

# Buffalo Boy's Heart On:

Buffalo Boy's 100 years of wearing his heart on his sleeve

A thesis submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Fine Art  
in the  
Department of Art and Art History  
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## **Abstract**

### **Buffalo Boy's Heart On**

Buffalo Boy's 100 years of wearing his heart on his sleeve is the sum of my experience at the University of Saskatchewan. It is an exploration of "coming to know" my worldview. It is an exhibition that includes but is not limited to ideas within indigenous knowledge, meta/ quantum physic's role in creating unity, the immergence of two-spirit people's history, colonial or post -colonial critique, ecology, spirituality and healing modalities within the creative process.

The exhibition has been organized into four directions corresponding to the Medicine Wheel, directions that align with the cycles of life, balance and attainment of harmony. I have come to know that history is a construction, fragments of memory told through the bias of time, place and privilege. In order to demonstrate ideas of fragmented memory, I have written this paper in a stream of consciousness style, meaning that it moves between my voice, visuals and academic research.

Buffalo Boy to Reader: A heart to heart introduces the reader to my ideas of worldview, Western constructions and fragmentation.

"In the beginning" sets the stage for the character known as Buffalo Boy, a construction and fusion of all times in the present.

"Spirit and Intent" mimics the treaty making process, it is an agreement with the University of Saskatchewan and myself. It is about process and the evolution of my spirit.

“Four Directions” introduces the exhibition and its alignment with the teachings of the medicine wheel. It explores the concept of being, time and enlightenment. Movements that create balance and unfold histories.

“Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land” is a site of resistance. I project protest graffiti on the college building, an illusion that insights ideas of protest.

“Nothing Happened: Old Sun – Time – Bison Heart” are three elements that speak to layering history; shadows of the past, being in the Western paradox and the tensions between light and dark.

“Gambling the Prairie Winnings” is the construction of time through narrative, image and artifact. It is a humorous view of how the west was dumb.

“Mission Impossible: Buffalo Boy's Wild West Peep Show” is an altar and a stage. It is a video projection where Buffalo Boy can dream of missions past.

“So long farewell” is the sum of my experience. Through my art making I transcend the constructions of history, I heal myself for others to see, it is a new place from which to view the world.



## **Acknowledgements**

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It takes many people to realize a vision; my heart felt gratitude to all who have participated in making my visions become a reality.

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all my relations, which means ancestors, friends and family. While I name a number of people, there is no hierarchy and if I missed someone, it does not mean that you are not in my heart; equal and enduring. Happy you make the space for me to be, there is no better partner and friend. Mom, Dad, Jason, Pam, Siksika and Sault family, you are my history and source of love. Kay, Ken, John, Debbie, Kenny, Ted, Jane, Liam and Edison Grove for your love and support over the years.

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## **Buffalo Boy to Reader: A heart to heart**

“When you see a new trail, or a footprint that you do not know, follow it to the point of knowing.”<sup>1</sup>

Each day is like a lifetime, unfolding new experiences that become part of my memory, fragments of time and space reflected in each step experienced. I am the sum of my experiences, a construction and combination of the colonial project and indigenous being. A binary that is contained within one body that knows itself through at least two worldviews.

This story reflects my awareness that I move between worldviews. I have written this paper with fragmenting in mind, in a stream of consciousness style that plays between the past, present and future. My being is a fusion of worldviews contextualized through the languages of voice, sight, and intellect.

It is my intent to use my voice and space as sites of resistance. When I think about the past native injustices, my experience is one of anger, despair, isolation and pain. I believe these experiences are maintained through colonialist strategies of oppression. Through reminding, I become the colonizer colonizing my own mind, reliving the past, keeping the pain alive thereby perpetuating conquering strategies. I lose the present and future possibilities thus maintaining limited or narrow ideologies, the systemic control and dominance of one idea over the other. When I apply indigenous knowledge thru sharing stories, I am resisting oppression, thereby transforming myself to become more than just a

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<sup>1</sup> Quote by Grandmother of Ohiyesa, Charles A. Eastman – Soul of the Indian

broken voice. Black cultural theorist bell hooks<sup>2</sup> speaks about broken voices and resistance " When you hear the broken voice you also hear the pain contained within that brokenness – a speech of suffering; often it's that sound nobody wants to hear ". Then she goes on to speak about places or spaces of resistance:

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice...We are transformed, individually, collectively as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world. (16-19)

Being aware of bell hooks writings assists me in imagining spaces that transform history: a space where I can interrupt and appropriate the colonial project through my physical acts of creation. I have a choice to resist pain and move toward another experience. My voice realized through art making is a space where I can gain new experiences, it is where I resist yet remain a part of the colonial project, an irony that fuels my creativity. Like the trickster, a contrary-being that does one thing but means another.

I have come to know that history is a construction, an ongoing story told through the bias of time, place and privilege. I have the privilege of becoming a part of the historical record through my relationship with western education; this

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<sup>2</sup> bell hooks purposefully decapitalizes her name as a resistance tool



is a space where I am aware of my compliance to the colonizing of my mind. Yet this is my opportunity to tell my story, to wear my heart on my sleeve, a site of resistance within which my spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual being unfold.

When I create I become more self-aware, it is an experience where I get to “Be”. My spirit materializes, my emotions move, my body feels and my mind stands still yet is aware. It is where I experience healing, a space of love, forgiving and grace. It is another construction, an imaginary space where matter dissolves into nothingness, and a void where everything is possible.



## **In the beginning**

*Born on the prairie during the coldest day on the planet, the wind blew across the stubble fields, a minus 54 with the wind chill at minus 64 arrested everything in its wake. Out of the wilderness there sounded a grunt, a lone bison standing defiantly, knowing this could be the beginning and the end. Suddenly, the steaming embryonic sack hit the ground shattering instantly, like the sound of glass charms in the wind. The snap of the umbilical cord signaled a birth, it was not human or beast, boy or girl. It was good fortune that anti-freeze flowed through it's veins as the cold turned to hot like the cutting of the knife through skin. It was predisposed to survive, weaning on the frozen nipple of the northern lights. The wolf growled and the bear stirred in her den, dream time, introspection, talking to the spirit world, gathering medicine of the heart. The wind spoke, a whisper then a shrill, too two spirited for you! Buffalo Boy you shall be! Thus were the humble beginnings of Buffalo Boy, his adventures to be filled by the Wild West, a spirited journey to the heart of coming to know.*

*A super natural life existed on the prairies, one that was full of joyous abundance, where the energies of the universe were visible to all. A multi-spirited landscape was filled with voices singing in harmonic resonance reaching beyond the stars. There was no other way of knowing, harmony and balance was at hand. Then, one day the wind changed, it blew a different direction, signaling a fate beyond all comprehension. Out of the dust storm there appeared a rag tag flag of dragged up men, pinched faced women and tidy children looking like mini replicas of the older. Like a red dragon, they slithered beneath the prairie moon,*

*belching smoke and fire as they cannonade across the land, prowling for the next big conquest, consuming and scorching everything in their way. Through the haze and putrid smell of branded skin, arose the sign, three crosses heralding happy and glorious, sending her victorious, long to reign over us. Buffalo Boy frolicked in the sweet grass, consumed by the smell of prayer, pre-burnt offerings. In the distance a scout saw him, signaled to the train, took aim and fired. Snatched like a Saskatoon berry from your sack, Buffalo Boy was bagged. Into the gullet and down to the gut of the consumer world, he became an attraction, a freak show of nature, another other for all to see. Years of struggle ensued, yet Buffalo Boy who was born of the frozen knife knew life was more than just a show, it was a peep show. Having the instinct to survive, she gained the tools of the trade, danced his way to the top, only to return to the bottom again and again. His life was full of adventure, fraught with frocks, fringe and Cher hair. Like the half-breed gypsy getting run out of town, Buffalo Boy sang "If I could turn back time, If I could find away, I'd beat the shit out of Custer again and again". A tune that would make you stay away became a mantra, soothing the bitterness of time. The crystal queens proud of Buffalo Boy's resilience gathered to grant his wish. Like sharp shards of glass smashing against her soul, tearing at his heart. Buffalo Boy woke knowing there was another way, SELL IT!" with that she looked down at her blood soaked hoofs, clicked and repeated, "If I could turn back time, If I could turn back time...*



## Spirit and Intent

*Articles of a Treaty made and concluded this Thirteenth day of September in the year of our Lord, Two Thousand and Five, between his most Gracious Majesty the Queen of the Universe of the one part and Buffalo Boy, inhabitant of the intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional territory, chosen as hereinafter mentioned of the other part.<sup>1</sup>*

My original statement of intent when applying to the University of Saskatchewan was to research healing modalities and aboriginal visioning as it relates to science. During the past two years I have researched how we come to know our worldview. Mine for example includes Blackfoot ways of being, meta / quantum physics role in creating unity, the re-immersion of two-spirit people's history as a part of indigenous cosmology, colonial or post-colonial critique, ecology and spirituality within the aboriginal or autochthonous art movement. Through this research I have become more self-aware. I am aware of my spirit and the power within and without. I believe and see that I am connected to but not limited by time, space, earth and the universe and therefore act to strengthen these connections. My MFA exhibition is the sum of this research, it contains these elements, subtle and obvious. The story aligns with the current provincial centenary celebrations. It is a journey of coming to know myself, layers uncovered by my multi-disciplinary art practice. Buffalo Boy can be considered a

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<sup>1</sup> Re-write of Treaty 7 introduction.

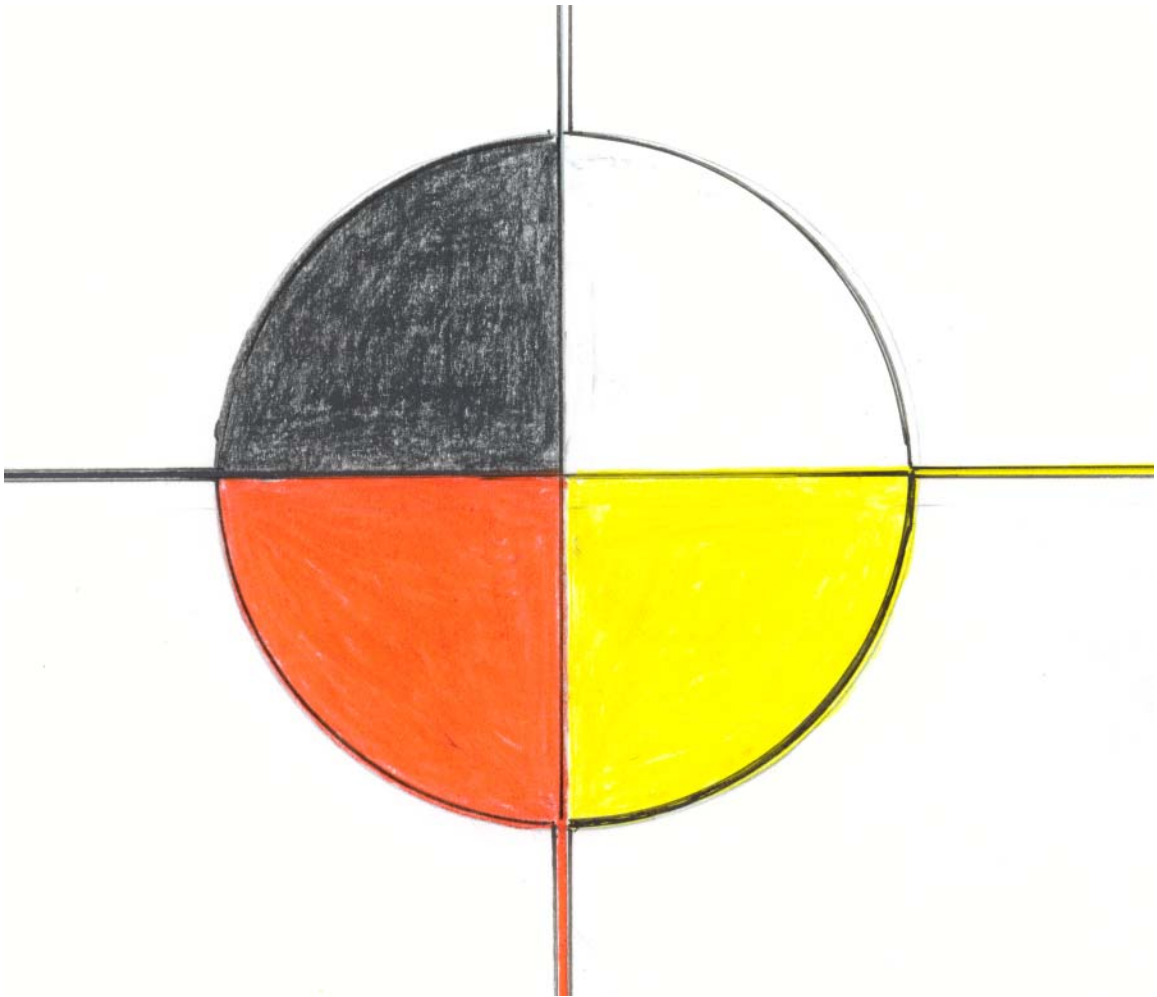
trickster. The trickster is a storyteller who seriously ridicules our human nature whereby creating connections that can divide then unite our universe.

The application of Indigenous Knowledge within Western institutions is evolving, I am excited to be a part and contribute to this evolution through the visual arts. My exhibition is called “Buffalo Boy’s Heart On”, a shortening of “Buffalo Boy’s 100 years of wearing his Heart On his sleeve”. To wear your heart on your sleeve is an idiom that means to express your emotions freely and openly, for all to see, to not hold back your emotions and to be clear about your feelings in each moment.

Visual art can open the door to individual interpretation; to change. I desire my exhibition to trigger those who seek to understand themselves through other points of view. Visual art is a healing modality that allows the individual to examine their path in relation to making choices, holding power rather than becoming a victim, victimization being a construct pervasive within Western culture. I have come to understand that in order for me to hold my power, I must be aware of my own intent. Intent is important as it puts into context our statements or actions, like the articles of a treaty, it is a way to account. I account by meaning what I say, not assuming the intent of others, trying to never take things personally as I know I am a mirror for others to see themselves in their actions and doing the best I can in every thing I do<sup>2</sup>. Buffalo Boy’s Heart On is the sum of my research and represents my experience in Saskatoon to date, an experience for which I am thankful and proud to have gained.

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<sup>2</sup> Applied Toltec teachings as told by Don Miguel Riuz.





## Four Directions

Buffalo Boy's 100 years of wearing his Heart On his sleeve is an exhibition in four directions. It aligns with the teachings of the medicine wheel, a circular movement between physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual states. In his book *Blackfoot Physics*, F. David Peat a theoretical physicist, related his experience among the Blackfoot, in particular his experience observing the ceremonies of the sun dance and the sacred medicine wheel or hoop and their relationship to understanding tribal systems;

The four directions are pictured as spokes on the medicine wheel and refer not only to the transformation of the seasons but also to the movement from birth to death; to health and of healing; to the dynamics of the individual psyche; to the concept of justice; to the meanings of sacred colors; to the history of a group; to the tasks that must be carried out by the different peoples of the earth, and to a host of other teachings. Again and again one sees that, from the perspective of indigenous science, sacred number is not abstract but concrete and experiential: the spirit of each number unfolds into an interlocking multiplicity of different meanings and teachings. (162)

The teachings of the medicine wheel can assist individuals in understanding their place internally and externally. It is about being self-aware and seeking harmony. When you come to know yourself through the perceptions taught by the medicine wheel, it can assist you in understanding your nature and its relation to the world around you. The four elements of the medicine wheel

speak to movement, a journey in coming to know you and the world around you. Colours and the spirits of the natural world guide ideas such as wisdom, innocence, trust, introspection, and enlightenment. It has been my experience when applying the teachings of the medicine wheel that balance will occur within and without. A realization that life is about spiritual movement, an evolution of self that addresses but does not dwell on the past colonial interruption. A state of present being that builds a more inclusive and dynamic future. It is a multi-dimensional and constantly revising path that places me in the present, a place where there is space for evolution and a continuum of immediacy. Indigenous knowledge and ideology can be explored through Western systems, yet explanations cannot give experience, experience is to be gained.

Being is a concept explored by many, Martin Heidegger theorized Being as the most universal concept, un-definable and self-evident.<sup>3</sup> Part of my being is the indigenous experience; I see it as a tangible and non-tangible energy force, contained within and without my physical bio-unit. For example, I experience connection to my state of being when I am in nature, when my mind becomes still and I resonate with universal energies. I do not know where I begin or end, I become part of the universal chorus, enlightened. Enlightenment can be defined as a natural state of feeling one with your being. Or a state of connection with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that is you and much

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<sup>3</sup> Summarized question of being by Martin Heidegger in Being and Time.

greater than you and which is beyond form.<sup>4</sup> Eckhart Toole's 'Power of Now' explains the greatest obstacle to enlightenment:

Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakeable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment, for validation, security or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer. (9)

My enlightenment comes from many sources, yet I have found that the act of creation or making art to be the most enlightening for me. It is where I feel balance, where my intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual states become one with the universe. In creating this exhibit, I experienced moments where my intellect was brilliant and dull, my emotions joyful and sad, my body eager and tired, my spirit present and detached. Movements that create balance, like standing in the middle of a teeter-totter, your movement determines your place, too far one way or the other and you may fall or keep balance. An awareness that keeps you connected to the energies moving through you. By following the path of the artist, I do not suppose that my art will change the world, it can only change me. However, it can unfold a history, a space from which to experience balance.

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<sup>4</sup> Paraphrased from Power of Now – Your are not your mind Eckhart Tolle.



## **Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land**

In a dream I had a vision of a herd of bison roaming in the University bowl- a space they once inhabited is now devoid of their presence. Yet I see the bison, still roaming in the bowl, energy that was once matter, ready to re-materialize out of the void. Bison in the Bowl: This is Indian Land is my first direction in this exhibition. Bison comes from the north, it is white and its gifts are wisdom, strength and endurance. I have decided to install my family's painted tipi called: "Buffalo Particles". In the Blackfoot tradition, painted tipis were created for protection and the healing of a family. My vision contained a maelstrom of bison in a vortex, I saw them as particles of energy swirling, constantly renewing. The historical slaughter of the bison was a time that released a great amount of energy; I believe that the matter of the bison became energy in the universe. I see that energy in and around us, attainable and transforming. In coming to understand some of the ideas within quantum mechanics, which sees the universe through the sub-atomic lens where all matter is connected; atomic particles of energy constantly moving, transforming and connected. In Taking the Quantum Leap Alan Wolf states:

At the quantum level of reality, when we choose to "see" what we see, reality becomes both paradoxical and sensible at the same time. Our acts of observation are what we experience as the everyday world. This way of thinking about the world is new to the Western mind. It arose when physicists discovered that their acts of observing the atomic world introduced a duality, a double or paradoxical way of seeing.

THIS IS INDIAN LAND

By introducing duality, I create a paradox in definitions, a space where meanings are not fixed and constantly shift. A way of seeing that allows for the evolution of ideas. In placing my tipi in the University Bowl, I honour the bison and the space it once roamed. I will project images of bison and other images that relate to the contemporary aboriginal experience onto the College building. It is my intent to create layers that speak to energy, matter, time, illusion, duality and paradox.

By projecting images of bison and the aboriginal experience onto the college building, I enlighten matter. A union of disparate histories that can be healed through the presence of an aboriginal healing device, the tipi. For three nights I will create happenings that will celebrate the bison and aboriginal presence in the university. Thus creating an open space for participation, transformation, celebration and ceremony.

*As a child, I recall traveling through the Garden River Reserve, spray painted in red on the railway bridge was "This is Indian Land", a statement that was in your face, clear and defiant. It is a statement that I often see on First Nations, usually close to a well-traveled road, letting all know where they are.*

Through the colonial project, I have been physically separated from the land, placed on reserves that segregate and identify difference analogous to the bison. Although racist and often repressing, reserves have been a repository of culture and spaces of resistance, somewhat like the University. By projecting images on a colonial space, I am creating a site of resistance, the illusion of constructed space and history.





## **Nothing Happened: Old Sun – Time – Bison Heart**

Crow Chief Plenty Coups refused to speak of the years after the last wild bison herds were gone, saying, “when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.”<sup>5</sup> For my second direction I have installed three elements that relate to colonialism’s impact on culture, temporal being and spirit. The bear comes from the west. It is black and its gifts are introspection, looking into ones own illumination.

Old Sun was a chief of the Blackfoot and a distant relative. My family has told me that he was a respected leader and distrusted the new comers greatly. He did not want to sign Treaty 7 preferring war to what at the time he considered the end of our way of life. I find it ironic that his namesake was used by the Government and Anglican Church to build a residential school on my Nation. A space that ensured the end of a way of life, many of my family members attended this school with stories happy, sad and tragic. The institution now called Old Sun College has made the transition from residential school to college yet remains as a colonizing symbol for many on my Nation. Over the years, various renovations have created fragments of material culture; I have been privileged in collecting some of these objects.

Old Sun is a sweat lodge replica constructed of metal with bison fur fragments arranged in a circle within the lodge, a residential school light is

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<sup>5</sup> First peoples history website quote

illuminated over the lodge. To represent the reconstruction of cultural icons, I've used the design of the sweat lodge, I have had it manufactured from steel, steel is an industrial material that drove imperial expansion.

It is a skeleton, a cage that shadows the struggle most aboriginal people face in reconciling traditional ways in contemporary Western Culture. I often use the bison as a symbol representing the destruction of aboriginal peoples way of life. I have pieced bison fur fragments together, an attempt at putting things back together, or trying to hold on to something that is rapidly changing. It is placed inside the sweat lodge, the womb for protection, yet it is also caged. I have placed the Old Sun light fixture above the sweat lodge. It shines downward interrogating the rest of the piece. As I believe that objects hold energy, this light that once shone above the heads of many children within the school is a witness to cultural genocide. The shadow created on the fragments of bison fur is the Union Jack, shadows of history haunt us, illumination of our history can enlighten us and bring us out of the shadow. Old Sun is a sculpture that contemplates layers of history, shadows of the past and tension between light and dark.



Time is entombed within an aluminum box. Aluminum is a light space age metal which is reflective and resistant to tarnishing. By mimicking the crypt, I have created a memorial to the past, a reckoning with the historical slaughter of the bison analogous to the aboriginal people. As a box, it is a container for real time and experience. The holes in the sides of the box relate to various star systems, Ursa Major, Draco, Pleiades and Sagittarius, systems that have connection to Blackfoot legends. Bison fur poked through most of the holes represents substance and shielding.

Four holes are left open, one on each direction for viewing the interior. For the interior, broken mirrors cover the walls, reflecting fragmented images of the viewer's eye and a real time video of bison in a snowstorm. The illusion of infinity is created, the interaction of the viewer causes the reflection of present being in infinity, as well as viewing the past in real time infinity. This creates introspection, a space to interact with ideas of the past, present and future. A light shines from the top of the crypt onto a disco ball, ascension of light particles illuminating fragments of reflections of light around the space. I used the disco ball as a metaphor of the cosmic dance.

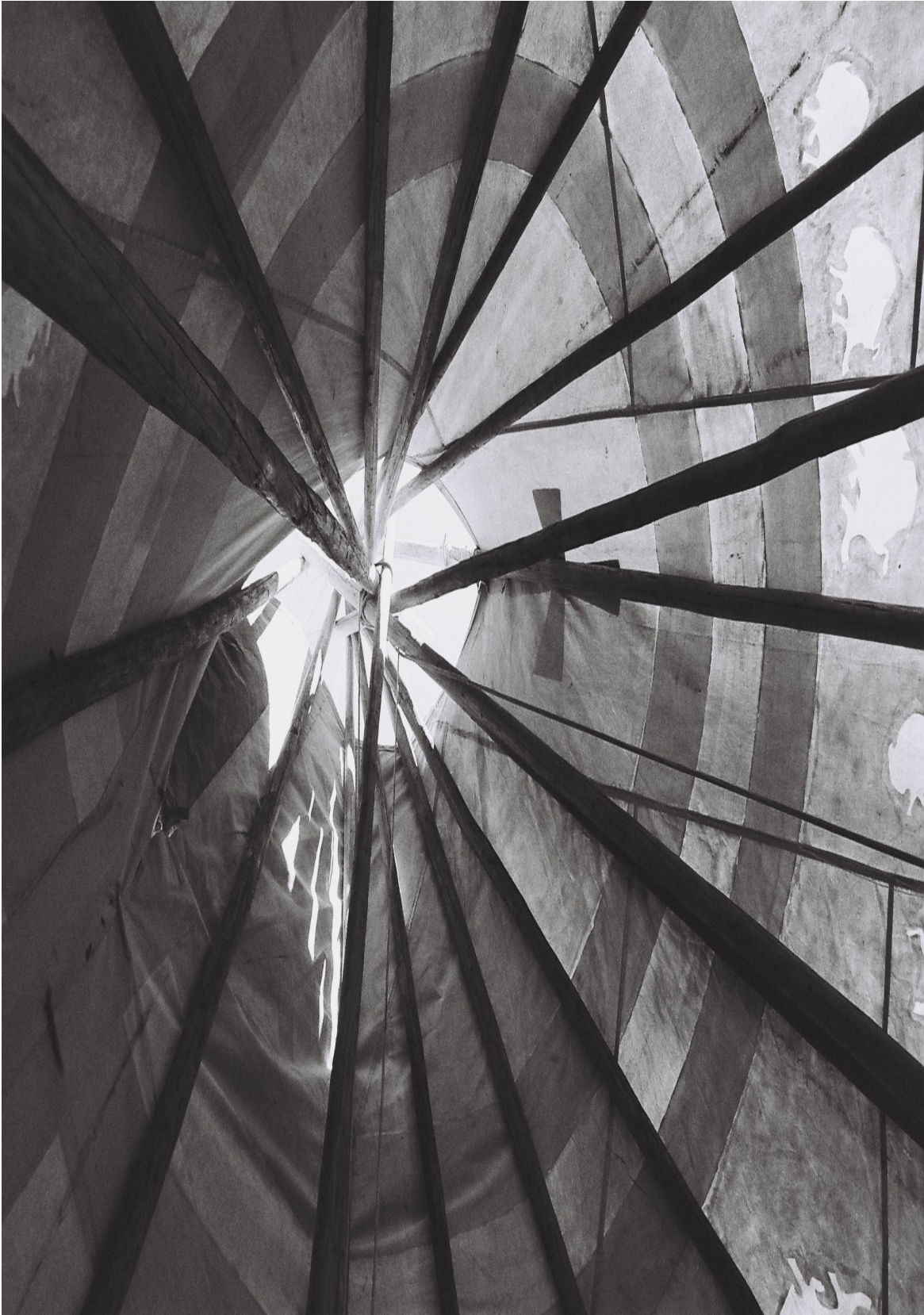
While creating this piece, I found myself giggling a lot; the serious nature of the crypt has been subverted through various elements such as the fur, mirrors and video. I see it as a play piece, an object that invites interaction with time, space and being in the Western paradox.

Bison Heart is oil and graphite painting that explores low, middle and high values of light. It is a prairie landscape painting of bison on a winter day. I call it



Bison Heart, as painting is a medium that connects me to the heart of my art practice. My undergraduate degree was in painting; it is a discipline through which my knowledge is transformed. Painting for me can be unpredictable, a space that allows for transformation. I often choose to paint with white oil and black graphite. The mixing of the white oil and black powder remind me of alchemy, the combination and play between light and dark forces. Both are viscous yet one is wet the other dry. Graphite is carbon based, a lustrous mineral that conducts electricity, that changes over time, giving it a life of its own. I choose these materials as they represent the light, dark and grey areas of my being. As a painting unto itself, it is representational, it refers to objects in the world specifically bison on the prairie. It invites comparison between itself and its subject. In the context of my aboriginal experience, this painting can be romantic, iconic and political. Like the layers of oil and graphite, I invite the viewer to move between the light and shadow to uncover their own meaning and relationship with the subject and self.





## **Gambling the Prairie Winnings**

Gambling the Prairie Winnings is my third direction. The mouse comes from the south, it is red sometimes green and gifts are warmth, growth, innocence and trust.

“Gambling the Prairie Winnings” is a play on the Western Development Museum’s centennial theme plays called “Winning the Prairie Gamble”. By re-working the sentence, I’ve re-contextualized it’s meaning. My intent is to examine and re-signify the colonial narrative and its use in marking historical milestones. Centennials are a western construction intended to re-enforce and expand colonial history; the passing of time is replayed in order to reinforce colonial space in this time and place. It is a narrative of winners and losers depending on your perspective. In reconstructing the narrative, I use the colonizer’s language as a tool of re-signification. Giving new meaning and creating layers within historical constructions. Rather than order history, I’ve re-ordered history through a narrative of prose and double entendre. I further re-enforce this narrative by creating a storyboard using both historical and contemporary images. Images are illusions; they give the viewer a moment in time allowing their imagination to imagine a space. I’ve also collected artifacts that are both historical and kitsch, material culture that verifies the presence of the absent. In arranging the narrative, images and artifacts, I have created a story that mimics the colonial narrative yet fragments its purpose. It is another layer or fragment of history that re-signifies the colonial project.



***“Looking up her universe, where have I been, where will I go...***



***Cloaked in the past I hide,***



*Running from the dust clouds pass,*



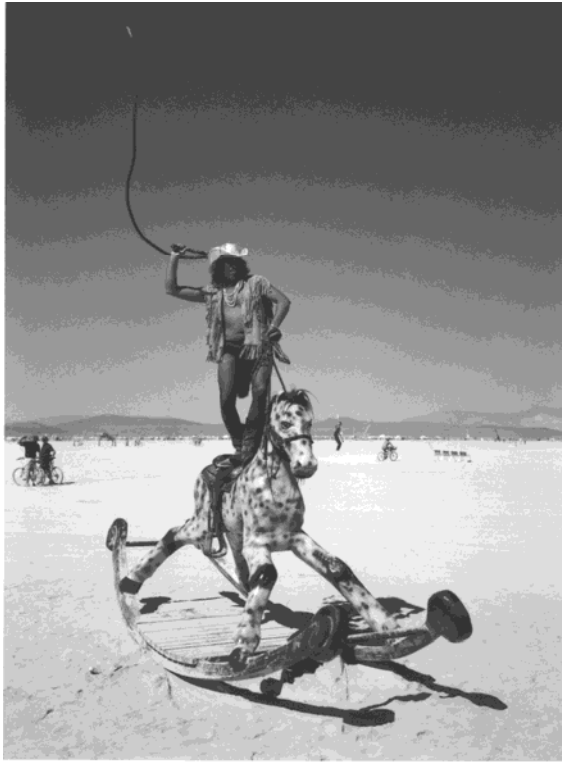


*Shadowing the winds of change,*



*whip back the wagon trains,*

*Ride'em nowhere rocking horse,*

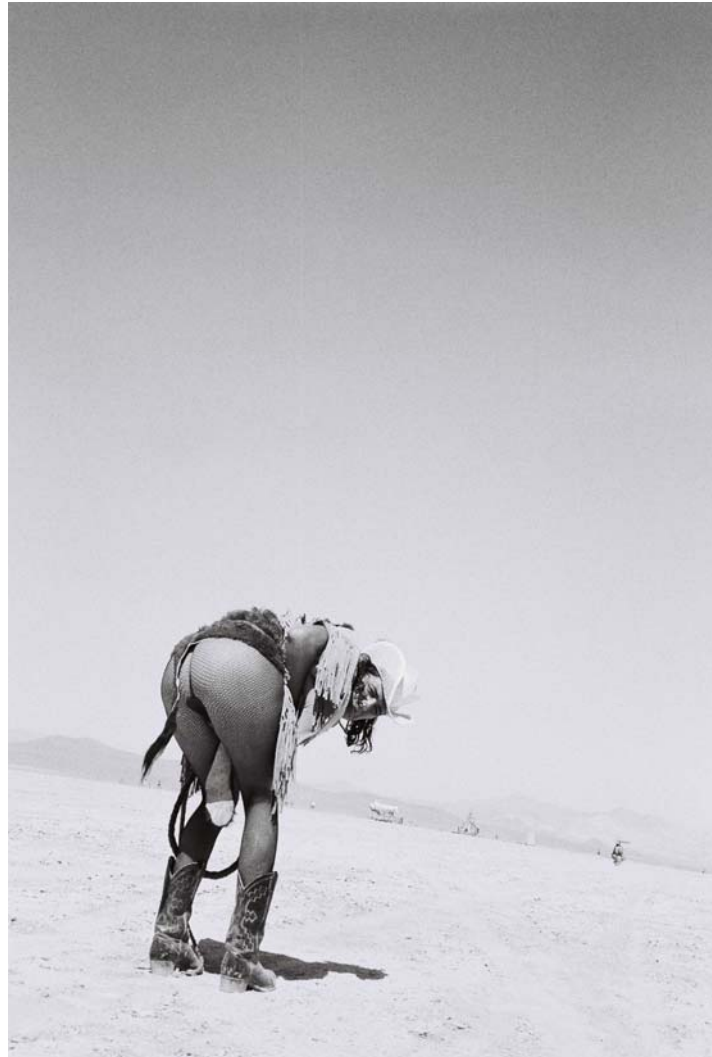


*Round'em up, giddy up,*





*I look at bones, sod home and me,*



***Choked by yoke, sweet chariot,***



***Snapped back from freedoms pace,***



*Onward upward Christian frock, the front of the lie,*



***Chalk board witness, telling eyes,***



***Sketches of Indian life,***





*Gambling games, you cheat or cry, medicine overdose,*



*Drink'em big martini glass, swizzle stick turning in fire,*



***Gather round the bottled heart, serving courage from the start,***



*Looking at the shutters eye, posing for the days gone bye.*



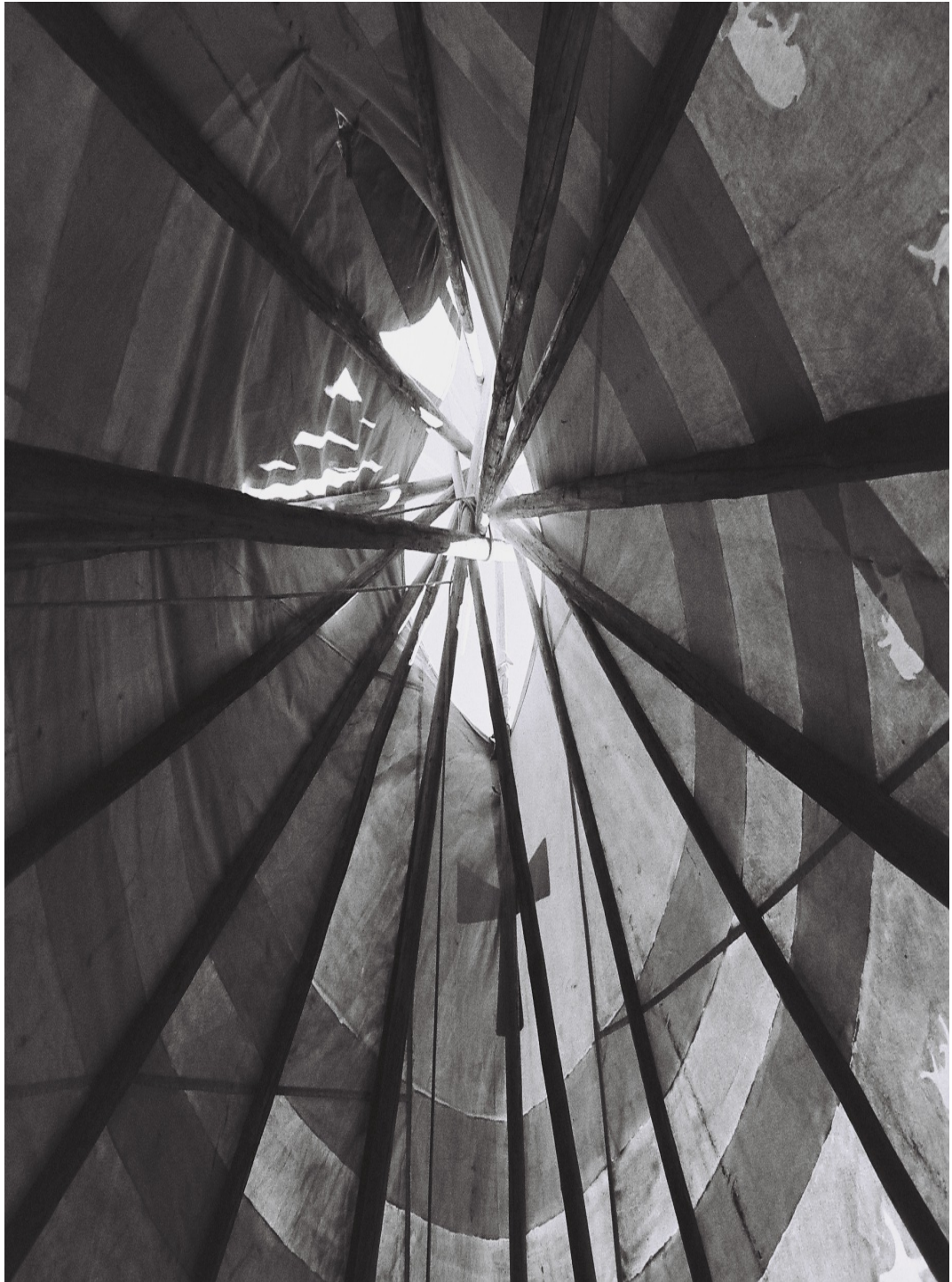
***Treaty queens hail Miss Chief, hoping for a union jack,***





***Onward upward tally ho, gambling winnings letting go,***





*Up her universe we go..."*



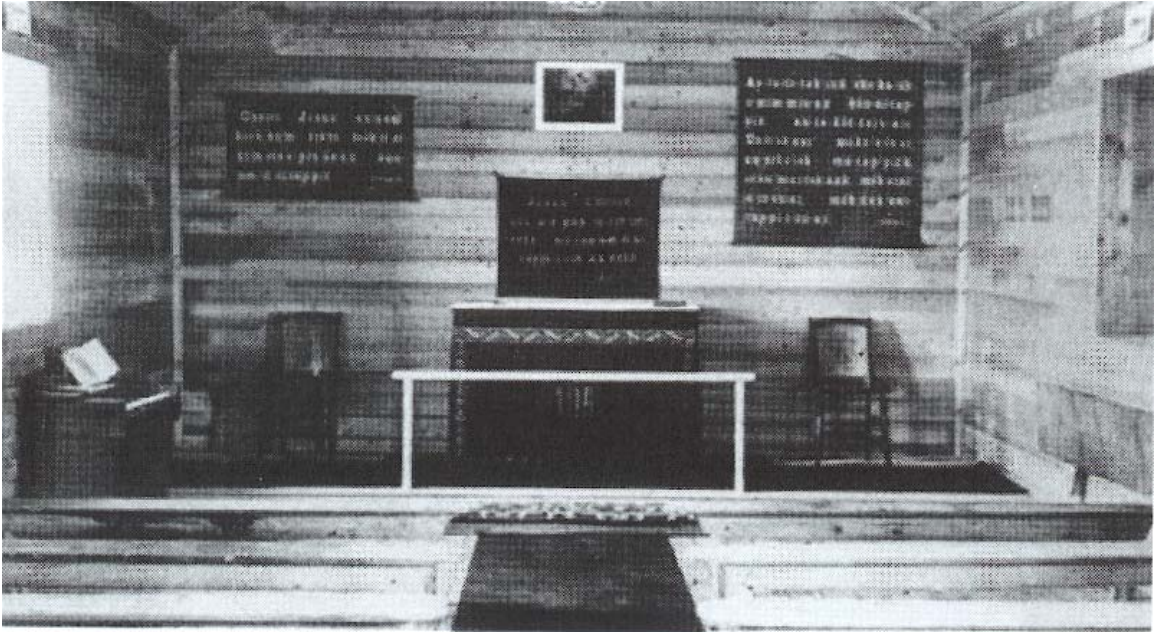




I use prose as language that triggers memory. In combination with visual signifiers, our minds are free to make up stories, stories that create myths, myths create reality, realities create ideologies, ideologies create dogma, dogma creates oppression, oppression creates revolution, revolution creates change, change is a constant and so the cycle cycles. It is a state of being where the destination is not as important as the journey itself<sup>6</sup>. The journey within mirrors the journey without, it is an ongoing experience where I get to constantly change my mind, make up my own story and manifest my own destiny.

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<sup>6</sup> Relates to Constantine P. Cavafy poem Ithaka.



### **Mission Impossible: Buffalo Boy's Wild West Peep Show**

For my fourth direction, the Eagle comes from the east. Its colour is yellow or gold and its gifts are illumination, peace, light and enlightenment. The Church of England is an institution through which I first experienced Western religion. I am Anglican by happenstance. During the Treaty making process, my reserve, the Siksika Nation (blackfoot) was divided up for conversion. The east end went to the Catholics and the west end to the Anglicans. It so happened that my distant relatives camped in the west and therefore came under the jurisdiction of the Anglican priests. While conversion and indoctrination occurred from the time of contact, the first Anglican mission church was built on my Nation in the 1880's. Over the years, subsequent waves of religious denominations have infiltrated the reserve, bringing the world of God, hoping to convert and dominate. Given the entire religious onslaught, a people remain and culture evolves. The people are still there, divided among imaginary lines and states of mind. Yet to this day, the mission was impossible.

The first Blackfoot mission church is the stage for Mission Impossible: Buffalo Boy's Wild West Peep Show. In this installation, I've recreated the main elements of the interior of the mission church changing them slightly into a theater rather than a place of worship, yet I see the two as synonymous. It is a space of spectacle and contemplation where the post-colonial diatribe plays out. I have created a small film called Mission Impossible: Buffalo Boy's Wild West Peep Show that will be projected over the altar. The short film includes movie clips, stills and music that fuse colonial history through Buffalo Boy happenings,

nature's movements and musical score. It associates rather than defines, I see it as a dreamscape where layers of time, space and sound become mixed, drifting in, out and between each other. I liken the film to a stained glass window, a frame of fragments that tell a story, static yet vibrant when illuminated.



## **So long and Farewell**

Through my art practice, I create another footprint along the trail, a footprint for others to see and possibly follow to the point of knowing.

I am the sum of my experience; the trail I have followed has brought me to a point of knowing. Knowing that I am a construction and combination of the colonial project and indigenous being. I also know that I can play between these conditions and create a reality that is my own. My compass, the medicine wheel has directed me to gifts and spirits of the natural world. The natural world provides gifts in joyful abundance, I just have to look and the knowledge appears. Each direction through moments of being has provided me with new perceptions, understandings of how I come to know my spirit, emotions, body and mind. I am like the bison in my vision of the vortex, continually spinning, transitioning from infant, child, adult and elder. Interchanging exchanging the gifts of each direction in time. Constantly renewing my being, healing me, giving me the opportunity to experience harmony in each new day.

My being is full of memory, fragments of time that reflect the colonial project, a project for which I am angry. In the Western paradigm, it has brought me pain and suffering, it is an experience that I can hang on to or release. As I come to know my indigenous ways, especially the teachings of the medicine wheel and apply them in my daily life, I am released. I realize that I am not broken, I am in the moment, a state of being that is continuous and ever evolving. I am the continuum of a way of life that has survived and thrived for millennia. I continue traditions of being that are autochthonous, I tell my story,

which is the story of all my relations and the communities I exist in. It is a way of being that knows no power other than itself. It is a state of mind, a space that is in a state of grace, transcendent, aware and willing to go into the void, where everything is possible.

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