

The Red Shift: A Contemporary Aboriginal Curatorial Praxis

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By Felicia Deirdre Gay

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DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my mother Valendie Lathlin-Buck, stepfather Alan Bishoff, my grandparents Peter and Margaret Buck, and my children Zoë, Osawask and Elijah and my sister Lindsay Lathlin-Buck. You all represent every stage in my life and continue to be there for me every step of the way-love you all and thank-you. Also an extra special thank-you to my daughter Zoë, who was always near to lend mommy a hand.

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Preface

The museum and the gallery are two sites in Canada that are instantly imagined as spaces that house the history and culture of the *white man*. This statement of course is a generalization. However, in my youth, this is how I visualized these particular sites of culture housed here in the west. I know now that there is a rich Indigenous counter-history within the still *white* spaces of the gallery and museum. My personal interest is with this Aboriginal narrative as it is voiced by artists, writers and curators whose work is tied to the gallery or museum space. This thesis is a reflection on my own praxis as a curator that has since 1997 taken me to both museum and gallery sites.

The existence of Indigenous public institutions—such as an Aboriginal community museum or an Aboriginal contemporary art gallery—creates a red shift within a community’s cultural imaginary. In Canada, many Aboriginal artists, curators, scholars, educators and writers have engaged tirelessly for many decades in decolonizing cultural work that centers Aboriginal voice, history and collective memory. In my curatorial work as co-founder and director of *The Red Shift Gallery: an aboriginal contemporary art space* in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, I am indebted to, and inspired by, the experience, example, creativity and wisdom of these cultural workers who continue to forge the way: infiltrating, appropriating, and re-making existing institutions and discourses, as well as creating new Aboriginal-centred events, places, and images, they are shifting the boundaries of what is considered to be relevant both in art, in history, and in the present.

In this thesis, I will discuss my emerging praxis as a curator. In the Introduction: *Nachimowin-My Story*, I reflect on my early life in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan and the cultural lessons I have retained from living with my Cree grandparents, Peter and Margaret Buck, and, the colonial lessons I have learnt in the wider community of Cumberland House. I also talk about the founding of the “Misti Saghikan Historical Committee” in Cumberland House, which is still to this day a fledgling project. In Chapter 1: *Methodology in Motion*, I examine how my thinking about curatorial work has been influenced by a number of Aboriginal educators and cultural theorists, including Marie Battiste, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Graham Hingangaroa Smith, and the

cultural workers who participated in the *Making a Noise* conference and publication, among others. In Chapter 2: *The Red Shift*, I talk about co-founding *The Red Shift Gallery* with Joi Arcand and I discuss selected exhibits that I have curated and programmed as director of this gallery and as an independent curator. In chapter 3: *Othered Women*, I discuss an exhibition I curated—*Othered Women* (2008)—that examine the discursive and material violence of imperialism and its impacts on the lives of Aboriginal women, past and present. In 2008, I was awarded a Canada Council for the Arts Aboriginal Curatorial Residency at aka gallery, Saskatoon. As part of this residency, I developed a three-gallery exhibition, *Othered Women*, which foregrounds the agency and voice of six contemporary Aboriginal women artists. In selected works, these artists testify to the role of Aboriginal women in the fur trade and the formation of Canada as a country, and, to the multiple ways in which Aboriginal women have been fixed in mainstream Canadian histories under the sign of the Other. This exhibit reveals how these six artists are appropriating, dismantling and transforming the cultural controls of colonial discourse, and, how they are giving “voice” to their own situated Indigenous-centred knowledge(s) across a range of visual media, including textiles, photo-based work, and installation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Nachimowin-My Story

I grew up, travelling between two worlds. Part of my life was spent in the Aboriginal community of Cumberland House and the other half in the city of Saskatoon's west end. My parents are also from two very different worlds. My father, who is Scottish, was born in colonial India in Assam. He came to Canada in his early twenties from Scotland to work for the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and met my mother in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He told me he quit after five months because the pay was rubbish. My mother is Swampy Cree from northern Saskatchewan, and was born in Cumberland House. My parents were married for three years, living in Edmonton, where I was born in 1977. After they divorced, my father moved back to Scotland, where he soon started a new family. I have two half brothers George and John. My mother moved on as well and had another daughter, my sister Lindsay, who is thirteen years my junior. I first went to stay with my grandparents at the age of three, soon after my parents separated. A child raised by extended family is a common occurrence in First Nations' families. My grandparents were very loving and I looked to them as my parents. They spoke little English and did not care to learn. I remember my kokum (grandma) sewing, cooking or gossiping with other old ladies or relatives. The house was rarely empty and visitors were frequent. My mosum (grandpa) was a trapper, fisherman and a self-taught carpenter. He was often found outside, working or shooting the breeze with his friends. Nokum (my grandma) was very protective of me, and it was mosum's sense of humour that kept me sane. I did not realize at that young age, that kokum had lost six children out of twelve. As a mother of two, I cannot imagine the heartache that she and my mosum had to endure. We lived in a house that would better be described as a glorified shack, and I say that with great endearment, as I loved that old house. We had a wood stove for heat and cooking and an electric stove that came later for cooking. I have many fond memories of the crackling wood on cold winter days and melting Old Dutch potato chip bags, shrinking them to mini size. We had blankets sewn into drapes to serve as doors for the two bedrooms and the bathroom. We had no indoor plumbing and had to go to the outhouse to use the bathroom.

It was then while living with my grandparents that I became aware that I was not the same: that I was different somehow. My family's nickname for me is 'Scotty' or 'Scotchiman.' My kokum

would laugh and tease every time I spoke Cree to her. My grandfather would become irritated, when I could not understand him when he was speaking to me in Cree. I had to learn to speak only so much Cree, and, at the same time, learn to understand fluent Cree. Although my mother is a fluent Cree speaker, she spoke only a fragmented version of our language, so I never became adept at speaking my language. Because I never saw my father after he left to Scotland or his family, I never considered myself part white: I always thought of myself as Indian but I envied Indian girls with long straight hair and brown skin. I had to learn to live with very un-Indian curly hair and a more medium tone skin. Kokum also had curly hair and hid it pinned up under her beret. I never saw her hair unless she was getting ready to go to bed. My kokum cooked dinner and supper for me every day. She would go to the company (Hudson Bay Company) and purchase me fish and chips, macaroni, and fries. She would make my mosum traditional food, like smoked muskrat, moose and fried fish with bannock. She would not offer me grandpa's food; I had to eat the 'other food.' I realize too, she was likely trying to give me a treat, that the food she and mosum ate was not all that special. However, mosum did not adhere to the same unspoken rules and often fed me what he was eating. There is a well-known story in our family of when mosum fed me beaver tail, and, someone asked me what I was eating and I said: 'chicken.'

When I was four years old, I went back to Saskatoon to live with mom. She had tried to retrieve me earlier but my grandfather was attached to me and made it clear that he did not want me to leave just yet. By then my mom had found an apartment on the west side of Saskatoon and begun school at the University of Saskatchewan to get her degree in social work through the University of Regina. I remember telling my mom over and over that I wanted to go home, back to mosum. She bought me a goldfish and I named him Peter after my grandfather. My cousin Barbara lived with us and babysat me when I was not at preschool across the street. I was homesick and often cried for my grandparents; finally my mom said that I had to choose to either stay with her or live with kokum and mosum. Peter fish died and Barb flushed him down the toilet. I chose to stay and never brought it up again. But, I did go back to stay with my grandparents at various times in my life, and, spent every single summer holiday with them beginning at age five.

My mother (Fig. 1) worked hard to rebuild her life after her divorce, but it was often a huge financial and emotional strain on her. My grandparents, aunts and uncles were a rock that I could cling to in times of trouble. This strong family network and support I later learned, is very much a part of our cultural make-up as Cree people. Everyone tries to be a support to one another. There are, of course, frequent family divisions and disagreements, but, when it comes to our children, we try to pull together.



Figure 1. My mother Valendie Lathlin-Buck and me, 1980s? Photograph.

In the early nineties, we went back to Cumberland House to take care of my grandfather who was dying. He was a severe diabetic and had heart problems. Earlier that year he had gangrene in his leg and it had to be amputated. I don't think he wanted to recover after that. He loved to live off the land, to tell stories. Peter was a spiritual man who loved God and chose to have that connection with Jesus. I remember listening to him every night amianin (praying), it sounded like singing. I would listen for a long time. I know it brought him comfort for everything he had lost—his children, his livelihood as a trapper and finally his strength, his body. I know he too found strength in the family network that constantly surrounded him. My grandmother who was

the matriarch in our family unit only lived three more years and then went to join her husband. For Margaret, she could not go on without Peter, the teasing, the laughs; serving each other in love—it was a lonely time for her after he passed away. I still have one of her blue berets sitting in my dresser to have something of my other mommy near me.

I began grade seven in Cumberland House at Charlebois Community School and stayed until I graduated high school. I was very resistant at first, because I was treated as urban and my childhood friends did not readily take me in. I did, however, have numerous cousins that made the transition a little easier. Living in Cumberland House was like living in a vacuum. My social life was all encompassing and I cared very little for school. I did have a few teachers that encouraged my interests in reading and writing. My English teacher, Ms. Mack, was a woman to be reckoned with, but, she was also very human and I could relate to her kindness.

The history of Cumberland House engrained in me by my schooling and by annual community events was a colonial history. It was a story that revolved around all of the colonial institutions, including Charlebois School, established in 1890 by Bishop Ovide Charlebois¹, (see Fig. 2); the Hudson Bay Company, later merged with the North West Company in 1821 (Judd 307); and the various churches, primarily the Anglican and Catholic churches. This history is what I accepted as part of *my* local history. What was excluded from *my* history was the history of First Nations' peoples pre- and post-contact. Cumberland House was a traditional trade route that was utilised for thousands of years before the first European explorers arrived. In school, I also learnt very little about the Métis history of Cumberland House; for example, the role they played in the Riel Rebellion or how members of the Manitoba Metis community had settled in the Cumberland district following the Red River insurrection of 1870. Mainly, I was taught the dominant Eurocentric fur trade narrative of Canada and very little about the history of the Aboriginal peoples of Cumberland House, and much less about the history of the First Nations of Saskatchewan. To be fair, our school systems were not yet equipped (and still are not equipped) to offer our students a decolonised version of Canadian history. I believe the absence within the mainstream history discourse is partly the responsibility of First Nations people to address as educators, as activists within their communities. As my formative years were spent with my



Figure 2. Bishop Ovide Charlebois with first school house he built in Cumberland House, Sk. N.d. findagrave.com. Web. 29 May 2011

grandparents, I absorbed and retained their cultural knowledge—even though I did not realize it was being relayed to me at the time. When I stayed with them, I was continually nurtured within their worldview, language, and sense of being-in-touch—with-the-spiritual. The colonial discourse taught by the schools and the church (via our families) was still outside our distinct First Nations or Métis worldviews. In school, we were told how to do things: how to do math, write and read—everything was explained to us. But in Cree culture, it is through example that we learn. For example, although my grandmother never taught me to make bannock I learned from watching her make it. Today, I have retained the cultural teachings that my family showed me through their example.

It was not until I was in my early twenties that I began to realize what colonization meant to me personally. I knew full well what the power relations were like in my country, and in my province: I was concerned but did not feel personally connected to the crisis on my doorstep. I remember as a child attending a protest outside the Canada Building in Saskatoon, concerning

the Treaty rights of First Nations people and the Bill C31, with my mother's older sister Maria. I was enthralled by the energy and the unity of our people. I grew up listening to my mother talk about the issues that Aboriginal people had to deal with and I too was concerned. Even so, as a teen I was still not concerned enough with the power relations that oppressed my people at all economic levels. But the seeds of change had been planted long ago and change is incremental. I became very aware of racism in my community when it was responsible for the death of someone I loved dearly. Just like a seed that must die before it can grow, it took the death of my dear friend before I truly saw the effects of colonial injustice. There is rampant institutional racism within the northern RCMP detachments in the form of racial profiling and stereotyping of our people in a specific immovable category. Colonialism to me as an Aboriginal person is like having a cut but not knowing you have the cut or feeling the wound until you look at it. At seventeen I acknowledged the wound but did not know how to heal it, so it festered for many years until healing finally came in the form of my renewed walk as a Christian. Instead of hate and retribution, my life became a love walk, which I owe solely to my belief in Jesus and not a belief in any specific religion or doctrine. The death of my friend was the beginning of my own personal journey towards what Maori scholar and educator, Graham Hingangaroa Smith calls *conscientisation* (34). In his cultural theory, Smith aligns himself closely with the work of Paulo Friere, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon and Michael Apple. It is important to note that Smith aligns himself with theorists who he considers to be organic intellectuals who have immersed themselves in the organic reality of their communities (35). In immersing themselves in the organic reality of their communities, these particular theorists do not face the consequence of “‘hollow’ theorizing and merely prescriptive writing” (35): rather, they mobilize themselves with the people in order to bring about transformative change. I may have realized consciously that I lived in a community dictated by colonial institutions, but, I was not yet at the point where I was ready to resist it. In Graham Smith's doctoral thesis entitled, *The Development of the Kaupapa Maori: Theory and Praxis* (1997), he talks about the significance of the inter-related components of conscientisation, resistance and transformative action to Maori cultural praxis. During my own self-inventory, I identified these points in different stages of my life. I did not reach conscientisation through my colonial education in high school. But, I absorbed a Cree worldview in living with my grandparents. I knew that my mother was resistant to the dominant culture and politically aligned herself with a grass-root politics that set out to bring forth change. This is

perhaps how I was able to see beyond my community and beyond my own personal crisis. I now see my community as a hyper-colonial space in which all information—current or historical—is filtered through a colonial lens. Yet more importantly, despite this colonial lens there coexists an Indigenous cultural lens through which the Aboriginal people of Canada see the world. It is as Leroy Little Bear so aptly names it, a situation of *“Jagged Worldviews Colliding”* (Battiste 77-86).

In 1995, at the age of nineteen, I decided to try my post-secondary education at the University of Saskatchewan. It was something my mother always aspired for me and I did in part for her. I look back, today, and see how very few coping skills I had. During the next three years there were thirteen deaths in my life, friends and family. My schooling suffered tremendously. In, 2002, I married my then husband and we moved back to Cumberland House. Months later, pregnant with my first child, I left Cumberland House for Saskatoon to take some classes at the University and declared Art History as my major. My marriage soon ended and I gave birth to a beautiful daughter that I named Zoë, meaning life. I slowly picked up the pieces and started over. I pressed on with my schooling and graduated with honours in 2004. It was during my university studies that I began to further my “conscientisation” personally and socially. As a mother I knew that change was inevitable. After another failed relationship because of my partner’s alcohol abuse and its effects, I was the mother of two beautiful boys each four years apart: Osawask named after his grandfather Peter means Yellow Bear in Cree, and, my newest addition, Elijah meaning the Lord is my God. Issues of alcoholism, abuses of all forms and self-sabotage were not problems that affected only my family, they were symptoms of a much larger overlying problem: the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Canada. The crisis was not mine, but, ours. Knowing what these colonial legacies would mean to my children, the sites of education and cultural action with respect to my responsibilities as a parent became key.

1.2 Cumberland House - Photo History

Driving into the Northern Village of Cumberland House, you are first greeted by the community cemetery. I travelled to Cumberland House in June 2007 to talk with my late auntie Lucy Fosseneuve, who at that time was in her sixties. I was under the impression that the cemetery (Fig. 3) was still divided between the Anglicans (Fig. 4) and the Catholics (Fig. 5). Lucy said it was divided up until the 1980's: and that there was an actual wire that separated the two sides, a boundary that divided and conquered, separating Roman Catholic families from Anglican families. In the mid-19th century, there was intense rivalry between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Saskatchewan (Waiser 26). And, as Lucy notes, that boundary is still there within our psyches. Dissension within a community weakens its solidarity. Religion and politics are useful tools for keeping the Aboriginal peoples weak. But, what has strengthened us is our knowledge of connection. Connection to our land is connection to our river. The interconnections of education, survival, and faith are so deeply embedded that you cannot separate them culturally. All the neyihewak (Cree people) that make up life in our community are the physical legacy of our survival. The little that is written about our history is almost always connected to the white man. There is a deep embedded co-history (Fig. 6) with the Europeans that tread our territories. But, in mainstream Canadian history there has always been a disconnection with our First Peoples' history. History in the western sense, is disseminated through the written word, and only if it is first legitimized with the co-existence of the European.

I have been taught to see the difference between spirituality and religion. My mosum taught my mother and me this key difference. Being a spiritual person, respecting the mysteries in the world, is not about politics, money or race: it is about being in tune with faith. The only thing that I remember about the cemetery in the eighties was picking strawberries, which were strictly prohibited by my kokum, and seeing the many white and black crosses that my mosum had made. (Fig. 7). There are other gravesites around the community but they are now abandoned and overgrown. The religious factions in the community are very much tied to the history of who came to our territory to civilise us, just as the fur trade was set up to utilise our labour force. The Anglicans were the first to arrive, sending Swampy Cree minister, Henry Budd, to set up a mission in Cumberland House in 1840 (Waiser 26). A Roman Catholic mission was established



Figure 3. Margaret J.Buck, Cumberland House Cemetery, May 2011. Photograph.



Figure 4. Anglican Church, Cumberland House, Sk. 1905-1919? Photograph. Jervois Arthur Newnham fonds. The Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. Web. 29 May 2011



Figure 5. Roman Catholic Church, Cumberland House, Sk. 1890s? Photograph. The Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. Web. 29 May 2011



Figure 6. Franklin Arbuckle, *Samuel Hearne builds Cumberland House 1774-75*, N.d. Painting. HBC Corporate Collection. *Exploration: The Fur Trade and Hudson's Bay Company*. Web. 29 May 2011



Figure 7. Painting of mosum (grandfather) Peter Buck by artist Wally Dion and me, N.d. Photograph.

for the Manitoba Metis who settled in the Cumberland district following the Red River insurrection of 1870. In Cumberland House, we have a provincial park, in it, are the boilers from the Northcote steamboat. Steamboats were used for a short time to transports goods in the 1800s. Eventually they were discontinued because of the unstable fluctuations of the river. The Northcote, however, was utilised in the 1885 Rebellion as a munitions transport and was put out of commission by Métis Gabriel Dumont and his men. The Northcote was later beached in Cumberland House; all that is left are the boilers (Fig. 8). These are the histories that I am very familiar with.

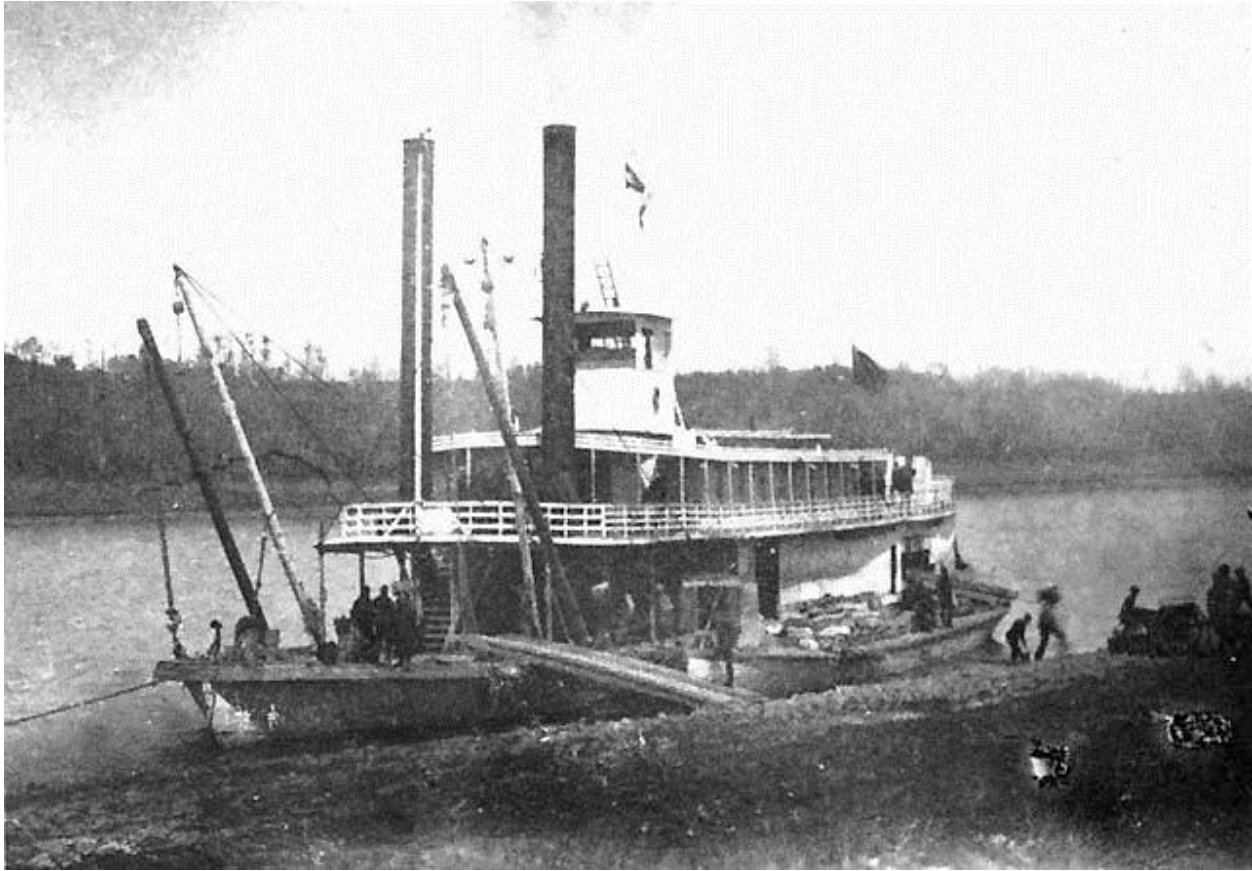


Figure 8. *Northcote Steamboat*. 1885. Photograph. Public Archives of Canada. The Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. Web. 29 May 2011

It is a complex entwined colonial and Aboriginal history that I am only just beginning to untangle for myself in order to tell it to my children. I do not accept what western history has written at face value. Instead I am on a mission of sorts to find out what my history is, in order to relay a truth, however fragmented. This has been the impetus of the Misti Sagahican Historical Committee, which I am committed to pursuing once my studies are complete.

Cumberland House is a product of its environment (Fig. 9). The river is a powerful entity that lies in the consciousness of every man, woman and child in that community. The Saskatchewan River surrounds us, we are the island², and it is the River that sustains us (Fig. 10). It is our road to other territories; it is how we gauge our environment, our seasons, and our wildlife. Our community is ravaged by acts of vandalism by children and young people who do not yet know their inheritance. Even though there is an obvious disconnect with their inheritance, our children



Figure 9. Andrea Fosseneuve, *View from the Bridge, on the North Saskatchewan River*, Cumberland House. N.d. Photograph.



Figure 10. Edward Kowal , Jaimie Wilson, *An avulsion event in the 1870's created the New Channel on the Saskatchewan River*. Saskatchewan Environment. N.d. Photograph.

still intuitively respect the river. The river will take you away. She does not ask for respect, she requires it. Before the road or trail ever existed, there was the river. In terms of geography, the pine island of Cumberland House was central to many other important waterways. Traveling north on the Saskatchewan River through the Sturgeon Weir, connects one to the Churchill River System, and if you continue on to the Grass River that connected to the important trade site of York Factory. If one paddled east, through Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson River, you can make your way to the Hudson Bay. Theoretically, you could travel west all the way to the Rocky Mountains. The river is what attracted the Europeans to our territories but it was the island delta that enticed them to stay (Fig. 10). But, it is we, the First Nations, who allowed the Europeans to stay. There was little worry about the European traders posing any physical threat. The island was a migratory site and meeting place for Aboriginal people long before first contact with foreign traders and explorers. First Nations people already named many aggregating sites that the early traders came upon when entering the region because they were already used regularly as hunting and trade sites (Meyer et al, 47).

In mainstream western histories of the fur-trade in Canada, it is always noted that Samuel Hearne and Mathew Cocking established Cumberland House as the first HBC inland post in 1774 (Colpitts, 127). In this eurocentric story of the fur trade, Cumberland House figures primarily as the first HBC post in the interior of western Canada, and, as Saskatchewan's oldest, continuously occupied, settlement (Fig. 11). The Indigenous history of the site is most often erased, barely mentioned, or camouflaged. Cumberland House was built on a far older Indigenous trade route that was utilized by First Nations people as a rendezvous point for their fur trade. Cumberland House was also a gathering site for ceremonial and social gatherings. It was a meeting and trading site used by the First Nations for thousands of years.

1.3 The Politics of Fur

In her book, *Cultural Politics of Fur* (1997), Julia Emberley examines the effect of different animal rights movements on the livelihood of Aboriginal hunters and trappers. Touching on many facets of the politics of fur, Emberley examines issues of class, gender and economy in her

investigation of the fur industry. She focuses, in particular, on the 1980s when animal rights activism (and groups such as Lynx) was at its peak, successfully stifling the fur industry in

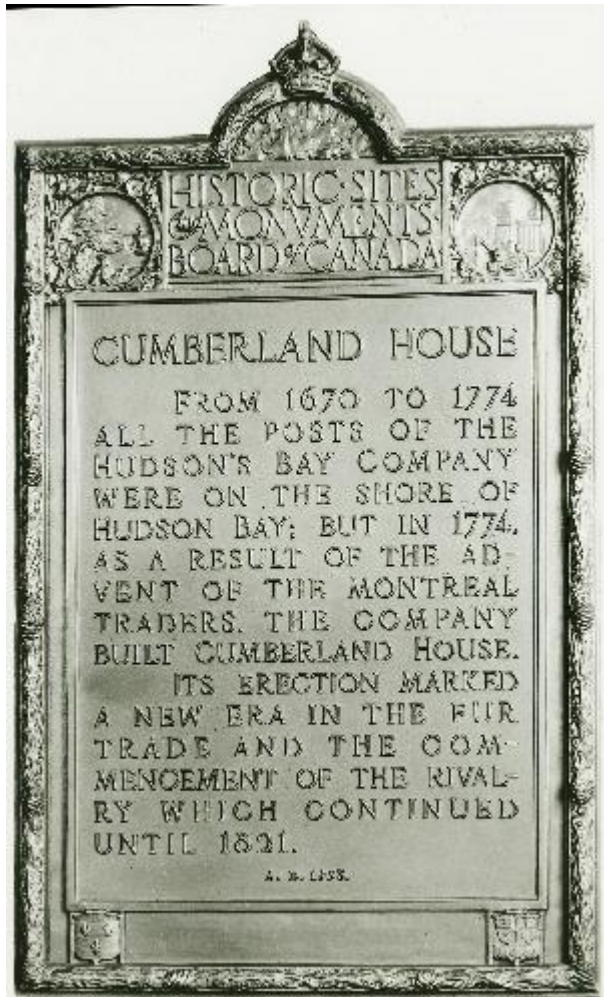


Figure 11. Commemoration Plaque, Cumberland House, Sk. 1938. Photograph. Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. Web. 29 May 2011

Canada.³ Within the North American context, she notes that the actions, motivations and discourses of contemporary animal rights groups are highly imperialistic. While reading the *Cultural Politics of Fur*, memories of my own childhood and experiences with the fur trade came

flooding back to me. I was a child in the 1980s, living half of the year with my grandparents who sustained themselves through hunting, fishing and trapping. Reading Emberley's book, I was reminded what it was like to be a child sustained by the fur industry in Canada.

My earliest memories are of laying in my blanket swing, which was nailed to each end of the wall, hung with huge rusty brown nails. I smell the muskrat and beaver pelts drying. The animals hang inside out and have an oily sheen to them as I look up at them hanging on the perimeters of the ceiling on every side of the house. I walk towards the only door in the house and behind it are a couple of martens, some muskrat, a weasel and a beaver. I like to inspect the pads of their feet. My kokum Margaret and my auntie Rachel have green garbage bags across their laps and they are scraping muskrat pelts turned inside out. Auntie Rachel says that if you poke a hole in the pelt, you ruin them. They are gossiping about people in the community and of course about family. I walk out and kokum yells at me to stay out of the ditch water. I say 'yuh' in an exasperated voice and walk over to my grandpa at the far end of the yard. Grandpa's philosophy is to let me do anything, whereas kokum does not let me do anything. I find a happy medium between the two extremes. Mosum is making a fire in the smokehouse that he made. He is probably going to smoke some rats and make a smudge because of all the mosquitoes. He then walks over to his shed with his green rucksack and fills it with dried pelts. I don't like the beady holes that were once their eyes. He tells me to go inside to stay with kokum. I immediately throw myself to the ground and throw a royal fit. I feel his calloused brown hand grab mine and we start walking to the company. Mosum farts like old men do and he says 'who did dat? A moose?' and I laugh and say 'ine mosum, your potim (bum) did that!' We get to the Hudson Bay Company and there are a bunch of old men sitting outside on wooden benches. One of the men says, 'ai minokesakaw' (what a nice day), and grandpa nods in agreement. It is a nice day, sunny and hot. We sit down on the worn bench and there are no women. The men outside the Bay are a feature that you will see in most northern communities. I am a girl but that's okay because I am just a baby to them. They are uninhibited with their gossiping and I am no threat. We notice a woman named Elsie walk up to the Bay and she makes some small talk. Elsie goes inside and all the old men resume their own talk. I notice how they had spoken differently to her. We walk through the double doors and mosum walks straight to the back of the store where the Bay manager works. He is small and white and has a funny voice. I hang on to my grandpa's leg and

wait. The man gives my grandpa a white slip of paper and grandpa puts it in his black wallet. The wallet is attached to a chain that has his name in silver writing on it, Peter Buck. It was a gift from my mother, his youngest daughter. We go to the grocery side of the store and he buys some canned fruit, diabetes candy and pilot biscuits. As we go to leave he hands me fifty cents and a cherry blossom chocolate in a yellow box. I don't have the heart to tell him I don't like them and I pop it in my mouth resisting the urge to gag. When he isn't watching I spit it out.

This narrative reads like a story but it is an example of a day in my life as a child. I was very happy living with my grandparents and although I missed my mother very much, I was extremely well adjusted with my kokum and mosum. I was not aware that we lived below the poverty line. We had no drinking water, sewage or well-insulated homes. Like many northern communities, Cumberland House had sub-standard medical, educational facilities and living conditions. This standard is beginning to change but there is still next to nothing in terms of employment. Although the situation seems dire, I did not personally feel emotionally the effects of poverty. I was never hungry, cold or sick because of the conditions we lived in. I was not aware of a traditional way of life ebbing away. The early 1980s was a difficult time for families who made their living as trappers. Looking back as an adult, I now know that the price of furs had plummeted and that the Squaw Rapids (renamed the EB Campbell Dam) had drastically changed our fragile ecosystem in the delta, causing hunting and trapping to phase out to a large degree. People outside of our community tend to look and see all the people on social assistance and the lack of employment in Cumberland House. People outside of our community tend to see steel traps and the bloody carcasses of animals. I see the effects of a sustainable way of life being lost to whole generations of people. Contemporary animal rights groups such as Lynx (a media and celebrity-based organization) readily locate the suffering of animals but refuse to locate the suffering of their fellow human beings. The issue with Lynx and other anti-fur lobbyist groups involves issues of class and race. The fact that the anti-fur campaigns (from the 1980s on) originate from a group that primarily consists of white middle and upper class people speaks volumes about how they have chosen to undermine a non-white underclass, ignoring or perhaps merely ignorant of the impact of their campaigns against traditional trapping and hunting. The impact of the anti-fur lobbyist groups led to the further impoverishment of Aboriginal communities. As a child in the early eighties, when the brunt of the anti-fur campaigns hit the fur

trade in northern Canada, I have to say that I never felt the effects of the lobbyist campaigns; because my grandfather was still able to provide with his small pension and what he was able to earn from the furs he brought in. I never heard him complain, I only saw him work. When he was tired, he sat on his bench, his head bent chewing snuff. I never knew what he was thinking. So I never knew if he was sad or worried: I imagine now he must have been at times.

In the *Cultural Politics of Fur*, Hugh Brody is quoted as saying that the anti-fur organizations are a “new example of southern, imperialistic intrusion (3).” I agree with this statement. It is now quite clear that the anti-fur lobbyists successfully affected the First Nations traditional fur economy, in turn, affecting the sustainability of whole communities. The attitudes of contemporary anti-fur groups such as Lynx are very similar to the attitudes of those who participated in the historical fur trade; we are seeing the continuum of an imperialistic worldview. Participants in the early fur trade in Canada held the view that the Indigenous people were primitive by European standards. The HBC believed that their posts, and the trading goods they supplied, brought a type of economic and cultural civilisation to the Indians. In the struggle for commercial supremacy between the HBC and the Northwest Company, a rivalry that ended with their amalgamation in 1821, the HBC felt that it had gained a distinct advantage with the establishment of its post at Cumberland House in 1774. This post—which gave the HBC direct access to the inland trapping areas—was a symbol of Britain’s penetration into the western interior and a potent symbol of their claim to that territory. It was the HBC’s imperial mission to create a trade market that would benefit Europe. And it is this same attitude of imperialism that pervades the mentality of the anti-fur lobbyist. Their mission is to teach Aboriginal people of northern Canada a more humanitarian or civilised way to treat animals. Notably, there is no mention in these anti-fur campaigns of how Indigenous people are to sustain themselves economically or traditionally after the market for fur disappears. In the 1980s animal’s rights activism, the anti-fur campaigners recycled the binary between primitive and civilised peoples and it proved just as effective as it was during the height of British and French imperialistic penetration into the western woods of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Western historians often maintain that the European fur trade replaced the hunting and gathering societies that had existed for thousands of years. The HBC’s fur trade economy, we learn, was a

British imperialistic endeavour that replaced traditional values of exchange that once dominated in Swampy Cree societies (Emberly 3). The dominant historical narrative asserts that the fur trade was centred in the colonial era on the needs of the British Empire. Throughout *The Cultural Politics of Fur*, Emberly notes that there is an imbalance of power between First Nations and Europeans, whether she is talking about the history of the fur trade or the recent contemporary history of the anti-fur lobbyists. While I recognize that there is an imbalance of representation and voice in the narrative of the contemporary fur trade, I think it is important to always keep in mind that the histories of the First Nations and Métis people have primarily been written by white males (French, English or Scottish) involved in the fur trade, exploration, and or missionary work. From an Aboriginal standpoint, I recognize that perceptions of the fur trade are skewed and one-sided. Indigenous oral histories of the fur trade are not readily recognized and very little has been recorded from the Aboriginal point of view. Emberly's text is refreshing as it is history written by a woman, whereas most other histories of the fur trade are written primarily by male academics. On the one hand, I feel she has written a wonderful counter-discourse about the role anti-fur lobbyist groups like Lynx have played. However, because of her location as a white academic, her account of the cultural politics of fur is still missing valuable insight as to how First Nations people, past and present, view their own position within the fur trade industry and their relationship with contemporary anti-fur campaigns. Although Emberley's literature review does contain accounts of First Nation perspectives, opinions of power and voice differ. It is imperative that the counter-history of Aboriginal' trappers and traders be voiced within the dominant history of the fur trade in Canada. If the First Nations' and Metis perspectives within the fur trade are not presented, readers are offered a misrepresentation. In Eurocentric narratives of the fur trade the white trader plays the dominant role in the power relations between European and Aboriginal peoples. In recent studies of the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative (Findlay and Pattison 2), however, an Indigenous-centered counter-history is being narrated. Considerable work is being done by the association to represent the Indigenous contemporary fur-trade and its efforts of revitalisation. Cumberland House however,

As mentioned, Cumberland House was the first inland post of the HBC in western Canada. But, what made the area significant to the Swampy Cree is the unique eco-system of muskeg and the delta that helped to sustain and allow them to thrive in the harsh northern environment. The delta

of the North Saskatchewan River is among the largest worldwide and the largest in North America. The muskegs of the area contain rare species of plants found only in those regions. The delta is known to contain powerful medicines and was thus carefully guarded by the Swampy Cree people Indigenous to that area. My point being, if the area was considered important to Aboriginal people, why would the Cree allow European trade to be established in that particular area in the first place? There were already instances of warfare between differing Aboriginal groups over the area. The Southern Cree and Dene were not allowed to tread upon their territory because of the medicines guarded within that region⁴. Nipiwini is a northern town site that borders on the territory of the Swampy Cree. *Nipiwini* is the Cree word for standing ground and it is common knowledge within the community of Cumberland House that this was an area where the Swampy Cree would ward off the Southern Cree, frequently through violent means. So why was it that the HBC were successful in setting up an inland post in this area? Warfare was a regular occurrence with the Dene people even during the last phases of the fur trade, so why is it that white traders were allowed to penetrate this region? The short answer is that the Cree did not believe the Europeans to be any type of threat to them physically or culturally in terms of their medicines. The Cree also most likely believed that the Hudson Bay post would benefit them in some way. Besides the HBC, there were also French traders and missionaries that were in the area. So the next question is: 'How did the Swampy Cree view the trading post and traders?' The area, in which Samuel Hearne and Mathew Cocking decided to set up, was an area that would most likely be strategically and economically beneficial to the traders, but, that is not to say that they were welcome into that territory.

Cumberland House was not the first area the HBC and others had attempted to set up inland trade posts. The Pas or Pasquia regions were sites that the HBC and other groups tried to set up posts and failed, due to ill relationships with the First Nations of those particular regions. It was one thing to set up a post in an area where trade had been established by the Indigenous people, and, was strategically beneficial to the white traders: it was quite another to set up a post in an area that left you exposed to attack. All the posts gambled with their lives by inserting themselves into highly vulnerable but profitable First Nation trade sites. If a trade post was successful, it was only because the First Nation people allowed it to be successful. This is a point that should not be taken lightly. It reveals the attitude that the First Nations had towards the

European traders and also how they felt about the Europeans in relation to themselves. The Europeans were not seen as the dominant force or as a threat. They were looked at in terms of potential trading partners but not in terms of any type of powerful threat.

There is little written about the subject of the fur trade and Indian relations (past and present) from the Aboriginal perspective. In the *Cultural Politics of Fur*, Emberley weaves a history between culture, politics, gender and class. But, she touches only lightly upon the history of the HBC and the fur trade. Her focus is on the contemporary aspect of the fur trade. The colonial narrative of the fur trade still needs to be interrogated, and, the fur trade narrative of the First Nation people has to be voiced. There are oral historians with knowledge of historical trade relations with the HBC and the Northwest Company. However, in most fur trade narratives, the voice I hear is one that has been recycled from the early fur trade literature that was written by European male traders, explorers, and missionaries.

I watched with interest the surge in anti-fur and sealing campaigns, which happened early on in the Harper government here in Canada. Like the 1980s group Lynx, the groups are media and celebrity driven. Although they have not gained the popularity or support that animal rights activists had in the 1980s, they do have clout because of their access to money, the media, and their celebrity affiliations. I would not term these groups to be grassroots, although I am sure this is how they would like to be perceived. In regards to the seal hunt there has been a blatant dissemination of misinformation to the public and to the celebrities themselves. As I watch the drama of the seal hunt unfold I am reminded of the impact that these same types of campaigners had on my own life and on my grandfather. The attitude of the modern day anti-fur lobbyist seems to be the same, to civilise the primitive act and therefore the primitive person. The same colonial attitudes and binaries in the fur trade archive are now being recycled in the media of television and Internet. Once again the Aboriginal hunters that participate in the hunt are largely silenced.

In Cumberland House, Aboriginal hunters and trappers still have a relationship with the trade post. This relationship still exists even though there has been an enormous decline in fur sales. Trapping, fishing and hunting still occur regularly and it is not likely to completely disappear. I

speaking from my own experience from living in the Northern Village of Cumberland House, and cannot speak for other Aboriginal communities. I see a decline in young people learning hunting and trapping skills and I do worry. But, when traditional practices like the hunt are performed and wild meat is set before me I feel a little at peace as well as a proud sense of knowing that although it is but a fragment of a tradition: there it is in front of me.

1.4 The “Misti Saghikan Historical Committee”

There has been talk for years about implementing a community museum in Cumberland House but nothing has ever come of it. A log house building was to be designated as the museum site and a number of the community's artefacts are housed there still, but the museum never actually got off the ground. It has yet to open its doors to the public. It is a goal that I still plan to work towards, as I am able. It is a matter of getting the community excited and onside about the project.

In April 2007, I met with my mother, aunt and best friend to form an informal committee for the purpose of 1) preserving the historical in-situ sites that are deteriorating, and 2) to implement a community museum. We left the meeting with the intent of recruiting more to join our cause and devise strategies as to how we might attain our intended goals. We felt it was time that we try to develop and research the Aboriginal narrative that has always existed in Cumberland House. Through an initial research via the Internet, I began to notice the lack of a complex or critical historical narrative about Cumberland House. Instead, I found the same recycled colonial narrative that I grew up hearing in school. There was little said about the First Nations people's relationship with the site pre-contact and very little said about them post-contact. Mainly the narrative focused around Metis-White trade relations and all the colonial firsts that it entailed. At this stage this project has been a visioning, a step towards critically engaging the history of one of Saskatchewan's most important sites.

2. Methodology in Motion

The development of theories by indigenous scholars which attempt to explain our existence in contemporary society (as opposed to the 'traditional' society constructed under modernism) has only just begun. Not all these theories claim to be derived from some 'pure' sense of what it means to be indigenous, nor do they claim to be theories which have been developed in a vacuum separated from any association with civil and human rights movements, other nationalist struggles or other theoretical approaches. What is claimed, however, is that the new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person. (L. Smith 38)

This thesis is based on my curatorial praxis, in which I see the traditional disciplines of visual art, art history and curatorial work as significant sites of struggle. I speak from a Swampy Cree indigenized politic which informs every facet of my work as a curator. As I outlined in my introduction, my Swampy Cree cultural inheritance and politic carries key understandings about the significance of language, land, spirituality, family and community relationships. It is a cultural politic that values collective Aboriginal memory as handed down to new generations in a range of media; shared understandings of a history in which every Aboriginal person has a place; the importance of spirituality in everyday life; and the need to celebrate survival and renewal in the face of the violent histories of colonialism and its legacies in the present. It is through my particular worldview/lens as a Cree person that I formulate and carry out my praxis. Nachimowin (my story) is a faceted telling of my past and how I have come to view my ever-evolving present in terms of my praxis.

In 2006, I co-founded the Red Shift Gallery with Joi Arcand. As Director of the Red Shift Gallery, I have developed the gallery's exhibition programme for the next four years. I also co-founded the Misti-Sakighanik Historical Committee in Cumberland House, Saskatchewan with local women Doris McAuley, Valendie Lathlin-Buck and Tanya Flett in 2007. The Red Shift Gallery, (which I discuss at length in chapter 2) was set up to make an Indigenous intervention

into the predominantly white artist-run-centre culture of Saskatoon. Similarly, the Misti-Sakighanik Historical Committee was set up to articulate an Indigenous perspective on the local and regional fur trade narrative; a story in which the Indigenous voice has been largely silenced by its colonial counterparts. The committee's mandate includes working towards the preservation of historical post-contact sites in and around the community of Cumberland House.

My work in founding and running the organisation is an example of an Indigenised-centred action research project. In doing this project, and in the discussion below, I drew on the model of action research used by other Indigenous-centred action researchers such as Graham Smith and Linda Smith.

As many commentators have noted action research is defined in many different ways but essentially the main themes are to engage a social issue critically through 1) research, 2) reflection, 3) action, and 4) collaboration in a cyclical or iterative manner (M.K.Smith). Action Research has been a useful way in which to frame my work as a curator as well as to reflect on how and if that work proves successful in bringing forth change. The Red Shift Gallery an artist-run centre was a site in which Indigenous-centred research of post-colonial strategies could be employed; in which collaborations with other like-minded organisations were forged; and, a site in which we had the opportunity to reflect on projects and whether or not they were successful modes of social justice and change.

The concept of "artist-run" will not outlive its usefulness so long as it realizes the transgressive potential that it holds within an increasingly professionalized and conformist art world. Here lies the strength of artist-led initiatives, to propose meaningful and radical alternatives to the established art system. (Hoffman 122)

The utilization of an action research practice differentiates this project and the artist-run centre from other mainstream galleries which do not critically engage with social justice issues.

2.1 Research Questions

My time working with the Red Shift Gallery and the Mist-Sakighanik Historical Committee has given me the opportunity and experience to review and evaluate a range of decolonizing strategies in relation to my emergent practice as a curator. In developing the following research questions for this thesis and my curatorial praxis, I have drawn on my experience as a cultural worker in tandem with my Cree knowledge base:

1. How can the disciplines of visual art, art history and curatorial practice be utilized as sites in which Aboriginal peoples can respond to existing issues of crisis?⁵
2. How does my opposition to the notion of the *authentic Indian* allow me to move complexly in my work as a curator?
3. As a curator how do I speak with my people and not apart from them?⁶
4. How do I respond as a curator to difficult knowledge in the past and in the present?
5. Are counter-dialogues effective in sites such as art history and the art gallery?

In the process of writing this thesis and developing my curatorial praxis, I have drawn on the work of a number of writers, theorists and artists, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who have addressed the issues that are important to me as an Aboriginal woman and curator. The concepts of Indigenous identity, hybridity, Indigenous cultural action, and Indigenous counter-dialogue allow me as a viewer and curator to interrogate both the specific sites in which I work and the art works which may be presented in them. What has become critical to my work, as a curator is not only the creation of sites of interrogation but also the need to engage symbiotically in sites of healing and transformation. In this chapter, I offer up the critical strategies I have found most useful in the work of other theorists, curators, artists and cultural workers: these strategies offer ways to decolonize the sites in which I work, and, they contribute to the larger community-driven Red (Aboriginal)-Shift that is happening in the contemporary Canadian art world. These critical strategies have facilitated my own thinking, commitment and political conscientisation in regard to the particular issues I have engaged with in my curatorial praxis.

2.2 Indigenizing a Curatorial Praxis: Decolonizing Methodologies

The definition of what a contemporary curator is has evolved. Historically a curator was one who is a custodian of a museum or collection: essentially the keeper of things.⁷ The definition of curator has changed becoming more fluid and it is difficult to pin a singular definition to it. Melanie O'Brian, a curator and writer, describes the activity of curating in the following manner:

As editors of ideas, curators bring forward art and cultural practices to make the ideas available to audiences, not only through exhibitions, but also through publications, talks [...], websites, forums, and other events. The curator is arguably the filter through which the work becomes known. Obviously, there are other filters, and the work is translated through recontextualization, text, reproductions, ect. (2/7)

I primarily work with Aboriginal contemporary artists. Curating exhibitions involves not only creating and researching the thematic on which an exhibit is based, but also selecting artists and works that dialogue with this thematic, as well as multiple administrative duties that range from shipping art works to extensive grant writing to networking to accounting. As Artistic Director of an Aboriginal Artist-Run Centre, I also programme and produce many exhibitions, which differs somewhat from the curatorial task of curating and creating a specific thematic for the artists involved. For instance, artists and curators are invited to propose exhibitions to our gallery and I also often invite artists and allow them creative the licence to choose which works they would like to exhibit to the audience as well as what their works means to them thematically.

In the following section I examine how my thinking about curatorial work has been influenced by a number of Aboriginal educators and cultural theorists whose texts have provided real-world, Indigenous-centred examples of action research that have inspired my own practice. Included is a brief discussion of some of the works of Marie Battiste, Leroy Little Bear, James Sakej Henderson, Graham Hingangaroa Smith, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and some of the participants in the *Making a Noise* Aboriginal curatorial conference and publication. Below you will find listed

some of the key concepts, thinkers and texts that have been influential in the development of my thinking and praxis as a curator.

1). Dr. Marie Battiste: Cognitive Imperialism

Dr. Marie Battiste is a Mi'kmaq educator from the Potlo'tek First Nations in Uma'kik, Nova Scotia who currently teaches in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. In 2000, Dr. Battiste edited an anthology of essays entitled, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Within this particular anthology I came across a number of theorists, writers and educators that have informed my own thinking around post-colonial theory and praxis. The authors of the various essays gathered together in this anthology articulate and share their own situated Indigenous frameworks of meaning; their understandings and analysis of colonization; and their visions of a desirable future in a post-colonial world (xix). In her introduction to the anthology Battiste says:

The writings seek to move beyond the existing Indigenous experience of colonization by liberating Indigenous thought, practices, and discourses rather than relying on existing Eurocentric or colonial theory. Indigenous thinkers use the term “postcolonial” to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality (xix).

In her own essay in this anthology entitled “Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language, and Culture in Modern Society,” Battiste names and defines the key concept of “cognitive imperialism,” in the following manner:

Cognitive Imperialism, also known as cultural racism, is the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview (192-193).

Cognitive Imperialism is a term that describes the hyper-colonial histories that I learnt and internalized in my community and through the institutional racism at work in the schools and the church. In these sites, the imposition of a colonial worldview was accepted: it was not questioned but, rather, as I have noted, it was celebrated. The recognition of the colonial worldview that

existed in my community and in my life was a revelation and it provides an opportunity to exercise choice: the choice to embrace an imposed colonial worldview as superior, or, to accept that other alternative Indigenous worldviews co-exist. My own experience in researching my own 'alternative' worldviews has been both powerful and essential to my daily life as well as to my practice as a curator.

2). Leroy Little Bear: Fragmented Worldviews Colliding

Leroy Little Bear is a member of the Blackfoot Nation and an Indigenous scholar; his concept or understanding of worldview is viewed as plural. As individuals from particular cultural backgrounds we have multiple worldviews, often with one more dominant than the other. Little Bear explains his theory:

No matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world. Different ways of interpreting the world are manifest through different cultures, which are often in opposition to one another. One of the problems with colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order by means of force and law, suppressing the diversity of human worldviews. The underlying differences between Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews is tenuous at best. Typically this proposition creates oppression and discrimination. (77)

Little Bear's concept of multiple worldviews benefited my own understanding. Living in a community that contains a transcribed colonial history as well as a colonial history maintained by particular institutions within the community, still had a separate Indigenous worldview maintained by family and community. However, at times it was also family and community that nurtured the colonial discourse. Conversely our Swampy Cree and Métis worldviews often collided with the Eurocentric politic that do create avenues for discrimination and prejudice within families and within the community. As a curator it is important for me to be aware of these oppositions. It allows me to question what my motivations are and ask myself where they come from when researching a particular thematic for an exhibition. Little Bear maintains that Aboriginal worldview has been fragmented by colonialism⁸ and that we now have what he

maintains as fragmented worldviews that collide with a colonial worldview that tries to maintain a singular social order. Little Bear reiterates, ‘Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values.’(85) Our worldviews are never pure, there is no such thing as the *authentic Indian*. Once we are conscious of the plurality of our worldviews, we are able to dialogue with ourselves and how we perceive the world around us.

3).Graham Hingangaroa Smith: Conscientisation, Resistance and Transformative Praxis

As a cultural worker within the visual arts, my praxis has been informed by Kaupapa Maori methodology. Graham Smith’s methods and praxis as an educator and activist is very relevant to my own work as an Aboriginal curator and educator. In his PhD thesis, *The Development of Kaupapa Maori: Theory and Praxis (1997)* Smith speaks specifically about the sites of education and schooling as important sites of struggle:

Kaupapa Maori strategies involve a complex arrangement of *conscientisation, resistance, and transformative praxis*, which collectively seek to transform these twin crises [education and schooling] related to education and culture. Education and schooling are significant and important sites of struggle for Maori in attempting to develop a Kaupapa Maori response to their existing conditions of crises.(27)

Although Graham Smith and I are speaking from different sites of struggle, we are both working with public sites of pedagogy. Like Smith, I am also speaking from an Indigenous perspective that coexists with the colonial perspective. Art history taught at the university level displays and exercises the same colonial conditions that Smith speaks to in his analysis of education and schooling in New Zealand. The sites of art history and the visual arts in Canada most often perpetuate the dominant white western storylines taught at universities and art colleges all over North America. As Smith notes, this “hidden curriculum” of western storylines and value-systems covertly exercises control, maintains social and cultural hierarchies and perpetuates dominant cultural interests (G.Smith 27). In my work within the visual arts, I have found that this

hidden curriculum of Eurocentrism is also still a reality within the dominant museum and gallery systems in Canada.

My key interest in Smith's work lies in his analysis of how his Maori community chose an approach to social change and transformation that was both culturally holistic and accessible. Often, when we speak about post-colonial aspirations in terms of Canada, the vision of a post-colonial reality feels contrived or perhaps just very far away. While Smith looks at the sites of education and schooling as significant sites of struggle, my approach is to look at the disciplines of art history, the contemporary visual arts and curatorial practice as significant sites of struggle for Aboriginal artists, curators and engaged participants.

As a cultural worker and curator, I borrow from Smith and the Kaupapa Maori, and use the strategies of conscientisation—resistance—and transformative praxis to incrementally transform the cultural sites in which I work. Smith approaches the theoretical notions of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis as a holistic framework or economy in which no single component can function without the other. This theoretical framework of conscientisation (revealing the reality), resistance (oppositional actions) and praxis (reflective change), Smith argues is effective at bringing forth meaningful change (38). All three elements – conscientisation—resistance—and transformative praxis are treated as equally important and represented as a set of circular relations so that an individual may enter any of the three components at any stage of his or her life. As Smith states:

Furthermore, this thesis argues against the popular (mis)conception that these constituent elements are developed in a linear or hierarchical manner. The proposition developed in this work is that they form a circular set of relations in which all the elements are equally important. In this analysis, it is possible for people to enter in to the cycle of '*conscientisation, resistance, and transformative praxis*' from any position. Thus, it is not absolutely essential to methodologically progress through the stages of conscientisation and resistance as prerequisite stages to engaging in transformative action. (39)

Graham Smith's non-linear and non-hierarchical approach to cultural transformation and change is relevant within my own world-view as an Aboriginal woman. The notion of life as cyclical and interconnected is an important aspect within my Cree culture in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Smith's work further articulates a shift in critical change and transformation theory as expressed by the work of anti-colonial theorists such as Paolo Friere, Franz Fanon, Michael Apple and Antonio Gramsci. This shift in change and transformation theory has relevance not only for the Maori but for Indigenous peoples the world over.

As Smith says:

All these writers are widely drawn upon by Maori to assist in explaining a range of issues related to their subordinated, indigenous, colonial class, experience. While it is acknowledged that two of these authors are deceased, and only one writes in English, there is nevertheless significance in their work for Maori. There is something in all their work which connects closely with Indigenous experience and struggle – all of these writers speak from a position of 'alongside' or; within' the 'ranks' of oppressed/exploited people; all of these writers' work, address the 'struggle' in a positive and optimistic way; all of these writers put emphasis on transformative outcomes; all of these writers openly declare their participation in various forms of struggle. (35)

As an Aboriginal curator, I am conscious of the importance of positioning oneself as 'alongside' or 'within' the ranks of oppressed and exploited people. As an Aboriginal person it has been my goal to be vigilantly aware of how I can work towards or within a transformative practice: I am always aware that conscientisation and resistance is an ongoing and life-long experience. In the prologue to this thesis, *Nachimowin*, I tell my story as a process of conscientisation and counter-dialogue to the dominant fur-trade and settler narrative of Canada. Presently, I am developing a curatorial praxis based on Indigenous knowledge and theory. I have found *Kaupapa Maori* methodology to be central to approaching my own curatorial practice and efforts as a cultural worker.

4). Linda Tuhiwai Smith: Twenty-five Indigenous Projects

In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), she writes a chapter entitled, *Twenty-five Indigenous Projects*, in which she says:

These imperatives [the survival of peoples, culture and languages; the struggle to become self determining, the need to take back control of our destinies] have demanded more than rhetoric and acts of defiance. The acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting indigenous cultures and languages have required the mounting of an ambitious research programme, one that is very strategic in its purpose and its activities and relentless in its pursuit of social justice. (142)

Linda Smith's, *Decolonizing Methodologies* is written in two sections. The first half of the book maps in a critique of issues around imperialism, research and knowledge and the second half investigates differing ethical, respectful, sympathetic and useful approaches and methodologies that have been developed by Indigenous peoples (8-9). Like Graham Smith's discussion of methodology and praxis, I found Linda Smith's work engaging and accessible. The twenty-five projects she writes about have all been utilised by different Indigenous communities and constitute a complex decolonizing research programme (142). I have utilised a number of these projects within my own practice as a curator, researcher and cultural worker. Of Smith's twenty-five projects, the following five projects have been central to my curatorial praxis: testimonies; storytelling; celebrating survival; remembering; and reframing. I have listed below the particular strategies within each of Smith's five projects that speak to my own praxis most directly:

Project 2: Testimonies: Indigenous testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events it can be constructed as a monologue and as a performance. The structure of testimony - its formality, context and sense of immediacy – appeals to many Indigenous participants, particularly elders. Testimony is a form in which the voice of a 'witness' is accorded space and protection (144).

Project 3: Story telling: Stories are ways of passing down beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the story teller connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story. Story telling is a useful way of representing the ‘diversities of truth’ while allowing the story teller to retain control.

Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as Indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to –day Indigenous lives. Importantly, story telling is also about humour and gossip and creativity (144).

Project 4: Celebrating Survival: Celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which Indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity. The approach is reflected sometimes in story form, sometimes in popular music and sometimes as an event in which artists and story tellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life and diversity and connectedness. Events and accounts which focus on the positive are important not just because they speak to our survival, but because they celebrate our resistance at an ordinary human level and they affirm our identities as Indigenous women and men (145).

Project 5: Remembering: The practice of remembering is about the remembering of a painful past and, importantly, people’s responses to that pain. While Indigenous communities can talk through the history of painful events collectively, there are frequent silences about what happened after the event. Often there is no collective remembering as communities were systematically ripped apart,. The aftermath of such painful events was borne by individuals or smaller family units, sometimes consciously or unconsciously obliterated through alcohol, violence and self- destruction. Violence and family abuse became entrenched in communities which had no hope... This form of remembering is painful. Healing and transformation become crucial strategies in any approach which asks a community to remember what they have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget (146).

Project 15: Reframing: Reframing is about taking greater control over the ways in which Indigenous issues and social problems are perceived, discussed and addressed. The framing or reframing of an issue is about defining its parameters, what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame. Reframing includes defining the issue and determining how best to solve the problem. For example, many Indigenous activists and others have argued that the range of problems faced by Indigenous communities is not in response to individual weakness among community members; rather these issues have a systemic basis arising out of the history of colonialism and cultural apartheid, and as such, require different strategies to put in place long-term solutions.

Reframing occurs also within the way Indigenous people write or engage with theories and accounts of what it means to be Indigenous. In the politics of Indigenous women, there is continuing resistance to the way Western feminists have attempted to define the issues for Indigenous women and categorize the positions in which Indigenous women should be located. Moves to discuss patriarchy without addressing imperialism and racism are always reframed by Indigenous women, as inadequate analysis. Similarly moves to attack Indigenous culture or Indigenous men ‘as a group’ are also resisted because for Indigenous women the issues are far more complex and the objective of analysis is always focused on solving problems (153).

Smith’s 25 *Indigenous Projects* are all projects that have resonated with my own world-view and experiences as a Cree/Scottish woman. These particular projects of decolonization have been the impetus behind many aspects of my own curatorial practice. As described by Linda Smith, the twenty-five projects constitute a complex research programme that is strategic in its purposes and relentless in its pursuit of social justice (142). The pursuit of social justice is a unifying theme in all aspects of my own work as a curator, artist and cultural worker. They are also very important to me on a personal level. The particular methodologies of *reframing*, *remembering*, *celebrating survival*, *story-telling* and *testimony* that Smith articulates in her 25 Indigenous projects have informed my practice as curator and artistic director of the Aboriginal artist-run-centre the Red Shift Gallery that I co- founded with Joi Arcand in 2006. These methodologies have also informed my work towards the establishment of an Indigenized museum space in my

home community of Cumberland House in Saskatchewan through the Misti Sakighanik Historical Committee.

The project of Indigenizing, as Linda Smith describes it, involves curating a politic of Indigenous identity and Indigenous cultural action. It is how Aboriginal people theorize and put into praxis Indigenous issues and strategies, stories and teachings, cultural understanding and worldview, legitimizing and making visible an Indigenous centred knowledge.

5). Making a Noise

In 2004, the anthology of essays entitled, *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community* was published. Leanne Martin, an important figure in the contemporary Aboriginal curatorial community, edited this anthology. The essays in the anthology are based on papers first given at the conference *Making a Noise* held in 2003 at the Banff Centre for Continuing Education. The publication *Making a Noise* was co-published by the Banff International Curatorial Institute and the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre.

As the collection of papers in *Making a Noise* reveals, the Canadian art world remains at present, a site that is continually contested by Aboriginal people. The senior positions in Canadian museums, galleries, artist-run-centres, universities and colleges are still primarily held by individuals who are white, male and from an upper economic bracket. But, many groups within Canada, including artists from various immigrant communities, women, visible minorities and people from marginalized groups, are currently working purposively towards claiming a space for their interests and communities within the wider Canadian art community. Curators, art administrators, cultural workers, art critics and visual artists from a range of marginalized groups are fighting for their voices to be heard: they are in fact “making a noise.” *Making a Noise* highlights the struggle to articulate Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous presence within Canadian curatorial practice. As Martin notes: “The essays in this volume affirm that our professional presence is individually diverse and collectively strong- a noise too loud to ignore” (22). As a curator, I learn from my peers in the *Making a Noise* publication, that the very act of asserting our presence is an offence to discursive silence: it is a powerful strategy. The silencing

of voice is a powerful but faulty colonial strategy, which, oftentimes, has an expiration date, souring with time.

In *Making a Noise*, Martin has strategically grouped the essays, provoking the reader to interact with Indigenized perspectives on art, art history, critical writing and community. Section one entitled, *Our own noise*, first asserts that Indigenous voice has always been present, before proceeding to review the development and insertion of Indigenous voice, theory and praxis within the western and Eurocentric discipline of art history and the space of the art gallery. Section two, *Getting there*, speaks candidly about the development of the *Program of Assistance to Aboriginal Curators for Residencies in the Visual Arts* established by the Canada Council for the Arts, and, the mixed experiences of two particular Aboriginal residents with this program. Section three, *In Whose Words?* points to the need for Aboriginal people to engage in critical writing, exploring the issues that surround this particular issue. Section four, *Who's (Whose) Community?* highlights how Aboriginal peoples might strategize as a collective group while, at the same time, taking into consideration the multiplicity of our communities and contexts, and, often times our conflicting value systems (21).

In this important anthology there are multiple strategies addressing many issues including colonialism, institutional racism, and modernist objections to issues of activism; cultural fatigue about Aboriginal issues; and how to infiltrate institutions of power. The insights that are offered within the essays that make up this text are especially important to young Indigenous cultural workers and curators such as myself. We must not look at the art community as a site of borders and restrictions, but as a site that sits within our traditional lands, and, a site that needs to be indigenized. *Making a Noise* maps in the multiple challenges faced by Aboriginal people, and, the differing decolonizing strategies they have developed to deal with the multiple and heterogeneous sites of cultural work that make up the Canadian art world.

As a curator, I am personally indebted to this Aboriginal art community that will not be silenced, that has made it their mission to “Make a Noise,” in the past and the present. It is because of them that I am able to make a noise within my own context.

3. The Red Shift: briefing reports from my curatorial praxis

In this chapter I will talk about my work as both an independent curator, and, and my work as the Artistic Director and curator of the Red Shift Gallery in Saskatoon. In both sites I attempt to be an agent of change, speaking on many different themes, but always from a site of resistance.

As a practice, the activity of curating has the ability to stage a conversation on urgent issues of the day within the visual arts. This conversation is, of course, always contested. Curating is also about staking a claim to space, whether that space is in a gallery, off-site, or on the Internet. To be perfectly honest, a curator holds a position of power. That is why it is necessary for more Aboriginal people to work within this particular field. I have heard this sentiment many times over from the Aboriginal art community. The need for more Aboriginal curators was my main concern when entering the field of curating in 2004. Presently, there still are very few First Nations/Aboriginal curators. As a curator, you have the ability to invite artists whose work resonates with your particular worldview. As a student of Art History I saw how difficult it was for emerging Aboriginal contemporary artists to infiltrate public galleries and the artist-run centres. If an individual wants to pursue a career as a professional working artist, it is essential the artist's work is programmed in either a public gallery or an artist-run-centre. Professional artists need to create new work and exhibit or be programmed by professional venues such as galleries or artist-run centres on a regular basis in order to move through the designated stages of *emerging*, *mid-career*, and *senior* artist. This also goes for curators.

3.1 The Red Shift Gallery: an aboriginal contemporary art space

The Red Shift Gallery is a project that started in 2006, and ended in the fall of 2010. It was a project that sprang from my concern for Aboriginal contemporary artists not having the same opportunities of professional development as other artists in Saskatchewan and elsewhere in Canada. The art community in Canada is still very much white-male-centred as it was of old. So it was a moment of great sadness when the Red Shift Gallery project ended in the fall of 2010. Presently it no longer operates as a gallery. The Red Shift Gallery was a central part of my praxis as a curator, and, as the Artistic Director I saw firsthand the needs and aspirations of emerging,

mid-career and established Aboriginal artists and cultural workers. I will now map in the mandate, goals, objectives, vision statement, a brief history and the intended beneficiaries of the Red Shift Gallery. To do this, I will use a template developed by the major funding arts organisations to describe the gallery and its operations. This format is slightly cumbersome and involves a certain amount of repetition, but gives readers a sense of the narrative I developed for the project and annual funding applications that kept the gallery doors open.

Mandate:

The Red Shift Gallery was an artist-run centre and exhibition space in which contemporary Aboriginal artists could exhibit critically engaging work, and, develop their professional praxis in a creative and supportive environment.

Goals and Objectives of the Organization:

The intent of our organization was to provide a space in which Aboriginal artists working across genres and media could expand their practice through participation in solo and group exhibitions, curatorial opportunities, and programs dedicated to professional development. Our not-for-profit organization assisted cultural workers to develop a professional art practice and to successfully manage the marketing of their own work. Our organisation provided resources to assist in the development and promotion of a professional art practice through such services as mentoring individuals in the writing of artist CV's; grant writing; participation in workshops (media technique and exhibition design); and the marketing of their work in different venues. Although the Red Shift Gallery's main objective was to promote contemporary Aboriginal art, the organisation was not exclusive: the gallery also encouraged non-Aboriginal peoples to participate in its programming with the aim of making the gallery accessible to the broader community. We felt that the inclusive nature of our organization created a vital context for cross-cultural dialogue about Aboriginal contemporary art and art history.

As an organization we strategically situated ourselves in Saskatoon's west side where there is a proportionately high Aboriginal population. The gallery was meant to be a visible and active part of this community and we sought to provide regular access to our facility. The Red Shift Gallery assisted the local and provincial Aboriginal community by promoting the arts and providing

programs, resources and professional support. We supported contemporary art that was interdisciplinary, multi-media, new media, and performance-based work. Part of our support to artists came in the payment of professional artist fees.

Although the Red Shift Gallery's target audience was First Nations people, the doors were open and free of charge to the general public. In the workshops that the gallery developed in Cumberland House, for example, the targeted audience was generally youth, and non- Aboriginal and Aboriginal people benefited from the issues brought forward by our programming that was designed to raise awareness of First Nations contemporary culture.

Vision Statement

The Red Shift Gallery: a contemporary aboriginal art space sought to deliver programming that was important to the narrative of its region. In the province's centenary celebrations of 2005, it was evidently clear that settler history was still the dominant and most prevalent historical narrative in the province. As a venue for Aboriginal contemporary art, the Red Shift Gallery countered this settler narrative with its own distinct and Indigenous-centred voice and politic.

Brief History

The Red Shift Gallery was incorporated as a not for profit organization in January 2006, opening its doors as a gallery in June 2006. Prior to its opening there had not been a gallery space solely dedicated to the contemporary Aboriginal arts in Saskatchewan. The Indigenous artist-run centres of both Tribe in Saskatoon and Sakewewak in Regina delivered their programming through a system of partnerships with existing established institutions. They still do not run independent gallery spaces. The Red Shift Gallery was created to address the need for an exhibition space dedicated solely to the contemporary Aboriginal arts in Saskatoon.

Saskatchewan has one of the highest populations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In the *2001 Census: analysis series – Aboriginal Peoples a demographic profile conducted by Statistics Canada*, it reads: As in previous censuses, the highest concentrations of Aboriginal population in 2001 were in the North and in the prairies.⁹ This trend has not changed in the 2006 Census, and is not expected to change in the next twelve years.¹⁰ In the 2006 Census, between 1996 and

2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population.¹¹ Statistically, there was a demonstrated need for a gallery in the prairie region geared to serving the increasing Aboriginal population in the areas of, exhibiting new works, professional development in the arts, mentorship, artist residencies, arts administration and the education of both First Nations and First Nations people in the cultural production of contemporary Aboriginal artists working in Canada.

In Saskatchewan the two major funding agencies for the arts are the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council for the Arts. For both agencies there are two streams of funding for artist-run-centers or galleries: annual and, multi-year operational funding. Organizations cannot access operational (annual or multi-year) grants until they have programmed successfully for at least three years. They have to work within the confines of the project grant system. One project grant would only cover, for example, one exhibition or perhaps a workshop. Within this particular funding framework, it was an overwhelming task-load to write project grants for each and every program year. It was also difficult because one could never program very far ahead based on tentative budgets. Normally, a gallery can program for at least one to two years ahead, whereas the Red Shift Gallery could not do that within the constraints put on us by the present arts funding system. It was difficult to approach artists and invite them to exhibit on the understanding that funding was based on the success or failure of a project grant proposal. Over-extended administratively, I was not able to access other grants that were available to the Red Shift from funding agencies that support the cultural sector nationally and provincially. I did, however, become quite successful at utilising the incoming monies to the fullest: stretching a dollar became essential to our survival as an organisation. Early on, the Red Shift Gallery did not have the funds to support its operations or to pay a salary to an administrator. In 2006-2008, most of our operational budget was self-generated via fundraising. In most artist-run-centres, there is an artistic director (sometimes called a program director) as well as an administrative director and support staff that work in one or more specialized areas such as accounting, media and technology.¹² The existing projects grant system also did allow us to support artists, curators and writers with the professional artist's watch-dog organization, Canadian Artists Representation: Le front des artistes Canadiens (CARFAC), rates as a minimum for artist fees. CARFAC operates as a group that facilitates the representation and rights of working artists'.

The Red Shift Gallery almost always paid artists well above the CARFAC rates despite our limited budget. I was able to pay these rates to artists, because I was not paid a salary or curatorial fee, which I could have paid myself from the grants in retrospect, but was waiting to receive multi-year funding before allowing myself payment.

In 2006, the Canada Council supported our first major exhibition with one of Canada's leading First Nations contemporary artists Faye HeavyShield. Faye is a nationally and internationally known First Nations sculpture and installation artist. She was a prestigious artist to book in our little storefront gallery. I had met Faye while helping her install for a solo exhibition at the Mendel Art Gallery years before and we became friends. The group exhibition I curated, entitled *Politics of Mother*, has had a lasting resonance for the Saskatoon arts community and myself. Faye continued on to be a mentor and friend and offered her support generously as an advisor. The relationships within the Aboriginal arts community, and beyond, that the Red Shift has built up through the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Saskatchewan Arts Board was essential to the ongoing development of the Red Shift staff and board, enabling us to work with many artists and allowing us to sustain critical programming and the local arts community in our region. During its history, the Red Shift Gallery took steps to ensure that a system for mentoring and training staff and volunteers was in place to facilitate the gallery's program direction and stated goals. Early on, the Red Shift Gallery integrated training and mentorship through partnerships with other like-minded organization such as Aka Gallery and Commonweal Arts.

In July 2008, The Red Shift Gallery was awarded an artist-in-residence with First Nations contemporary artist Wally Dion from the Saskatchewan Arts Board. This grant enabled the Red Shift Gallery to realise its vision to reach the immediate community through community programming and professional mentorship that generated increased public visibility. A partnership was also developed with the Northern Village of Cumberland House to do a collaborative project. It was decided early on that we would do a project that commemorated the Aboriginal Veterans of Cumberland House and have it publicly displayed as a mural. Cumberland House has a high number of veterans stretching back from World War I and World War II to the Korean War: working together, with the veterans and the community, we decided that the focus of the mural be on World War II. It is important that the role of Aboriginal

veterans be remembered and honoured. Aboriginal people have a consistently high record of enlisting. (Berry 70). Both Wally Dion and I met with one of Cumberland House's last World War II veterans, Nathan 'Dolly' Settee, to talk with him about his experiences and were gifted with many wonderful stories about his life in Cumberland and his experiences in the war. Dolly was on the front lines as a machine gunner in the Italian campaign, and, travelled all over Europe. He is now in his nineties and was very pleased with the mural and is said to have remarked about his portrait "who is that handsome guy?" The community as a whole took complete ownership of the piece as most families had a relative or two portrayed on the mural. After the project was completed the Red Shift Gallery and Commonweal (North) were able to partner with the northern community and do monthly art workshops bringing to the community different artists to teach on a range of differing media. Artists like Wally Dion, Michele Mackasey, Faye HeavyShield and Jayce Saloum visited the community of Cumberland House to share their expertise. It was important that in each of our workshops we highlighted Aboriginal Contemporary art in order to educate the community about the history of this particular genre of art making and its importance in the context of Canadian art history.

Facilities

The Red Shift Gallery was a fully dedicated presentation facility: the sole tenant in a leased one-story building (with basement) on 20th Street in the Riversdale neighbourhood of Saskatoon. This highly visible space provided street-level access with large picture windows that further increased the visibility of the Red Shift's programming and accessibility to the general public. Located just a few feet from the busy intersection of Idylwyld and 20th street west, and one block from the new Saskatoon Farmer's Market, the Red Shift Gallery was located within the heart of not only the highest population of Aboriginal peoples in the city but also the busiest pedestrian area in Saskatoon.

Program Profile:

The Red Shift Gallery's program year ran from September to June, and, its fiscal year ran from April 1st to March 31.st

Most of our programming was curated from thematic developed by myself and by invitation, as opposed to juried selection or calls for submissions. Our board was involved in programming, acting as a resource to the curator, and as a jury for the annual member's exhibition. It was our original intent that as we grew as an organisation, and interest in our centre by Aboriginal artists grew, along with our operational capacity, we would involve the board more and more in programming. The board was increasingly active in the creation of selection juries, the work of programming committees, and the development of board-originated programming initiatives.

Intended beneficiaries:

As an artist-run centre, the Red Shift's primary beneficiaries were Aboriginal contemporary artists working in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and the surrounding region. As noted, the gallery provided opportunities for exhibition, education, professional development and exposure to new art and new audiences. Our goal was to have a broader impact on the communities, in which we were situated, both connecting with the diversity of people reflected in our programming, and providing developmental opportunities for them. We aimed to be an active and responsible member of the communities we served by continuing to evolve and respond to the needs of the people within them.

Personal note on the Red Shift Gallery:

The Red Shift Gallery was a project I could not do alone so I approached my friend Joi Arcand, an emerging contemporary Metis artist. She was equally as excited as I was at the possibility of bringing this project into existence. We searched for a suitable space and leased a storefront building with our own money. We then began intensive fundraising efforts to get the project off the ground and through sheer determination we were able to have a space that was equipped and ready to present. With the help of our board, local artists, and my limited experience at Tribe we were able to formulate a strategy of what our mandate and vision statement should entail and what our organisation needed to support and stand for. Joi and I met many times to pinpoint exactly what was needed within our community. The Gallery was something I had envisioned while working as an administrative assistant for Tribe, an artist-run-centre located in Saskatoon that worked to promote the work of Aboriginal contemporary artists within mainstream institutions and not-for-profit organizations. Before developing the concept of the Red Shift

Gallery I read about Maori language nests and the success of Maori women in revitalizing their language at the local level.¹³ I thought that if it was possible for these women, who were often local mothers and grandmothers, then it was possible for me make change happen at the local level. I began to envision the possibility of creating a space where Aboriginal artists could develop professionally and perhaps be successful as working artists.

Although there was support staff in the form of volunteers, it was not enough to relieve the amount of work that was needed to run the programming and administrative duties associated with running a gallery. Joi Arcand left the organisation early on, but with the steady support of certain volunteers within the community such as First Nations artist Wally Dion and contemporary artist Cindy Baker, we were able to continue for as long as we did. Dion did much of the technical installation work, working gallery hours so that the doors to the Red Shift Gallery were open to the public. He was also involved in the creation of promotion for programs, the preparation of visuals for our project grants as well as sitting on our Board of Directors. Baker mentored me extensively in artist-run-centre knowledge and grant writing, always making she and any resources we might need available to us. In our latter years, Francophone artist, Michele Mackasey, was also instrumental in carrying out many of the administrative duties associated with our programming, as a dedicated volunteer. These artists all generously donated their personal time and expertise because they believed in what the Red Shift Gallery was about. Both artists Dion and Mackasey were provided with a studio space, free of charge, and were included in many of Red Shift's projects and outreach. In our last two years of operation we were eligible to apply for the multi-year grants in the fall from the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council for the Arts; however, from August to February 2009, I was ill and was not able to write them in time. The ownership of Red Shift's building changed hands and we closed our doors at 118 20th Street West in the fall of 2010. We had the option of looking for a new space and renovating it to gallery standards but we neither had the finances or energy to do so. Another option was to share a space with other like-minded organisations in a single building. However, because we did not have the full consensus of all those involved, and our exhibition time would have been cut to one program a year; I decided that it was better to close for now than to accept a marginalized position. After all, the Red Shift's role and mandate within the art community was to address and advocate against such marginalization.

The Red Shift Gallery was an important and necessary project for Saskatchewan. Although it was difficult when the gallery closed its doors, it was also a relief to put the project to rest.

Program Overview:

2006

June 10 – Aug 31st

PRIDE and The Red Shift Gallery partnership

“Thrift Store Cowboy” – Thirza Cuthand, Jonathon Busch and Elwood Jimmy

July

Mural project in partnership with SCYAP/Junior Urban Canvas Project and the Mental Health Region, Saskatoon, facilitated by artist Marie Brown.

Sept 8 – Oct 6th

Mural Project photo exhibition- mural is a community youth initiative that was completed on the east side the Red Shift Gallery building..

Oct 20th –Nov 17th

“Eco-Indian”, Group Exhibition -Priscilla Settee, Anna Leigh King

2007

Nov 24th - Feb 2nd

“Politics of Mother”, Group exhibition

Faye Heavyshield, Lissa Robinson and Linda Young – thematic - the body politics between mothers and daughters.

March 3rd-17th

“We Remember” – partnership with Indian Teacher Education Program – Student Exhibition. (Art Education program workshop, installation of exhibition and curatorial themes in Aboriginal contemporary art.)

<i>May 11-June 22nd</i>	<i>“Alter Ego- The Best Man Series”, Solo Exhibition retrospective Riel Benn</i>
<i>July 6th – August 10th</i>	<i>“Nimis, Nitanis (My Sister, My daughter)” Group exhibition, Michelle Mackasey and Chrystal Kruselnicki</i>
<i>Aug 24- Sept 28th</i>	<i>“Red Friends” – Red Shift Gallery Members Exhibition</i>
<i>Oct 19th - Dec 07th</i>	<i>“Buffalo Boy’s Confessional Indulgence”, Solo and performance, Adrian Stimson</i>
<i>Dec 08th - Jan 3rd</i>	<i>Holidays</i>
2008	
<i>Jan 08th - Feb 22nd</i>	<i>“The Stand-Off”, Solo performance and installation, Jackson 2Bears, partnership with Blackflash Magazine</i>
<i>May4-May24th</i>	<i>“Diaspora”, Solo performance and installation, Nahed Mansour, partnership with aka gallery</i>
<i>May 30th –June 27th</i>	<i>“Annual Members Show Exhibition”</i>
<i>July 01st – August 31st</i>	<i>Holidays</i>
<i>Sept 05th- Oct 18th</i>	<i>“My Assimilation” Solo Exhibition, Michel Boutin</i>
<i>Nov 06-Dec 12th</i>	<i>“ Othered Women” three gallery exhibition- Red Shift Gallery, solo exhibition (Nadia Myre), paved art, group exhibition (Rosalie</i>

Favel, Joi Arcand, and Tania Willard) and aka gallery, group exhibition, (Sherry Farrel Racette and Mimi Gellman)

2009

Jan 06- Feb 13th

gallery renovations

Feb 17th- Mar 28th

*“Pop goes the world”, Group exhibition,
David Garneau and Sonny Assu*

Apr 03rd- May 08th

*“Things may appear larger”, Group exhibition,
Terrance Houle and Tim Moore, partnership with Commonweal
(North)*

May 15th- Jun 27th

Wally Dion /Artist in residence, Open Studio new works

Jul- Aug

*“Veterans Project- Cumberland House”, Wally Dion/ Artist in
Residence*

Nov 28-29

*Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Wally Dion and
Michele Mackasey (drawing)*

Nov 20-Dec 18th

*“Identity, Land and Spirit”, solo exhibition,
Christi Belcourt*

2010

Dec13-14th

*Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Wally Dion
(painting with acrylics)*

Dec 19-Jan 3rd

Holidays

Jan 8- Feb 19th

“Dis-Ease”, solo exhibition,

Ruth Cuthand

Jan 21-22nd

Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Cumberland House, Michele Mackasey (watercolors and pastels)

Feb 27-28

Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Cumberland House, featuring artist Faye HeavyShield

Mar 2-Apr 10th

“Annual Members Show”

May 15-16th

“Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Cumberland House, Wally Dion and Michele Mackasey (Drawing and Sculpture)

Apr 16- May 28

“the rhythm of Turtle Island” solo exhibition, artist Leah Dorion

Jun 24-28th

Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, featuring Artists, Jayce Salloum, Michele Mackasey and Aleyna May (video and contemporary art themes around community)

Jun 1- Jun 25th

“NYCAW exhibition- Cumberland House”

Jul-Aug

Closed Summer Holidays/

Sept 14-Oct 16

“Rope” group exhibition, with artists Judy McNaughton, Cindy Baker, Joi Arcand, Wally Dion, Felicia Gay and Michel Boutin

Nov 27-28

Northern Youth and Community Art Workshop, Cumberland House, Michele Mackasey (painting and drawing)

Terrance Houle: Clowning Around: my work as writer

I was offered to write a piece for Blackflash Magazine, a magazine that focuses on the work of contemporary new media and photographic art. As a curator, it is important to have your writing published; this piece was my first opportunity to do so.

Laughter can mediate pain and have it speak to us in a transformed way. Laughter disarms our resolve to be bitter: laughter may implicate pain but it also resists it. My hope is that our people, Aboriginal people, will close the gap between silence and resistance. How do we accomplish it? I say, we laugh out loud—It is our strength.

The first time I came across the work of Terrance Houle, I thought, “what a clown!” And so he is in the most endearing sense of the word. In his practice as an artist, Houle clowns the politics of his social, cultural and personal environment. Clowning or the use of humour is a trickster strategy. The way Houle utilizes humour is traditional as he visually narrates issues that affect him as a Blackfoot man. He often deconstructs contemporary and historical images of Aboriginal people with his use of wit following suit to the many Aboriginal contemporary artists who have come before him. That is not to say the trickster narrative is always delivered as humour, but delivered as a de-centering of the dominant narrative through visual or oral culture. Houle’s work poses the question, ‘how does the dominant or neo-colonial narrative affect others and me?’ More so, ‘how does a de-centered historical/contemporary image or narrative of Aboriginal peoples affect others and me?’ To Aboriginal artists and curators this is an important question to pose. What role does this clowning play? Can it bring balance to our imbalanced societal notions of Aboriginal people in North America? Houle, as the urban joker, infiltrated Regina, the historical capital city of Saskatchewan, with a project entitled *85.11.16*¹⁴ - miniature intervention-installations delivering a powerful yet unresolved punch line.

85.11.16 was created as part of *The Dewdney Avenue Project*, initiated by Common Weal Community Arts in Regina, Saskatchewan and featured Houle as well as other contemporary artists. The project partnered multi/inter-disciplinary artists with communities specifically associated with the North Central Regina area. Dewdney Avenue was chosen as a jumping point

for discussion because of its significance and importance economically and socially. This particular avenue is reminiscent of the many streets across our country often signifying prejudice, historical and contemporary sites of violence. Sites like Dewdney Avenue contain difficult knowledge that, more often than not, is silenced. Whether it is Dewdney Avenue in Regina, 20th Street West in Saskatoon, Jane and Finch in Toronto, or the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, they all share a commonality that we recognize. It is Common Weal's view that art has the ability to empower communities given the opportunity to express their stories with their own voices. It brings to mind what my mother would often say when people would not speak out against their victimization; she would poignantly say, "Well, your silence won't protect you." I am not connoting that the residents of Dewdney Avenue past and present are victims but that simply put, silence does not bring resolution. We can argue politics and label neighbourhoods like Dewdney Avenue as on the periphery of society devaluing urbanized neighbourhoods or conversely label Dewdney Avenue with liberal categorizations and post-colonial rhetoric but either way it does not bring resolution to the reality of being a part of that particular place or a part of that particular history. Dewdney Avenue is a complex network of communities and subverted histories. Houle understands that he is an artist coming to a particular place as an outsider. However, he engages these histories with themes that connect not only to him but to the place he is creating work around.

A majority of Houle's work touches on the absurd or kitsch. He has a natural ability of weaving complex narratives into seemingly frivolous or silly topics as seen in this particular series *85.11.16*. The title: *85.11.16*, refers to the day that Metis Leader Louis Riel was hung for his alleged crime of treason by the John A. McDonald government. Regina is implicated as the site where Louis Riel spent his final hours, but his legacy did not end with his death. Louis Riel's history continues however contentious it is. Regina has other stories that are just as contentious but are all but forgotten.

Houle seeks to reconcile forgotten/silenced histories of violence to Aboriginal people and the poor by presenting the fact that history often repeats itself. Houle does not want to offer a resolution. In *85.11.16* he seeks to demonstrate that connections can be made between history and the contemporary lives of people living in North Central Regina. Unfortunately, poverty and

abuse are an ongoing and present issue to many in North Central and the theme of violence in itself is not silenced but well publicized in the media as a First Nations problem. There is a type of fear mongering that goes on with the local media without critically questioning why these violent images of Aboriginal people are continually perpetuated. However, there are countless instances of historical and colonial violence that are not seen or heard and Houle as an artist does not want to be complicit in that violence by remaining silent. In 85.11.16 he utilizes a number of strategies to disseminate references of that violence to the general public. Houle chose small public interventions that later became a series of five 81 by 127 cm colour photographs seen both in a gallery setting as well as on public bus shelters in the city of Regina. MacLean's Magazine did a piece in January 2007 by columnist Jonathon Gatehouse controversially titled; "Canada's Worst Neighbourhood" (Gatehouse). The article painted a dismal picture of life in North Central where Dewdney Avenue is located. Within that piece Peter Gilmer, Director of Regina's Anti-Poverty Ministry makes a valid point:

For me, there's an inherent contradiction in Saskatchewan. On the one hand there's the tradition of social justice-this is the home of Medicare, the co-op movement, the country's first bill of rights, on the other hand there's a history of racism, poor-bashing, inequality and exclusion.

It is imperative that we examine the deeply entrenched colonial implications that are contained within our localized histories. In *The Dewdney Avenue Project*, artists came together to give a critical reading of the traditions and histories of that particular neighbourhood.

Houle successfully relates his take on community and the colonial institution with the series 85.11.16. The intervention installations are made up of tiny H0 scale model figures, hand painted and arranged by Houle and glued in place for the public to happen upon. At first glance, the installations are humorous- almost ridiculous because of their scale. But, because of their size the onlooker is encouraged to take a second look in order to question the tiny scenario. Photographer Carey Shaw documented the tiny installations and the project took on another face. The large-scale photographs were installed on bus shelters that were displayed all along the avenue: this allowed for further dissemination of the project to the general public. It is within the photographs

that we see looming in the background the institutions that dominate the history of Dewdney Avenue.

Days of Buffalo, (Fig.12) reference the history of the buffalo hunt in the Regina region and what that particular history connotes. Pile -O -Bones was the original name of Regina before it was changed in 1883 in tribute to Queen Victoria. First Nations people of the Plains regions were sustained by the buffalo hunt. Due to commercial hunting, the buffalo were near extinction and the First Nations people were left impoverished with no food economy. Houle asks: does the history of a place change? First Nations worldview confirms that history is indeed cyclical, as all things must come full circle. In the photo, *Days of Buffalo*, we see a portion of a statue that sits atop a high pole at the entrance of the Regina exhibition grounds on Dewdney Avenue and is affectionately known as Pemmican Pete sitting atop his buffalo. Pete is the official mascot of 'Buffalo Days' an annual exhibition that occurs on the grounds. Pemmican Pete is also a buffalo skinner, commemorated villain to the detriment of First Nations people. Houle places tiny models of buffalo running free just beneath the statue. His buffalo successfully disrupt the image with its wit and charm—the trickster strikes again!

White Mob, (Fig.13) shows people dressed in Saskatchewan Roughrider gear celebrating after a successful game, the Mosaic Stadium at Taylor Field looms just out of focus in the background. Despite the seemingly innocent celebration, the title—*White Mob*—insinuates a much darker meaning. During the depression in the 1930's large relief camps for the unemployed were set up in cities nation-wide, including the city of Regina. The camps were to provide temporary housing and jobs. The Canadian Government was not able to properly sustain this program, which led to inhumane conditions within the camps and nation-wide protests erupted. One famous incident in Regina occurred when 3000 protesters rioted after police disrupted a meeting of strikers. People congregated to fundraise the money to aid strikers from the relief camp. The raised money was to help the strikers as they made their way to Ottawa on a march to protest the conditions of the camps. The RCMP attempted to arrest leaders and a mob ensued, killing one officer and leaving at least 100 injured.¹⁵ The relief camp was situated where the exhibition grounds and stadium are now. The poor and the dispossessed have a long and contentious relationship with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian government.

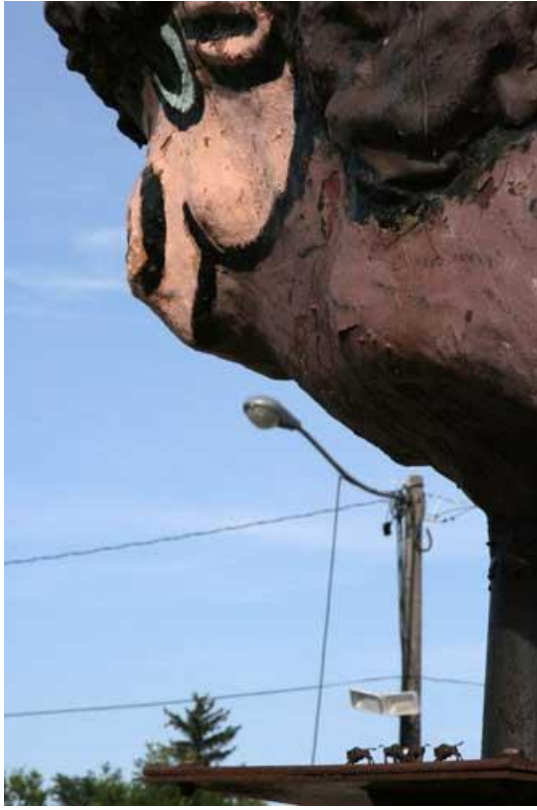


Figure 12. Terrance Houle, *Days of Buffalo*, 2008. Lightjet, digital photo. Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 13. Terrance Houle, *White Mob*, 2008. Lightjet, digital photo. Images courtesy of the artist.

Contemporarily the relationship between the poor and or Aboriginal people is also volatile. Houle took a point-blank approach in *Untitled (dead)* (Fig. 14) and like the others in this series, ties in with the overall history of Regina's North Central neighbourhood. The history of animosity between police and Aboriginal people is indeed a historical issue but it is now, as Houle implies, a contemporary issue. Amnesty International's 2004 report, entitled *Stolen Sisters* states:

The inquiry explained that many police have come to view Indigenous peoples not as a community deserving protection, but a community from which the rest of the community must be protected. This has led to a situation often described as one of Indigenous people being 'over-policed' and under-protected. (57)



Figure 14. Terrance Houle, *Untitled (Dead)*, 2008. Lightjet, digital photo. Images courtesy of the artist.

Untitled (dead) is a portentous image. Police Officers surround an Aboriginal male either dead or injured; incoherent in the background is Regina's Pasqua Hospital. I imagine some passer-by happening upon this tiny installation, and if it were I, would probably find it humorous only because of the blatant reality of it. As a photograph the scenario becomes larger than life, offering the public many kinds of interpretations. I immediately begin to think around the post-colonial strategy of mimicry. Mimicry, a term coined by Homi Bhabha, is mostly described around the mimicry of colonial authority, as vehicle of disruption. This can be seen as a colonized person overacting or mocking the gestures of the colonizer. This act of disruption unsettles the dominant colonial narrative. But mimicry can also be seen simply as this,

The menace of post-colonial writing, then, does not necessarily emerge from some automatic opposition to colonial discourse, but comes from this disruption of colonial authority, from the fact that its mimicry is also potentially mockery. (Ashcroft et.al 140-141)

Mockery, humour, and sarcasm- all these are aspects of a traditional strategy that Houle uses time and time again. Laughter is used to mediate pain in a transformed way. Through the medium of art Houle communicates counter-stories that relate a different history or reality than what is perceived by the mass media.

The last two photo/installations in the series are *Pray for me* and *100 years*, both referencing Louis Riel in different contexts. *Pray for me* (Fig. 15) is a reference to some of the last words Riel spoke before his death. Albeit a controversial figure, Riel fought for the rights of the dispossessed. 'Pray for me' can be seen as a plea not only for himself in those last moments but for those he represented, the excluded and the poor. In the photo it becomes a plea for the communities of North Central Regina. *100 years* (Fig.16) is different in the sense that it is a contemporary image of a figure illegally tagging on a wall '100 years' in revolutionary red. *100 Years* is a reference to a written excerpt that Louis Riel famously quoted: "My people will sleep for a hundred years, and when they awake it will be the artists that bring back their spirit." Is it prophecy or mere poetry? Houle alludes to the possibilities of what art can do for Aboriginal people. The figure in the photo declares with the medium of the street: it has been a hundred years and we have our eyes wide open. What is the spirit of the people? And how will artists bring the spirit of the people back? It is what Riel fought and died for- truth and the justice that truth brings.



Figure 15 Terrance Houle, *Pray for me*, 2008. Lightjet, digital photo. Images courtesy of the artist



Figure 16 Terrance Houle, *100 years*, 2008. Lightjet, digital photo. Images courtesy of the artist.

As a First Nations man registered with the Blood (Kanai) Tribe in Alberta, Houle has had a somewhat nomadic upbringing. His father was in the military and he and his immediate family moved often throughout his formative years. He has said this about himself in a recent online interview:

*My folks thought it was important to always stay in touch with our traditional practices. I am still involved with many communities as an artist, mentor, teacher and Blackfoot person. I regularly go to my reservation and help out with various ceremonies, or to do artist talks. I also work with aboriginal and Métis youth in Calgary, facilitating media programs.*¹⁶

Perhaps Houle's nomadic upbringing allowed him to realize early on the importance of community; that community itself can be nomadic, that people take community wherever they go. It is the many ways in which a person connects to a place. Many Aboriginal people, once in an urban setting, internalize feelings of disconnection from their culture, unless they actively go out and seek a cultural connection. Houle takes his community with him wherever he goes. As an artist he shifts in and out of traditional strategies that have been a part of his cultural make-up as a Blackfoot man for thousands of years. Playing a disrupter, a clown or in other words a trickster is a powerful reminder of how we can all be unified as a community by contributing to the voice of whatever particular territory we are in.

4. Othered Women

In this chapter, I discuss *Othered Women* (2008) an exhibition in which I develop visual narratives about the voice and agency of Aboriginal women. I sought to investigate histories specific to my region and to my culture. It was necessary for me to locate myself, as the curator, within the thematic I was researching. *Othered Women* examines the discursive and material violence of imperialism and its impacts on the lives of Aboriginal women, past and present. And testifies to the multiple ways in which Aboriginal women have been fixed in mainstream Canadian histories under the sign of the Other. The unifying or underlying theme of the shows is the silencing, marginalization, and invisibility of the ‘other’ within differing contexts. To have the ‘other’ emerge or appear within the text disrupts and displaces the dominant narrative. As a curator, I do not want to take a pedantic approach to assembling an exhibition. Instead, I seek to open up a space in which the viewer can engage with differing visual work, addressing a range of approaches to the overall curatorial thematic.

4.1 Othered Women: an exhibition

In 2008, I was awarded an Aboriginal Curatorial Residency funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. This residency involved working closely with AKA Gallery in Saskatoon under the supervision and mentorship of the Director Cindy Baker. My task was to learn the business of directing an artist-run-centre, and, to curate an exhibition of my own choosing. As part of this curatorial residency I curated the exhibition entitled *Othered Women* in 2008.

Othered Women is an exhibit that took place simultaneously in three separate artist-run-centres in the inner city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, all located on 20th Street West: aka gallery, paved gallery and the Red Shift Gallery. The six women artists included in this multi-centred exhibit were: Sherry Farrell Racette, Mimi Gellman, Tania Williard, Rosalie Favell, Joi Arcand and Nadia Myre. All six artists come from differing communities and cultures across Canada. In their exhibited works they examine the history of First Nations and Métis women in Canada from their own situated contexts, locations and perspectives. In this exhibit, I wanted to generate a

dialogue about the concept of the othered women within the Canadian national imaginary. As the curator, I posed the following questions to the artists:

- How do we as First Nations and Métis women articulate our identities?
- What do we want to say?
- How do we engage history from our own particular relationships to territory?
- How do we cite our differences and search for commonalities as First Nations and Métis women in our shared histories as *othered* women?

As the curator of this project, I also wanted to speak and work from my own situated experience as a woman of mixed heritage—Swampy Cree and Scottish. In formulating my ideas about the representation of First Nations and Métis women within the dominant histories of Canada, I turned to the work of the Italian Marxist historian, Antonio Gramsci, and his investigations into why the ruling classes are so effective in promoting their own histories and interests in society. In his articulation of the concept of hegemony, Gramsci points to how the dominant group secures power and control over other groups not by force or active persuasion, but, by representing the ruling class's interest as the common interest by means of a "subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media" (Ashcroft et.al.106). As many critics have pointed out, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a useful term for describing the success of the discursive practices of imperialism within the colonial context. In his work, Gramsci was interested in the history of the subaltern classes which he claimed was just as complex as the 'official' history of the dominant classes. He also points out that "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic" as they are "always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel" (Ashcroft et al: 216).

In order for the history of the settler dominant classes to hold precedence in official Canadian history, the history of the Aboriginal *other* has to be fragmented, episodic or erased. In the official histories of the fur-trade in Canada and the US, the elite have had the power to represent the Aboriginal *other* in whatever way they deemed fit. But, 'official' history has been unsuccessful in silencing the history of the subaltern groups, in particular, the history of Métis and First Nations women in the fur trade eras. Unbeknownst to the colonists there were other

modes of voice during (oral histories, beadwork, clothing design, tattooing, etc.) the fur trade eras would eventually become part of Canada's official history. Even now, scholars, curators and artists are actively researching the role of Aboriginal women in the fur trade and writing it into the mainstream history of Canada.

Growing up for most of my life in a Métis and First Nations Community, I saw firsthand that the history of Aboriginal women was represented in a fragmented and marginalized manner within mainstream culture. It was clear to me, early on, that First Nations and Métis women were not included in the 'official history' of the fur trade narrative or any other narrative in the Canadian history books. We were a secret, a silence, an absence in the text. I say "we" because I identify myself with these women: their story is a part of my heritage and lineage. The relationships and unions that the early colonists had with First Nations women were undoubtedly varied. But they were nevertheless not considered to be official unions by Britain or France. Whether these early (or later) unions within the fur trade were political, affectionate, or not, Aboriginal women were still perceived to be uncivilised. Yet, while these marital unions were unacceptable in Europe, they were both acceptable and necessary for the survival of the European fur trade in Canada; though this was rarely acknowledged officially. First Nations and Métis women—as mediators, diplomats, guides, labourers and emotional supports—played an integral role in the formation of Canada as a country.

I titled this exhibition, *Othered Women*, because I wanted to point to the silence within the colonial or dominant text about the role of First Nations and Métis women in the fur trade and other economies. The term, 'other woman' conjures up colonial images of the mistress, a counterfeit, the marriage that was not legitimate, and the children born from these unions as bastardized versions of Europe. While the 'other woman' was represented in colonial discourse as dangerous to the morals and principles of Europe, her labour, as I've noted, was nonetheless entirely necessary to the fur trade economy. If traders did not enter into an equal partnership with their Aboriginal wives during the fur trade era they did not survive very long. This exhibit necessarily points to the 'official' silence about the history of First Nations and Métis women in Canada—an absent presence that is now well known. This exhibit foregrounds the *Voice* of the six contemporary Aboriginal women artists, connected by their shared history of being the

‘othered woman’ in the national imaginary, and, most importantly, by their participation in the important task of building Indigenous counter-memory (in differing media and locations). Resistant Indigenous counter-memory has, of course, existed from the first moment that the first colonizer set foot on Indigenous territories.

Once I began to think about other differing modes of voice I realised I could not limit the concept of Aboriginal voice in the visual arts to a particular area or media. In this exhibit, *Othered Women*, I therefore sought out a range of artists, albeit all female, but from different nations, areas and histories. Because of my interest in the visual arts, I have been able to recognize that the artwork of my female relatives and other women in Cumberland House- sewing and beadwork- is evidence of an unspoken and unwritten history of the community.

Working in the city of Saskatoon, I became acquainted with Aboriginal people from other territories, namely the south of the province. Many had Cree or Salteaux surnames. In Cumberland House, every Aboriginal member has an English, Scottish or French surname. Although many speak fluent Swampy Cree in my community I discovered years ago that my daughter’s surname Chaboyer was actually a Michif name meaning ‘small boy.’ Michif is not a language spoken in Cumberland House although there are a few words here and there incorporated into the Swampy Cree language spoken locally. The language Michif itself is a result of long trade relations between the Cree and French peoples and it is evidence of the integral role of Indigenous peoples in Canada’s early trading economies. I was never aware of the Michif language even existing in Cumberland House or area- it was another indicator of silenced histories and peoples that were involved in the history of the fur trade in my particular area. It begs one to think, what other modes of voice have remained unheard or unvoiced? The only evidence we have that Michif people were once in Cumberland House is the few Michif words incorporated into our main language: the Michif of surname Chaboyer is carried by two very separate and large family units in the community.

Cumberland House is a rich site for thinking about language and voice in the colonial encounter. In that space is fertile ground to create new possibilities of appropriation and transformation of the colonial language as well as the continuous usage of the Swampy Cree language.

Focusing on visual culture, I see the same possibilities opening up. Aboriginal artists have been active transformers of the Aboriginal visual language. As curator of this three exhibition project, on the topic of *othered women*, I had to think strategically about where to place the work. I wanted the exhibitions to be available for everyone, but, at the same time, to have a narrative primarily addressing Aboriginal people. I had to also be aware of the three different exhibition mandates for the three artist-run-centres. In what follows I detail the shape each exhibit takes at each of the artist-run-centre venues.

AKA Gallery:

AKA Gallery is an artist-run-centre dedicated to innovative art practices in the visual arts that are not limited to any one medium. As part of my curatorial residency with AKA Gallery, I invited two artists, Mimi Gellman and Sherry Farrell Racette, to engage with the concept of the othered women exhibition. Both of these artists have made significant contributions to the development of a powerful Indigenous counter-memory that addresses the silences and stereotypes of “official” Canadian histories about the lives and histories of Aboriginal women. For these reasons, I felt that their work was important to the storying of my curatorial theme of othered women.

Sherry Farrell Racette is an established contemporary artist of Métis ancestry, and, a member of the Timiskaming First Nation in Quebec. I am appreciative of Racette’s work because of the in-depth research she applies to each individual piece. She is a scholar-artist who is well respected within the First Nations and Métis communities for her visual art practice and her work as an academic. Racette has made important and timely contributions to both the written and visual counter-histories of First Nations and Métis peoples.

In the four pieces she exhibited in *Othered Women* (Fig. 22), Racette engaged with the core of what I considered the show to be about. Métis women involved in the fur trade economy as having control over what they wanted to trade, and, who they wanted to trade with: they were not passive onlookers as is commonly represented in mainstream history. As Racette noted in an e-conversation, her works in the show developed out of a couple of essays she has been working

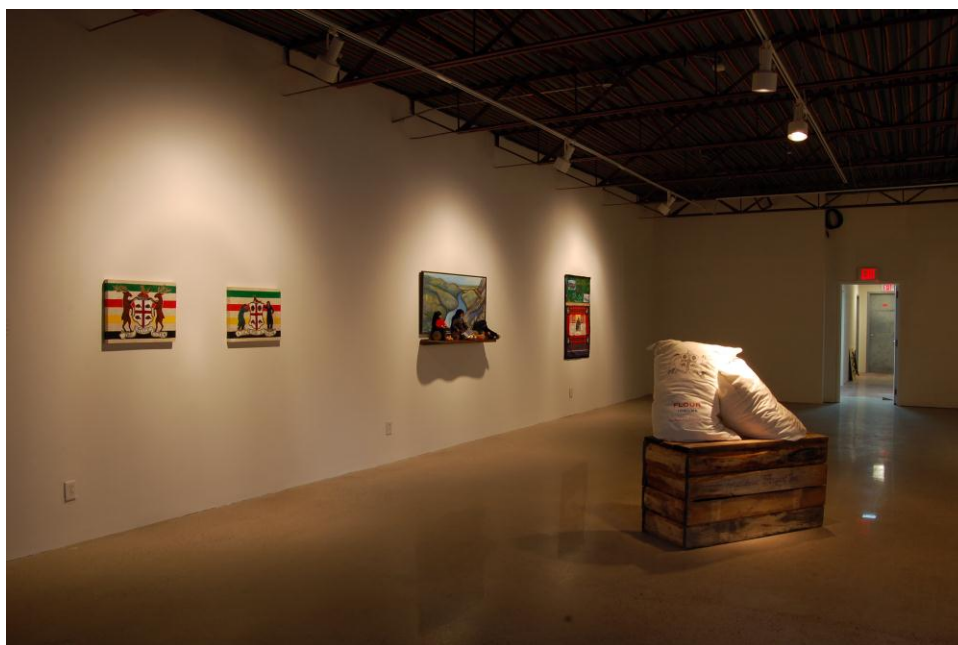


Figure 17. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women*, 2008. Installation.

on that explored “the role of women's arts practice in the creation of new knowledge, literally stitching disparate elements together into the fabric of daily life.” In her first piece, *My grandmothers loved to trade*, (Fig. 23), Racette assembles different aspects of her research into the role of Native women in the fur trade—archival documents, photographs and the local knowledge of Métis people—incorporating this research visually. In *My grandmothers loved to trade*, she stitches together a quilt made with tartan and paisley scraps, some of which she collected in her travels in Scotland and decorated with silk embroidery and Métis style beadwork. In this work, quilting is transformed to convey the realities of many different cultures. The differing components of the quilt are intelligible to all these working within the fur trade. Métis women often wore tartan as part of their dress, as can be seen in the archival photographs Racette located during her research. The beadwork styles she uses in the flowers that decorate this textile hanging were learnt from women in Cumberland House and Ile a la Crosse: historical communities involved heavily in the fur trade eras. This piece also depicts the Ottawa River, Lake Timiskaming and the Montreal River on the left and right. These trading waterways are a direct link to Racette’s own family history: In her works, Racette depicts main waterways as a route for trade that spanned thousands of years.¹⁷



Figure 18. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women, My grandmothers loved to trade*, 2008. Installation.

Like the other artists in this exhibit, Racette speaks from a position and worldview that is not only thematically relevant to the exhibit's thesis but it is also powerfully connected to her own personal history. Racette's four installations--*Nimble fingers and strong backs* (Fig. 24); *Swept away, story of a fur trade bride* (Fig. 25); *My grandmothers loved to trade*; and *A skin for a skin* (HBC logos) (Fig. 26) - are all examples of Racette locating herself within a personal narrative that effectively interrupts a Canadian history that mis-represents the importance of the role of Aboriginal women within the fur trade narrative. *Nimble fingers and strong backs*, captures the viewer's attention because it speaks of a little known fact about the role of First Nations and Métis women in the fur trade. Throughout the entire history of the fur trade these women were involved in intensive labour. In the early fur trade era, First Nations women were held in esteem by First Nations men not because of their physical beauty but because of their physical prowess. In her book, *Many Tender Ties*, the historian Sylvia Van Kirk, writes:

The Hudson's Bay Company men found the unladylike strength of Chipewyan women particularly astonishing. On one occasion David Thompson sent one of his strongest men to

help a Chipewyan woman who was hauling a heavy sled; to the man's surprise, it took all his strength to budge the load...As the famous Chief Matonabee declared, Women...were made for labour; one of them can carry, or haul, as much as two men can do." (22)

Racette's installation, *Nimble fingers and strong backs*, began from a photograph Racette found at the Saskatchewan Archives: the photo depicts women hauling and portaging.¹⁸ The photo that Racette uses in the installation is of women packing 100 pound sacks of flour and then carrying them to be transported. The installation consists of a crate similar to the one depicted in the archival image, but Racette has now stencilled the legend "Anishnabekwe Transport" (Fig. 27) onto its side, in her assemblage, she also replicates the hundred pound sacks of flour depicted in



Figure 19. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women, Nimble fingers and strong backs*, 2008. Installation shot.



Figure 20. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women, Swept away, story of a fur trade bride*, 2008. Installation



Figure 21. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women, a skin for a skin (HBC logos)*, 2008. Installation .



Figure 22. Sherry Farrell Racette, *Othered Women, Anishnabekwe Transport*, 2008. Installation

the archival photograph. This installation makes visible the continuity of a labour force of Aboriginal women that was utilised late into the fur trade era: the photo itself dates from the 1920s! Women were an integral part of the early and late fur trade, whether they were paddlers portaging alongside the men, making clothes, and supplementing food stores. Yet, despite all these activities they were still treated by the fur trade companies as “less than.” They did not receive the same wages as their male counterparts and were considered cheap labour, even though their labour was essential to the survival of the fur trade economy (Van Kirk 71-72). Unrecognized as their role was, I cannot help but feel a deep sense of admiration for their strength and tenacity. These women worked not because they had to, but, because it was a skill that ensured the survival of the community they were a part of: it did not matter if that community was a First Nations band or a trade fort. They knew their role was essential. The Europeans did not understand the cultural work ethics that dictated survival to the First Nations people. Indeed, the Europeans sought to change the subsequent role of their Métis daughters in

relation to Aboriginal culture. They encouraged their daughters to relate more to their white counterparts and to adopt a Eurocentric worldview.

In her four works in the exhibit, Racette shifts mainstream research on the fur trade, and, supplements it with an Indigenous story which she interprets for us. She is successful because she takes what has been offered as official written history (and its archival documentation), and, then re-views, re-interprets, and re-inscribes this dominant history through the lens of her own particular history and voice as a Métis woman. In her installation for *Othered Women*, she uses differing modes of voice- traditional—contemporary and written—visual, to connect the viewer to a particular Métis history that is also an integral part of the history of Canada, the US, France and Britain.

Mimi Gellman is a Metis (Ojibway/Jewish) contemporary artist and curator currently living in Toronto, Ontario. Her introspective work relies heavily on the concepts of hybridity and memory. At first glance, her haunting installation entitled *Blood Ties* (Fig. 28) seems to connote the relationship between territory and dress and how we as people carry our territories, histories and memories with us. River stones are placed in seven moccasins that are arranged carefully, on



Figure 23. Mimi Gellman, *Othered Women*, *Blood Ties*, 2008. Installation.

a floating shelf, with long leather ties trailing to the floor below. Initially, I thought the shoes were leather moccasins but in actuality they are a hybrid between traditional Ojibwa moccasins and a *Halitza*—a traditional Jewish shoe worn in time of ritual¹⁹. The long ties of the shoes are specific to the Halitza ritual, used in the symbolic act of binding and unbinding a widow's hand in marriage to her brother in law, a common practice in Judaic culture that ensures the welfare of the widow and her children. The river stones are representative of travel and the long ties suggest the long ties we have to our cultures. As Métis women we are of two nations, and, as a part of the history of our land and territories, we must constantly reconcile our connections to this traditional territory, so as not to be labelled as outsider or apart from a legacy that seems to only include men. Gellman's piece represents to me a reconciliation of two cultures as it pays homage to the strength of the ties that bind us as people.

Paved Gallery

paved gallery is an artist-run-centre that supports the presentation of contemporary new media and photography. The gallery is situated on the same street as The Red Shift Gallery and is in the same building as AKA Gallery. In the paved exhibition space, I invited three artists at varying points in their careers, who work in photographic media. These artists are not from my territory, they have very different backgrounds and historical contexts, but, the connections we have, as Aboriginal women in Canada, situate and connect us to our past and how we must perceive the future.

Tania Willard is from the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation in British Columbia. Willard is a multi-dimensional artist widely known for her early work as editor of *The Redwire Magazine*, an Indigenous youth advocacy magazine. She is also a graphic designer, visual artist and emerging curator. Currently, Willard has a curatorial residency with the grunt gallery in Vancouver, B.C.

Tania Willard is an artist that is very much interested in advocacy. In the photographic series entitled *Kye7e dress* (Fig. 29) she photo-documents public interventions and memorials that speak to her female lineage as well as her family history. In *Kye7e dress*, (Fig. 30), Willard stencils images of a dress onto varying sites in the urban landscape; the dress belonged to her great grandmother, Adeline Willard (Secwepemc). The dress is by no means a traditional dress,

but it was made with care and was to be worn at the Indian parades in the small town of Chase, B.C.²⁰. Willard explains that these parades were both an opportunity to represent the pride and solidarity of her people through dress, while also speaking to the colonization of her people.



Figure 24. Tania Willard, *Othered Women, Kye7e dress*, 2008. Installation.

Appropriating the image of this dress, Willard stencils it onto various surfaces in the urban landscape: the dress signifies that these urban sites are appropriated landscapes that belong to the traditional territory of her people. The dress locates Willard's female heritage and lineage: inserting the image of this dress into the colonial urban landscape, she disrupts the national imaginary at the same time as she acknowledges the presence and role of First Nation and Métis women, past, present and future.



Figure 25. Tania Willard, *Othered Women, Kye7e dress*, 2008. Stencil and paint.

Rosalie Favell (Métis) is an established photo-based artist originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba and currently based in Ottawa, Ontario. She often depicts and inserts herself digitally into humorous settings that speak to her heritage and positioning of self in the colonial narrative. Writing about her work, Favell states:

I do a lot of self portraits partly because [...] I can only speak from where I'm coming from. I started out taking portraits of aboriginal women to try and situate who I was in

the community [...] but ultimately I felt I needed to be the one that spoke from my position.

For the paved exhibit, I chose a series of six photos that in my opinion exemplified how Rosalie as a Métis woman dialogued with a particular colonial history using traditional strategies of humour or satire, to share with her audience a simple but powerful post-colonial counter-memory. An example of this visual strategy is seen in her piece entitled *Voyageur* (2003) (Fig. 31). This image shows a digitally superimposed image of Favell as a Star Trek Voyager in a natural wilderness setting.



Figure 26. Rosalie Favell, *Othered Women, Voyageur* (2003), installation shot paved gallery, 2008.

Historically, it is thought that the voyageurs (meaning travellers in French) were all men. But, women were also often part of these treks, participating in the roles of paddlers, guides, companions and mediators. In an act of double-coding, Favell inserts herself into the popular media narrative of *Star Trek*, a popular 1990s T.V series which is well-known to many North American contemporary viewers. The title for the work invokes the historical image of the voyageur that is also clearly identifiable to many Canadians and Americans. Favell inserts

herself into the Star Trek and Voyageur narratives as a Métis woman, inviting the audience to begin to question and dialogue with the gendered voice and classed politics of the two imperial narratives: the mainstream history of the Canadian fur trade; and, the popular T.V show of Star Trek and its colonial adventure stories of outer space.

Lastly, **Joi Arcand** is an emerging photo-based artist from the Muskeg Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. Her work exemplifies her contemporary connections to the women of her home reserve but also her wider connections to family and history. In the exhibition, Arcand presented two works entitled, *the postcard series* and *Oskinikiskweyak (Young Women, Plains Cree)* (Fig. 32). Arcand often investigates the notion or trope of the ‘authentic Indian.’ She herself is the daughter of a Cree father and white mother who has treaty status having been married prior to the change in the Indian Act (Fig. 33). In *The Postcard series*, she takes a contemporary look at the notion of the ‘authentic Indian’, utilizing her own family history as a backdrop in order to speak back to the question: what is a real Indian? In the series, in one image, you see Joi’s white mother holding her status card, and, another, you see a self-portrait of Joi herself wearing war paint, an image that plays into the stereotypical notion of an Indian in the historical imaginary of the West. (Fig. 34) *The post card series*, challenges the idea that skin colour is what makes an individual authentic or not, suggesting instead that it is worldview rather than skin colour that makes the individual who they are. In a series of five digital prints mounted on aluminium plates entitled *Oskinikiskweyak* (Fig. 35), Arcand once again challenges the colonial trope of the “authentic Indian.” She appropriates and recycles old images created by early 20th-century illustrators of white women dressed up as Indian pin-up girls.²¹ Working digitally, Arcand inserts contemporary images of First Nation and Métis women into the original photographic print. On her artist web space Arcand says that this is her way of reclaiming the image. Colonial stereotypes of Aboriginal women are still and perhaps it also points to how the *othering* of First Nation and Métis women is not only historical but it is always in flux--ever changing and adapting to our present time.

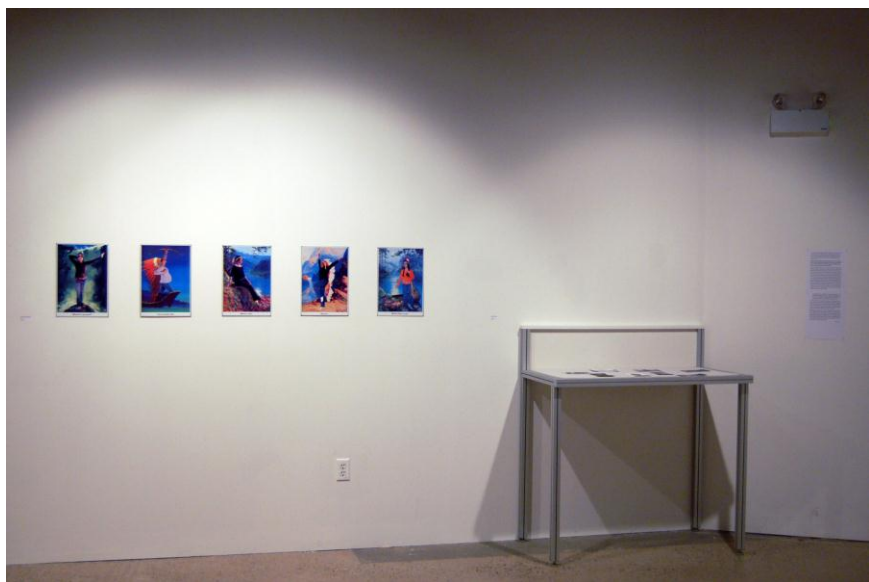


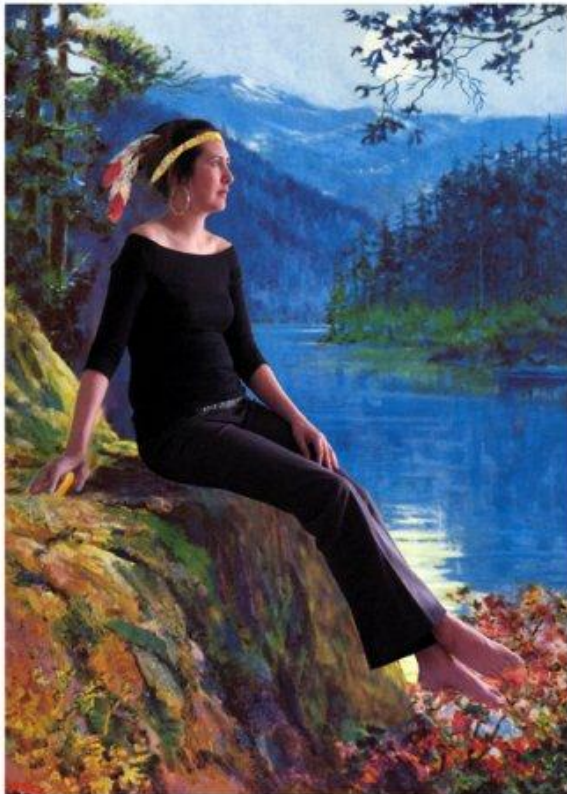
Figure 27. Joi Arcand, *Othered Women, the postcard series and Oskinikikweyak*, 2008. Installation



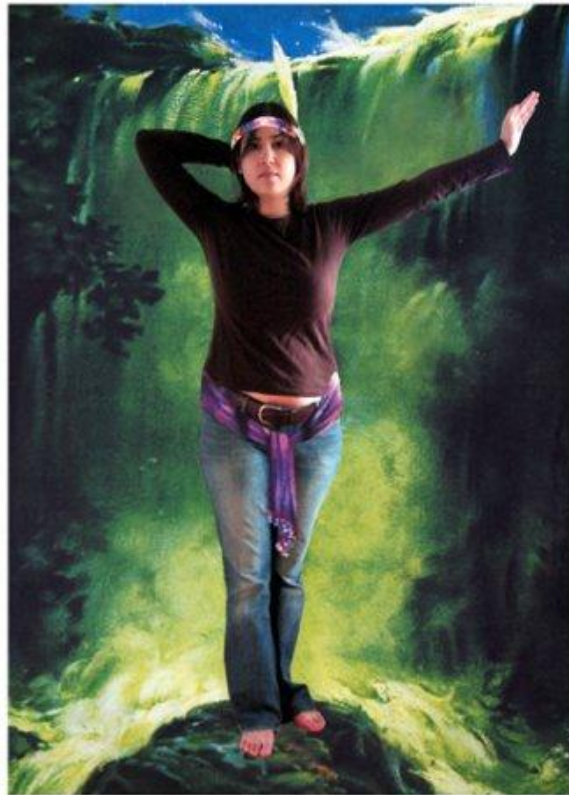
Figure 28. Joi Arcand, *Othered Women, the postcard series (mother)*, 2008. Photograph.



Figure 29. Joi Arcand, *Othered Women*, the postcard series (self-portrait), 2008. Photograph.



My feathers are digital



My white side, or my wrong side?

Figure 30. Joi Arcand, *Othered Women*, *Oskinikikweyak* (image one and two), 2008. Photo mounted on tin, Photoshop.

The Red Shift Gallery

The Red Shift Gallery is an Aboriginal contemporary art space in which artists and curators may develop or showcase critical programming that speaks to a particular worldview. As artistic director of the Red Shift Gallery and curator of this exhibition, I made the decision to have a single artist develop a solo exhibition around the theme of *Othered Women*. Nadia Myre is Algonquin and a member of the Kitigan Zibi reserve in Maniwaki Quebec. Traditionally, her work has interrogated themes of identity and the *other*. In the Red Shift space she incorporated a number of ongoing works that took on differing aspects of the exhibition thesis of *Othered Women*. To do this, she slightly shifted the perspective and look of her prior investigations. For this exhibit, she represents the land itself as the *other woman*, while, at the same moment, displaying the connections between the history of women and trade within our traditional territories. In a series of beaded logos, she connects the activities of the Canadian and European fur trade to the activity of contemporary corporate imperialism and its violence to traditional territories. Originally, this work was meant to be a performance in which Nadia set about beading the logos in the public sphere of the gallery, but, unfortunately this event did not take place. The beaded logo of Cameco Corporation (Fig. 36) is especially poignant to the First Nations and Métis people of Saskatchewan. Cameco has a number of uranium mines in the north of the province and makes it their duty to employ Aboriginal northerners.²² The financial gain of working at the mines supersedes to many the fact that these mines cause great ecological harm to their territory, including the ill-health effects of uranium drift that travels the waterways, poisoning Aboriginal communities. Many northern communities do not address the ecological rape of northern territory on any specific level. In Myre's textual piece (Fig. 37), stencilled words such as, "don't," "no," "please" are arrayed in a pattern of repetition on the gallery wall connoting many layers and allusions to voice and violation. I interpret these violations and loss of voice to the corporate othering of the land beginning with the early fur trade and continuing today in the corporate intrusion into the Canadian landscape. Myre also included a contemporary logo of the Hudson Bay Company alongside the logo for Quebec Hydro Electric from her home province, connecting and linking these colonial corporate projects on traditional territories, past and present.



Figure 31. Nadia Myre, *Othered Women, Beaded logos (Cameco)*, 2008, Canvas, beads.



Figure 32. Nadia Myre, *Othered Women, untitled (text)*, 2008. Paper, paint.

All three exhibitions that made up *Othered Women* dialogued with, and, addressed a history that has been silenced by colonial dominant narratives. First Nations and Métis women are continually working to peel back history utilizing diverse contemporary modes of voice: in this case, the language is used to re-inscribe a different Aboriginal-centred history. The work that these artists made and displayed in this exhibit, hopefully gives pause to those who have viewed it. The dissemination of these no longer silenced narratives to the larger Canadian public is important. It is my hope that this recognition of the presence and contribution of generations of Aboriginal women who assisted vitally in the formation of this nation called Canada will assist in the healing and shifting the ongoing legacies of colonialism.

5. Conclusion

Working in the field of Aboriginal contemporary art has given me the opportunity to assess my own history, to look beyond tomorrow, and to look and speak critically about today. Our history as First Nations people encompasses all of our struggles, defeats and victories. So when I speak of my work today, it is equally as important to note on whose shoulders I stand: the countless activists, artists, writers and socially-aware citizens that have worked diligently to strive for the basic human rights of First Nations people here in Canada, not to mention the United States. The late Joanne Cardinal-Schubert, an established and highly recognized Aboriginal contemporary artist, writer and curator saw early on the need to recognize the advancements made by Aboriginal people during the “Indian Renaissance” of the 1960s. During that time, many Aboriginal people worked towards Indigenising the Euro-centric landscape of educational and cultural institutions. Since that decade, many Native Studies Departments have been formed at the urging of Aboriginal students. In terms of the arts, Saskatchewan is unique in that the Saskatchewan Arts Board (SAB) formed in the late 1940s under the Douglas Government: it was the first government funded cultural program of its kind coming before the Canada Council for the Arts by thirteen years.²³ Today the SAB works to advocate and foster community outreach and the professional development of artists (Morgan). The SAB is unique, amongst provincial arts funders, for the many innovative outreach programs disseminated to Aboriginal artists. These programs, past and present are geared towards fostering the professional development and visibility of Aboriginal artists.

Saskatoon has been home to me since 1995. If I had remained up North, I can say in all likelihood, that I would never have been exposed to contemporary Aboriginal art to the extent that I have been here in Saskatoon. That is why it is an important facet of my work to heighten the visibility of contemporary Aboriginal art and to educate our people about our rich history in the arts. My thesis has allowed me to take inventory and map in my journey as an emerging curator of Aboriginal art in diverse media and contexts. As an undergraduate I had the wonderful opportunity to learn from other contemporary artists and cultural workers within Saskatoon. The discipline of Art History became a site of interrogation, a space in which to reconceptualise what Canadian Art History is, from another lens or worldview. After graduating from the University

of Saskatchewan, I worked at Tribe an artist-run-centre in Saskatoon. Tribe exposed me to a wide plethora of contemporary Aboriginal artists. To be able to network with artists that I otherwise would have only read about in textbooks was a great gift and inspiration to me. I truly believed that what my peers were doing within the art community was important and necessary in the context of creating a vital post-colonial counter-discourse.

My work with the Red Shift Gallery was a project that lasted five years. My curatorial practice and the development of the Red Shift Gallery was a project framed within Indigenous-centred action research. Below, I discuss how the project addressed the four principal components of action based research: 1) research, 2) reflection, 3) action, and 4) collaboration.

Collaboration:

We collaborated with artists in the national and local community, to critically explore issues of social justice. The list of artists that exhibited in the Red Shift Gallery from 2006-2010, excluding Red Shift Gallery members- or student group shows include: Thirza Cuthand, Jonathon Busch, Elwood Jimmy, Priscilla Settee, Anna Leigh King, Faye HeavyShield, Lissa Robinson, Linda Young, Riel Benn, Chrystal Kruselnicki, Michele Mackasey, Adrian Stimson, Jackson 2Bears, Nahed Mansour, Michel Boutin, Nadia Myre, David Garneau, Sonny Assu, Terrance Houle, Tim Moore, Wally Dion, Christi Belcourt, Ruth Cuthand, Leah Dorion, Cindy Baker, Felicia Gay, Joi Arcand, and Judy McNaughton. Most of the gallery's programs were funded by the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council for the Arts through project grants written primarily by myself. During 2006-2010, we partnered with ten like-minded organisations that allowed us to operate as an artist-run-centre at varying levels. These organisations were as follows:

- PRIDE Festival (2006);
- aka gallery(2006);
- SCYAP (Saskatoon Community Youth Art P) Junior Urban Canvas Project(2006);
- Mental Health Region Saskatoon (2006);
- Indian Teacher Education Program (2007);
- University of Saskatchewan-Art & Art History (2007);
- Humanities Research Unit-University of Saskatchewan (2007);

- paved art (2007);
- aka gallery(2007);
- Blackflash Magazine (2008);
- paved art(2008);
- aka gallery(2008);
- Humanities Research Unit-University of Saskatchewan (2008);
- aka gallery (2009);
- paved art (2009);
- Commonweal Arts –North (2009);
- Commonweal Arts- North (2010);
- Mendel Art Gallery (2010);
- University of Saskatchewan-Art & Art History (2010).

Action:

The successful establishment of the artist-run centre and the consistent programming we developed comprise the action component of this Indigenous centred action research project.

Research:

Through this project of active engagement I have had the opportunity to experience and evaluate a range of methodologies and practices that are critical to a socially relevant curatorial practice.

My curatorial research praxis will not end with the closing of the Red Shift Gallery. As my research evolves and matures so too will my journey as a curator of Aboriginal contemporary art. I can only see my efforts as a cultural worker increasing. I was a new parent when this journey began and I have been grateful that my children can bear witness and share this journey with me.

As a parent I feel a certain responsibility to engage in issues that are pertinent to me as an Aboriginal person and it is along this path that I plan to continue my research as a curator and writer in the future. Being conscious of colonialism and how it has affected Indigenous people worldwide is the first step in looking into the past and moving forward into the future. To engage

with issues that are important to me, as an Aboriginal person is a strategy on my part to resist the colonial imaginings of the West. This task has become a responsibility in my mind. My role as Director of the Red Shift Gallery has changed, but my praxis within the field of curating and as a cultural worker has not. My utilisation of Indigenised methodologies has enabled me to create sites of Aboriginal voice, healing, and transformation within the wider realm of contemporary art in Saskatchewan and Canada.

Reflection:

Having undertaken the project I can now reflect on the research questions identified at the start of the project and assess what has been learned that can inform my own future practice and those of other critical socially engaged curators.

- How can the disciplines of visual art, art history and curatorial practice be utilized as sites in which Aboriginal peoples can respond to existing issues of crisis?²⁴

These disciplinary sites when utilised by Aboriginal cultural workers and artists are continually informed by a specific Indigenous worldview. For myself, when I work within these sites, I often pinpoint a moment in history and time about it in relation to my own worldview. I then begin to engage that particular point in history- through the various sites of curating, critical writing and visual art- armed with a worldview- that looks through a post-colonial lens. Most often, I engage with the work of other artists work rather than with my own, but again, always in tandem with my own specific worldview. To create a site in which there is an audience is important whether one is curating a performance, critiquing an exhibition, or viewing an artist's work in their studio. It is always important to create an opportunity for people to engage with an art work. The sites of visual art, art history, and curatorial practice can all become opportunities in which taboo subjects and difficult knowledge are aired. It is important to create cultural spaces that allow Aboriginal people to respond to issues that affect them. I have curated numerous exhibitions on issues that affect Aboriginal people and I will continue to do so.

- How does my opposition to the notion of the *authentic Indian* allow me to move complexly in my work as a curator?

The *authentic Indian* is a trope that has always troubled me. Perhaps it troubles me because it excludes me and labels me as inauthentic or hybrid. Who is authentically Indigenous? It is not so simple to negate the notion of authenticity or essentialism as it does present a site of opposition to the ever-present colonial dominant culture. (Ashcroft 21). However, the notion of authenticity is also a slippery slope in which the identity of Indigenous peoples becomes stagnant and unmoveable. Taking on a contested notion of authenticity, however, allows me to think critically about the thematics I work with as a curator. There is no simple answer. I continue to interrogate my own work as well as the work of other artists and curators.

- As a curator how do I speak with my people and not apart from them?²⁵

My work with the Red Shift Gallery allowed me as a cultural worker to create a venue that was available and accessible to artists and curators. Through grant writing and fundraising, I managed to cover the financial costs of the gallery's programs and all the other administrative duties associated with them.

As an organisation we never censored an artist's work. Our space was available for artists to think critically about issues relevant to them, whatever our opinions. We actively sought out Aboriginal contemporary artists whose work had not been exhibited in our particular region. Or, we commissioned new works that were exhibited or performed in the Red Shift gallery space, providing diverse audiences with new and exciting works. As a curator, I am careful not to be the voice of the people but to speak with the people. The politics of voice is complicated within the realm of curating. As a curator, I need to continually question my motives and myself when creating curatorial themes and when writing about other artists work.

- How do I respond as a curator to difficult knowledge in the past and in the present?

Mainstream galleries oftentimes censor difficult knowledge. Overall it has been the Canadian practice to censor Aboriginal issues that are difficult to acknowledge politically. In the past,

contemporary Aboriginal artists and curators have taken the important step to implicate difficult knowledge. It is also critically important for artists and curators to go beyond implication and to make room for restorative modes of transformation (Smith).

- Are counter-dialogues effective in sites such as art history and the art gallery?

Counter-dialogues have been an essential strategy in the work of Aboriginal artists and within art historical writing. In fact, there needs to be much more critical writing to add to the art history canon. Many public galleries still need de-centring in terms of their colonial discourses. Counter-dialogues offered from a perceived periphery (Ashcroft 56) serve to make way for sites of resistance within these colonial institutions, which is necessary. To ‘talk-back’ to colonial history, politics, or issues of crisis is a powerful strategy in post-colonial discourse. Many programs I have curated or programmed have offered counter-dialogues within the colonial institution of the gallery site. In curating the exhibition, *No word for Goodbye* for example, I included the work of three artists that interrupt the notion that time, history and language is linear. Rather, the work in this exhibit revealed that, in fact, an embedded First Nations worldview is connected to language. The exhibit negated that time runs from A to Z, and then ends but that time is cyclical, with no space for finality. The exhibition was an intervention, a way in which to disseminate a First Nations worldview within the colonial space of a university gallery. In the act of disrupting western notions of time, it also set about de-centring western academic space.

As I move forward I will continue to develop strategies of post-colonial counter-discourse in order to further disseminate the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists, working in the fields of curating, writing and visual art for the benefit of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike. Martin Luther King wrote from prison: “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed²⁶.” There is much work needed to be done to achieve a post-colonial reality- it is something we must aspire and work towards. There are many stories that have been silenced by the oppressor and it is up to us as cultural activists to bridge the gap and intercede on behalf of the colonized: voicing their stories, with the colonized and not for the colonized.

I realized early on in my undergraduate studies in Art History that my decision to be a mother would enrich my process but also at times hinder it. As any parent will tell you, your child does not care about deadlines unless it's to get dinner on or read me a book, Now! As a mom I have to flow with my children's schedules whether it is convenient or not. However, the day my first child was born, I looked at the world differently. My decisions were now based on how the decision in question would affect my child. As a mom I strive to impart knowledge, coping strategies, a work ethic and skills of perseverance to my children. I have taught my older children to question and not to accept things at face value, to have empathy, and to look at others and not only themselves. To run the Red Shift Gallery and attend University (for the most part as a single parent) has shown me that I can do work that is important to me and still be an available parent. The price paid for this career plan, however, was not having the financial security that one would like as a parent. As a single mom, maintaining a balance between work, school, and home life was difficult, but I was not completely alone: I had the support of a loving network of friends and family; we always thrived. The research questions of this thesis in chapter two, I realize now, were often posed with this question in mind:

- How do I pass on to the next generation the tools of transformation for a realized post-colonial reality?

Perhaps this question goes back to motives. What are my motives when curating an exhibition? Why should I share my worldview or disclose difficult knowledge related to my people? Change is slow and incremental. If we are to ever reach what we aspire to, we need to continue to pass down strategies and knowledge, to be fully aware of colonization and its ongoing effects, and to keep our eyes-wide-open. Colonialism is very much a road that Indigenous people have been relegated to walk upon. However, it is not the only path and as Indigenous people we need to be aware or *conscious* of the path that we walk and the paths we would like to walk. Only then is a crossroad laid open before us. The blinders we wear must be removed so as to see that there are choices; there are avenues of post-colonial transformation and change where in which we become the vehicles of change.

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7. End Notes

¹ For further information on O.Charlebois, see History of Keewatin.

² Cumberland House is located on the largest delta in North America; see Wikipedia-Saskatchewan River Delta.

³ Lynx was borne out of Greenpeace; once Greenpeace withdrew its campaign against the fur trade after seeing the effects it had on the Indigenous trappers in Northern Canada.[§] Emberley focuses on the group Lynx and the effects that their dissemination of misinformation on the fur trade had on Indigenous trappers and hunters; see Emberley.

⁴ Oral history related to me by my mother Valendie Lathlin-Buck

⁵ Smith Graham, 1997: In Kaupapa Maori methodology, Graham situates Education and schooling (whereas I utilise art history and art) as significant sites of struggle in which an Indigenous response be formed to their existing conditions of crisis; see Smith (27).

⁶ Smith Graham 1997: In Kaupapa Maori methodology, Graham Smith speaks of Kaupapa Maori as developed with the people and not outside of them; see Smith. (26-27).

⁷ See O'Brian (1/7)

⁸ Little Bear explains his theory of jagged worldviews colliding; see Little Bear (84-85)

⁹ For further information see, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A demographic profile: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 96F00XIE2001007(p.10)

¹⁰ For further information see, *Canada's Aboriginal Population in 2017*. The Daily. Statistics Canada, Web.28 June 2005.

¹¹ Most recent statistics will be held May 2011

¹² There are other titles for this line of work and vary from institution to institution.

¹³ Article provided by Professor Marie Battiste.

¹⁴ 85.11.16 is one aspect of the larger project initiated by Common Weal called the Dewdney Avenue Project. Other artists that created works for this project are Edward Poitras and Cheryl L'Hirondelle

¹⁵ For more information see, <<http://www.scaa.usask.ca/gallery/regina/central/riot.html>> web.12 August 2009

¹⁶ For more information see, Black, Anthea, *Living History Lesson*. Fast Forward Weekly- Visual Arts Section, 27 March 2008. Web.

¹⁷ Racette Sherry Farrell, email conversation (21/01/2010, 3:36pm)

¹⁸ Racette Sherry Farrell email conversation (21/01/2010, 3:36pm)

¹⁹ Gellman Mimi, Artist Statement via mail (October 2008)

²⁰ Willard, Tania Artist Statement via email (29/03/2010, 12:07pm)

²¹ For more information see, www.joitarcand.com

²² For more information visit Cameco website.

²³ *Quality of Life-Arts and Culture*. Government of Saskatchewan. History.; see Morgan.

²⁴ See, Smith Graham, 1997: In Kaupapa Maori methodology, Graham situates Education and schooling (whereas I utilise art history and art) as significant sites of struggle in which an Indigenous response be formed to their existing conditions of crisis. (27)

²⁵ See, Smith Graham 1997: In Kaupapa Maori methodology, Graham Smith speaks of Kaupapa Maori as developed with the people and not outside of them. (26-27)

²⁶ See, Martin Luther King Jr... "BrainyQuote.com. Xplore Inc, 2011. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/martinluth125901.html>