, Power* produced a catalogue with essays from the curators, reflections from the artists and interviews with the artists. The curatorial premise for *Land Spirit Power* was to channel the cultural capital of shared knowledge and history through the art and experiences of First Nations artists. As the curators state, “Native artists carry in them the memory of the land – place at its most primordial – as a spiritual and political legacy. Being a part of this legacy, in all its richness and its moral responsibility, is the subject of this exhibition” (Nemiroff 13). What resonated from the art chosen and words written is the interconnection between Land + Spirit + Power, of and within First Nations people and their art. It is all encompassing, the curators assert “as the ongoing struggle of the Aboriginal People of North America for their ancestral land reveals, the land has social meanings that are profoundly spiritual and intensely political” (13).

With this in consideration, the role and aesthetic of Indigenous visual arts is unequivocally related to resistance/activism for and in the name of land, spirit and the powerful reverberations of those connections to ancestors, animals, culture, personhood and nationhood. In this moment, art and resistance is not one without the other. As

mentioned intermittingly, being an Indigenous person is inherently political and Indigenous art is inherently politically, culturally and socially charged. I relate to Indigeneity as a collective community built upon the interconnections, interrelationships of a group, not just through human relationships but on the basis of our relationships to the land (Wilson 80). There is a spiritual, social, economic, and political connection to the land that binds Indigenous people together. It is through the protection of land, culture and identity that provokes and instills survivance, a notion from Gerald Vizener that connects Indigenous survival, resistance and active presence in our culture to enact sovereignty (Rice and Taunton 8).

Land Spirit Power exhibition artist Jimmie Durham made a strong conviction to sovereignty as he wrote,

It is important to note that one *is* what one is; we cannot not be Cherokee or whatever [nation]. So, we know the world through whatever specific cultural constructs we have. But Indians of the Americas have a subtle colonial overlay to our self-definition, which is almost impossible to separate out. Then, because we all still live under colonial conditions, we have a political responsibility to our own people. (Nemiroff 143).

4.3. Foundations in Indigenous Curatorial Methodologies

The Indigenous curatorial methodologies in both *Indigena* and *Land, Spirit, Power* commanded a complex process of organizing large group shows that focused on rewriting history, celebrating culture in all its complexities and distinctions, while addressing timely issues that mattered to Indigenous Peoples. Through constant

reflection, mediation and redefinition of Indigenous identity, these exhibitions revealed a dynamic evolution of artistic practices that shed the divide of contemporary and traditional, broadened artistic disciplines and commanded presence on the Canadian art scene. The curatorial practices utilized research methodologies that included interdisciplinary Indigenous worldviews, intercultural collaborations and social sciences.

Indigena and *Land, Spirit, Power* exhibitions recognized distinctive qualities found in artwork from the artists' nationhood within a broad region but also brought together common interests in politics, culture and social realms. These exhibitions have worked in distinguishing traits of regional/nationhood differences within epistemologies but also presented commonalities shared politically and relationally. The outcomes of these types of exhibitions validate and authenticate Indigenous art as distinct in Canada.

It is important to note that the curators recognized the distinctions in nations, language, art forms, traditional knowledge, and customary protocols as unique within the overall Indigenous cultural framework they were presenting and drawing from within the given themes. As Marie Battiste describes, "a review of available literature reveals that although Indigenous cultures and languages are as diverse as the North American landscape, they share a worldview informed by the common belief that their environment is shaped and created by living forces" (qtd. in Trepanier and Creighton-Kelly 24). In consideration of both the diversity and similarities, the Indigenous curatorial praxis demonstrated the unity in connection to activating sovereignty.

4.4. Curatorial Agency

I have framed these exhibitions in parallel to major resistance movements to convey the agency of Indigenous curatorial praxis in self-determination and also to signal their significance and vital influence towards the future of Indigenizing and decolonizing Canadian art. These exhibitions brought together representations from curators and artists that began to conflate notions of traditional and contemporary motifs to firmly identify their place historically and in the contemporary milieu. The exhibitions curation honored and celebrated cultural complexities within the larger context of Indigenous. Within the curator's contextual framework, the ethical modes of representation directed the careful consideration of the curator's cultural and intellectual positionality, delivery of language, method of interpretation and exhibition, from an anti-paternalistic, anti-colonial knowledge.

4.5. Breaking the Mold: Taking Charge

This chapter would not be complete without addressing how activism, advocacy and persistence of Indigenous artists and curators critically impacted the infrastructure and art administration areas. As it is an interconnected system, art and curation wouldn't be where it is today without key foundations. Alfred Young Man wrote an article called *Bob Boyer and the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA)* that summarized the history and importance of SCANA for Indigenous arts in Canada. The article recounts that SCANA really began when the Indian Group of Seven got together in 1974, but more officially formed after a symposium on “the lack of recognition for Indian Art in Canada” in 1983 in K'san, British Columbia. SCANA had many people

involved from different provinces and served to advocate for inclusion of Indigenous art in collections, Indigenous curation and exhibitions. SCANA also led symposiums about Indigenous arts, and made important recommendations of what to do with the “over-4500 objects of Indian art in the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Indian Art Centre collection.”⁵ By many accounts, SCANA was one of the first collectives that helped both curators and artists lay a foundation for new generations and is acknowledged as an integral part of Aboriginal Art History.

One very comprehensive and straightforward summary of the Aboriginal art movement in Canada is Jim Logan’s essay (77), “It’s Not Just Noise” in *Making a Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community* publication, which imparts an important history, key developments, and mobilized proceedings of Aboriginal art inclusion in Canada. In this essay, Logan provides a history from 1978 through to 2003 including the beginnings of SCANA, key people, and conferences that were catalysts for change. Logan also includes key reports that would determine Aboriginal artistic and curatorial inclusion in the Canadian visual arts community and by extension Canadian art history for years to come.

One conference described was *Networking* in 1987 hosted by SCANA in Lethbridge, Alberta, attended by the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Department of Indian Affairs and many important Aboriginal artists, including Carl Beam, Alex Janvier, Jane Ash Poitras, Joanne Cardinal –Schubert and Edward Poitras.

⁵ www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/BobBoyer/ http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/bob_boyer/en/essay4.html Active site 2008 – 2015.

The outcome determined that “Aboriginal artists would no longer accept exclusion due to the ethnological, anthropological view of contemporary Aboriginal art by curators within Canadian art institutions,” arguing that “a state of cultural apartheid existed and was entrenched within Canada’s public galleries resulting in the exclusion of art by Aboriginal artists” (Logan 77). It was also at this conference that participants planned the boycott of *The Spirit Sings* exhibition at the Glenbow Museum.

Following this was another conference hosted by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations called “Preserving Our Heritage: A Working Conference Between Museums of First Peoples”; its mission statement was “to develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions” (76). In 1991, Canada Council for the Arts released a report by Lee Ann Martin, *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contemporary Native Art and Public Art Museums in Canada* and in 1992, the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*, both charging a call to action for Aboriginal consultation, inclusion and control of the dissemination and respectful representation of Aboriginal arts. The recommendations essentially challenged art institutions for fair representation by acquiring Aboriginal arts in collections and hiring qualified Aboriginal curators to “develop programs dealing specifically with the collection, research, exhibition and publication of works by native artists” (77) and that all museums and galleries with Aboriginal art (including ethnographic) to provide opportunities and employment in all levels of operations, for instance, curatorial, preparatory, and education (78). More than twenty years later, these recommendations are still relevant and need to be actively enforced as there still exists a misconception that

there aren't any qualified Aboriginal people to fill these roles, thus continuing an employment gap.

From the late 80s onward, an emergence of Aboriginal-consulted programs and infrastructure started to support the culture of Indigenous curatorial practice and contemporary Indigenous arts leadership. Important places/organizations began, like the Native Indian and Inuit Photographers Association incorporated in 1985; Tribe: A Centre for the Evolving Aboriginal Media, Visual and Performing Arts Inc., in Saskatoon in 1995; Sakewewak in Regina in 1996; and Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg opened in 1996; these are just a few examples. Canada Council for the Arts started the First Peoples Secretariat in 1994 and the Assistance to Aboriginal Curatorial in Residence Program in 1997, (outlined more explicitly in Logan's *It's Not Just Noise* essay), and many Indigenous curators have since written about their experiences.

Provincial art councils began adopting the Aboriginal art programs across Canada; Banff Centre for the Arts became a supportive place for contemporary Indigenous art production, dialogue, conferences, publications and residencies under the helm of allied supporters. A few key galleries and artist-run-centers became allies that started to make space for Indigenous focused programming across Canada. Indigenous led art organizations like the previously mentioned (SCANA) Society for Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry paved the way for now vital art service organizations like the national Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and the National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition. Both continue a self-determined path to advocacy for controlled and ethical dispersion and opportunities for Indigenous art; in creation, production, exhibition, collection, criticism, symposia and publications of Indigenous content partnering with

Indigenous-led galleries and mainstream contemporary art galleries, museums and Universities. In the United States, The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was established out of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in 1962. It presents an exemplary model of Indigenous representation and self-determination, in exhibitions, collection and promoting Indigenous arts.

The summarization of the contextual history of Indigenous exhibitions and important movements in this chapter demonstrates why and how Indigenous artists profoundly affected, impacted and established foundations for contemporary Indigenous Art History and Indigenous Curatorial Practices. There are many valuable contributors and knowledge keepers that know this rich history, however this thesis is not a definitive work but a reflection representing the generational voices of Indigenous curators.

Chapter 5. Curating What is Difficult and Sensitive Knowledge

Indigenous curatorial practice forged a self-determined framework in representing Indigenous arts, worldviews, history and knowledge through a dedicated process of political negotiations and community activism. A deeper decree of curatorial stewardship has been undertaken to share Indigenous stories and truth in the most sincere, effective and responsive manner⁶. A considerable amount of Indigenous art reflects a profound understanding and inquiry of difficult knowledge, and experiences of enduring colonial trauma and ongoing injustice. Arguably, these narratives have formed a cultural vernacular, best explained from culturally embodied knowledge keepers, mediators and conduits such as Indigenous curators. With divergent perspectives in mind of what difficult knowledge means, it is worth explaining in this context. In contrast to assimilatable knowledge, difficult knowledge is information that disables what we know and what we are accustomed to knowing about ourselves; difficult knowledge might contradict and complicate comfortable knowledge with more complex and difficult realities (Lehrer, Milton and Patterson 8).

Indeed, visual art exhibitions presenting difficult knowledge or traumatic and sensitive content present unique curatorial challenges and responsibilities. Curatorial

⁶ The concern with Indigenous stories and truth in the context of the late 20th century Indigenous politics beyond the nation-state, beyond the Eurocentric historical linear temporal timeline of ‘now’ and ‘past’; and the shift in Indigenous literary traditions, and Indigenous social movements beyond borders in light of Indigenous genocides in the Americas which have deeply impacted how Indigenous Canadians have re-framed their politics of ‘rights’. After all, many of today’s Indigenous political figures from the movement, were in their teens and twenties when they experienced Indigenous genocide as official witnessing / observers in Guatemala (J. Armstrong, for example). This had a significant impact on their understanding of ‘truth’ and the right to know. This was integrated into Canadian Indigenous sensibilities in a local-global frame. (Tamez, Margo 2106)

approaches are shaped by ethics, pedagogy, perspective, response, intent and engagement. A foundational objective of Indigenous curatorial practice provides a layered and meaningful context to the broader public in tandem with commemoration and empowerment of the affected. Questions which arise are: within an Indigenous context how do institutions with a dishonorable past of misrepresentation and Indigenous subjectivity program difficult knowledge for public witnessing in a manner of enlightened reform? How do institutions effectively create spaces for empathy, thoughtfulness and sincere dialogue? What curatorial methods and modes are used in exhibiting contested, sensitive, sacred and traumatic representations? Using exhibitions for pedagogy, how can curation effectively educate and memorialize with respect to divergent understandings and experiences? This chapter predominantly considers these questions with relation to exhibitions that have unpacked the experiences and history of the Indian Residential School legacy in Canada. It will also examine what is sacred and sensitive material and include discussions about exhibitions dealing with difficult knowledge and realities that conflate Canada's colonial past and present.

Artists, curators and arts and cultural institutions are important agents in facilitating dialogic exchange within political, social and economic realms; the “discussion of difficult subjects have been key drivers of innovative curatorial theory and practice” (Lehr, Milton and Patterson 5). Exhibiting knowledge that is spiritual and sacred is sensitive and challenges the artists, curators and institutions to carefully and respectfully mediate meaningful ways of engagement and awareness of the subject matter.

In consideration of Canada's difficult history of the Indian Residential School legacy, Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives and critical discourse have grown and evolved since its beginnings. In 1998, Phil Fontaine made public his experiences of being a student in the Indian residential schools, and what followed was years of lobbying the government, grassroots initiatives for healing, and many efforts from Indigenous People to confront this legacy. It wasn't until 2008 that the general public became aware of Canada's history or the degree of severity the school system had on Indigenous People's social, economic, spiritual and political existence in the past and present, when the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper officially apologized on behalf of all Canadians.

Following the apology, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed. The TRC's mandate was to contribute to truth, healing, and reconciliation. The national events held across Canada were meant to commemorate survivors of the Indian Residential School legacy, educate the public, and provide opportunities for people affected and impacted to share their experiences. In June 2010, I coordinated the visual arts component at the inaugural Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Within the scope of work at the TRC event in Winnipeg 2010, with only two months to research and plan, I organized visual artwork and curatorial pursuits that pertained to the Indian Residential School history in Canada with a responsibility to commemorate, educate and disseminate this history to a broad audience.

The breadth of work by Indigenous artists within this domain remains abundant (prior to the TRC, George Littlechild, Alex Janvier, Joanne Cardinal Shubert, Carl Beam, Lita Fontaine, Adrian Stimson, and Jim Logan to name a few). So it was incontestable to

include the work of Indigenous artists, survivors, and intergenerational survivors, but I also felt it was important to include non-Indigenous artists and their perspectives on this matter, as this legacy pertains to and has affected all Canadians on multiple levels (Isaac 27). Canada's reality and history includes the Indian Residential School legacy, therefore it is a collective history and responsibility (Isaac, "Curator", *leahdecter.com*). Some of the projects were inherited upon my hire, and others I was able to select and propose to a committee authority, which ultimately made the final decisions on what would be accepted for exhibitions. It was very challenging on several accounts because there are many works by artists that I felt were significant and relevant, but that weren't selected for reasons I was not entirely privy to. With this opportunity and challenge, I felt a considerable amount of responsibility to convey the issues with utmost respect and sensitivity. Still, working within a federal governmental system presented limitations in regards to transparency and artistic/curatorial agency.

The approaches utilized were determined by each exhibition's content; there were assigned therapists/health workers, comment books, opportunities for community interaction and engagement with the artworks, and private areas to contemplate and read. The visual arts component of the event was largely pedagogical in nature, appealing to diverse audiences and various demographics such as: survivors, intergenerational survivors, non-Indigenous people, settlers, children, adults, youth, and the elderly. The educational method was vital in working towards healing and reconciling, guided by the idea that people must first confront the truth of the IRS history, empathetically consider the trauma, understand the impacts, and unpack the causality.

Overall, I worked on six visual arts components for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event Winnipeg; one area focused on two Winnipeg-based Anishnaabe artists, Lita Fontaine and Linus Woods, through mixed media paintings that reflected their personal family histories with the IRS, and was displayed in the Manitoba Theatre for Young People foyer. In the outdoor artist tent, my focus was future envisioning by involving intercultural and intergenerational voices including Newfoundland Mi'kmaq artist Jordan Bennett who had 3 skateboard sculpture installations, and non-Indigenous Winnipeg-based artist Leah Decter's debut of (*official denial*) *trade value in progress* which involved audience participation (Decter, "Official", leahdecter.com). Also in the tent were computers linked to the *Beat Nation* hip hop exhibition via Grunt Gallery, and a graphic novel and an animated video by Shaun Muir. The Red Riding Media Indigenous youth skateboard crew did a demo/competition and an urban art display in the Forks skateboard plaza. Installations included *Project from the Heart* tile project⁷ in the Manitoba Theatre for Young People; Cathy Busby's *We Are Sorry* at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Busby 2010), and *Where Are The Children* at the Forks atrium (Legacy, *Where*, legacyofhope.ca).

Coordinating the visual arts at the TRC was challenging on many levels. There were many artists I wanted to include and so many more things I wanted to do in addition but had limitations and parameters to work within. Being an emerging curator at the time, I felt at times I was working blindly – there was so much I didn't know as an ingénue in

⁷ Project of Heart" is an inquiry based, hands-on, collaborative, inter-generational, artistic journey of seeking truth about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada <http://projectofheart.ca/who-has-used-project-of-heart/>.

curating and dealing with sensitive knowledge. As a neophyte it was a high learning curve and I am thankful to my Elders, mentors and colleagues.

After my contract was completed, I submitted the following recommendations for the TRC visual arts component (paraphrased):

It is important to hear and see perspectives of both First Nation Peoples and settlers of Canada as the IRS is our shared history and it is a valuable step in reconciliation. Consider balanced representation symbolically and fiscally. Aboriginal artists in Canada are still being compensated 28% less than other artists in Canada (according to Hill's Strategies Research).⁸ In Aboriginal art history and in contemporary Aboriginal art, artists have contributed many relevant artworks that conceptualize the IRS experience—direct or indirect, survivor or intergenerational.

It is vital to recognize these works in the process of research and program development ... it would be valuable for the coordinator to identify a core audience for each exhibition and prepare for the expected outcome in reaction/response (i.e. providing access to Elders, health care workers, counselors, traditional medicine, tissues, possible trigger warnings etc.). The visual arts coordinator should meet and consult with representatives from local galleries, artists, community arts and survivors. This would be effective outreach to gauge art projects, create meaningful programming and locate regional artists.

⁸ Hill Strategies Research is a Canadian company that specializes in applying social science research methods to the arts sector. www.hillstrategies.com

The visual arts would benefit from a transparent vetting process that outlined selection parameters.

Among the exhibitions I worked on for the TRC, I organized exhibiting the *Where Are the Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools* exhibition, curated by Jeff Thomas, and with the help of Legacy of Hope staff the exhibition was installed in the Forks Market (Legacy, *Where*, legacyofhope.ca). The exhibition consisted of an extensive archive of photographs from the Library and Archives Canada, among other sources. The Legacy of Hope Foundation, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada supported the exhibition *Where Are the Children*, which utilized pedagogical approaches in exhibition planning and design. Developed as a package, the exhibition could fit different spaces if required - it wasn't limited to the white cube presentation, making it available and accessible to broader audiences and alternative spaces.

The exhibition also provided education packages about the residential school legacy, which included the catalogue, a DVD of survivors telling their stories, maps and other relevant reading materials that could be applied to education curriculums. *Where are the Children* revealed the colonial history of the residential school legacy as well as ethnographic photography practices. The archival photos displayed images of Indigenous children and staff at the residential schools, and they may be viewed as mere documentation of the school lifestyle, but what isn't represented are the underlining complexities. In every image of a child, there is almost always an authoritarian figure present (a nun, priest, Indian agent) and if not evident in the photo, the photographer obviously controls the situation.

“An image is a representation of a segment of reality. The four black sides that construct or define the frame hide more than they show, and the truth as it is constructed though images can only be an accumulation of points of view of the same material. This construction depends on the ability to use archival materials not to just to illustrate a single moment, speech, or memory, but to manipulate them freely so as to arrive at a new narrative” (Sivan 287).

5.1. Theorizing Criticisms in Exhibitions

A common criticism of the exhibition was that the archival photos didn't capture the trauma that was endured. On the contrary, I argue that the archive images astutely confronts the observer with questions about how and who constructs history and requires the observer to read beyond the forced compositions of the photos. Thomas reflects in the catalogue that, “our historical photographs tell more about colonial society and their prejudices and stereotypes” (Thomas 13). In some of the photographs, there are Indigenous children wearing handmade paper headdresses and others dressed up in ‘regalia,’ in posed positions as if to capture a relic of the dying noble Indian associated with Edward Curtis, anthropologists and museological practices of ethnographically objectifying and ‘Othering’.

Interestingly, when referring to the archival photos Robert Houle incorporates in his paintings for the *Sovereignty over Subjectivity* exhibition, Shirley Madill stated also “that photography and anthropology share a common history. Their innocence left them open to abuse by forces of colonization. Houle prompts questions about how and with whose gaze we look at and photograph the world beyond our own culture” (14).

Given the exhibition's content Jeff Thomas asserts that,

the objective of *Where Are the Children* exhibition is not to place blame, rather it is directed at self-empowerment by providing Aboriginal People with the opportunity to begin to understand the residential school experience by being finally able to see the places to which Aboriginal children were taken. Again, the photographs offer an opportunity to come full circle and move on (Thomas 19).

If the public is confronted with a subject matter that propositions, preaches or blames in a dogmatic tone, it can present problematic and combative circumstances that counter the main purpose to bring about productive dialogue and transformative knowledge. Being open to bearing witness is a critical development in understanding and acknowledging current realities of economic/spiritual/cultural/political states of Indigenous communities and generations. In other words, dealing with the past where it impinges painfully on the present (Leher, Milton and Patterson 4). It is quite evident in today's headlines and First Nations' realities that the intergenerational impacts stem from this historical system which continues to affect generations of Indigenous Peoples. "We only have to look around the streets of any major city in Canada and see the effects of this ethnocide" (Thomas 19). This is true when we consider the disturbingly high rates of Indigenous people who are homeless, incarcerated, missing and murdered, and committing suicide that demonstrate the effects of current colonial conditions and racism. Unearthing the history of the Indian Residential School legacy opened the floodgates of anguish and remorse that is generated from a past and present violent colonialism, and an environment of denial.

In reflection, during *Where Are the Children*, there were many personal stories and memories shared from survivors that would be stricken by photos triggering remembrance. There were always gatherings of people together talking or listening to one another, the stories and dialogue circulating the room and beyond. One profound gesture will forever be burned in my memory, when a woman came in on her own and stayed for a while closely examining each photo; after thumbing through the materials in the quiet area and before she left, she said a prayer and left tobacco at the entrance (where it stayed and was added to). For me this simple but powerful gesture embodied cultural continuity in the face of aggressive assimilation. Exhibitions that focus on the residential school legacy propelled from Indigenous leadership have empowered Indigenous Peoples to return to traditional knowledge, language and practices with an honor that can no longer be silenced.

After *Where Are the Children*, the Legacy of Hope Foundation generated the *We Were So Far Away* exhibition curated by Dr. Heather Igloliorte (Legacy “We”). The exhibit started with the idea of using seventy-five archival photos from churches, private collections, and government archives across Canada as the basis for the exhibition. However her curatorial approach apparently shifted to tell the stories and personal testimonies of 8 Inuit residential school survivors as a foundational start. Other primary source material to build upon the exhibition was the survivors’ chosen photos and personal objects, which made personal histories and painful testimonies more relatable and tangible.

We Were So Far Away had a motive to heal and a mandate to tour the Arctic intended for a hierarchy of audiences; first to survivors across the Arctic/Sub-Arctic and

then to a broader Canadian public (Igloliorte “We” 20). The exhibition had several curatorial innovations that successfully mitigated the challenges in curating difficult knowledge in the context of the Indian Residential school experience, in specifically focusing on the Inuit experience. For the presentation of Inuit history, specific Indigenous curatorial strategies to protect and care for the people that the exhibit profiled, considered culturally appropriate ways of communicating their stories by “placing primary importance on the integration of Inuit philosophies and epistemologies into the exhibition”. Oral tradition was at the center to “give prominence to first person oral testimonies by participants in an approach that also helped emphasize that these stories were part of a living history” (33).

Other thoughtful elements of the exhibition were all the texts, signage and the publications featured English, French and Inuktitut syllabics; health care providers were available in quiet rooms if available and the exhibition design was portable and flexible to accommodate exhibiting in different spaces and sustain Northern transportation. *We Were So Far Away* put the authority into the hands of the people it served and its very core mandate cared for and protected the people it portrayed. In presenting the Inuit experience intentions were transparent in respecting their voices, and in a collective process of constant communication and collaboration, an exhibition was created.

As curators and artists express and gather information about trauma, it is not only an emotional strain to process the content but also to consider ways it will be experienced with a keen sense of pluralism. The pedagogical principles and dimensions of documentation and explanation in exhibitions like *Where Are the Children* and *We Were So Far Away* were developed with specific audiences in mind. It is difficult to control the

outcome of interpretations but intentions must be transparent in providing information that both honors the survivors experience and teaches the public. The act of remembering these memories from a victim stance and the act of realizing these stories from an observers' stance is traumatic. "The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing" (McKay 107).

There is a balance to obtain in considering exhibitions of trauma that uncover careful layers of telling that honor complexities of this past. Language and communication systems are so vital to how a given audience engages with representations. Effective exhibitions around trauma have used alternative methods of curation that have created spaces for reflection. If exhibitions can be read as texts narrating difficult knowledge, the languages expressing them must reflect and consider multiple perspectives and be inclusive of interdisciplinary approaches. The exhibition design and layout should anticipate and consider who and how one will experience, interpret, witness and absorb upsetting subject matter. The space itself has to transform from a white cube gallery into a place that generates a forum for respect, empathy and inclusion. The space must

seek[s] for a minute to destroy the distance between observers and victims, on the premise that mere spectators become the perpetrators and targets,... Yet it also seduces people who prefer to think of themselves as bystanders into recognizing their participation in current troubles. It attempts to realign their perspective, so they will act to reorder their realities. (Hill and Nelson 189).

Non-Indigenous and Indigenous art institutions, artists, curators who engage in this discourse can instigate change by connecting to supportive networks with traditional

medicines, Indigenous knowledge with Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders, and/or diverse genres of health and wellness care. In approaching difficult knowledge involving Indigenous Peoples in mainstream venues of exhibition, art institutions have a responsibility to embrace Indigenous ideologies from Indigenous art practitioners and involve their voices in their representation as authoritative and legitimate.

5.2. Collaboration and Contact Zones

Furthermore, non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups have to collaborate in order to avoid a divisional approach of seeing and understanding. Groups working toward reconciliation and decolonization through art and exhibition practices can embrace a phenomenology that strengthens sovereignty. With community collaborations, art institutions have the opportunity to engage the wider public, and access audiences that haven't previously been involved to reflect upon a shared history through innovative exhibition strategies, interactive programming and education. Programming and educational components have the ability to add layered knowledge not wholly captured within the exhibition. By involving community consultations and participation, the notion of community curating breaks down authoritative mono-vocal narratives to a plurality that is embraced and motivated by community. Community voices from the non-museum/art/gallery world should be heard, valued and honored to promote community relationships and inclusivity.

Creative collaboration in respect to co-curation, artistic interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue opens up productive channels for exchange of information,

experience, knowledge and expertise; breaking the authoritative tone gives way to critical interchange and intercultural understanding:

Drawing upon the theoretical concept of “contact zones”, advanced by Mary Louise Pratt and applied to museums by James Clifford, Erikson argues that Native American museums/cultural centers are hybrid embodiments of Native and non-Native perspectives. As a synthesis of cultural forms, they reveal a process of collaboration between diverse people amid conditions of unequal empowerment. Native American museums/cultural centers are both translators and translations, agents of social change and products of accommodation (Lonetree 3).

Cultural centers like galleries have become “contact zones” to encounter one another, to disrupt the ‘us and them’ binaries in humanness between privilege and circumstance. We exist as species living among each other on this earth for ages, as curator Gerald McMaster eloquently states, “our interrelated history as Canadians is 1000 years old. During that time we have traded in materials and ideas, lived and struggled together, pictured each other differently and contributed to this country”(“Our” 3) and he believes our art history should reflect those facts and ideas.

When considering a nationalist genre, exhibitions demand the convergence of non-Indigenous and Indigenous representation because it weaves significantly diverse perspectives and realities together to reveal a layered and complex narrative. These narratives and representations either stand in tension, or in solidarity together, and it is at those intersections where audiences can learn and question what they know and perhaps give them an opportunity to un-learn with a critical advantage. In my experience as an artist and curator, collaboration has been extremely important to my practice, my

concepts and prospective projects. I have collaborated with the Ephemerals, an Indigenous female collective with Jenny Western and Niki Little with ongoing experimental documentary style films and exhibition-making to explore Indigenous identity and subjectivity. As curator, artist and writer, I have collaborated with Leah Decter on the projects, *official denial (trade value in progress)* for 5 years, and co-curated a group exhibition called *Mammo 'wiiang to Make Change* that included non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists Ayumi Goto, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Adrian Stimson, Michael Farnan, Scott Benesiinaabandan, Paul Zacharias, and Peter Morin at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba May 21 – July 2, 2015.

Mammo 'wiiang is an Anishnaabemowin word meaning gathering.

Mammo 'wiiang to Make Change was an exhibition highlighting artworks that address social cultural, economic, and political conditions arising from Canada's ongoing colonial project. For over 500 years Indigenous peoples have enacted resistance to the structures and relationships of colonization. According to Decter and Isaac in *Mammo 'wing*, increasingly it is understood that these decolonizing actions undertaken by Indigenous Peoples must be met by a commitment to change from non-Indigenous people. "The risks of essentialism and insularism are more likely to be eluded if we advance the work of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars [and artists] on topics of decolonization and reconciliation" (Decter and Isaac *Reflections* 124).

In the context of partnerships of plurality and diversity, collaboration does present challenges and requires qualifying sensibilities in human relations such as generosity, compromise, vulnerability, honesty, tolerance and diplomacy. Partnerships and collaborations have also been problematic in terms of co-opting cultural knowledge,

benefitting from cultural-specific opportunities and leaving one party taken advantage of and exploited.

Concerning the colonial legacies in Canada, without careful curatorial care taking and without sincere Indigenous perspectives/voice/representation, exhibitions that involve difficult knowledge can be tremendously harmful and counterproductive that instead creates a spectacle of suffering, inflicting further distress on victims. The outsider or anthropological perspective in this area has been extremely damaging and further repressive, perpetuating colonialist methodologies. Throughout history, Indigenous Peoples are very familiar with being the subjects studied and objectified in appropriative colonial knowledge systems thereby creating an expected amount of distrust and unease. Is it possible that exhibitions illuminating traumatic histories not only enlighten observers, but also conversely perpetuate the ethnographic colonialist gaze and promote fetishistic voyeurism? If ethics and actions aren't considered to safeguard potentials to further traumatize, or exploit, the chances of negative reactions are high and justifiable.

One exhibition had created adverse responses - the National Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC) hosted a conference in 2009, at the National Gallery of Canada and a few speakers spoke to the IRS legacy in their artistic and curatorial practices. Among the represented was the *Mush Hole Remembered* exhibition, a solo of R.G Miller paintings and drawings that portrayed his memories of attending the residential school, presented from the curator Neal Keating. *Mush Hole Remembered* “in the words of Miller, is a combination of vague, mundane memories of years at the school, and flashes of horror experienced there. They are the strongest memories I could approach without descending into a place I would not be able to emerge from” (Shingwauk *algomau.ca*). During the

ACC presentation of artwork, the curator, Keating presented content that caused triggers among the audience when he began to share his theories of how genocide affects culture, specifically in how the residential school system affected survivors, ‘that residential school survivors suffer a cultural necrosis’ while pairing this hypothesis with a photo of an infected amputated leg.

In addition to the unsettling feeling provoked by the presentation, the artist R.G Miller was absent. It was no surprise that people, especially survivors present in the audience, were upset and offended. While some people left the auditorium during the presentation, two Indigenous artists and curators interjected to state their distress and rejection not towards the artists’ work but towards the curator’s cultural insensitivity. After his presentation abruptly stopped, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective focused on mending the situation and had a trusted authority address and smudge the conference participants before starting the conference again.

After this experience, I recognized how important Indigenous curatorial presence is as a foundation in exhibiting difficult knowledge relating to Indigenous stories not only for the victims, but also for the witnesses, audience, and those involved in facilitating discussion. Had Keating collaborated with an Indigenous curator, I question whether or not this would have happened in the same offensive manner. Selections from *Mush Hole Remembered* were later exhibited at The Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC) at Algoma University, calling it *Serving Time at The Mush Hole: Visual Testimony of R. G. Miller-Lahiaaks*. The SRSC director Jonathan Dewar explained that the Centre promotes programming that shares, heals and learns about the Indian residential school legacy and a broader colonial context. In doing that it sometimes means taking on even

the most challenging issues, such as the truths of physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse and genocide – themes explored unflinchingly by the artist and curator Neal Keating (Shingwauk *algomau.ca*). In hosting the exhibition at a Centre dedicated to sharing, healing and learning, *Miller-Lahiaaks* art works substantiate those commitments for a specific community of survivors and students.

By employing aesthetics to affect transformative pedagogy and prescribed reconciliation, there are associated risks in using the experiences of others' pain to achieve these ends. What are the qualities of exhibitions that cross the line in sensationalizing on pain in efforts to learn from and affect social dynamics for change? Indigenous curator David Garneau has said that he “has a lot of anxiety about shows that are basically a display of Aboriginal pain. Why are we Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal curators presenting Aboriginal pain to a primarily non-Indigenous audience? What do we hope to achieve?” (Sandals, “Art”, *canadianart.ca*).

While these are valid and important concerns, on the other hand, if curators did not acknowledge the work of an artist that has experienced trauma and produced resonant artwork – the risk of their artistic process of healing and experiences working through that trauma falls on silent ears and blind eyes. Artist Adrian Stimson says that making art on these topics can be used “as an exorcism of those demons in a public manner, and create awareness to a wider public about what happened in residential schools and to address racism continuing today” (Sandals, “Art”). Stimson addresses how art and artists have a role to play in reconciliation: “artists are conduits for the community in many different ways, of the experience that has happened in the community” (Stimson 193). If cultural/political institutions seeking reconciliation shy away from exhibiting work that is

traumatic or powerful in efforts not to re-traumatize, it negates those experiences and denies historical truths.

Stimson powerfully raises a point that “if we want to truly understand our condition as human beings in relation to residential schools, there’s some pretty awful shit that happened and there are artists who are going to show that. You don’t have to look at it if you don’t want to, but it’s there. It’s there” (197). Indeed, art is capable in helping survivors deal with trauma. As an artist /curator, I too can attest that in the process of making art that deals with the residential school experiences of my family, I have continued to work through a process of understanding and relating to intergenerational affects. In considering the notion of reconciliation and healing through the arts, not only is art therapy an established practice but art is also known to transcend the limitations of language, articulation, and utterance by allowing the creator to express or confront feelings and emotions (Isaac and Decter, “Official”, 36). Artists like Robert Houle with his work the *Sandy Bay* series, and R. G. Miller with his work *Mush Hole Remembered* have expressed the vital role that their art practice has played in their process of healing from Indian Residential School trauma. Bearing witness to these bodies of work, one feels the anguish expressed by the artists, as if to behold the hellishness as it is manifested and released on their canvases (36).

Curating art and exhibitions of this nature is less about supporting a fascination of victimhood but more about how curatorial approaches can meet the challenges to mediate dialogue and forge transformative political, spiritual, cultural and social actions that honor and acknowledge peoples’ experiences caused from government policies. Drawing attention to painful pasts as a learning pedagogical reform must not only just focus on the

‘Aboriginal pain’ as Garneau indicated but also, importantly focus on Aboriginal resilience and survivance for an empowered framework.

5.3. Graphic Photography Exhibition in the USA

To digress momentarily and consider a reference study of curatorial approaches across the border that deal with trauma, The Andy Warhol Museum presented the exhibition *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, which was supported by the Animating Democracy Initiative, an organization that encourages civic engagement and dialogue in the United States. It was an exhibition that displayed archived photographs of lynching in America. The photographs present graphic and disturbing scenes from America’s history. The museum staff developed multiple interpretations and ways of encountering and acknowledging this horrific past.

Methodologies and strategies were utilized to make the exhibition relevant and educational; speaking corners, resource packages and daily dialogue sessions included the audience within the exhibition – assuming active roles as audience. The museum facilitated a system to respond to the subject matter, to “display the photographs in an appropriate manner and to provide informative and engaging contexts and spaces that encouraged discussion, contemplation and reflection” (Grogan 6). The programming and educational components involved communities outside the museum and adopted the idea of community curating:

museums engaged in creative, dialogic, and civic practices opens itself up to multiple voices and to creating/curating together with audiences. In the process the museums play a critical role in galvanizing engines and promoting a sharing

of knowledge in turn builds trust and relationships with and across communities (12).

The museum brought resources together and connected diverse perspectives to make the exhibition a value to its audience. The museum became a gathering place to learn and unpack history with a critical perspective. With the idea that exhibiting lynching as a visual product in an art museum as being exploitive, Grogan explains,

Any image of war, terror, or torture inevitably, permanently, casts perpetrators and victims in their roles. There is no question that the exhibition of the images, however well intentioned, (re)presents and uses their pain. Perhaps the only counter-argument is that the only horror worse than looking, is not looking (6).

Similarly, as Martha Minow also articulates in her book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, “art of the unthinkable should disturb and commemorate” (6).

5.4. Murdered and Missing Aboriginal Women in Canada

Walking With Our Sisters (WWOS) is a massive installation to commemorate Missing and Murdered Women of Canada and the United States. It is a collaborative commemorative installation created by artist Christi Belcourt in 2012 and continued by a national collective organizing committee, with Sherry Farrell Racette, Ryan Rice and Maria Hupfield as part of the curatorial team. The installation consists of 1763 pairs of moccasin vamps (aka, tops or uppers) to represent one missing or murdered Indigenous woman and 108 children’s vamps to represent the children that never returned home from the residential schools.

Each pair of moccasin tops are intentionally not sewn into moccasins to represent

the unfinished lives of the women and girls. This project is about these women, paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth. They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, daughters, cousins, aunts, grandmothers, friends and wives. They have been cared for, they have been loved, and they are missing (Belcourt *christibelcourt.com*).

The vamps were created and donated by more 1300 hundred artists from around the world concerned with the travesty of justice of over 1200 Indigenous women and girls in Canada reported to be missing or murdered in the last 30 years. The work is displayed as a floor installation made up of beaded vamps arranged in a winding path formation on fabric and includes cedar boughs. Viewers are asked to remove their shoes to walk on a path of cloth alongside the vamps (Dewar 87) and “at the beginning of the ‘path’ there will be tobacco available to pick up and carry. And at the end there will be a container to deposit the tobacco – much like placing tobacco on a sacred fire (the tobacco will be burnt after each exhibition)” (Bell *acc-cca.com*).

In an early interview with Belcourt, she recalls starting the project as part of a series to honor our grandmothers, ancestors and women that eventually led to the missing and murdered Indigenous women. Belcourt realized the project and the critical mass it developed, was going to have to be entirely artist driven. She modestly “admit[ed] I am not a curator,” adding she “encourage[s] anyone who wants to be involved to take ownership of it. Each person can be involved as much or as little as they wish. Together, we will make this great” (Bell). Entirely community based, the *Walking With Our Sisters* National Collective will be exhibited in over 30 cities in Canada and the United States between 2013-2020, and it is incredible and powerful to know it is driven by community grass roots, free from corporate and government authority or input. The WWOS

Collective prepared a document for hosts and one of the procedures is that the hosts also bring together members of the community to volunteer to fill essential roles of Elders and Keepers. Each host community must have an Elder to provide guidance for the organization and ceremonies to honor local protocols and needs. Each host community designs its own layout with some teachings, and vamps must be installed on the floor pointing in the direction that viewers walk and underneath each vamp are sacred medicines. The installation opens and closes with a host-specific protocol ceremony and viewers are asked to respect the given protocols (Dewar 90).

Jonathan Dewar reflects on hosting the *Walking With Our Sisters* installation at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre at the Algoma University, which was a former residential school: “the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls should intersect with the legacies of Residential Schools, which include social and systemic dysfunction that leads to women and girls being put at risk” (91). Dewar also refers to the installation as a “chance to engage in this essential, transformative memorial,” that it was “meaningful,” and “our community needed this engagement,” particularly fitting at Shingwauk Indian Residential Schools Centre, where the mandate is “Sharing, Healing and Learning” (90).

Many people have taken part in this charged collaborative installation memorial that has been significant in not only actively not-forgetting and honoring but also raising awareness of The Missing and Murdered Indigenous women in North America, I would argue, more significantly than a political body has ever done. On political, social, cultural and spiritual levels, the WWOS project engages community through artistic and traditional cultural practices. One the curatorial team members, Sherry Farrell Racette has

reflected that

the practice of beadwork by Aboriginal women is situated as a tradition which is historically associated with social and cultural healing and undertaken in times of crisis. In the context of WWOS, I consider ‘healing’ to refer both to individual and community experiences of mourning and finding ways in which to grieve the loss of Aboriginal women, as well as cultural healing, which is perceived as a continuing process of cultural and psychological decolonization of First Nations peoples in Canada (King *sensibleculture.org*).

The WWOS project’s resonance is layered in the transformative power it has created to affect and gather so many people, to not only create objects of traditional Indigenous value, but also to memorialize, to heal and to acknowledge, which is paramount and monumental.

However, some people criticized exhibition spaces promoting ceremonial protocol upon entering the installation memorial. David Garneau refers to Rebecca Belmore’s response to the exhibition that the protocol of women wearing a skirt was gendering and to some felt exclusively traditional (Garneau “Indigenous Criticism” 78). Garneau recalled discussions from the “Stronger Than Stone: (Re) Inventing the Indigenous Monument” conference at ACAD November 21-22, 2014, which brought up “perplexing issues in Indigenous cultural politics, barely discussed in public – the challenge of the secular Native, and Indigenous criticism of Indigenous culture” (78). Garneau explains that *Walking With Our Sisters* “is an example of something authentic emerging not from a ritualistic adherence to tradition (real or invented) but a creative response that builds on and adapts tradition to express and critique a real issue faced by

living Indigenous people” but “not immune from criticism” (78). In thinking about secular exhibition spaces that take on spiritual and sacred domains in knowledge and in *traditions*, there will always be a risk of exclusion and criticism, but if it is “well intentioned, respectful and ultimately honoring” (Isaac 11) Indigenous (nation-specific) spirituality and protocol has a place in contemporary realities, especially as it aids in absorbing and understanding difficult knowledge.

5.5. Finding a Balance

In undertaking curation of exhibitions around trauma, there exists a fine balance in seeking to use an effective force of images that simultaneously disturbs and commemorates in a manner that is transformative, respectful and sensitive. While addressing the harm, these exhibitions must not only consider avoiding overstimulation to instill compassion fatigue but also avoid “retrench(ing) old divisions and prejudices of the sort that helped to precipitate the original tragedies... In Derrida’s words, what is most painful is that the painful is not painful for others” (Lehrer, Milton and Patterson 7). It is important to acknowledge that failure to communicate these stories at all and/or failure to communicate these stories effectively are mistakes culpable for indifference, apathy and exploitation.

The Robert Houle exhibition, *Sovereignty over Subjectivity* at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1999, underlined cultural, social and political issues affecting Indigenous people in Canada. One of the works, the aforementioned *Sandy Bay* work, represents the residential school Houle attended, of which the then WAG’s director Patricia Bovey called a “beacon of empowerment” (WAG 4). Artist Bonnie Devine wrote an essay for

the catalogue that explains the ways of telling our Indigenous stories; telling as loss, telling as history, telling as lie, telling as remembering, telling as political process and telling as painting. In recalling a tradition of the Plains peoples, she parallels the winter counts to Houle's *Sandy Bay* work in the way of telling the scribes of the Peoples; she says "in our culture, the process of telling is sacred and honored. Telling our stories has always been a means of connecting members of communities, families and generation..." (Devine 46-7). More than 10 years later, Houle worked the *Sandy Bay Residential School Series* that was exhibited and acquired by University of Manitoba School of Art. Of the exhibition, Houle said "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal viewers responded incredibly. It was awesome. It gave me hope that eventually we will get through this dark history. And when I say 'we,' I mean both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals" (Sandals, "York", *canadianart.ca*).

In recent years there have been stimulating forums to further the dialogue, theory and production of art work in the areas of the Indian Residential school legacy, reconciliation/conciliations, and the broader colonial context with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and scholars. In October 2011, the Centre for Innovation in Culture and Arts in Canada gathered a group at the Thompson Rivers University for the *Art/Reconciliation* residencies where many seeds were sewn for future collaborations. In March 2013, the Shingwauk Residential School Centre and Algoma University hosted a 4-day event - *Apology, Denial and Reconciliation* that brought together artists and scholars to engage in discussions, presentations and research. In July/August 2013, the Centre for Innovation in Culture and Arts in Canada hosted a month long residency at the Thompson Rivers University – *Reconsidering Reconciliation* brought Indigenous and

non- Indigenous artists together to support a focus on reflection, innovation and socio-political engagement which later resulted in an exhibition in Kamloops and Kelowna (Kamloops Daily News). There have been additional symposia – however it was critical that these be mentioned because I can authenticate the valuable impacts it had on my own creative practice being there, as well as experiencing the work of the other artists involved, which together have formed a unique familial connection bound by related research interests and experiences. With engaged residencies like these “for artists, curators, writers and administrators, [residencies] have become a key medium for such network building” (Terry Smith 234).

In the fall of 2013, *WITNESS: Art and Canada’s Indian Residential Schools* opened at the University of British Columbia’s Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery and is known to be Canada’s largest exhibition yet on the topic of art and residential schools, and best-attended Belkin exhibition ever (Sandals, “Art”, *canadianart.ca*). The 7-person intercultural curatorial team consisted of Geoffrey Carr, Dana Claxton, Tarah Hogue, Shelly Rosenblum, Charlotte Townsend Gault, Keith Wallace and Scott Watson. The 21 artists included were Gerry Ambers, Carl Beam, Rebecca Belmore, Chris Bose, Cathy Busby, Joanne Cardinal-Schubert, Beau Dick, Faye HeavyShield, Lisa Jackson, Alex Janvier, Gina Laing, Peter Morin, Norval Morrisseau, Jamasie Pitseolak, Skeena Reece, Sandra Semchuk and James Nickolas, Henry Speck, Adrian Stimson, Tania Willard and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun.

The idea for the exhibition came from a response to a request from Chief Robert Joseph to raise awareness about the history and legacy of the Indian Residential schools. Scott Watson described the exhibition’s mandate: “to raise awareness and understanding

of an aspect of history Canadians need to take full ownership of. Canadians need to understand what happened to generations of Indigenous children. Only with such an understanding can Canada move forward towards the goal of a fair and just society” (Watson 6). Watson continues to assert that “it can be said with some certainty that the Indian residential schools are to be deeply inscribed in Canadian art history” (6).

Geoffrey Carr raises an important ethical issue: “how will this difficult past be characterized, remembered, and taught to subsequent generations?”(7), which is an important concern to raise, in relation to who is writing and framing the narratives and who are we doing it for?

These constructions ought to be formed from and with those on the inside, whose embodied cultural knowledge is inextricably requisite in rewriting history. Chief Robert Joseph says of *WITNESS* that,

there is a duty and responsibility to include of all us, not just Aboriginals in sharing these experiences that it’s important to look forward together. Canadians need to work together toward a new future that’s really inclusive and collaborative – where every ethnicity, every color, every race, every creed is honored in these lands (6).

Curator Dana Claxton reminds viewers that, “residential schools are a Canadian Legacy – not just an Aboriginal one. It has to be an ongoing discussion” (Sandals, “Art”, *canadianart.ca*). In recognition of historical subjugation and objectification of Indigenous peoples, the curatorial team was aware that displaying personal traumas would need to be protected. Curator Tarah Hogue explains the curatorial methods to safeguard against further traumatizing or exploiting: “it is helpful to work closely with

artists to ensure they have control over how their stories are viewed and distributed in exhibitions... collaborations with non-art-stakeholders can lead to a more balanced exhibition and program”(Sandals “Art”), adding that the curatorial team met with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, the Musqueam Nation, the UBC First Nations House of Learning and other groups who gave feedback on how the exhibition was developing.

Another important exhibition that should be embraced in Indigenous art history, which thoroughly employed innovative Indigenous curatorial strategies is the *Moving Forward, Never Forgetting* exhibition at the Mackenzie Art Gallery February - April 2015. Co-curated by David Garneau and Michelle LaVallee, it included Indigenous and non-Indigenous allied artists; Michael Belmore, Rebecca Belmore, David Benjoe, Leah Decter, Audrey Dreaver, Faye HeavyShield, Julianne Beaudin-herney, Terrance Houle, Jaimie Isaac, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Amy Malbeuf, Dylan Miner, Peter Morin, Jane Ash Poitras, Skeena Reece, Sandra Semchuck, and Adrian Stimson. The co-curators’ combined vision “create[d] a space for intercultural dialogue and storytelling. The exhibition and related events encouraged sharing, empathy, and deeper understanding of what it means for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to co-reside in these territories” (Garneau and Lavallee 2).

Newly commissioned works and performances, as well as work from the Mackenzie’s permanent collection, are accompanied by Story Keepers, people hired to speak to the audience about the work, content, and to activate discussion—a new initiative at the Gallery, which was a sophisticated way to mediate difficult subject matter. The Story Keepers activated and asserted Indigenous knowledge within the

gallery and exhibition space, working to extend knowledge(s) with inquiring audiences. By doing this, the Story Keepers were able to influence the content understanding and assumptions of difficult subject matter. This was done well because each Story Keeper interviewed at great length every artist in the exhibition, going way past the duties of a regular gallery docent. The exhibition also had a gathering place equipped with a couch and chairs where people could sit for discussions or a quiet place to sit and drink tea, and read books on related exhibitions. The exhibition's content was affecting and powerful, so the space and Story Keepers offered an extra layer for access, contemplation and understanding – and for some, a place to vent and shed their colonial guilt and implicated denial.

Moving Forward, Never Forgetting gathers beautiful, haunting, homey, occasionally humorous, but always moving testimonies of resilience. The exhibition engaged the personal, intergenerational, and intercultural effects of the aggressive assimilation of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The participating artists wrestle with the cumulative effects of Residential Schools, public school experiences, out-of-culture adoptions, land and language loss, and other generational deprivations. Their work presents a stark picture of how these government policies distorted their lives, ties with family, and relationships with neighbors, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. At the same time, these works offer glimpses of hope: examples of cross-cultural friendship, family sharing, and cultural continuance (Garneau and Lavallee 3).

In terms of the labels, *Moving Forward, Never Forgetting* included a warning trigger advisory to the audience about the content, and each artist's work contained an

extended label to include the artist's statement and voice, thus breaking down the monovocal authority of the curators/institution. The exhibition had many layers of accessibility and discussion, one of which was hosting a symposium called *Indigenous Aesthetic Sovereignty and Creative Conciliations* with more than 40 attendees. There was a keynote speaker, curator Megan Tamati-Quennell discussing the state of Indigenous curation and art in New Zealand, which both paralleled and succeeded Canada's state of Indigenous curatorial practices and present challenges.

The symposium timeline presented a small dilemma as the session of introductions took time away from a discussion planned for 'creative conciliations' and group discussions and presentations. This could be perceived as a setback. However, the introductions of attendees captured individual knowledge(s) and experiences, informing their practices within areas of creative conciliations and in a way suitable in reflecting the exhibition's essence of the personal, intergenerational, and intercultural perspectives and effects of aggressive assimilation in Canada.

The curatorial methods that the co-curators used went beyond representation and mediation; they created new ways to engage audiences as well as bringing together attendees and diverse communities in active discussion, which generated a space in which the audience could no longer be passive spectators, symbolizing a significant turn in exhibition engagement.

In exhibitions regarding Residential schools and difficult or sensitive knowledge, it seems that striking a balance is the general direction in which Indigenous curatorial practice is developing. Seeking a balance in voices represented/unrepresented, the balance in authority and control, the balance of unsettling/settling, the balance of ways of

telling the trauma/resilience and finally, finding a balance in constructed notions between tradition, temporality and contemporary in defining Indigenous identity. To contextualize trauma aesthetics, a curator must be a conduit of knowledge, marrying concepts that honor the art and make it readable for audience understanding, all within a given positionality or stance that also safeguards.

One example shared by all the exhibitions discussed was to have thoughtfully constructed and language-considered labels, extended labels that gave voice to the artists and provided trigger warnings at the entrances, warning the audience of the exhibition's difficult knowledge. Exhibitions that seek to present issues of trauma that exercise utmost respect to affected peoples, work to renew and rebuild relationships in a collective positive process towards understanding. The capabilities of reconciliation/conciliation are through empowering; affected people must have a voice in the process and must be involved in the coordination and consultation of exhibitions. The curators of these exhibitions have thought of various effective ways of reaching diverse types of audiences through experimentation, consultation, alternative exhibition techniques, and an approach to making the space a transformative forum and medium to engage real-world context. Although the long-term impacts are immeasurable, these exhibitions will be invaluable and historically critical within Canadian Art history.

The process of reconciliation, truth telling and decolonization needs balanced perspectives to make a difference and create change. It has taken dedicated approaches and action to build ways of communicating and understanding the complexities of visual exhibition and critical dialogue that are translatable to a diverse audience base. Regarding Indigenous curatorial responsibilities, the agency of caretaking what is difficult or

sensitive carries multifaceted capacities in productive knowledge sharing by evoking memory, reminding, building, connecting and responding to empowered mobility.

Chapter 6. Decolonizing and Indigenizing: A Braided Process

Indigenous Curatorial Praxis encompasses a wide-ranging scope of roles and responsibilities within the gallery and outside the gallery, with and for community, pushing theory into practice and practice into theory. Once Indigenous artists and curators wedged their moccasins firmly into the gallery doors, they stepped out of the frames to frame their own stories. Indigenous Curatorial Praxis began to evolve and forge self-determined methods, what would begin to change and contribute to the wider arts world. The evolution and processes of Indigenous curatorial praxis is not linear, lateral or chronological, rather the praxis is shaped with layers of knowledge that is continuously researched, revealed, referred, thought, learned, lived and practiced through Indigeneity, inter-disciplinarity and established standards. Genres, themes, methods, roles and theories overlap and intersect that make placing and historicizing Indigenous curatorial praxis into an art history, a challenge, nevertheless significant and necessary. It is a praxis of complex legacies and contemporaneousness that is ever unfolding and cyclical; connections are drawn to diverse knowledge(s) that continue to build upon itself textures of curatorial literacy.

The previous chapters have identified developments in Indigenous Curatorial Praxis and its critical importance in advocating for and reframing Indigenous arts and culture, as well as advancing important social justice issues faced by Indigenous People today. This chapter will expand on, by integrating complex indigenous ‘braided processes’ into the methodology. Here I am specifically referring and invoking the ancestral, material, symbolic, and metaphorical braiding practices within many Indigenous cultures. Calling to mind complex weaving patterns that serve both aesthetic

and symbolic power within Indigenous embodied arts—from hair, to clothing, to baskets, to beading, to color, etc., I am suggesting that the braiding processes become more complex and satisfying as I explore them, as Margo Tamez states, “as embodied stories which comprise an always dynamic and energetic constellation of Indigenous peoples’ ingenuity and productivity in a genealogy of Indigenous consciousness which is our collective heritage” (Email, April 2, 2016).

These involve discussions around decolonization and indigenization within the context of Indigenous Curatorial Praxis. I will demonstrate ways in which decolonization and indigenization are a braided process, critically and simultaneously interwoven together to challenge the white cube structures of engaging art and culture. In understanding, identifying and recognizing the colonial system and the consequential circumstances, the process towards acceptance, and deconstructing that knowledge – individually and socially, is complex. As the cloak of colonial knowledge is shed and its authority transposed, another is adopted, the process of becoming attuned with Indigenous traditional, sacred and cultural knowledge is centered by acknowledging and exercising it in theory, experience and professional practice.

How has Indigenous curatorial praxis effectively promoted the literacy of colonial history and the colonial present? How can representations of culture be authentically and respectively explored and engaged within the critical visual art world today? What are the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous curatorial praxis in relation to interdisciplinarity within methods of decolonizing/indigenizing? How has Indigenous Curatorial Praxis continued to negotiate space and inclusion? What are some concerns, challenges and barriers that Indigenous curators face going forward? This chapter explores those

questions in regards to exhibitions that seek to decolonize and indigenize spaces through the lens and epistemologies of Indigeneity.

Before delving into exhibitions that utilize and demonstrate methods and modes of decolonizing and indigenizing, these terms should be examined to situate their significance in the Indigenous arts and curatorial sphere. I will primarily recognize interdisciplinary Indigenous scholarship to liberate discussions of art from the confines of Eurocentric discipline-based theories, and to fully embrace practices of decolonization and indigenization. In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's landmark text, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), she presents and dismantles colonial knowledge through Indigenous scholarship. With fellow Indigenous scholars, Smith works through and calls upon the theories of Foucault, Fanon and Said to advance counter-Western imperialist and colonial knowledge and regimes of truth by exemplifying ways in which imperialist meta-narratives of the *Other* have affected Indigenous peoples and scholarship. Smith makes connections between knowledge, research and imperialism and outlines how academic disciplines and education are based on colonial methodologies that have shaped how researchers think. In this prose, Smith challenges researchers to consider historical colonial/imperialist pedagogy and subvert and shift these paradigms by recognizing the privilege of Western superiority as a first step towards decolonizing.

To center those considerations in the art and cultural world, Lonetree in *Decolonizing Museums*, states that

privileging Indigenous voices and perspectives, challenging stereotypes that have dominated museums representations of the past and serving as sites of

‘knowledge making’ are only the beginning of a decolonizing museum practice... As the museum world explores further what a decolonizing museum practice involves, it is critical for museums to speak the hard truths of colonization and to honor Indigenous ways of understanding history (172).

This holds true for art galleries as well. Although contemporary galleries and artist run centers have been effectual spaces to critique society and explore decolonizing and indigenizing methods in art, there is still a need to further these conversations and support the ongoing efforts of Indigenous artists and curators. That goes beyond not only making space for Indigenous content, but also including Indigenous participation and contributions in governance, and adopting Indigenous protocols that work to further decolonize systems of control and knowledge. Onyota’ scholar Linda Sunseri has clearly stated, “what we demand is not merely equal opportunity within the mainstream Canadian system but rather an inherent right of First Nations people to live by our own unique set of values” (158).

6.1. Post Inclusion

Inclusion should not be a cursory act of tokenism or a superficial engagement with Indigenous arts and culture, as this is a common mistake in pursuit of Indigenous content to fit equity mandates. In skimming the surface, organizations don’t entirely understand the issues, contexts, and terms of reference at the core of what Indigenous inclusion means for diverse Indigenous peoples. In reality, the local context of settler colonialism must be addressed in terms of local processes, and the global in the local must be examined as Indigenous peoples examine these structures within their lives. To

neglect these intersecting strands of the Indigenous consciousness is to negate local forms of settler colonization and its beneficiaries, and to further repeat past problems bred from denial which reproduce privilege and oppression, and which make engagement and representation vital concerns for Indigenous peoples within their traditional territories. Museums and galleries should be places of discourse, recourse, and critical reflection committed to examine and unsettle history and take up contemporary realities. Institutional colonial gestures that perpetuate Indigenous representation without actively involved Indigenous stewardship is the antithesis of decolonizing methodologies. Decolonizing should be aiming to purpose the de-privileging of non-Indigenous control and domination over representation at all levels, and for opening space and emancipating resources in order that the Indigenous peoples represented gain control over their own cultural heritage. Lonetree insists that “involvement in developing exhibitions point to the recognition that controlling the representation of their cultures is linked to the larger movements of self-determination and cultural sovereignty” (1).

Galleries and museums have a responsibility to reset the harm of colonial knowledge production to enact transformation and plurality. The possibility of decolonizing and indigenizing galleries lies in transforming these centers into sites that restore and encourage community well-being, critical thought, knowledge and empowerment. The notion of survivance speaks to our collective need to decolonize, to push back against empire, and to reclaim what it means to be a people of sovereign mind and body (Grande 250), but first, there needs to be a collective understanding of what the empire encompasses, and to examine the effects of colonization, which needs to be understood through an Indigenous way of telling, through the Indigenous experience.

In consideration of exhibitions of art as pedagogy and agencies to artistically and culturally educate the public, acknowledgement of systems of colonial knowledge production is significant in subversion. As Quechua scholar Grande reflects: “the project of decolonization not only demands students” or in this context, scholars, curators and artists

to acquire the knowledge of the oppressor but also the skills to negotiate and dismantle the implication of such knowledge. Concurrently, traditional perspectives on power, justice and relationships are essential, both to defend against further co-option and to build intellectual solidarity – a collectively of Indigenous knowledge (241).

With the awareness that in order to corroborate Euro-centric interests, Indigenous existence, contributions and knowledge were denigrated and downplayed, the process of dismantling and in turn honoring Indigenous knowledge in education systems of knowledge is necessarily dire. Education Mi’Kmaq scholar Marie Battiste insists that Indigenous people are aware of how assimilationist education is deficient, and there is urgency for reform.

in a discourse of a decolonized education that seeks to reconcile contemporary education with the past and with peoples’ present, ensuring that the ideological and self-interests within Eurocentric education are not imposed on Indigenous peoples and they build their own present with their own agency and power intact (*Decolonizing* 26).

Is it possible and effective to work within current systems and structures of colonial constructs to make changes that advance Indigenous knowledge or is it more

valuable and sustainable to carve out specialized spaces for intellectual, creative and spiritual freedom that escapes issues of inclusion/exclusion in the mainstream but still eludes essentialized ghettoization?

6.2 Sovereign Spaces

Alfred and Cornthassel referred to the idea of “zones of refuge, from colonial powers that are spaces of freedom, strength and authenticity, where true power as Indigenous people ultimately lies in our relationships with our land, relatives, languages, and ceremonial life” (142). In paralleling *zones of refuge* in the context of art, David Garneau has referred to autonomous centers for Indigenous arts as “sovereign Indigenous display territories,” and poised Richard Bell’s poignant yet troubled question of, “why can’t an Art movement arise and be separate from but equal to Western Art—within its own aesthetic, its own voices, its own infrastructure, etc.?” (Garneau, “Toward”, *artlink.com*). In consideration of Indigenous arts’ affective qualities of challenging the institutionalized/eurocentric/westernist conceptions of contemporary art in the larger art communities, would creating these specialized Indigenous *zones of refuge* and sovereign spaces over-essentialize, isolating significant knowledge from broader public discourse or further push underground Indigenous art?

In finding a space as an example of an autonomous institution that functions to serve its specific nation to indigenize and decolonize, I looked again across the border to Michigan, USA at The Ziimbiwing Center of Anishnaabe Culture and Lifeways, which dedicates their mandate to promote tribal based knowledge systems in the telling of history and ways of life through exhibitions that are tribally controlled and self-

determined; their “focus exemplifies its subjectivity both as a cultural center and as a site for community empowerment and decolonization” (Lonetree 125).

The center is a remarkable example in the museum domain for best practices to develop a space that specifically and simultaneously works to decolonize towards indigenizing. From the beginning, the design and concepts were developed from collaborating and consulting with community on all aspects - a strategy that won the support of community; because of shared authorship, it is an inclusive sanctioned space. Both in the exhibition design and physical space but also theoretically concept driven through the tribally distinct perspective of the Anishnaabe, it uses the 7 Prophecies and 7 Fires⁹ as a critical curatorial method to retell their histories and existence. Within this culturally rooted framework, history is presented in a narrative structure to understand history through Anishnaabe epistemologies and language – thus engaging an important decolonizing strategy by privileging the oral tradition and Indigenous conceptions of history (132). Through an Anishnaabe epistemological worldview, decolonization and indigenization was actually alluded to by the 7th fire prophet, which many refer to this moment in time as the 7th generation. The Ziimbiwing Center provides a “critical understanding of the colonial process – to help process their grief and to assist in the healing process...to foster a reattachment to traditional Native values by incorporating tribally specific ceremonies and cultural teachings” (125).

In acknowledging a history that not only asserted Indigenous authority and power pre-colonialism but also addressed “the historical process of colonization and the toll it

⁹ The 7 Prophecies and 7 Fires which is Anishnaabemowin philosophy and spiritual system of knowledge and oral tradition.

has taken on tribal people and communities...it is through naming of specific difficult histories” that “Native people and communities can begin to frame their history within the context of colonization” (125). Acknowledging history, by understanding history and its effects, people then can begin to move forward, because truth telling is important in this process. Coming to terms with this history opens the door for insights...not just for non-Indigenous peoples that need to learn about Indigenous/interrelated history, but also Indigenous people too, as so many generations do not know the full extent of the suffering their relatives have undergone and still carry with them, from the government policies of aggressive assimilation and cultural genocide (145).

In a direct presentation of 1) colonization and its impacts and 2) knowledge production and remembering through an Indigenous framework, the focus on survival and resilience within an enduring colonial context is paramount. Building upon the previous chapter’s emphasis on curating difficult knowledge, considerable attention to Indigenous strengths is powerful and necessary. This entails not being a display of victimhood and pain, though not glossing over structured, organized, and institutionalized violence. The Ziimbiwing Center offers a dynamic and nation-specific model of decolonizing and indigenizing a museum and cultural space, a model many Indigenous museums could abide by as a framework.

How can this model be regarded in a contemporary art gallery context in Canada, where there is not one national autonomous institution or ‘zone of refuge’ to collect and present contemporary Indigenous Art, to represent the many unique nations with unique epistemologies? Decolonizing and indigenizing curatorial methodologies have not been centralized and are practiced on various scales and scopes within various institutions

across Canada. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred argues that, “you can’t Indigenize the Academy” [and I would include art institutions], “but you can create effective spaces for mobilizing Indigenous peoples as decolonizing agents and having strong allies in the community” (Alfred *youtube.com*).

There are few contexts wherein Indigenous curators are working permanently within institutions. Though, encouraging, in reality this is a demand which, in current economic, social, and political national climates may not be achievable, or even desirable for many up-and-coming, emerging Indigenous curators graduating and anticipating to curate Indigenous art. The practice of Eurocentric exclusion, marginalization, and control of representation is still a challenge Indigenous curators and artists face in a crusade for space, inclusion and respectful representation. Entering this field, one knows it is competitive and claiming space for Indigenous art and Indigenous curators is still formidable. Mohawk curator Ryan Rice has identified that being an independent curator isn’t always a choice, and he posits, “there are still a number of professionals who aren’t working.” Further, he insists and many would agree that, “what’s needed is more accessible and available exhibitions” (Rice “Visiting” 19). Lee-Ann Martin asserts “we must combat the colonial legacy that has maintained the exclusion of Aboriginal art histories and Aboriginal contemporary art in mainstream art galleries in Canada into the 21st century” (Martin, “Negotiating”, 239).

Whether it has been by choice, Indigenous curators have worked within art institutions, as ‘agents’ and change-makers - albeit in temporary positions, as it still largely remains a reality of freelance exhibition making for many. Though, there is something to be said about independent freelance Indigenous curators evoking a sense of

the nomadic¹⁰ (Young 52). The term nomad implies a settler-colonial construct and a misunderstanding of Indigenous engagement with vast territories and complex food use systems. Appropriating and re-claiming the idea of the ‘nomad’ as a subversion of the original mislabeling of Indigenous cultures conveys the notion of an Indigenous intellectual curatorial tradition out-side of colonial institutions. The concept of curatorial nomadism enacts a certain resistance and sovereignty, by effectively resisting the control of one ruling institution; the curatorial nomad transgresses boundaries, moves across territories to defy insistence of hegemonic control and claim Indigenous spaces. Whether it is by circumstantial or by self-determined influences, without an autonomous institution, Indigenous curation signals a state of landlessness, or rather a personal and collective self-determined relationship to the land that migrates with opportunity and diversity.

The dance of exclusion and inclusion of Indigenous art and curation in mainstream galleries is often critiqued to be driven by the availability of targeted funding initiatives rather than a sincere desire for contemporary Indigenous engagement. In spite of the lack of institutional permanency, Indigenous curators have worked within institutions to break conventions, confront the art historical canon, promote Indigenous protocols, exercise Indigenous rights and challenge exclusion - even if done in temporal intervals. The Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Curators in Residency grant has provided curators with opportunities to momentarily step into institutions to work and advance Indigenous inclusion.

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the nomad as a strategic concept, one who most effectively resists the controlling institutions of the state.

One such institution, The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) has benefited from an infusion of Indigenous curatorial practice with various exhibitions. I will refer to two specific exhibitions by curators Richard Hill and Gerald McMaster. In January 2003, with the Canada Council's Aboriginal Curatorial residency program (and later hired as the Aboriginal specialist Curator in the Canadian art department), Indigenous curator Richard Hill organized *Meeting Ground* in its McLaughlin Gallery. With Hill's AGO colleagues, *Meeting Ground* brought together historical Aboriginal and European-Canadian art of the Eastern Woodlands/Great Lakes region (1670-1845) housed in the permanent collection. Positioning these side-by-side worked to challenge categorical distinctions between Aboriginal and European Canadian art. The gallery space and furniture was altered and redesigned to provide a context for the convergence of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal perspectives (R. Hill 51).

Hill utilized indigenizing concepts within the actual design of the physical gallery and involved outside communities that shaped and guided the project. Hill recognized that "Aboriginal histories and perspectives had been systematically excluded from the AGO in the past and marginalized in general," and asserted that *Meeting Ground* challenged that exclusion. Emphasizing that Aboriginal art troubles the established narrative of Canadian art (54), the schism of presenting non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadian art together presented a valuable tension. In *Meeting Ground*, Indigenous curatorial praxis considered methods of indigenizing a gallery space to balance the scale of aesthetic appreciation typically dominated by Eurocentric values and aesthetics.

Another AGO exhibition to consider is *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World* which was organized by the Heard Museum in Phoenix and the Smithsonian's

National Museum of the American Indian, co-curated by Gerald McMaster and Joe Baker. The exhibition toured to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 2009. *Remix* featured the work of 15 artists from across Canada, United States and Mexico; Dustinn Craig, Fausto Fernandez, Luis Gutierrez, David Hannan, Gregory Lomayesva, Brian David Kahehtowanen Miller, Franco Mondini-Ruiz, Kent Monkman, Nadia Myre, Alan Natachu, Hector Ruiz, Anna Tsouhlarakis, Kade L. Twist, Bernard Williams, Steven Yazzie. The curatorial premise explored art and identity from a “*post-Indian*” perspective. The artists were selected based on their collective artistic research that made connections to Indigenous culture, cultural hybridity and today’s realities in popular culture and politics. It brought together Indigenous artists that focused on identity and popular culture. The exhibition read as a remix; a complicated compilation of Indigenous hybrid identities and histories in contemporary times.

Collectively, these artists probe the global movement of ideas, search for a new language of artistic practice, and push the boundaries of the expected. Heirs to rich traditions, they define their moment by dismantling and rebuilding, like DJ’s borrowing and building new sounds, beats, actions and engagements (Baker 17).

By remixing, the division of traditional and contemporary art is blurred and the paradox disrupts art historical habits of Euro-Western interpretations of Indigenous art that separate traditional from contemporary art. In doing this, the curators created a sort of laboratory by selecting artists that were experimenting with art practices and ideas of Indigenous identity. This exhibition was a continued deliberate effort to assert the voices of Indigenous artists and legitimize the work of Indigenous artists within the art world. The artists were given a voice in the catalogues and through panel talks and online

technologies, for example the AGO's website provided short pod casts from the artists explaining their work, which provided more context for the audience.

The AGO also held a panel talk with selected artists, and art critic Sarah Milroy, which was moderated by curator Richard Hill. The panel drew out significant discussions and reflections. The panel talk provided an opportunity to learn beyond didactics, artist statements and reviews, and hear directly from the artists and audience's responses and questions. Kent Monkman shared his research and artistic process behind his painting series that deals with art historical reproductions of George Catlin and Paul Kane artworks. Monkman explains

the act of copying in painting has been utilized for hundreds of years, and through copying you gain the skills, imprinting them into your hand and into your brain, and absorbing the things you've been methodically observing in the process.

Through this series of paintings, [he] is reflecting on history, following a lineage of history. Painting is a restorative therapeutic act of reengaging with history and reconnecting his own ties to histories (Monkman *ago.net*).

This was redeeming in the wake of the criticism it received in likening his work to painting by numbers (Milroy 2009). *Remix* provoked an interesting dialogue and debate after Milroy's review in the Globe and Mail newspaper, in which she questioned whether or not curating an Aboriginal art show is still valid...! The curatorial methods were challenged with questions of ethnicity over quality. Milroy stated, "the curators have made weak choices: These works don't feel dynamically hybrid so much as simply diluted," and further "this is what happens when museum curators focus on ethnicity over aesthetic discernment" (Milroy *theglobeandmail.com*). At the beginning of her article,

she posed some controversial questions: “Is it still possible these days to make a viable, themed exhibition about contemporary aboriginal art that doesn't feel stillborn? And what happens when works of art are gathered around ideas such as cultural hybridity and racial identity?” She added that filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk won prizes at Cannes, and artist Brian Jungen’s work had shown in respected institutions in Europe, and re-invoking temporal boundaries to the era, Milroy posed the question if shows like *Remix* aren't “anachronistic and weirdly protectionist?” (IBID).

While there is a litany of ironic statements here to consider. What does Milroy’s example of a short-list of artists who have “made it” in the arts world actually imply? In reality, is Milroy suggesting there is no more room to promote more Indigenous artists? In the presumed usage of ‘anachronistic’ as an anthropological subversion, Milroy’s imposition comes across as especially patronizing given that, historically and presently, Indigenous art and culture continues to be viewed through anachronistic myths pervasive in popular culture. The examples of two successful Aboriginal artists and criticism of an all-Aboriginal art show suggests an historical and exhibitionary amnesia. On a pessimistic note, Milroy’s perception fails to recognize the long history and current normality of all-white artist exhibitions, collections, and the ongoing exclusionary challenges of Indigenous contemporary arts in the arts world.

Of critical importance, Milroy’s analysis cannot escape coming under scrutiny as a major facet of the systemic discrimination and misrepresentation which Indigenous artists and curators aim to dismantle. The use of media to impose epistemological violence upon Indigenous peoples’ intellectual critiques of power is rooted in local structures of settler colonialism and rooted in normalized paternalistic and privileged

standpoints which underpin the general tradition of Canadian and North American art criticism. This aspect goes hand-in-glove with undermining rigorous Indigenous artistic movements within the Indigenous art community. A criticism of this nature informs the general disparity in under-representation in galleries. Canadian Art published a survey to demonstrate the limited representation of race and gender in Canadian galleries.

Concerning results revealed 11.2% of living artists in Canada identify as Indigenous or as a member of a visible minority, and are more frequently included in group exhibitions that focus on production of art from those demographics. The general representation of non-white artists represented in solo exhibitions is “dismayingly uneven,” with only 11% of solo exhibitions since 2013 featuring non-white artists across Canada (Cooley, Luo, and Morgan-Feir *canadianart.ca*).

6.3 Indigenous Art Criticism

In spite of the pitted criticism, Milroy’s *Remix* review did mark a significant turning point for contemporary Indigenous arts and criticism. Social networking sites buzzed with activity and energetic debates about the article emerged. The non-homogeneous reality of Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences seemed to offer an important moment of reflection, re-evaluation and assertion that Indigenous arts isn’t and shouldn’t be immune from criticism. In fact Indigenous arts needs more diverse and engaged criticism, from Indigenous artists, curators, critics and writers who are knowledgeable and aware of an Indigenous art and cultural literacy while still remaining critical to aesthetic discernment. After all, without criticism how does contemporary art remain socially relevant, valuable and viable?

In a discussion about Indigenous art criticism, David Garneau states that “Indigenous artists and curators are developing a newly emergent *Indigenous* perspective,” affirming that Indigenous artists “seek not mainstream acceptance but critical engagement as an intellectual and artistic equal from a parallel discourse” (Garneau, “Toward”, *artlink.com*). Garneau contends that Indigenous criticism is lacking in quantity and occurrence, and I would add limited textual spaces of criticality and diversity of voices within mainstream publications. Garneau asserts, “Indigenous criticism is not about adopting the critical habits of the mainstream and forcing a rough translation”...but that a “goal of the Indigenous is to indigenize”...”to promote Indigenous ways of being and knowing.” Adding that “anyone who can combine the best of Western critical approaches and Aboriginal worldviews to produce an Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art is ready to contribute to the work of Indigenous artists and curators” (Garneau, “Toward”, *artlink.com*).

Embracing Indigenous curatorial practice is also to embrace an Indigenous art criticism to develop texts and to educate and establish audiences of art which can understand and respect the artists’ and curators’ visions. Indigenous art criticism has in some measure co-opted the very system of language and knowledge which has oppressed Indigenous peoples from dominant Western hegemonic misrepresentation in museums, galleries and historical texts. At the same time, Indigenous art criticism has been deconstructing the system by engaging, adopting, and developing diverse, grounded, and culturally relevant approaches to theory. By infusing Indigenous knowledge and embodied authority, Indigenous art criticism has been creating its own criticality. In *The*

Garden of Signs: Aboriginal Art Criticism, Wanda Nanibush, Anishnaabe curator/artist, utilizes gardening Indigenous plants in a British garden as a metaphor:

My starting place is the call from Gerald Vizenor to unwind ourselves from the white words we have become and the warning from N. Scott Momaday that the greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined. Our own cultural concepts as well as any other philosophical tradition can be put in the service of imagination and creation. Neither author is advocating a complete eradication of the Western philosophical tradition from our ‘imaginary,’ if that were even possible. They caution us that in our planting of Indigenous plants we do not remake ourselves in the ‘white’ man’s image of us (Nanabush 35).

Nanibush says Indigenous criticism is “the ‘new’ in criticism [and] is brought forth through experimentation, making connections, and taking risks” (35). Mohawk curator and writer, Steve Loft insists that it is integral to establish and defend Indigenous epistemologies and embark on a strategy that rejects the current Art History by adapting new modes of contextual analysis and critique. Indigenous scholars, curators and artists are examining art world language as a transformational vehicle to signify and deconstruct conceptual systems put in place by westerners and integrate this language for an Indigenous world view.

Indigenous art persists and is poised for a criticality that possesses an intellectual and cultural sophistication. Exhibiting an ‘Aboriginal art show’ will stand the test of time as long as Aboriginal People continue to live to self-identify and assert their presence in society. With respect to identity nuances and critical and cultural regionalism, there will always be new ways to regard Indigenous realities: socially, politically, culturally, and

through art, “alternative examples of thinking about how we can live together today [are offered]...to put our ideas of cultural identity under pressure and examine the process of inclusion and exclusion in the world today (Esche *becomingdutch.com*). Ideas of exhibiting cultural identity in Canada and beyond, is triumphantly relevant and ever evolving.

6.4 Mega-Exhibitions of Indigenous International Art

As if to boldly assert and defiantly demonstrate relevancy, post Milroy’s review, a series of international mega-exhibitions of self-determined Indigenous art happened one year after the next to exemplify cultural and artistic persistence. From January 22 to May 8 in 2011, *Close Encounters: The Next Five Hundred Years* was a large-scale exhibition that featured the work of 33 Indigenous artists from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Finland and Brazil. The artists included were: KC Adams, Maria Thereza Alves, Shuvinai Ashoona, Mary Anne Barkhouse, Micheal Belmore, Colleen Cutschall, Wally Dion, Jimmie Durham, Rosalie Favell, Jeffrey Gibson, Brett Graham, Faye HeavyShield, Marja Helander, Jonathan Jones, Brian Jungen, James Luna, Kavavaow Mannomee, Tracy Moffatt, Kent Monkman, Reuben Paterson, Archer Pechawis, Edward Poitras, Postcommodity, Pudlo Pudlat, Lisa Reihana, Paul-Anders Simma, Doug Smarch Jr., Skawennati, Christian Thompson, Marie Watt, Linus Woods, Lawrence Paul-Yuxweluptun. The curatorial team was Lee-Ann Martin, Steve Loft, Candice Hopkins and Jenny Western. It was a project developed under the banner of the Winnipeg Cultural Capital of Canada 2010.

Close Encounters filled two large main exhibition venues at Plug In Gallery and a space leased specifically for this exhibition. *Close Encounters* curatorial premise, as the title suggests, *The Next 500 Years*, contemplates the future from diverse perspectives of Indigenous artists and writers. In efforts to subvert the oft-retrospective Indigenous representations, the curators felt that “Indigenous thoughts, images and words have been omitted in discussions addressing the future, or if they have been included, it is often through pan-Indian prophecies and predictions¹¹, poorly understood, and appropriated by dominant culture,” also echoing what many Indigenous artists, curators and scholars lament, “art history and anthropology have largely succeeded in freezing us in the past. Popular culture and media tend to reinforce this notion of Indigenous people as relics of the past” (Hopkins et al 65). In this groundbreaking exhibition, *Close Encounters* worked to affirm “Indigenous people offer speculative, critical, and aesthetic mediations on our collective future. The artist and writers included in this project pose intriguing possibilities for the next five hundred years” (65).

Many Winnipeg art and cultural organizations took part by hosting exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art, also partnering with the *Close Encounters* project to host various activities which spread across the city in parallel durations. *Close Encounters* collaborated with Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art for a solo show of Keesic Douglas’s *TRADE ME* to explore the relationships between First Nation people and the Hudson Bay Company during the Canadian fur trade. Presented also was Metis curator Cathy Mattes’ curated *Frontrunners*, an exhibition to recognize the legacy and

¹¹ Especially relevant, as at that time there was a fear mongering of the so-called cataclysmic misinterpreted Mayan prophecy that the Mayan calendar ended in 2012.

impact of the Indian Group of 7, as well as a film screening of *Bringing It All Back Home*, a documentary about James Luna's performance work, followed by a Q & A with Luna and director Chris Eyre. PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts and Gallery 1C03 presented *Acting Up! Performing the Indian* curated by Rosalie Favell with artists Lori Blondeau, Larry McNeil, Kent Mockman, Shelly Niro, Adrian Stimson, Jeff Thomas, Jackie Traverse, and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie. La Maison des artistes visuels francophones exhibited *Pardonnez-moi/ The Forgiveness Project*, a solo show of Nadia Myre's ongoing text-based participatory project that involved people to complete the sentence, "Forgive my...".

The University of Winnipeg's Gallery 1C03 held *unSacred*, featuring digital and video work in the solo exhibition of Scott Benesiinaabandan that explored the Windigokaan, a sacred contrary figure in Anishinaabeg culture. The North End Arts Centre and Graffiti Art Programming Inc, hosted mentoring artists Jason Baerg, Darryl Nepinak, Jordan Bennett and KC Adams over three months. Graffiti Art Programming invited artist Jordan Schacht and Aboriginal Youth Advisory Council member Dakota Chambers to work with modern tools of graffiti to explore the Seven Sacred teachings (Hopkins, et al 65). Each of these initiatives alone deserves an individual regard and contextualization on their own strengths, further validating that *Close Encounters* really did succeed to create a "veritable takeover of Winnipeg's art scene" (65) by boldly advancing a necessary engagement with contemporary Indigenous art in "the center of the world at Winnipeg to make this city a site for Indigenous artists and thinkers to come together and envision the future" (65).

The undertakings of the galleries and organizations involved and audiences that attended provided a strong indication that there was a keen interest in contemporary Indigenous arts from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as its qualities represent a Canadian culture and identity that counters tired nationalist mythologies, and provides perspectives that are momentous and gaining cultural capital. In a review of *Close Encounters*, Garneau reckoned that since the curators were independent they had more curatorial freedom because they weren't beholden to the confinements of institutional requirements and pedagogic burdens. Earlier groundbreaking exhibitions from Indigenous curators had to update perceptions of Indigenous people and art; the tone was suitably educational and serious. However, Garneau observed that *Close Encounters* imparted a lighter, freeing, wide ranging view of a future, bestowing that “this exhibition is about adaptation and perseverance, and playful independent thought that is nevertheless rooted in shared experiences” (Garneau “Traditional” 75).

Close Encounters and the surrounding exhibitions gave a respectful nod to past exhibitions by referencing, instead of reflecting on, 500 years of colonization and Indigenous survivance. Celebrating and envisioning the next 500 years, *Close Encounters* claimed a future that upholds Indigenous perspectives, influences and knowledge. Compellingly, in parallel timing with the *Close Encounters* exhibition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP) was in the process of implementation. The UN DRIP is the most comprehensive international human rights instrument to specifically address economic, social, cultural, political, civil, spiritual and environmental rights, which sets out minimum standards necessary for the dignity, survival and well-being of Indigenous People (United Nations *un.org*).

Specifically, of great significance is Article 11:1. Indigenous people have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and *future* manifestations of their cultures, such as archeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. In this moment politically and socially, Indigenous momentum on the cultural and artistic fronts sparked a flourish of creative production, activity, exhibition making and important Indigenous criticisms. Indigenous arts and its cultural significance to Canadians as well as outside the nation's imposed borders have started to grow in influence.

In connection to the UN DRIP and in the wake of *Close Encounters* exhibitions, an Indigenous internationalism and intellectualism had begun to receive recognition and respect. In the context of Indigenous internationalism, *Sakahàn* should be mentioned as an International Indigenous art exhibition in 2013, co-curated by Candice Hopkins and Greg Hill (also supported by a curatorial advisory team) at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa.

Sakahàn—meaning “to light [a fire]” in the language of the Algonquin peoples—brings together more than 150 works of recent Indigenous art by over 80 artists from 16 countries, celebrating the National Gallery's ongoing commitment to the study and appreciation of Indigenous art. This exhibition is the first in an ongoing series of surveys of Indigenous art (National Gallery of Canada gallery.ca).

In the West Coast, *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* was another revolutionary and inspiring exhibition conceived first by Tania Willard and Skeena Reece in 2008, which was first an online exhibition through the Grunt Gallery in Vancouver.

The website then evolved into an exhibition first presented at SAW Gallery in Ottawa, and then again at Grunt Gallery in 2009. In 2012, curator Kathleen Ritter invited Tania Willard (Willard and Reece *Beat*) to expand on the *Beat Nation* exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February 25 to June 3, 2012 (Willard and Ritter vanartgallery.bc.ca). Since then, it has successfully toured The Power Plant in Toronto, ON, from December 15, 2012 – May 5, 2013; Kamloops Art Gallery in Kamloops, BC, for the summer of 2013; Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal in Montreal, PQ from October 17, 2013 – January 5, 2014; Dalhousie Art Gallery and St. Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, NS from March 22 – May 18, 2014; and Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, SK from July 5 – September 7, 2014.

In the Vancouver Art Gallery iteration, 28 artists were brought together from across the continent; from the West Coast, Alaska, and Nunavut, to the East Coast, Labrador and south from New Mexico. Artists included; Nicholas Galanin, Duane Linklater, Shawn Hunt, Sonny Assu, Bear Witness, Jackson 2bears, madeskimo, Hoka Skenandore, Raymond Boisjoly, Skeena Reece, Maria Hupfield, Kent Monkman, KC Adams, Dana Claxton, Ostwelve, Rolande Souliere, Dylan Miner, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Dustinn Craig, Mark Igloliorte, Brian Jungen, Jordan Bennett, Corey Bulpitt and Larissa Healy, Marianne Nicolson, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Raven Chacon, and Kevin Lee Burton.

The work ranged in various and diverse mediums including painting, sculptures, installation, and video. The Vancouver Art Gallery partnered with Grunt Gallery to produce a catalogue that followed the tour. *Beat Nation* explored the connections

between Aboriginal cultures, hip-hop and art. Hip hop culture was channeled to explore art and Aboriginal culture

as a tool of empowerment, a means to speak from the margins, a way to give voice to struggle, a vehicle to inspire and mobilize, and a catalyst to assert a continued, contested presence in our contemporary world...hip hop has been a driving force of activism for urban Aboriginal youth, its origins being influential across disciplines and have been transformed to create dynamic forums for storytelling, Indigenous languages and new modes of political expression. Aboriginal cultures on this continent have consistently adapted to new influences. This sense of innovation and transformation, based on trade, exchange and conflict and other cultures, continues today in contemporary Aboriginal experience and mainstream culture and weaves through many different elements of Aboriginal society (Ritter & Willard 9).

Curatorial categories within the exhibition reflect these diverse aspects of culture, hybridizations of mainstream pop culture and Aboriginal traditions, and historical complications into distinct areas labeled as *the beat*, *the stage*, *the street* and *the tag*. The artists' works are explored through these distinct, yet connected, categories to assert Indigenous identities and presence which are urban, modern, and diverse; which engage with contemporary popular culture in ways that still challenge historical and current settler colonialism. *the beat* evoked the traditional drum and beats to contemporary technological advancements with music, film and new media. *the stage* presented performances and representations of entertainment, spectacle that acted and played out notions to defy and question expectations and stereotypes of identity. *the street* addressed

the nuances of marginalized land use for inner city youth culture by using vehicles of skateboarding and bike culture to survive and thrive, while also drawing from their Indigenous heritages of self-propelled sustainable transportation. *the tag* called forth the parallels of Indigenous pictographs and petroglyphs with contemporary tagging and urban graffiti as transfer of knowledge and presence on the land, pre-colonial contact and beyond.

Victoriously and ceremoniously, *Beat Nation* presented a theme and artists/artwork that celebrated Indigenous cultures, simultaneously positioning Indigenous cultures as preserving distinct nation-based traditions and knowledge, as well as developing new traditions and narratives within contemporary cultures. *Beat Nation* positioned Indigenous cultures within the present senses and pulses of significant youth culture in music, sport, and media, in what is heard, felt and performed while maintaining a critical reflection and assertion of past and present colonial processes and powerful resistances.

In 2011, curator Heather Igloliorte organized a show called *Decolonize Me*, which was first shown at the Ottawa Art Gallery and has since toured across Canada. It included 6 Indigenous contemporary artists working in interdisciplinary art; Sonny Assu, Jordan Bennet, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Nigit'stil Norbet, Barry Pottle, Bear Witness, and a collaboration between Heather Igloliorte and Carla Taunton. The catalogue engaged a foreword from senior curator and artist, Barry Ace and two established writers, Brenda Croft and Steve Loft.

The show engages audiences in a knowledge transfer and translation of Indigeneity and decolonization. As Heather Igloliorte presents, "*Decolonize Me*

participates in the examination of the long and complicated history of colonization in Canada, the emergent processes of decolonization, and the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and cultural continuity without borders and beyond” (*No 20*). Igloliorte utilized de-colonial and indigenizing methods throughout the exhibition in design, artist selection and writing. Working to shift the institutional and curatorial authority, effective strategies were used to reflect multiplicity of voices, consultations, multi-sensory artwork and varied opportunities for engagement and dialogue.

In reflection, Igloliorte indicates that the most significant decolonizing strategy was that the artists voices were honored and given prominence by including their artist statements translated in the Indigenous languages of their specific communities – throughout the exhibition and catalogue - which is not only an institutional challenge but also a logistical and budgetary challenge for translation services. *Decolonize Me* exhibition is the manifestation of decolonization and indigenization on many levels and qualities with resonant reverberations.

6.5 Putting Theory Into Practice

In my own work towards decolonization and indigenization, I’ve worked independently and collaboratively with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and curators. In August 2010, I curated a show called *Akina N’dinwaae Magahnuk: All My Relations*; it was a solo exhibition of Manitoban Anishnaabe artist, Linus Woods at aceartinc. Gallery project space in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The exhibition was created from a contract I held in collections management with a major Linus Woods collector, Debra Challis of Hobbs and Associates, which consisted of over 300 works in the collection.

This exhibition presented Linus Woods' specific body of work of mixed media paintings of Indigenous Peoples across North America to explore the relationships of Indigenous cultures by drawing a connection to kinship, community and family. In the manner of Indigeneity, I connected Wood's work with the common saying "many nations or many peoples but one people" on the notion of similar experience, and of similar difference. His paintings incorporated cut-outs of Edward Curtis' ethno-salvaged images of North American Indians to co-opt the pan-Indianism that Curtis had perpetuated. Woods' subversions drew connections to uniting Indigenous People culturally and spiritually.

Bearing the weight of colonial influence, Indigenous people have united together to transcend borders globally. This selected body of work summoned viewers to reflect on the past and the present depictions of Indigenous Peoples, contributing to historical analogies and iconographies. The use of Anishnaabeg language in the title made connections to both my and Wood's cultural heritage, while also a wider inclusion of All My Relations; the Indigenous people, presented in Woods' paintings and the viewership at large. The curatorial premise allowed me to arrange the works chosen in a way that asserts both premise and integrity of the artwork. With permission of the artist, by assuming the role of both the curator and artist, I inserted a visual response and installation within the display of Linus Woods' work that would challenge traditional curatorial modes of presentation. I arranged his paintings in an unconventional lateral cluster composition evoking a family-tree arrangement, adhered large floor-to-ceiling printed plastic canvas trees printed from his paintings to the wall, placed 4 rocks on all 4 sides of the room, and installed real birch trees hung from the ceiling to the floor – which

created a space that not only celebrated his work but emphasized the family tree and sacredness of the theme, *All My Relations*.

Positioning and identifying my knowledge base from within my own Anishnaabe cultural teachings and experience informs my curatorial practice, has made meaningful connections individually and collaboratively, and has asserted that

building on the notion of dynamic and interconnected concept of Indigenous identity constituted in history, ceremony, language and land we consider relationships (or kinship networks) to be a the core of an authentic Indigenous identity...the need to maintain respectful relationships that guides all interactions and experiences with community, clans, families, individuals, homelands, plants, animals, etc. in the Indigenous ideal (Alfred and Corntassel 143).

To further that ideal, another decolonizing and indigenizing exhibition that I worked on was with the Ephemerals Collective (consisting of Niki Little, Jenny Western and myself), called *Trending* at the University of Winnipeg Gallery 1C03 in 2011 and then restaged *Re: Trending 2014* at the First Nations University of Canada in Regina. *Trending* at the University of Winnipeg in the fall 2011 was a display from the ethnographic collection and found objects of our own, performative embedment (bake sale, flash mob, radio show, student interviews and blog casts), a film screening, presentations, photo shoots and a blog. This exhibition discussed issues of cultural appropriation in popular culture, Indigenous identity and material culture on a level that could include a multitude of voices and methods that made this topic accessible and relevant to Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people alike.

The responses were stimulating as this topic is rich and layered, bringing up issues of gender, cultural hybridity, race relations, representation, identity and subjectivity, the economics of culture and the legacy of colonial representations of Indigenous People. For *Re: Trending 2014*, we presented a display case of articles from our own personal collection again (scarves, necklaces, belts etc.) to appear like an array of retail items. We selected artworks from Indigenous artists from the University's abundant art collection and arranged them in a salon style composition, and a medicine wheel approach that organized the art in the gallery from North, West, South and East, following the Medicine Wheel teachings of the Anishnaabe/Cree in Territory 1. The artworks were assembled in the following framework and subject matter; Yellow (East, baby/childhood), Red (South, Youthhood) Black (West, Adulthood) White (North, Elderhood).

We also presented performative embedment throughout the University during the orientation week; hosted a web cast to explain our project, a screen print workshop making tee-shirts for students that contained an element of the exhibition, hosted a decolonized pancake breakfast and a public talk to contextualize further the exhibition.

In exhibitions regarding decolonization and indigenization, it is a braided process in honoring and privileging Indigenous voice, knowledge and traditional ways of knowing to unpack and dismantle knowledge systems and spaces of coloniality. Indigenous Curatorial Praxis that utilized decolonial and indigenizing strategies have effectively promoted the literacy of colonial history and the colonial present to diverse audiences. Through cultural responsibility and intellectual rigor of Indigenous curatorial practice, representations of culture can be authentically and respectfully explored and

engaged within the critical visual art world in exhibition making and criticism, by disrupting the archaic linearity of art history. Indigenous curatorial praxis in relation to, and utilization of, interdisciplinary practices of decolonizing/indigenizing multi-disciplines are considered to create a plurality of voices that in turn develops new audiences and axis of understanding.

There are still challenges and barriers that Indigenous curators face in efforts to decolonize and indigenize institutions of coloniality, and assert a presence in contemporary art. Indigenous Curatorial Praxis continues the need to negotiate space and inclusion in textual and exhibition space. However, decolonization is a process; “it is a result of a long history of activism and persistent push to honor and privilege Native voices, perspectives and understanding” (Lonetree 172). In regards to exhibitions that seek to decolonize and indigenize spaces through the lens and epistemologies of Indigeneity, I framed these exhibitions to express methods and aesthetics of Indigenous curatorial praxis to signal their significance and contributions towards a more Indigenized and decolonized Canadian art history. The role of some Canadian institutions and galleries has been vital in contributing to a critical dialogue towards decolonization and truth. Exhibitions that de-center dominant ways of knowing by challenging and exposing colonialism and de-mythologizing racist ideologies in Canada, are happening with more occurrence and affecting resonance. As Indigenous curator, artist and scholar Dana Claxton has written, “the art community has helped lead the decolonization process in the exhibition space...” which “is the site where the most radical and polemic critiques of Canadian society have taken place.” Claxton maintains “that as Aboriginal People

decolonize, so too does the non-Aboriginal community. Both groups need to become forces that have cast Aboriginal cultures as inferior” (Claxton 17).

Chapter 7. Conclusion: Honoring the Past and Present to Imagine the Future

Reflecting on the previous chapters, the selected discussions and exhibitions offer a different introduction to the complexities involved in Indigenous Curatorial praxis foregrounding an Indigenous critical lens. My impulse is to continue to ask more questions and to challenge the fields of Indigenous Studies, Indigenous art history and cultural theory to expand our theorizing through more in-depth study in order to represent Indigenous curatorial practice within a re-imagined and enlarged scope of Indigenous art history. Although, due to the limits and constraints of thesis production and time, there are important Indigenous curatorial voices not represented here, which is indicative of Indigenous curatorial practice as an active force in the Canadian art world. I see this as both an opportunity to continue this research as well as to encourage more publications, criticism and writing in order to educate and inform audiences and community about these exhibitions' significance, and to articulate these legacies into history. This is a humble gesture, as mentioned in the introduction and elsewhere and does not reflect a comprehensive history of balanced regional scope or definitive Indigenous curatorial praxis. Rather this study can be regarded as an introductory framing of an emergent, ongoing process of investigation into a larger complex and dynamic genre. Each case study/exhibition could have garnered greater detail, and each exhibition analyzed deserves its own chapter. The intention was to demonstrate their significance and impact in the manner in which they reflect and surpass their temporal frameworks and in their potential to affect the future of Indigenous curatorial practice.

With the urgency to write, research and advance Indigenous art history by recognizing and asserting its significance to the contemporary Canadian arts canon –

deserves critical and sustained engagement. Tracing the history of exhibitions making has centered the discourse of Indigenous artists and curators locating their significant contributions to curatorial theory with a distinctive Indigenous lens confronting the conventions of Canadian curatorial process in institutions. Thus, Indigenous artistic practices and curatorial praxis fundamentally change how society relates to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous issues by fundamentally transforming these institutions.

An important part in the historical tracking is to recognize the linkages between generations as well as acknowledge the trailblazing Indigenous artists and curators who worked tirelessly to pave the way for generations now benefitting from their insight and advocacy. This study honors and reflects the foundations and pathways in Indigenous arts intellectualism and scholarship, administration and funding governance, which demanded incredible vision, courage and risk. The linkages and influences deserve more in-depth analysis, in particular the roles of mentors, gender, and support networks which Indigenous peoples developed in order to pursue controversial and difficult knowledge.

In this respect, this study carried out an exploration into knowing where we came from, which is to respect the roots of knowledge that exist. This thesis explored the significance in Indigenous scholarly praxis today, nurtured within Indigenous centered inquiry, to make known the efforts of those whose work and contributions preceded our efforts today. My effort to learn this important history is an act for those who will come into this area of research in the future.

The chapters outlined categories under analysis in an effort to Indigenize the categories of analysis most relevant to the producers of knowledge. This laid the ground for re-imagining and re-contextualizing decades of Indigenous peoples' artistic, aesthetic,

and curatorial enactments, which then enabled me to establish indigenized case studies that document examples of key Indigenous Curatorial Praxis qualities of curation occurring in Canada. This is an on-going process of negotiation with the Canadian settler state and settler society, and is dense with content, continues to flourish, and cultivates new knowledge in its ongoing evolution.

The chapters were loosely chronological, and western temporal organization was not as significant as a formal organizing framework as the Indigenous holistic frame I invoked in the introduction, to honor and respect the Indigenous epistemic categories of collective process, convergence, and struggles. These over-rode the strict adherence to traditional, linear, progressive organization embedded within normative art history, a construct of colonial epistemic dominance over Indigenous consciousness. It was important to frame this study as ‘formative’, in recognition that Indigenous curators and our curatorial praxis are continuing to function as intergenerational survivors of genocidal processes and in resistance to on-going coloniality in western academe and Canada. Indigenous curators and artists are still very much in a contested negotiation with established colonial institutions and structures demanding that we continue assimilating to western linguistic and rhetorical mannerisms; yet at the crossroads of the burgeoning Indigenous decolonial movement which calls this negotiation into question. These very colonial institutions have erased or marginalized important formations critical to the recognition of Indigenous social movements intrinsically interwoven within and articulated through Indigenous arts practices. Recognizing this tension and its creative possibilities, the categories most certainly overlap to track modes and methods and critical scholarship of Indigenous praxis that demonstrate the changing nature of the

practice. Framing my position in relationship to high profile exhibitions and historical exhibitions contextualizes my own Indigenous curatorial practice outside and inside the academy. From this position, I am able to identify and energize a new foundation for an Indigenized Theory and put that theory into practice.

In summary, the form I provided in each chapter allowed me to explore, contextually and culturally, the key emergent frames identified within my own curatorial praxis, which resonate with the explored history of Indigenous exhibitions. As such, the attempt to holistically apply intuitive Indigeneity, with a summary at the end of each chapter, may have (unintentionally) left some readers with questions. To address this potential inter-cultural disconnect with readers, I have chosen a reflexive method, below, and I return briefly to the essence derived from each chapter.

The first chapters served as an act of remembering and justify why Indigenous Curatorial Praxis was and is needed to represent Indigenous arts and culture through a self-determined lens. With the tenacity and rigor of Indigenous artists and curators working in the last 50 years to advocate for Indigenous arts and self-determination, the new generations of Indigenous artists and curators are indebted and must continue their work. Indigenous art and artists have “the ability to initiate multi-layered discourse in multiple directions is a fundamental reason why contemporary Indigenous arts have the potential to make an important intellectual contribution to the broader field of contemporary art” (Farrell Racette 41) which took a few dedicated and courageous trailblazers to pave the way for Indigenous artists producing today. Still, the Indigenous arts community deals with the residue of colonial pedagogy and perspectives that continue to recycle tired tropes of Indigenous identities and stagnant notions that place

Indigenous arts as a retrospective practice and artifact. The new generations must work with persistent stride to disregard and dismantle these old regimes and establish new conventions within and outside the current systems of representation. It also served to evoke the acknowledgment of colonization and how it affected and shaped perspectives in the arts world and realize its wider impacts on public perception and pervasiveness in popular culture.

The fourth chapter examined the role and aesthetic of Indigenous visual arts as it is explicitly related to resistance /activism /perseverance /mobilization for and in the name of one or all connections to land, ancestors, animals, culture, spiritual, personhood and nationhood. As mentioned intermittingly, being an Indigenous person is inherently political and Indigenous art is inherently politically, culturally and socially charged. Many scholars, artists and curators echo that “Our art has always been tied to, whether we want it to or not, the political movements of our times and the struggle for self-determination,” or “the affirmation of self-determination” (Nanibush 43).

The fifth chapter demonstrated the necessity of Indigenous curatorial presence, leadership and consultation on the subject of difficult and sensitive knowledge, especially with consideration of the colonial violence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in regards to specific histories and current environments. The Indigenous voice must be front and center; narratives and representations must privilege their experiences, knowledge and permissions. In order to practice careful caretaking while also including a multiplicity of voices to avoid essentialism and further understanding, a balance must be sought to achieve relevance and resonance.

The sixth chapter further affirms Indigenous curatorial praxis and its scholarship as compulsory in the presentation and criticism of Indigenous arts and culture, either on a leadership curatorial role, as key consultative, collaborative, or in critical scholarship in the dissemination and representation. These constructions ought to be formed from and/or with those on the inside, whose embodied cultural knowledge is inextricably requisite in framing Indigenous representations. Contrary to common beliefs, there are enough Indigenous curators, artists, scholars and knowledge keepers to hire, consult and refer to in the pool of North American/Global arts. We live in the moment for hard inclusion of Indigenous participation, community involvement, collection acquisitions, scholarly acknowledgement and diverse plurality of authority is necessary and expected. There must be more space made for exhibitions, publications, criticism, mentorships and residencies for Indigenous curatorial and artistic practices, both for the established but also for the emerging artists and curators. In representation of Indigenous arts, what must be honored are the complexities of nations, languages, knowledge, experience and multiplicity of voices and narratives in existence. Maria Battiste paraphrased observations made by Linda and Graham Smith on the importance of these complexities in the following:

Linda and Graham Smith have theorized that any Indigenous movement is going to be necessarily unique to each area, to its nations, to the colonial encounters in its territory, because context with colonialism has not been all alike, and these diverse histories and experiences would need to be addressed. Decolonizing these spaces, they assert, is also not a linear and tidy process....the sites of struggle for recognition, acceptance, and integration were going to require collaborative,

interdisciplinary, participatory, and Indigenous research methodologies to decolonize educational institutions [and I would add galleries and cultural spaces] (Battiste *Decolonizing* 111).

7.1. Thrivance

Indigenous curatorial practice threads decolonized and Indigenized strategies as a braided and ongoing process. The concepts and actions of resistance and survivance have provided both an agency and aesthetic for Indigenous artistic and curatorial practices rooted in self-determination and indigenization (nation-based). ‘Thrivance,’ is a new term that celebrates contemporary Indigenous art and curatorial practices thriving in this environment; because of the resistance and survival actions of Indigenous scholars, curators, artists and knowledge keepers, are we in the moment of transcending survivance to thrive? As Greg Hill explains to further “Gerald Vizenor’s concept of ‘survivance,’ which [he] now see[s] as the precondition to “thrivance”” (*Sakahān* 140). As long we necessitate Indigenous self-determination in presenting and framing, our culture is ever-present as we continue to affirm, assert and insist our presence.

Indigenous Curatorial Praxis developed to assert, advance and frame Indigenous art as contemporary and relevant. The inclusion of Indigenous art, culture, theory and perspectives will continue to have staying power and distinct presence in contemporary Canadian art because of the causality, agency and aesthetic of Indigenous curatorial and artistic praxis.

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