

**Ktaqamkuk: Remembering and Re-Imagining our Relations**

**by**

**Jordan Bennett**

**B.F.A., Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2008**

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

**Ktaqamkuk: Remembering and Re-Imagining our Relations**

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Submitted by     Jordan Bennett     in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

The degree of     Master of Fine Arts     .

**Stephen Foster, Creative Studies, UBC Okanagan**

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

**Dr. Virginie Magnat, Creative and Critical Studies, UBC Okanagan**

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

**Dr. David Jefferess, Critical Studies, UBC Okanagan**

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

**Dr. Allison Hargreaves, Critical Studies**

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

**August 16, 2016**

(Date submitted to Grad Studies)

## **Abstract**

My thesis exhibition Mniku, translating to island in Mi'kmaw, consists of a series of carvings, paintings, drawings and interactive sound installation. Each piece in the exhibition is a representation of the island of Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland) itself. With each piece created I strived to find a visual balance between known Mi'kmaq and Beothuk designs while dismantling western interpretations and understandings of time and space. The thesis exhibition and this support paper follow my journey in attempting to revisit known and speculative sites of both Beothuk and Mi'kmaq settlement in Ktaqamkuk through both a physical and artistic journey. Most early historical documentation I encountered concerning the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq of Ktaqamkuk was from a western colonial perspective, and through that writing I believe it is impossible to fully know the true history of our people. There is currently little critical analysis of this historical writing, which creates more questions than answers. It is my intention to demonstrate the impact of these documents in relationship to my research/creation methodology, as a response in part to the colonial tradition and assumptions based in this historical documentation. The research I have undertaken here will allow me to apply my findings into future research, writing and artistic creation. The intention of my work is to question historical and contemporary writing, assumptions and interpretations of Mi'kmaq and Beothuk relations and to add to future dialogue and discourse in this area.

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**Dedication**

Dedicated to my Grandmother Gladys Garnier, Daphne Odjig and Shanawdithit.

## Introduction

Kwe' teluisi Jot'n Penit. Tleyawi Nujio'qoniik, Ktaqamkuk.

Hello my name is Jordan Bennett, I am from Bay St. George (Nujio'qoniik- Where the sand blows), Newfoundland (Ktaqamkuk- The Land Across the Water).

Since beginning my Master of Fine Arts degree at UBCO I have been inspired and influenced by people, place and new materials. Being an Indigenous person from Mi'kma'ki<sup>1</sup> surrounded by the Atlantic ocean I have found that *place* has become a very important aspect of my practice. Over the past few years I have travelled extensively nationally and internationally, yet since I've moved to the Okanagan this has been the longest I've been away from my home and the most challenging.

My thesis exhibition Mniku, translating to island in Mi'kmaw<sup>2</sup>, consists of a series of carvings, paintings, drawings and interactive sound installation. Each piece in the exhibition is a representation of the island of Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland)<sup>3</sup> itself. With each piece created I strived to find a balance between known Mi'kmaq and Beothuk visual designs breaking down western interpretations and understandings of time and space. Most early historical documentation concerning the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq of Ktaqamkuk was from a western colonial perspective, and through that writing I believe it is impossible to fully know the true history of our people. When I first started this journey I was overwhelmed with the available historical documentation and found that the objectification embedded and implied by what was the overtly anthropological nature of this documentation inhibited my ability to create art that reflected a living visual tradition of an Indigenous Ktaqamkuk. The question I found myself asking was:

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<sup>1</sup> Mi'kmaq Territory consisting of all of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, the Gaspé of Quebec, Newfoundland and part of the State of Maine.

<sup>2</sup> The spelling of this word will vary through this thesis, as each form holds a different meaning and is spelled differently throughout the scholarship visited. Mi'kmaq: plural of the word, It is the tribal name. Mi'kmaw: singular form of the same word, word for the language spoken by the Mi'kmaq, and the way to describe singular member of the Mi'kmaq.

<sup>3</sup> Ktaqamkuk is the Mi'kmaq name for the province/island known as Newfoundland. it will be used in this thesis to refer to Newfoundland from this point forward. Phonetic's: Ta-gam-goog

How can I make reference to this tainted historical tradition from a western colonial perspective while embracing a deeper and more profound truth that is reflected in the Indigenous artistic work of past and present?

There is currently little critical analysis of this historical documentation creating more questions than answers. This thesis will touch on some limited historical accounts, this decision is not in any way meant to dismiss or discredit the authors of such writings or other scholars who have written on the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq of Ktaqamkuk. However, it is my intention to demonstrate the impact of these documents in relationship to my research/creation methodology, as a response in part to the colonial tradition of the historical documentation. This written support paper is meant to accompany the artwork, in order to profile and document my artistic process, which embraces a shared relationship and territories model from an Indigenous visual perspective. I am aware that we will never know the true history of Beothuk and Mi'kmaq relations in Ktaqamkuk that is, as history is understood through a western perspective, but I feel that as Indigenous people access to our stories is embedded in the land of our origins, in our bodies and through our oral traditions. "While many histories are written only from historical documents, understanding our past and our homeland requires understanding many different kinds of information... In the past, Mi'kmaq people learned about their culture and history through stories and legends" (Mi'kmaq History). "Before European contact, the Mi'kmaq wrote in hieroglyphs which were scratched into tree bark or animal hides. Fortunately some of these writings have been preserved as petroglyphs..." (The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq 20).

Everything we know about our identities is informed by the land in which we live and depend on, we record it though utilizing its rich natural resources such as the colours it produces and the patterns that are present in nature. These traditions live on in the form of art, clothing, baskets, pictographs, wearable and ceremonial objects, all of which are present within Indigenous cultures today. These objects which hold important information about time, story and flux have always existed in Indigenous cultures and have been passed down with oral histories connected to them, yet sometimes the meanings are lost to us as they were not considered as truths from a western perspective, and when a culture is pushed into a state of near extinction such as the Beothuk, then the stories that are told and passed on are the ones of the victors. The victors were

present but did not understand the perspective of the traditional people and their reliance, dependence and bond to the land in which they lived.

I am aware that there is much interdisciplinary research to be done concerning the Beothuk. The tragic history of the demise of my relations is a dark one, and it is sad that we will never know the real story. Through increased settler populations and violent conflict due to the encroachment into Beothuk territories, the Beothuk were killed or died due to exposure to new diseases and only in the late hours of their time here were they looked at with curiosity, and some would say pity. This concern and the lateness of the matters may have been because the colonial powers knew that there was little to no chance for the Beothuk to come back from the devastation of their populations, and that there would be no fight lost— a successful colonization. As in many cases blame was put on another Indigenous community, the settlers pinned the blame on the Mi'kmaq. There are numerous accounts of written history stating that the Mi'kmaq were brought from the Maritimes to help hunt the Beothuk. Today we know this as the Mi'kmaq Mercenary Myth. Although it is a myth, challenged only recently it is still pervasive today, even among the Mi'kmaq themselves.

This thesis was approached as a visual remembering of the shared territory of the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq through an artistic exploration of materials and visual image. The thesis exhibition and this support paper follow my journey in attempting to revisit known and speculative sites of both Beothuk and Mi'kmaq settlement in Ktaqamkuk both in a physical journey and artistic. I think it is important for my community to know how I came to use the imagery and art forms that exist in my work so that if they are adopted, utilized or shared, there will be a means for understanding where the source of inspiration lies. I looked to the research and work of Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson to assist with my own methodology throughout my research journey. Wilson explains of his book *Research is Ceremony* that, “In order to tell this story, it may be necessary for me to use some pretty big and daunting words. I try hard not to use these words in everyday conversations, because I think that too many people use big language as a way of belittling others” (Wilson 13). With an awareness of the power of words to belittle, I wrote this thesis with the intention that it will be used as a tool in my community and written to be accessible and relatable to my community rather than overtly academic.

When trying to decide on a format for this written thesis I found that dividing my experiences, influences and process became quite difficult to articulate. I tried to explore words in English, numbering to separate sections or chapters but in doing so I felt as if I was omitting entire parts of my journey. It was through learning new words and phrases in Mi'kmaq and an introduction to Mi'kmaq sensibilities of time that everything started to fall into place.

This support paper for my thesis exhibition is divided into sections based on Mi'kmaq language and in particular a Mi'kmaq concept of time; Ta'n tela'sik cowy (Don Dell-ah-sick Goway), which is roughly translated to *the way that things have played out*. My cousin and dear friend Ursula Johnson shared this Mi'kmaq perception of 'time' with me. She went on to explain that if I planned on time travelling in anyway then my headings must change, and this will be reflected throughout my thesis. This concept of time profiles the inspiration for my work and influences for my creative methodology.

**This support paper has been divided into the following chapters:**

Mawi amku's (in the beginning)

Sa'sewasik (a new direction/path)

Tijuw (and then)

Plu'wasik (things changed direction)

Misoquo (until)

Kwaskasik (things turned around)

Na'taqamasi (I'm in the water preparing to make land fall)

Kespi-a'tuksitkik (the story has finished being told/not the ending)

## **Mawi amku's (in the beginning)**

I was very close to my maternal grandmother. She was my best friend. We would spend endless hours together, playing cards, and just simply chatting up a storm. I think even at a young age I knew the importance of spending time with my elders, I didn't see the difference between old and young people and to this day I find comfort in speaking with elders, and I think the feeling is mutual. Since losing my grandmother over three years ago I have felt the importance of carrying on what she taught me, and what others have taught me in my community. Until a few years leading to her passing, she denied her Indigenous heritage as many people in my community did for many decades. I don't think it was because she wasn't personally proud of who she was, but it was that through the opposing influences and government classification she wasn't allowed to acknowledge and express her pride in being Mi'kmaq. "Up to the late 1970s, many people of mixed descent in Newfoundland attempted to hide their Mi'kmaq ancestry and publicly identified themselves as English or Irish Newfoundlanders. Amid widespread stigmatization and discrimination, European identity trumped Indian identity. Their Mi'kmaq roots were present, but eclipsed by other identities that were more acceptable in the dominant culture" (Bartels and Bartles 251).

As written history goes, and the way in which the history of Ktaqamkuk's Indigenous peoples are concerned, "the denial of a Mi'kmaw presence was taken to an extreme; at that time, the position taken by both federal and provincial representatives presaged the universalism of Trudeau's White Paper (Government of Canada 1969), by claiming all peoples in the province to be one and the same with no substantive provisions being made for its Innu, Inuit, Metis and Mi'kmak populations (Wetzel 1999). This one-identity-fits-all approach to governance asserted a form of neocolonialism that ensured continued and, arguably, increased repression of Aboriginal peoples in the province." (Robinson 385)

At home there is an ongoing cultural revival, people are now reconnecting to their heritage, and finding pride in being Mi'kmaw once again. The important initial work has been done in my community to rectify our erasure and acknowledge our presence as Indigenous people of Ktaqamkuk. It's a very important and trying time in my community, this is why I continue to

create. Our visual culture is present and identifiable but many of the meanings why we use particular designs have been lost or forgotten, and I am attempting to give some of these designs voice again. I find myself drawn to a quote by my friend and the source of much inspiration Daphne Odjig; “I don’t want to see young artists of Native ancestry paint themselves into a box in their search for authenticity. Every artist paints from their own cultural heritage and their own experience. Whatever your heritage, it will come out in your brush. My council to young artists is to stop worrying about authenticity. It is within you” (Lavallee 73).

## **Sa'sewasik (a new direction/path)**

During my stay in the Okanagan I have had the opportunity to spend time with inspiring artists, community members, elders and colleagues who have all aided in my creative endeavors, but none as inspiring, influential and pivotal as Daphne Odjig. I've been a fan of Daphne's work since I had first seen it in my undergrad, along with other artists of her generation such as Alex Janvier, Jackson Beardy, Carl Ray, Norval Morriseau, Eddy Cobiness, Joseph Sanchez and many more. These artists “made history by demanding recognition for its members as professional, contemporary artists” (Lavallee 23). During the first couple of weeks of my first semester here in the Okanagan, I was asked to assist Daphne with a Skype meeting, she had an exhibition opening in Toronto and it coincided with her 95th birthday. We had a blast, as it was her first time ever doing anything like that! We went on a virtual tour of her exhibition where she saw a retrospective of her work, some of which she had not seen since the 1960's. At one point in our virtual gallery visit she turned and said to me that what we were doing felt like time travel. She found so much joy in explaining to me each piece that we viewed together, she was instantly transported to the place and time she created the work or the moment of her inspiration- it was an amazing day. After that experience in helping Daphne with her Skype meeting we created a strong friendship. My wife Amy and I visit her as often as possible, just to see how she is doing, to spend time in her presence and to share a good laugh. Daphne is actually the reason that I decided to start drawing again, and in turn the reason these drawings have developed to the point in which they exist today, as both two and three-dimensional works of art. Daphne has become very special to me, a grandmother figure of sorts.

My drawings are derived from known patterns, symbols and colours from various Mi'kmaq and Beothuk sources of visual culture. The starting point for each of my drawings or carvings begins with revisiting patterns found in Mi'kmaq porcupine quillwork. I have observed various pieces of quillwork in museums, online and in textbooks. I've been aware of Mi'kmaq porcupine quill design for quite some time, but only recently have I begun to further explore the design, symbolism and history of this intricate and beautiful art form. The majority of the porcupine quillwork that I have been researching exists in museum collections in the form of baskets, containers, chair seat covers and wall hangings. I have done research into motifs both visually

and through the writings of other scholars, such as Ruth Holmes Whitehead, interested in Mi'kmaq quillwork and have found very little analysis on the origins or symbolism behind the majority of Mi'kmaq quill design. "There are very few quill workers left among the Micmac, and none have been found who remember meanings of the 'traditional' designs" (Whitehead 33).

One of the first historical colonial accounts of porcupine quillwork as referenced by Whitehead was noted more than 400 years ago by Marc Lescarbot of France who recalls in his voyage to New France in 1606-1607 that "in Port Royal, and in the confines thereof, and towards Newfoundland, and at Tadousac, where they have neither pearls nor vigils, the maids and women do make matachias with the quills or bristles of the porcupine, which they dye black, white [the un-dyed quill] and red colours, as lively as possibly may be." The Mi'kmaq have employed this method for countless generations, "quilled objects and other native 'decorations' for personal use were made not merely as ornaments. They often had practical applications within the native culture, having magical associations, conferring or denoting roles and power." Lescarbot's account helps to illustrate the appeal that these designs had with European settlers and explorers. In time the Mi'kmaq took note of the appeal and attraction that their designs garnered and this was the beginning of a more commercial use for quillwork, but at the same time marked the disappearance of other important techniques. As Whitehead goes on to explain in her seminal text *Micmac Quillwork*, "The forms that quill-art traditionally took were reconstructed to attract an alien culture. The Europeans wanted 'curiosities', 'for display in their own Land', so the Micmac furnished them with quillwork souvenirs. At an early date, they began cashing in on the novelty value of making and decorating purely European forms with native materials, and by the eighteenth century were producing such items as quilled-bark hat boxes and jewelry cases. Traditional quillwork that didn't sell was de-emphasized and gradually discarded" (Whitehead 21).

The pre-contact quillwork objects, which embodied traditional and spiritual meaning as mentioned above, have not survived. In my drawings and carvings, I strive to recall the pre-contact designs by referencing and honouring the works produced primarily for trade. The surviving quillwork pieces display the intricate and highly skilled craftsmanship of my ancestors and in the essence of their existence they too hold sacred meaning and embedded stories. My

people saw the realities of the time, the growing encroachment of European settlers meant that their traditional ways of being were at risk, the technologies such as iron cook wear and rifles that were being introduced and traded for were of high value and in many ways simplified some aspects of their everyday. Yet with the adaptation of these advanced technologies, “the coming of the Europeans was ultimately to prove disastrous to the Indigenous cultures, and naturally the decorative arts suffered: four major quilling techniques virtually disappeared between the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries... The greatly-accelerated loss of techniques in the early eighteenth century is understandable, in that these stresses, these cultural traumas, had begun long before 1600” (Whitehead 15).

Through my research at various institutions such as the Museum of History, Ottawa and The Rooms, St. Johns, NL, I have spent numerous hours visiting with the objects that are held in airtight rooms and boxes, as most of them rarely get visited at all. There are stories in these objects, lessons that have been taught and, in some instances, yet to be understood by us from our ancestors. It took only a short visit with some of the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq objects to feel their presence and voice; I drew from the visual attributions of the pieces, materiality and symbolism and have created and continue to do so in hopes to create new artworks that inform my own cultural understandings of my community and home territory.

The most influential cultural artworks I have been referencing are the drawings created by Shanawdithit. Shanawdithit is most widely believed to be the “last of the Beothuk”, often viewed from an anthropological perspective, or from a colonial perspective as a true symbol of the successful colonization of Ktaqamkuk. “When Shanawdithit was born, probably in 1801, Beothuk deaths usually outnumbered births each year. Her people had dwindled to perhaps one-fifth of their number at first European contact” (Steckley 107). Violent encounters with white settlers were amongst the leading causes of Beothuk deaths, “Folktales report that the whiteman's dogs were sent to drive them (the Beothuk) into the open lakes to be shot for Sunday sport, like deer” (Such 63). Tuberculosis was another of the leading causes of death for many Beothuk that came into contact with settler populations, which in the end was the cause of Shanawdithit's death at the age of 28. “There's no doubt this dreadful disease was greatly responsible for much of the Beothuk population decline but it was aggravated by the near starvation they had to suffer

from being constantly harassed by the whites” (Such 48). Shanawdithit just as with many other's was captured by the settlers, this colonial tactic imagined “Once an Indian was captured, they thought he could be treated with extreme kindness, taught the whitemen's ways, and returned to the tribe to act as ambassador between the two warring groups” (Such 69). This tactic would lead to a completely different outcome, since “shortly after 1800, a reward was offered for capturing a Beothuk alive... On July 30, 1807, Governor Holloway increased the reward to £100. . . To wrest a member from the tribe would entail violence and perhaps many were slaughtered by such kidnap attempts. It is significant that only women were ever captured by the settlers” (Such 69). Although it is important these colonial histories are not forgotten, I do not want the recalling of these brutal and known histories to be the focus of this thesis, the treatment of Shanawdithit and her people has been the focus of numerous pieces of literature and anthropological studies. In remembering Shanawdithit, I feel she should be recognized as a member of her Beothuk community, a daughter, a storyteller, knowledge keeper and an artist.

There are limited historical accounts that relate to Shanawdithit's artistic process and ways of being. Although her drawings on paper speak for the majority of what still exists today, her creativity and technical proficiency in utilizing and experimenting with new materials of European design are well documented, but at the time never quite understood. One of these experiments being “Shanawdithit thinking the long front of her bonnet an unnecessary appendage had torn it off and in its place had decorated her forehead and her arms with tinsel and coloured paper” (Howley 172). So many of the materials she was introduced to since she was captured in 1823 must have been very foreign, yet intriguing. “It is also worth noting that Shanawdithit's people already had a long record of deploying European materials for their own purposes. As archaeologist Donald Holly notes, the Beothuk “eagerly incorporated European goods and raw materials. They hammered iron nails into arrowheads, fashioned spears from trap parts, and covered their dwellings—mamateeks—with canvas sails” (Polack “Reading Shanawdithit's Drawings” 2).

Researchers, ethnologists and scholars have studied the drawings of Shanawdithit with varying analysis and interpretations. Dr. Fiona Polack a professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, NL, has done what I think is a pivotal analysis of some of the key

drawings and artistic works/actions by Shanawdithit. Dr. Polack examines both the physical drawings by the hand of Shanawdithit and the annotations done by William Cormack, “amateur ethnologist...colonial adventurer” (Polack, “Reading Shanawdithit’s Drawings” 1) and founder of the “Beothick” institute. “Shanawdithit’s drawings were the products of a highly flawed, uneven “collaboration” with Cormack, and made when Shanawdithit was terminally ill. Nonetheless they offer a unique window on the possibilities and limitations of mutual efforts at cultural translation in early nineteenth-century colonial North America” (Polack “The artist herself” 43). As Dr. Polack explains in great depth in her essay, *Reading Shanawdithit’s Drawings: Transcultural texts in the North American colonial world*, a unique and thought provoking analysis of the relationship between Shanawdithit and Cormack, Edwin L. Wade and Jacki Thompson Rand warn that “we must be vigilant in questioning whether [European inserted] captions are relevant to the intent of the artist” (Polack “Reading Shanawdithit’s Drawings” 9).

Dr. Polack goes on to explore the artistic abilities of Shanawdithit from a perspective similar to my own when she states: “Examining the ways Shanawdithit melded Indigenous and non-Indigenous representational practices, subject matter and materials can help deflate notions of her purportedly irredeemable cultural otherness, while still ensuring a respect for her cultural difference. Yet little attention has yet been paid to her experiments.” Shanawdithit was a contemporary Indigenous artist in her time, utilizing materials, motifs and her environment to try and make sense of the world she was in, and again the people surrounding her paid little attention to her experiments and attempts to display her new found understandings. I find as an Indigenous artist today, I’m doing this in my own practice, for me it is a way of trying to understand my place and role as a creative individual in my community, looking at the world from a personal perspective, fitting myself into a larger narrative. Shanawdithit created art as a legacy for future generations to glimpse Beothuk culture and world-view. “Shanawdithit apparently took considerable pleasure in making things, and was skilled at doing so. However, it is difficult to form a more in-depth understanding of how she perceived the drawings and artifacts she produced, especially the ones melding European and Beothuk elements; Did they, for instance, have spiritual resonance for her” (Polack “Reading Shanawdithit’s Drawings” 3)? The drawings of Shanawdithit allow us to see a true expression of Beothuk culture from her

contemporary perspective and knowledge.

I had the opportunity and privilege to visit the drawings of Shanawdithit in person at the Provincial archives in St. Johns, NL. It was a very moving and special day for me as these drawings have limited interaction. I visited them for many hours. Her skills in drawing were nothing short of amazing, the quality of line, detail, form and perspective were done with particular precision, especially her drawings of the six staff like objects, labeled by the hand of Cormack as “Emblems of Mythology.” I have seen these drawings many times before as reproductions in books and online. I even have two of her staff illustrations tattooed on my arm. I got the tattoo just a couple of weeks before I left to embark on this Master’s thesis as an everyday reminder of where I come from. The permanence of her drawings on my skin, yet not knowing their meaning or intent is a constant reminder to listen and to learn from my ancestors and the land that informed them. Seeing these drawings in person was an experience I will never forget, it gave me insight into her style, pressure, mark making and method, and how it related to other Beothuk objects. “The geometric precision of her “Emblems of Mythology” ..., is reminiscent of the intricate, incised patterns on Beothuk bone pendants” (Polack “The artist herself” 43).

There has been some reference and overview of the staffs she depicted, but nothing in-depth about the function or physical form/material. Not much is known about these staffs, it is noted by Cormack alongside each drawing that they were approximately 6 feet tall. Each had a different symbol or representation on the top, all different but very similar in execution and style. Knowing the materials that existed in Ktaqamkuk around the interior near Red Indian Lake, the staffs must have been carved from some type of hardwood.

Each wigwam had a quantity of deers' leg bones ranged on poles (in all three hundred). Having used the marrow of some of these opposite that we occupied, the Indian replaced them with an equal number of others signifying that these were his; he pointed out a staff and showed that it belonged to the person that wore the high cap, the same that I had taken to be the chief; the length of this badge was nearly six feet, and two inches at the head, tapering to the end, terminating in not more than three quarters of an inch; it presented four plain

equal sides, except at the upper end, where it resembled three rims one over the other, and the whole stained red (Howley 79).

When I started this research and artistic journey I set out with the intention and goal to reproduce the sculptural staff forms that today only exist as images that Shanawdithit drew almost 200 years ago. The forms resonated in my imagination and pushed me through the next steps in my journey.

## **Tijuw (and then)**

As a sculptor I have worked in various types of wood as well as other natural materials such as moose antler, but I do not have the understanding and relationship to wood that some of my colleagues have. My journey into traditional methods of carving started by visiting a friend, Dean Hunt from the Heiltsuk nation. A couple of years ago Dean put out an open invitation for me to come visit and learn some carving techniques at his family studio which he shares with his father Bradley and brother Shawn in Sechelt, on the Sunshine coast of British Columbia. This past summer I took up this generous invitation and spent some time with the Hunts in their studio, to observe and with hopes of learning skills so that I could try my hand at carving.

The Hunt family is originally from the community of Waglisla<sup>4</sup>. “The Heiltsuk people have lived in their lands; on what has come to be called the Central Coast of British Columbia, since time immemorial” (Heiltsuk). Families in Waglisla have been carving for countless generations and have an unparalleled understanding and relationship with the wood of their region. The methods have been passed down from families and community and have changed over time, but in their essence remain the same. In my home community we have very skilled woodworkers, but very few of them have an understanding for wood working in the way my friends the Hunts do. When I visited them I hoped to gain a small grasp of their understanding for the properties of wood, cedar, so that I could apply these skill sets to the Indigenous wood of Ktaqamkuk.

I have always had an affinity for carving and have employed what knowledge I learned in my undergrad and from my father into many artworks over the years. There are Indigenous artists and practitioners from eastern Canada both past and present that work in wood, such as Ned Bear and others but carving is not as prevalent and commonplace as it is here in British Columbia. I expected that learning from the Hunt’s would really give me insight into the process of carving and that learning in this environment would be an experience and starting point for translating back to a Beothuk and Mi’kmaq form. I hoped that from this experience I could carry these new found methods forward, and what I would learn here could be taken back and with time and

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<sup>4</sup> Waglisla is the traditional Heiltsuk name for the community now known as Bella Bella.

practice, shared with my community. Carving has been a Northwest coast tradition for countless generations, although at times colonial forces have threatened the tradition it continues to this day. Nearly 300 years before contact on the west coast, the east coast of North America also faced a similar threat to cultural tradition but persevered. From the late 1800s until 1934 in the U.S. and 1951 in Canada, the potlatch—the great system of celebration, honouring, witnessing, and wealth redistribution—was banned in an effort to kill Indigenous cultural ways. Potlatch-related activities, such as carving, were banned. Authorities confiscated regalia. People who went to potlatches were arrested and jailed. And yet, the cultural ways survived. Among those who defied the unjust laws of the time were the artists who continued to carve regalia masks, house posts, great totem poles, and sea- and ocean-going canoes. (Walker)

The artistic methods and cultural practices are still strong despite the attempts of ethnocide: the strength of the people, the presence and the voices of the ancestors can be felt in the small studio of the Hunts. It was the efforts of Bradley’s ancestors, community and connection to the land through art that “the Heiltsuk continued to practice elements of the feast system in secret, it was not until after the ban that it began to emerge into public light again. During the late 1960s and continuing through the 1980s the Heiltsuk experienced a revival of potlatching and feasting that continues to this day” (Heiltsuk).

My intention was to set up my camp in the yard of the Hunt’s studio so that I could spend time directly on the land. Large cedar trees surround their studio, only a few hundred feet from the ocean. I had decided to set up a tent under some cedar trees; unknowingly it was located directly in the middle of an Eagle/ Crow turf war. I slept pretty well at the beginning of the first night, but was awoken by a screaming Crow standing on the ground about 6 inches away, only the fabric of the tent between him and my ear. It was barely dawn, but how could I argue with the Crow, it was time to get up. My dreams that first night were very vivid. I usually get ideas for artwork in the moments before I fall into a deep sleep, and this night I saw so many designs, so many ideas for carving and drawing, but the designs were not mine, not even from my nation, they were Heiltsuk.

It was day two of my nearly two-week stay with the Hunts in their studio; I spent the whole day talking with Bradley, Dean's father. I asked endless questions, visited with their completed and in progress work and watched their techniques. Bradley is full of knowledge and very open to teach new comers to the shop some techniques in working in Cedar, he is very particular and makes sure that any artwork that leaves the studio is done right. We talked about form line in the Heiltsuk imagery, stories of the animals that the family honours through their design, of people that helped Bradley while he was learning, about where he came from, the hardships he had faced, and about some of the designs he was working on. He wanted to know more about where I came from, stories about Ktaqamkuk, the Mi'kmaq and the Beothuk, and about the journey I was embarking on. It was a very full day, and it's a day I will not soon forget. Near the end of the day, after observing and sketching I told Bradley about the dream I had the previous night, that I was seeing so many designs, but they were not mine. He told me that the Northwest coast form line is very powerful with overwhelming designs, strong colours and compositions. He felt that the dream possibly meant I needed to create imagery that was equally as powerful as the Heiltsuk formline and that I needed to create something that would represent my nation and where I came from. It was a lot to think about. Most of the historical imagery of Mi'kmaq was either based on quillwork, beadwork or pictographs, nothing like the carvings in Northwest Coast design. I had been making drawings based loosely on quill and beadwork, but only as two dimensional drawings and paintings. I needed to find a way to translate them into a sculptural form.

For the next couple of days, I woke up to the sound of the crow and made my way to the studio to draw designs that I had seen in my dreams. Bradley and Dean found me a piece of red cedar to work on, a 12-inch circle. I learned some of the basic techniques in measuring and plotting my image and then was introduced to some knives and chisels to work with. I fell in love with carving. I spent every minute that I could in the shop working away at my design, consulting Bradley, Dean and Shawn for input, to learn techniques and how to read the grain in the wood. I was able to create a finished piece in the time I was there. (Figure 1) It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I knew half way through my visit to the studio that I wouldn't be able to recreate the Beothuk staffs and present them in an art gallery. These staffs drawn by Shanawdithit were too powerful and important to the land and of the Beothuk nation, and it would take more than just me to give them their spirit back, it would have to be a

community endeavour. With this in mind I decided that I would keep working on my drawings, paintings and carving, utilizing the skills I was learning from the Hunts to create something new and unique in Cedar as a way of honouring the techniques, methods and materials of Northwest Coast British Columbia, while at the same time staying true to the forms, colours and designs of my ancestors territory.

One evening while we were having dinner at Dean's home there was a knock at the door. It was an elder from the community that Dean had not seen for some time. He came in for a cup of tea and told us that one of his relatives had acquired some beautiful yellow cedar. He had known the Hunts for years, and wanted to know if they, or I needed any for carving. It was quite amazing how this was all working out, I had just begun carving and here I was being presented the opportunity for some cedar to continue this art form, for which I have grown a fast and yet strong connection. Dean and I calculated how much I would need and I put in an order. The second last day that I was at their studio there was another visitor passing through town, a young Indigenous knife maker from Vancouver. He had known the Hunts and popped by to see if they were in need of some new knives and tools. I had no knives of my own for carving, and if I had planned on continuing on with this art form I would need to start somewhere. I purchased two knives from this young knife maker, and this was the true beginning of my journey.

This past fall I returned to Sechelt to visit with Dean, Bradley and Shawn and to pick up the cedar for carving. Before I arrived I was informed that the wood that I was supposed to be getting wouldn't arrive on time, but a new source was possible. A friend of the Hunt's, a local timber worker had come across some salvaged old growth yellow cedar, a very rare and special wood. I got to go visit the supplier and observe the process of milling the log. He was especially excited to see that an Indigenous artist would use this tree to give it life again in the form of art. I was told that the tree was well over a thousand years old. The thought of using this ancient tree was, and still is daunting. This being, this tree has been alive during the time my people the Mi'kmaw and our relatives the Beothuk were speaking only our traditional languages. This tree would have met Dean's ancestors, it would have heard so many Indigenous languages, stories, and experienced moments in our collective history unbeknownst to us. I was being presented with this tree that has so much knowledge embedded in it, an understanding and connection to

the land much longer than any one being's living memory. I am baffled, excited, humbled, and honoured to have been given the opportunity to add more story of its life. Dean and I started talking after this, both of us were taken back with the age and history of this tree. We talked of how amazing it is that, him being from the Heiltsuk nation, a people of the Pacific Ocean and myself from the Mi'kmaq nation on the Atlantic Ocean, the complete opposite side of Turtle Island, are here connecting with, and over this tree. Our two nations, until relatively recent advancements in modes of travel would most likely never have met, historically. I was honoured at how special an experience it was that he and his family invited me into their place of creation and ceremony to teach me even a little of their knowledge of these trees, trees that do not grow in my territory which I do not have knowledge of and through it allowing me a chance to help communicate stories from my people and relatives, the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk who's voices are still present in the land.



Figure 1 Hunt Guide in Red Cedar, carving and acrylic paint on Red Cedar, 12”diameter, 2015

## **Plu'wasik (things changed direction)**

The next part of my research journey took place while I was in Ottawa, Ontario, at the Museum of History. Through a previous trip to Ottawa in 2011, I had the opportunity to visit the Museum of Civilization, now the Museum of History. While I was there I got a behind the scenes tour of the ethnology collection from Mi'kmaq Elder, Stephen Augustine. Here I got to see an arrangement of Mi'kmaq artifacts and articles of cultural importance. One of the pieces that significantly stood out was a seat cover for a chair, made of dyed porcupine quills. It was absolutely mesmerizing. The quillwork consisted of many dyed bright pink, black, white, grey and blue quills arranged in geometric and organic patterns on birch bark. I had only seen this piece briefly but it was burned in my mind permanently. On this most recent visit to the Museum of History I got a chance to spend more time with this article along with many other Mi'kmaq and Beothuk objects in the collection. On the first day of my visit I spent time with Beothuk pendants and small carvings, I observed their mark making techniques, and thoroughly documented the patterns and forms. It was a very overwhelming and powerful experience, the collection is very rarely viewed, and as someone of Indigenous ancestry from Ktaqamkuk giving witness to these works of art was a very special experience. I observed this particular collection by myself with no supervision, which allowed me to properly visit with them. Through my observations of the Beothuk carvings I got a better visual understanding of their materiality, carving techniques and even how they were worn as personal adornments.

There were so many objects to visit, and I am thankful to the museum for allowing me the time to spend with them. Through spending time with both Mi'kmaq and Beothuk items I have come to recognize many similarities between the motifs, forms and line work of both nations. Repeated patterns such as triangles, half-moons, stepped motifs, chevrons and many more occurred in ornate Mi'kmaq tools such as carving knives as well as Beothuk caribou bone pendants. By the end of my two-day visit to the museum I realized that the journey I had embarked on in examining, comparing and exploring the two nations would have to extend further than a Master's Thesis, this research will lead to many years of artistic investigations and creation.

Through oral histories we know that there was intermarriage between the Beothuk and the neighboring Mi'kmaq nation, "Indeed, the oral tradition of the Mi'kmaq suggests that the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq shared a village in St. George's Bay and that there was a good deal of intermarriage between the two nations" (Lawrence 52). This known history reinforces the idea that there would have not only been intermarriage between neighboring communities, but also a sharing of important and culturally significant objects, motifs and traditions. The repetition of patterns that were found during my visit to the Museum of History was a first step into exploring further this possible exchange. The similarities that I observed, combined with the known oral history that the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk had lived together led me to question not only the shared motifs and patterns, but to think about the inspirations that must have led to these common cultural means of expression. While I was observing objects in the Museum I began drawing and layering the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq patterns on top of one another, side by side, overlapped, partially hidden and in many other arrangements on paper. Previous to this visit I was mostly trying to balance existing Mi'kmaq imagery. Finding the similar patterns of the two nations led me to think about Indigenous sensibilities of territory, trade and ideas of cultural sharing. Even the Museum's labeling process, many objects were distinctively labeled as Micmac-Montagnais-Beothuk, implied the often indistinguishable nature of the symbols and craftsmanship hinting at the complex nature of the Indigenous cultural relationships.

Most of what we know about Beothuk material culture has been decontextualized by removing it from its original resting places and isolating it behind glass, or in airtight cases where it can no longer breathe, be visited or return to a cyclical state of existence. According to Rowe's 1977 research, the majority of writings regarding the Beothuk people "contain so much exaggeration, demonstrably false information, and emotional bias that it can only be considered fiction" (Rowe 1). In many ways the only truths we have of the Beothuk come from the visual culture that was a part of their everyday life. These artifacts and objects most certainly hold the only truths and stories from a culture that experienced such violence from the advancement of colonial forces. In the case of Shanawdithit's drawings, William Cormack's annotations "can seem to leach the vitality from her drawings and create a sense of Cormack's authority over her contributions" (Polack "Reading Shanawdithit's Drawings" 9). Cherokee artist and scholar

Jimmie Durham states: “We, you and I, must remember everything. We must especially remember those things that we never knew...and be deeply suspicious of simple stories, simple acts” (Durham 145).

## **Misoquo (Until)**

This past fall I returned to my home, it was exactly 15 months since I was there last. I felt a connection to home that I haven't felt before, I always knew the importance of where I came from but during my time here in the Okanagan, this realization really set in for me. I returned home with a heightened awareness, thinking about the land, the water and how my family has for generations lived on the same bay and relied on those waters as we do today. Since I was home last, there's been much change to the landscape I had grown up in. Most visible was the clear cutting to make way for transmission lines by the energy sector, cutting directly through our hunting territory. Through reflecting on the changes I can remember in my life, I began to think about the change that had occurred in my grandmothers life time, the "progress" that had changed her and her family's way of being, and to think even further back in my familial lineage. Hanarhan states "Changes to the Mi'kmaq way of life began in the late 1800s as industrial development on their land, particularly hydroelectric development and large-scale logging, made life dependent entirely on the land much more precarious" (qtd. in Lawrence 54). It was Moose Hunting season while I visited. On my first day home my Father and I went out looking for signs of moose, with high hopes of finding one the first venture out. We went for a long drive up an old dirt road of which I had never been before, leading to a magnetite mine—Dad had been there once, but not for many years. We started chatting about the land, how it was being "developed" for resources, seeing this devastation first hand, talking about how at one time it was respected. Now, the hillsides looked like someone had come along with a razor, shaved down the earth until nothing was left but an unprotected skin, harsh stubble, charred, infected and left untreated.

My Father and I always have good conversations; we talk about nature, science and whatever comes up. After spending time with the Hunt family in Sechelt, carving and working with various woods, I was thinking of the tree species in my home region, I knew a little but not enough to spot one sub-species from another. I was telling Dad about the drawings Shanadwithit did of the staffs, how I spent my time with the Hunts, learning about Cedar and I wanted to get his opinion on what the possibilities were for wood that might have been used on our territory for carving. He informed me that there were many species that could have been used, some of the trees he even pointed out while we were scouting for moose. He told me that there were areas

near where we lived that had never been cut by the pulp and paper mill, the trees we were seeing would be dwarf in comparison to the virgin forest not 50km away. I could only imagine how the landscape looked 300 years ago. My family has lived in the Bay St. George area of Western Ktaqamkuk for countless generations. I fish in the same spot that my Father; Grandfather, Great-Grandfather and Great-Great-Grandfather have fished. As a child, my Mother took me to pick berries in the same place where her Mother brought her when she was a child, and where her Grandmother was brought by her Mother, and so on. I know the smell; the beauty, how it feels, but mostly I remember the sounds of my home on the ocean. I began to record the land through a microphone. This land is a part of who I am and I wanted the world to hear it.

I began to visit these familiar areas in Ktaqamkuk, I spent time with the land and through the use of a homemade parabolic microphone that I configured I began to record the ground, water and air. I have recorded landscapes many times before, I love how everything is amplified and it's like having extra acute auditory senses. It was amazing to listen to my environment through this enhancement. I made several recordings and drawings at different locations, each providing me with a very unique and amazing perspective. Some of my favorite recordings are from a cold morning during one of our hunts. My Father and my Wife and I had planned to head out to a place locally known as "Red Indian Point" or "First Pond," a place where we were told there was a causeway of rocks piled out into the water. I've heard stories about this place; this area is where our oral histories say that both Beothuk and Mi'kmaq settled. You can only access this place by boat, and on this morning, there was a two-inch layer of ice on the pond. After some venturing along the shoreline, breaking a path in the glassy ice for the canoe and kayak, we paddled awhile to where the point was. We came ashore near a very old pine tree. It was strangely familiar to me, the moment I saw it I knew it yet, I had never been here before. Soon I pulled the canoe ashore and ventured out to check the point that we were told about earlier. I walked about 100 feet out into the deep pond on a walkway created with round rocks, my feet just below the surface. It was most definitely man made and it appeared to be a fish weir. It was a very exciting morning. We went looking through the bush for signs of moose and with no luck returned back to the old pine tree where we had a fire for lunch, a classic "boil up" on the beach. Afterwards I spent some time visiting with the old pine tree and buried my microphone under some earth near its roots. I could hear the wind blowing through its trunk, the water breaking on

the shore and the nearby fire crackling, it was nice to listen to what the tree had to share. I wanted to record my home in this way to give it a voice. Our communities are in constant flux, changing with people coming and going, stories leaving and new stories coming in. I took a piece of the ancient cedar tree to Ktaqamkuk; I took the tree to Ktaqamkuk so that I could leave it there.

I wanted to tap into a way of hearing more of these stories. I wanted to listen to what Ktaqamkuk had to say and what it had to tell me in that moment. I chose these places because with each successive generation stories change, are retold, or even forgotten. A similar process of change and renewal but, more exaggerated has happened in the understanding of Beothuk cultural practices and language. The Beothuk's stories are being forgotten, and I believe that it is part of our responsibility as Indigenous people of the island to help carry their spirit and renew their stories. It was during this trip back home when I first saw the original drawings of Shanawdithit at the Rooms Provincial Archives. I not only had the honour of visiting her drawings but also of visiting more Beothuk pendants and objects. I spent time with these pendants and tried to imagine the lives they lead before being placed in airtight cases and locked up in vaults, I wondered what conversations passed through them, what interactions and histories had been made when they were being adorned. It was in thinking about this that I decided to record the audio in their current sterile environment, to attempt to understand their emotion and existence nearly 200 years since they were left behind by the people in burial and ceremonial settings to live out their intended cyclical return to the earth.

Throughout written history from a colonial perspective there have been many stories told about the relationship between the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq. One such story that exists is the Mi'kmaq Mercenary Myth (MMM). This account of Mi'kmaq presence in Ktaqamkuk suggests that the French introduced us to the island during the 18th century to "wage war against the then "troublesome" Beothuk. However, such claims have been refuted by several scholars (Bartels 1987; Caddigan 2009; Pastore 1978; Upton 1977) and have been replaced (particularly within scholarship) with a more comprehensive version of Beothuk "extermination," involving a combination of factors, not the least of which was the hunting of Beothuk by European settlers, most notably the newcomer residents of central and northeastern Newfoundland" (Robinson

390). The Mi'kmaq Mercenary Myth “appeared in Frances Briffett’s *The Story of Newfoundland and Labrador*, published between 1949 and 1964, and was part of the general school curriculum throughout Newfoundland and Labrador” (Robinson 395). We know the propagation of these myths as a common and very successful colonial tactic of divide and conquer. The pervasive and insidious nature of this false history has caused many Mi'kmaw today to be cautious when discussing or exploring the cultural nation to nation ties embedded in the long history of Mi'kmaq and Beothuk interaction. We will never know the exact history of our land and its original tenants, but our history as Mi'kmaq here on Ktaqamkuk is well known. “The Mi'kmaq based in Newfoundland, Ktaqamkuk, were well known to the Cape Breton Mi'kmaq. The two groups gathered annually at Chapel Island, Cape Breton every summer. The Newfoundland Mi'kmaq were referred to as “the Ancients” (Sa'yewedjkik), indicating their long-term residence in Newfoundland” (Hanrahan 220). It was my intention throughout this thesis to challenge this colonial myth, and in the creation of artistic works of sound, wood and image to celebrate our collective told and untold histories.

## **Kwaskasik (things turned around)**

Through my recording I wanted to hear the real story from the ground, water, wind, ice and fire because they have been listening and speaking to us for a long time. Taking into account my own place-based approach as well as examining oral histories, written colonial accounts and Indigenous written histories, I set out to create multi-faceted artworks that tell stories of my own encounters with sites of cultural and community significance. As stated earlier in this thesis, each artwork in my thesis exhibition is a representation of the island of Ktaqamkuk itself.

Many artists have utilized various forms of new media to communicate their connection to Indigenous communities and land. Indigenous artists are leading the way in terms of employing the use of (new) technology to convey the (ancient) experience of being connected to the land. One such artist, Mike MacDonald has been referred to by Hunkpapa Lakota filmmaker, photographer and performance artist Dana Claxton as the “grandfather of aboriginal media art. ‘He was so instrumental in using video as a fine art ... And he was the first aboriginal artist to use it as such and continue to work with video in the exhibition space.” (Aboriginal media artist) Mike MacDonald was “born in Sydney, Nova Scotia, of Mi’kmaq, Beothuck, Irish, Portuguese, and Scottish ancestry, his heritage (was) an integral part of his work.” (Green Museum) Mike MacDonald up until his death in 2006 was (to my knowledge) the only living person to openly identify as Beothuk in contemporary culture, let alone in the contemporary art world. Mike had a very unique and special way to communicate our connection as Indigenous people to the land. He was truly breaking ground in media art, and as our ancestors before us utilizing the most efficient and effective tool for the job. For Mike there was no divide between art and life, in his own words he describes Aboriginal cultural production by saying “Before contact, the Aboriginal people had no word for art – no concept of it as anything separate from everyday life. Art was spoons and bowls, the handles of tools, the clothes people wore, the way they lived life” (Todd 106).

The first time I saw Mike MacDonald’s artwork *Electric Totem* was in 2008 when I helped install it for the exhibition “Bureau de Change” at the Walter Philips Gallery. At this time I was fresh out of my undergrad and unfamiliar with many of the artists whose work I was helping to

install for the Banff Centre's 75th anniversary exhibition. The work itself "comprised of five stacked television monitors, it depicts various elements of the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en culture of Northern British Columbia – berry picking, singing, and drumming amid images of the Skeena Valley" (Todd 106). When I think back now on seeing *Electric Totem* in the corner of the room I remember feeling that this piece made so much sense to me, it was combining Indigenous ways of being with something else so familiar and relatable: TV media. I wasn't aware at the time that Mike MacDonald's Indigenous ancestry was so similar to my own, from the same land and as I look back at his work from 1987 and my current practice, our work comes from a similar conceptual perspective. There are a few key artworks that have informed my practice, the *Electric Totem* is one of them. "With Aboriginal knowledge at the centre of this work (*Electric Totem*), the traditions ultimately become the true protector of the land. In living with the land, the traditions embody the knowledge, the way of life" (Todd 106).

The story of the Beothuk, in particular their demise and the hardship they endured has been the focus of several contemporary artworks utilizing media art by Indigenous artists, including Rebecca Belmore's 2008 video installation "March 5th, 1819" which was exhibited at The Rooms, St. John's Newfoundland. The video installation creates a deep rooted and traumatizing immersive experience. As explained by Rebecca Belmore in an interview with Lee-ann Martin:

My version of the incident at Red Indian Lake is a visceral rendering that focuses on imagining the trauma of the moment. I wanted to make room for visitors to consider Demasduit and Nonosabasut as individuals, as flesh and blood. My decision to clothe this historic couple in contemporary dress, reaching out for each other across two large opposing projections, was an attempt to see them as a woman and a man desperately trying to escape their unseen captors. By placing the viewer in the middle of this trauma, I was casting the gallery visitor in the physical role of witness and perpetrator (Belmore).

Duane Linklater's "Santu's Song" stems from "the story of late Santu Toney and her song which was recorded by anthropologist Franck Speck using a wax cylinder recording device." (Linklater) As an artwork the song was performed at the opening of his exhibition "Beothuck Building" at the OR gallery by musician/cellist Peggy Lee. "The show took its title, 'Beothuck

Building,' from an actual office building in St. John's; the Cree artist was riffing on the problem of reducing a vanished Native tribe to an adornment for commercial signage." (Burnham)

I found myself drawing inspiration from MacDonald, Belmore, Linklater and many other artists throughout the creation of my new body of work. Jerry Evans, a well-known artist of Mi'kmaq heritage also from Ktaqamkuk has been a mentor and a friend to me for many years. Jerry's work takes the form of printmaking, drawing, film and video. In much the same way that I have approached this thesis work, Jerry draws from known Beothuk and Mi'kmaq visual culture in a means to pass-on and keep the art forms alive and within public consciousness. Another inspiration for my work is my colleague, friend and cousin Ursula Johnson. Ursula is a performance and installation artist of Mi'kmaw ancestry who utilizes endurance performance and precision craftsmanship of traditional art forms that she explains as "creating a space where the viewer is confronted with thought provoking visuals, sounds and scents. Often challenging the viewer to investigate their own Identity, as well as examining the relationship that their ancestry and cultural practices relates to that of mine." (Johnson) All of these artists from whom I draw inspiration are known for their groundbreaking approaches in depicting perspectives of Indigeneity through contemporary and what is considered to be traditional artistic mediums.

## **Na'taqamsi (I'm in the water preparing to make land fall)**

In the creation of the new artworks I found myself creating pieces that looked more towards the lived experiences and inspirations drawn from both Mi'kmaq and Beothuk in the creation of visual forms and to use Vizenor's term, that speak to the ongoing "survivance" and memory of our people on the land. I intentionally steered away from directly depicting or referencing the demise of the Beothuk like in the work of Belmore and Linklater. There were many factors to consider when creating artwork that tries to imagine histories forgotten or untold. In response to this thesis exhibition, Dr. Heather Iglolorite writes that, "At its heart, this is a collection of works about visiting with our relations and reclaiming our histories. It creates a space where Mi'kmaq and Beothuk cultures continue to flourish and co-exist as they did centuries ago in Ktaqamkuk, to imagine a future that might have been, but is not now. And in reflecting on that, we are reminded of what is always at stake." In the creation of this work I wanted to remember Shanawdithit as a contemporary artist, imagining and revisiting her practice and artistic methodologies as a starting point, recognizing that what she did in the short time of her artistic expressions only account for a small reflection on her story, let alone her nation's stories and history. Many of the forms she utilized in her drawings were incorporated into my sketches and final artworks. I wanted to remember our shared stories, I wanted to try and remember my relatives who met her relatives.

The final thesis exhibition consists of a series of studies on paper, canvas, wooden panel and carved cedar, three painted and carved wooden panels as well as two circular carved yellow cedar panels with accompanying audio triggered through the use of sensors. (Figure 2-6) The creation of the works in their final presentation at the Vernon Public Art Gallery creates a site and gathering place for a conversation between the various forms presented in the artworks. The materials used, the audio that fills the space and the interactions between the works and the gallery goers creates this conversation. In addition to the main works, I decided to present the original visual studies in the gallery as I felt they were an important part of my journey depicting the stories originating from the land. These studies were my initial explorations in the process of remembering the forms seen and used by my ancestors and relatives throughout generations. I explored a variety of mark making, colours and spatial textures. My first cedar carving,

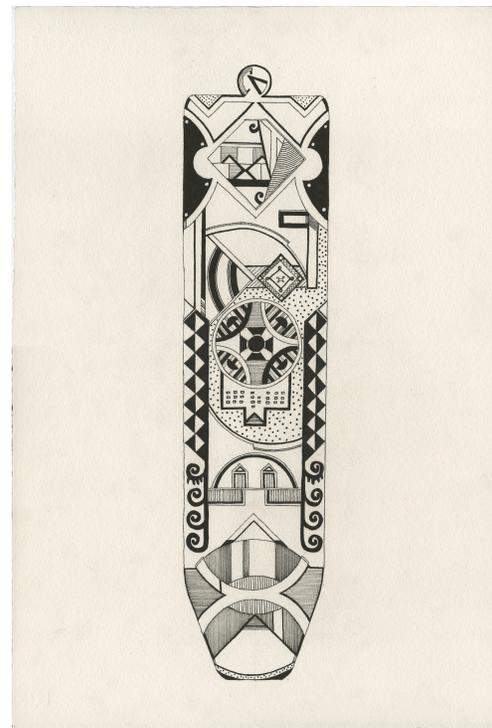
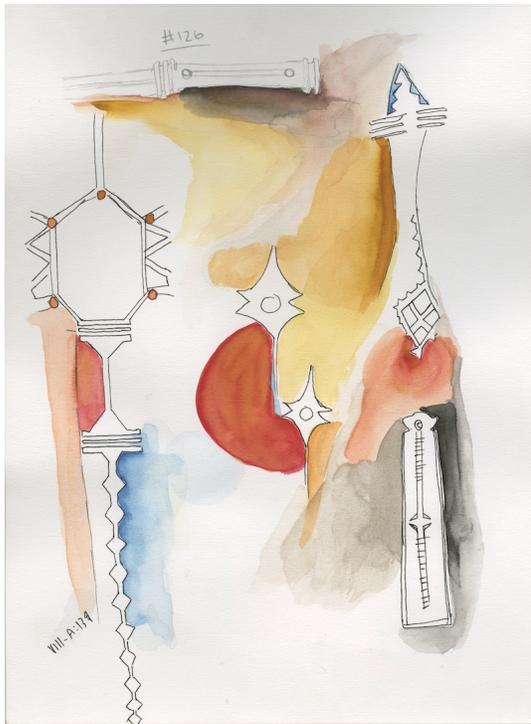
completed at the Hunt's studio was displayed with the studies; it was and is a very important piece and reference point. When I was first learning to carve, Bradley helped guide me along and showed me various techniques on this one small piece of cedar. He told me that I could reference the piece in the future as an example of how my cuts should be and how the wood should respond. I titled the piece "Hunt Guide in Red Cedar" in honour of his teachings. The various cuts from my guide allowed me to recall the teaching that I was given as I translated them to the larger carvings. I began these large carvings on this very special, ancient yellow cedar with great hesitation, consideration and respect. The wood was so intimidating and powerful that it took me several weeks of spending time and just simply visiting with them to finally arrive at the right imagery. While talking to Bradley about imagery, he would say "that it's already in the wood, you just have to find it and pull it out".

I enjoyed spending time with the wood, the more time I spent with it the more I seemed to understand it, the wood became animated again with each visit. I truly appreciate the act of visiting, I would spend so much time visiting with my grandparents and my relatives when I was younger, and the more time I spent with them the more I would learn about them and myself. I wanted to try and replicate this practice of visiting and learning within the gallery space. Accompanying these carved panels is an audio component. With the use of sensors and some programming I created active zones in front of the cedar carvings that would trigger sound through the motions of the gallery goers. The audio was composed of the recordings collected during my visit to Ktaqamkuk and corresponded to the places that I was depicting in the carvings themselves. When you are in the active zone furthest from the piece you would hear audio recordings of the sterile vaults of the Rooms Provincial archives where the Beothuk artifacts now live. I amplified and manipulated this audio so that it would give an exaggerated and eerie reverberation of the space. In the active zone closest to the cedar carvings were audio tracks that were recorded at the sites of known Beothuk and Mi'kmaq occupation that I visited while at home. If the viewer stood close to the piece long enough audio would build from silence to the slight roar of a river, or of the fire crackling as heard from the old pine tree near first pond. In between these two zones was another zone that was a mix of the two tracks. When standing in this mid-way position you hear hints of the natural recording, which is intended to cause the viewer to seek the clearer recording nearest the sculpture. The viewer was not informed when

entering the space that there was an audio component triggered near the sculptural works: if one for some reason ended up spending enough time under the sensors then the audio would be start; if one did not stand near the piece long enough then you would only experience the pieces strictly as two or three dimensional works on the wall.

Just as in the work of Mike MacDonald, I find that I create works that independent of artistic disciplines creating intricacies and complexities for a contemporary Indigenous art that connects technologies with traditional ways of being challenging sociopolitical assumptions. When I began my Master's thesis I would have never of thought I would be embarking on a two-year exploration concerning primarily two and three-dimensional art that is considered traditional in the world of "Contemporary Art." I often find that I try and push new technologies in my practice to further explore my own technologically informed world as an Indigenous person. Working in carving and painting made me think about the vast accessibility that we have as artists today compared to my ancestors 200 years ago. In the creation of the new work I was reflecting on the change of colours I had observed in the porcupine quillwork pieces viewed at the Museum of History. It is evident that when commercially produced dyes made their way into trade and into the hands of the Mi'kmaq quill workers they were instantly adopted, colour patterns transitioned from earthy tones to include vibrant pink, purples, greens and various others. I can only imagine the level of excitement that these vibrant palettes presented and what new ideas and possibilities it inspired in a new generation of quill workers nearly two centuries ago. As Dr. Heather Iglolorite says, "If I didn't already know the colourful inspiration behind

Bennett's latest series of paintings and carved pieces, I might suspect he had been looking at Hockney's southern California pool paintings rather than 100-year old Mi'kmaq quillwork” (Mniku 11). Indigenous artists have always found a way to be at the leading edge of contemporary expression and materiality, from the introduction of glass trade beads, commercial dyes to the latest in 3D printing technologies, I am honoured to be amongst so many inspiring and creative colleagues. "Our connection to the land is what makes us Indigenous, and yet as we move forward into virtual domains we too are sneaking up and setting up camp — making this virtual and technologically mediated domain our own”(L’Hirondelle 52).



Left: Figure 2 Civilization Not History, Acrylic, Watercolour and Ink on Paper, 9”x12”, 2015

Right: Figure 3 Pendant in Ink, Ink on Paper, 15” x 22”, 2014



Figure 4 Nisqunamu'k Kmtn (Purple Mountain), Acrylic paint on carved wooden panel  
36" x36", 2016



Figure 5 Wo'kin, Acrylic paint on carved Yellow Cedar, 29" diameter, 2016



Figure 6 Double-Walqu'n, Acrylic paint on carved Yellow Cedar, 28" diameter, 2016

## **Kespi-a'tuksitkik (the story has finished being told/not the ending)**

Through the creation of this thesis exhibition each work is intended to act as a personal mnemonic device. I wanted to embed a story within the works so that it can be used to speak of a place, moment or relationship, just as various cultural objects are used to do so in many other Indigenous cultures. As was stated earlier in the thesis, many of the meanings connected to the imagery found in porcupine quillwork have been lost or forgotten, and in the case of the Beothuk we have had to rely on a great deal of written colonial histories. I do not yet know if I will find the meanings behind some of the designs that I have been exploring. Most seem to be representational of the landscape, but through visiting and working with other communities and nations I feel that my ongoing artistic methodology will lead to future understandings and even the creation of new visual markers to illustrate contemporary Indigenous realities.

I know that I have begun a long journey, but now I feel like the journey will take a different form. I am truly thankful that this Master's thesis has provided me the concentrated time and consideration necessary to further explore this specific subject matter. Being so far from home has been the hardest part of completing this work, the distance between Mi'kmaki and the Okanagan didn't allow for the amount of community engagement and visiting that I had intended. I have only scratched the surface of exploring and spending time with Mi'kmaq and Beothuk cultural objects. My future work will lead to spending more time and building strong relationships with other Mi'kmaq communities so that I can help share the stories of specific communities and in turn I hope to help bring their designs and stories forward again.

The designs and motifs I have created and revisited have already caught the attention of other Mi'kmaw. A gentleman from the community of Listuguj contacted me with a very special request, he had seen my work and wanted to know if I could help him design new powwow regalia. He has been a powwow dancer for over two decades and informed me that he has been, with permission, borrowing and utilizing some designs from other nations in combination with our nation. He feels that what I am doing would work very well representing him as a Mi'kmaq person, and it would allow him to rightly claim that his regalia design originates from his home territory. I am truly excited about this connection, to think that these ancient designs, combined

with designs that portray contemporary Indigenous realities will be embodied and animated through dances that will take place directly on the land where they first originated.

The research I have undertaken will allow me to apply this newly acquired knowledge into future research, writing and artistic creation. I plan on spending more time with the drawings of Shanawdithit so that I can add to the limited dialogue that exists on the interpretation of her works and her as an artist. As was mentioned earlier in the paper, I do plan on pursuing the recreation/reimagining of the staffs she depicted, but not for display in a gallery setting. The creation of these objects will be done in and with community participation and with the help of many hands returning them to the site they likely stood over 200 years ago. As the Beothuk pendants and personal objects were meant, in time, to return back to the land they too will be returned. Future explorations with community participation are also planned; I have upcoming engagements guided by Mi'kmaq communities to create large outdoor wall paintings sited for city centres to boldly claim Mi'kmaq presence within those urban spaces.

The ongoing intention of my work is to continue challenging historical and contemporary writing and interpretations of Mi'kmaq and Beothuk relations. With my future research I hope to explore and uncover more evidence of the shared relationships and territories of the people of Ktaqamkuk through the continued examination and witnessing of the material culture of both nations. I hope that one-day future generations will look back and see not only my work, but also the work of others who have explored Mi'kmaq and Beothuk histories and this will become a part of the continuing story of our land and cultures. I also hope that this writing will make someone else's journey a little smoother, and that my artistic process and methodology may find a way into future projects by other Mi'kmaq or Beothuk artists.

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