

OF THIS LAND, ON THIS LAND: INDIGENOUS ARTISTS CHALLENGING THE  
RACIAL LOGICS OF LIBERAL MODERNITY

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the role of Indigenous artists in illustrating and denaturalizing the systems of colonial thought that continue to constrain Indigenous peoples' expressions of political agency. I argue that the works of select contemporary Indigenous artists challenge contemporary liberal settler society's racial ideas of citizenship, belonging, and relationship to place through methods that involve diverse audiences in imagining more just and shared futures upon Indigenous lands.

My examination of tendencies to frame Indigenous political expression as aggressive, anti-state, or anti-progress looks to literature on liberal thought, which describes concepts of freedom and equality manifested in the development of the social contract that has determined citizenship. I look at the ways that these concepts have been deployed historically to determine the value of Indigenous subjectivity and the supremacy of settler nations and institutions. In this sense, the artworks that I highlight engage critically with liberal thought, and also express Indigenous political thought in their own right.

The analysis takes place in three parts: an examination of the history of ideas surrounding perceptions of Indigenous political presence; an investigation into the legacies of liberal thought now threatened by assertions of Indigenous political presence; and a study of the ways in which Indigenous people are misconstrued as violent even as they are the continued subjects of ongoing colonial violence. Using an artist-curator approach to research, I draw upon artworks that together help to articulate the ontological barriers facing Indigenous political thought while offering texts through which audiences can collectively and reflexively examine life together upon Turtle Island.

Dedicated to my beautiful, complicated, resilient, and ever-loving family.

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together to dismantle them. To those artists whom I had the opportunity to speak with during the course of my research I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for sharing your time and thoughts as participants in this study.

Over the last several years my family has stood beside me as I grappled with the concepts explored in this dissertation. To my Mom and Dad, thank you for helping me to work through difficult ideas, and for walking with me through the most beautiful and most challenging parts of this process. To my husband Nathan, thank you for always being there for me, for all of the times that you stayed up late so that I could read you what I had written that day, and for your unending support and kind-hearted perspective on the difficult issues I broach in this research. You have shown me, among many things, that there are ways to press up against these issues that are rooted in love and kindness.

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# FOREWORD

## **Situating Myself in the Path through the Research**

My heart and soul reside with my family. These pieces of myself are kept, not within my own body exclusively, but within those of others to whom I am connected both by blood and by friendship. I place these pieces outside myself in part to create a framework of accountability for my actions, so that tending to myself also means tending to those around me. While I stand alone as an individual, I seek to make contributions that lend strength to the overall health of my family. This understanding of relationships shapes how I see myself as part of a community, and how the necessity for the research presented in this dissertation first took root. I used to think that my heart and soul belonged to the prairies, because I would long for the outstretched land and flat horizon. Now I understand that the prairies are where my family and community come from, and this is the land that we belong to.

My name is Neginew, or Suzanne Morrissette, and I am from the Bear Clan. I identify as Cree-Metis from the city of Winnipeg. My paternal grandmother was Metis from a small community called St Laurent located in the Interlake region of Manitoba. My paternal grandfather was Cree-Metis from the Red River Valley settlement. Both my paternal grandmother and grandfather's families took scrip, part of a Canadian government process aimed at erasing Indigenous title by offering small parcels of land or small single payments of money to impoverished Metis people in exchange for their status. On my mother's side, my grandmother comes from an English farming family that settled in Southern Ontario and my grandfather from a Mennonite family settled in Saskatchewan. I introduce myself in this way, as is common protocol within Indigenous communities, knowing that my identity is and always has been in

flux. I know myself today as an Indigenous person, as a daughter, a granddaughter, a niece, a sun dancer, a wife, a friend, a student, a teacher, an artist, a curator, and a scholar. In each of these capacities I have come to learn different things about myself and about my role as someone who has been given a particular set of tools to contribute to the necessary process of decolonization.

In this dissertation I discuss the ways in which Indigenous political knowledge is received and understood within contemporary North America, in particular inside the boundaries prescribed by the Canadian state.<sup>1</sup> I use the phrase “Indigenous political presence” to refer to the actions and gestures of Indigenous people that challenge the pre-eminence of this inherently colonial state, and who assert Indigenous peoples’ rights to inhabit and care for the lands as they have since time immemorial. Before I develop this concept within the body of my analysis, I would like to first put forward a few thoughts about how I have come to understand Indigenous political presence as an embodied concept that has relevance within the scope of my own life. It is important for me to acknowledge important works that have influenced by people with whom I have grown up, both academics and non-academics. These are the people who have helped to show me the importance and necessity of the research that follows. This foreword also illustrates where I come from so that readers may better understand why it is so important that I put forward this research as a place on which to stand, and as a marker of where I am going in the future.

Growing up in a city where racial tensions are high and where my own family reflected a sometimes-confusing disunion of racialized experiences provided me with unique first-hand examples of what it means to embody Indigenous political presence. In this sense, my roles as a

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<sup>1</sup> In the dissertation I discuss art within the Canadian context, although this can include the work of Indigenous artists who are either from or who reside within other nation-state contexts.

daughter, a granddaughter, and a niece were among the first to direct me on this research path. On my mother's side of the family, my sister Sarah and I are the only grandchildren of seven in total who are not white. Our parents raised us in close proximity to ceremonial lodges where we learned through play and the events of everyday life about Indigenous ways of viewing our relationships to others and to the earth. Although love for my sister and me was constant, our immediate family's distance from the Christian faith, combined with persistent ideas of race largely placed on my Cree-Metis father by my German-Canadian grandfather, led to an equally constant state of unease, which, for me, has impacted my own sense of self and sense of relatedness to others. Despite being loved, not-so-subtle Christian sing-a-longs when we visited and yearly Bible gifts always felt like gestures of disappointment, even for a small child. The idea that I needed to change was especially confusing to me, because within my father's family I experienced nothing but pure love from my cousins, my aunties, my uncles, and my Nana, who was the matriarch of our family. This is not to say that members of my father's side of the family hadn't also had to face their own challenges. My Nana attended residential school as a young girl, which complicated her relationship to her own ancestry in indelible ways. The severe repercussions of living under a colonial system are present even today, and manifest in ways that are too many to discuss in this short foreword. It suffices to say that I learned from an early age about negotiating my own sense of self in the presence of racial thought, while also learning about love and compassion from a family I am certain would move mountains for me or any other member. For me, these family dynamics lie at the core of my own understanding of Indigenous political presence, because it is out of racial confusion that my own research trajectory has been formed. Family is also where I have witnessed some of the most profound

love I have ever known. This love, I believe, is an integral component of Indigenous political presence.

One way I have seen this love expressed within my family is in the work of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge that my father, my uncle Larry, and my mother have dedicated their lives to. This reclamation permeated my father and uncle's work in social work and social welfare policy, recognizing the problems and changing the material conditions in which Indigenous people live and work. My understanding of Indigenous political presence has matured by watching these members of my family act with love, fierce intelligence, and resilience in the face of tremendous injustice. In brief, my father's research and practice in social work and the child welfare system have left important marks on policy and on the literature that continues to be used in national and international curricula on Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous perspectives in social work. My uncle Larry is co-author of *Indians Wear Red: Colonialism, Resistance, and Aboriginal Street Gangs*, and was instrumental in creating rehabilitation programming for incarcerated youth through trades training and Indigenous knowledge pathways. My mother has worked as a public school educator for much of her career, where she makes important space for Indigenous knowledge within curriculum and pedagogy. These are some of the ways that I have come to understand Indigenous political thought in action, by watching my family act with love and compassion to address the urgency of myriad interrelated concerns that continue to face Indigenous people within the colonial setting.

My uncle Larry passed away unexpectedly in the fall of 2016 while I was in the middle of writing this dissertation. On one of the difficult days that followed his passing my mom sent me a photograph of my uncle and my dad sitting on a couch with my cousin Greg, me, and another child I did not recognize (figure 1). What I first noticed about this photograph was that



everyone one of us is engaged in the act of reading. Although I believe that the path I take is my own, and that there are as many paths as there are people in this world, this photo reminded me that the values and lessons I have gained from my family have fortified me with the tools I need to do good things with the life that I have been given. Admittedly, there have been times when I have not been willing to see this, or when I have been reluctant to take up this responsibility. When I was admitted into the PhD program at York in 2013 I knew that this responsibility lay in front of me, and that I had limited time to begin learning how to fulfill it.

Figure 1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was a photograph of the author, the author's cousin Greg, an unknown child, the author's Uncle, and the author's Dad. Photographer unknown.

**Figure 1**

A part of this learning process took place for me in ceremony. For two years leading up to the beginning of my PhD I had been attending sun dance ceremonies where my mother danced. This ceremony typically centres around four days of events that include feasting, fasting, sweat lodges, and dancing. Dancers make a four-year commitment to participate, and to continue

their pledge as a way of life that extends beyond the gathering and into every other day of the year.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, a month before I began my studies, I felt that it was important for me to make my own pledge to dance. I danced to cultivate the strength and knowledge that was necessary to do my best work for the health and happiness of my family and community, and to support others in their own endeavours.

In June 2017, I completed my first cycle or four-year commitment to sun dance. There have been times over this period when I have been challenged to remember my intentions and purpose within my course of study. In these moments I have been pushed by the love and contributions of those who support me through the spaces they have helped to carve out within the academy, in which I now stand alongside my colleagues and friends. Thinking back on how I overcame these challenging moments I am reminded of one in particular during my first year of sun dance. That year I travelled to the ceremony alone, without my family, who were overseas and unable to accompany me. It was the third or fourth day of the ceremony and I was very fatigued and hungry. In a moment of great difficulty I imagined that my father was dancing behind me, which fuelled me with the support that I needed to persevere. This network of love and support is a form of Indigenous political presence in action that I have witnessed time and time again within my own life.

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<sup>2</sup> In preparing this foreword I contacted sun dance chief and family friend Wilfred Buck and asked him if it was appropriate for me to share this ceremony in the pages of this dissertation. With this approval, I offer this description knowing that my own understanding of the ceremony is limited to my own experience. Considering that my knowledge of the ceremony has grown tremendously over the last four years, I expect it will continue to do so.

In the four years it has taken me to complete this degree I have come to realize that taking care of one another is a key component of Indigenous political presence. By fulfilling our responsibilities to one another and to this earth we embody a political praxis that extends through all aspects of our lives. Sometimes this praxis is apparent within the visible labour that is performed within academia or in social justice actions. Other times, the labour of Indigenous political presence is less visible, such as when we take the time to listen to one another, or when we simply hold each other. Expressions of Indigenous political presence are not homogenous in their beliefs or objectives. Rather, I believe that this phrase reflects the multitude of ways Indigenous people express their care for one another, and show their responsibilities to all of our relations.

In this foreword I have briefly outlined where I come from, and how my experiences have informed the place where I stand today as a researcher. I was recently sitting outside in the sun while working at my laptop on the last of the writing for this dissertation. In a moment of pause I turned down to look at my hands. I quietly reflected on how much they resemble both my father's and my mother's hands. I have been told that my father's hands are like his father's, my grandfather, Robert James Morrissette, who I never had the chance to meet. I thought about how these hands are my own, and how they were also given to me by my family. Though I cannot see my heart and soul, I have been gifted with this body that reminds me of interconnectedness and responsibility through its resemblance to the bodies of others.

I returned to my work, using these hands to chisel out the last few pages of what has become the dissertation you are about to read. While I take full responsibility for the content of the pages that follow, I also acknowledge the important networks of relationality and community

that have fostered my approach to research, that hold me accountable, and that continue to fuel me in the work that I undertake.

## CHAPTER 1

### Writing Indigenous Art Histories During Times Marked by a Continued and Flagrant Disregard of Indigenous Life and Law

Two nations are a threat, but six hundred are an inconvenience.

(Flanagan 2000, 87-88)

[T]he racial contract links space with race and race with personhood, the white raced space of the polity is in a sense the geographical locus of the polity proper. Where indigenous [sic] peoples were permitted to survive, they were denied full membership in the political community, thus

becoming foreigners in their own country.

(Mills 1999, 50)

#### Introduction

Despite the public perception of improved Indigenous<sup>3</sup>/state relations – most often contained, referred to, and promoted in terms such as reconciliation, as well as economic and

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use several terms in different context to refer to the First Peoples of the land now known as North America. Generally speaking, I employ the term Indigenous to speak to the experiences of global peoples who share a colonial past and present, while simultaneously recognizing the unique experiences of individuals and communities in specific locations and historically specific contexts. I also use this term to acknowledge the experiences of those individuals who exist outside of the state structures that have predetermined and

social partnership and consultation – Indigenous people continue to live under conditions contained by the normative and acceptable standards and definitions of a liberal society. These conditions place the needs, aspirations, and interests of settler states and publics above the cultural and political interests of Indigenous peoples within Indigenous territories.

As a central concept informing this dissertation, I suggest that the starting point of such relations emerges from the persistence of race in contemporary political thought, which inherently and directly feeds an ongoing colonial project. The continued and flagrant disregard of Indigenous people’s exercise of knowledge and political autonomy within and upon their territories, evidenced for example in the lack of adequate media coverage of Indigenous resistance to state decisions, speaks to this persistent view in light of so-called improved relations. The false perception of improved Indigenous/state relations takes its cue from ideas of race that have developed since the seventeenth century (Bernasconi 2001, 12) to furnish ideas about human history (Bernasconi 2001, 23), postulating race’s inherent role in determining a

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complicated the identities of so many. I make use of the terms Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis/Metis to specifically reference the different and politically recognized categories of First Peoples in Canada. Terms such as Native American and Indian are also used sporadically, and largely in reference to the self-identified Indigenous peoples of the United States. In all cases, I draw upon these terms with critical attention to the role that settler states have played in determining their meanings and membership.

For more on Canada’s role in the construction of contemporary Indigenous identities see Bonita Lawrence’s *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (2005); and Pamela Palmater’s *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity* (2008).

person's natural predispositions (Kant 2000), and using it to determine one's ability to be a free (Buck-Morss 2000, 822) individual who can enjoy the benefits of civilized life (Iverson 2003, 88). Such perceptions have had a defining impact upon Indigenous people's expressions of political knowledge, leading many to interpret Indigenous political knowledge and expression as possible only within the purview of settler state political frameworks, as in the works of contemporary liberal scholars (Cairns 2000; Kymlicka 1989), or as inconvenient to the state and its liberal subjects (Flanagan 2000, 87-88). Ultimately then, definitions of Indigenous political expressions are wrapped in a history of liberal political philosophy and are traceable to the historical and evolutionary development of dominant Western thought. These historical pathways of thought are not inert. Rather, their persistence continues to constrain Indigenous/state relations in new guise.

This flawed discourse that erroneously represents Indigenous political knowledge and philosophy has implications for the writing of Indigenous art histories. The impact of liberal ideologies upon the exercise of political knowledge from outside the ideas of history sanctioned by settler narratives reveals how, for Indigenous people, concepts such as citizenship and belonging have been conceived along unfit philosophical lines in contemporary states such as Canada and the United States of America. Indigenous artists'<sup>4</sup> perspectives, expressed through their artworks, destabilize these histories, and participate in reorienting public perception as an integral expression of Indigenous political presence.

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<sup>4</sup> By artists I refer to individuals who work across a range of production methods including but not limited to practices in visual art, new media, sound, music, filmmaking, and creative writing/poetry.

## **Indigenous Political Presence**

Indigenous peoples, artists among them, live today within a political reality demarcated by the spaces afforded to us by contemporary settler society. In this chapter I outline the concept of Indigenous political presence as a form of expression within and against these constraints. In Chapter 2 I illustrate how this situation has progressed from ideas of race and society embedded in the ideals and visions of liberal modernity. I use the phrase “Indigenous political presence” to describe this situation, and throughout the dissertation to discuss acts of resistance to settler state transgressions upon land and ways of life, as they take place both in demonstrations and blockades, and in artistic practice. In their resistance, artists articulate their own political knowledge based on their own understanding of historical events and Indigenous philosophy. By reframing so-called historical truths as historical fictions set up to service the interests of colonial pursuits, acts of Indigenous political presence describe actions that refuse the ongoing expression of racial values inherent in liberal political philosophy.

### **Situating the Research Within a Contemporary Political Context**

While in many ways historically located, the problems posed by liberal political philosophy are very much contemporary in their expression. As Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard has argued, the liberal-pluralist model of recognition, which seeks to ameliorate past injustice through the acceptance of difference, has conspicuously failed to provide for Indigenous peoples’ meaningful exercise of self-determination and governance (Coulthard 2014, 3). Instead, he argues that contemporary gestures towards recognition end up fostering and reproducing the “configurations of colonialists, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (Coulthard 2014, 3). As



a tool of right- and right-centre leaning political platforms, recognition represents a gesture of deceptive benevolence, one that hints at justice while reaffirming the structures that support and benefit settler interests and sovereignty. This is one of the ways in which liberal states manage racial difference that I take up more directly in subsequent chapters.

A recent example of the settler state's continued promotion of amicable and just relations with Indigenous peoples in Canada elucidates the problem. During the 2015 federal election campaign, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau promised to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Once in power, however, Prime Minister Trudeau gave the green light to two widely contested pipelines on November 29, 2016: Kinder-Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline and Enbridge's Line 3 line. This action disregarded his election promise to uphold the UN Declaration by its failure to consult in good faith with Indigenous peoples (Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2008, 8), resulting in distrust in systems of recognition where rights flow from the forked-tongue of settler democracy. Despite the optimism extolled by political figures like Trudeau in contemporary times, these and other related decisions show how Indigenous peoples are framed by and within the settler state, which makes unilateral decisions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. These are the normative conditions under which Indigenous people in Canada are living and within which I, as an Indigenous person, am writing this dissertation.

In the nearly four years that have passed since I began my doctoral studies, I have watched news coverage – both underground and mainstream – of numerous instances of settler state transgressions upon Indigenous rights and ways of life upon the land now known as North

America (L'Hirondelle 2014, 166).<sup>5</sup> When I first began my studies, I did so in a space formed and held by Idle No More, an Indigenous-led movement which emerged in response to a series of proposed legislative changes by the Canadian government that posed a threat to Indigenous sovereignty and ways of life. In 2013 members of Elsipogtog First Nation, a Mi'kmaq community located in the province of New Brunswick, blocked numerous highways to call attention to the community's dissatisfaction with proposed shale gas research, which included hydraulic fracking, upon their territories. I learned also of the Wet'suwet'en peoples who continue to live in and build resistance camps on unceded Unis'tot'en territories to prevent the construction of pipelines that would cross through their territories, impacting the land and all lives that rely upon its sustenance. And now, over the course of the last few months, peaceful demonstrations at Standing Rock in North Dakota have gained strength and support from peoples and nations around the globe for their efforts to protect the water supply and ancestral burial grounds from the Dakota Access pipeline. These and other examples of Indigenous responses to settler state transgressions are linked to a history of Indigenous resistance to state abuses of Indigenous peoples' rights and ways of life.

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<sup>5</sup> I adopt this language from Cree artist and curator Cheryl L'Hirondelle, who frequently references "the place now known as Canada" in her writing and oral presentations in order to stress the importance of denaturalizing the common understanding that the nation state territory provides us with a complete picture of this land's history. In her essay "Codetalkers of the Digital Divide," (2014) L'Hirondelle acknowledges Janice Acoose's original use of this phrase (166).

## **An Artist-Curator Approach to the Research**

Liberal forms of governance make Indigenous people's exercise of political self-determinacy nearly impossible, which has implications for the production and presentation of Indigenous art. I come to this subject by way of my professional practice as an artist and as a curator. In the latter position, my research has focused on the work of contemporary Indigenous artists who challenge prevailing political conditions in their work. The artists whose works I have selected comes from the relationships that I have established and grown through my creative practice. To complete the research I have revisited many of these relationships, and struck up new ones, where artists have demonstrated a concern with challenging the normative political conditions that I outline in this dissertation. I have engaged in research, connecting my own readings of the artworks that I discuss with other texts on these artists' work, as well as through interviews.

Bridging this work into an academic program, I have prepared a dissertation that constructs a framework for analyzing the contributions Indigenous artists are making to this discussion, which involves all peoples who walk upon the lands of Turtle Island. My review of literature, steeped in Western philosophy, liberal theory, and recognition theory, but read through the lens of critical race theory and Indigenous Studies, gathers evidence of the ways that the racial stakes of liberal modernity impacts contemporary Indigenous lives. By describing colonial history through the philosophical traditions of liberalism, I look to carve out space to assert my thesis: that contemporary Indigenous artists are engaging with these racial histories in ways that call attention to their continued prevalence while refuting the legitimacy of the institutions that contain the vision of history we have inherited from the trajectory of dominant Western thought. Their artworks interpellate viewers into these acts of questioning, which extends the impact of

their work beyond the usual crowds of (likely already converted) art audiences to engage the broader public. Their artworks disturb the sensibilities of liberal political consciousness and advance a greater understanding of Indigenous perspectives and histories in this land we now share. Their work, like the actions of those resisting encroachment onto Indigenous lands and ways of life in various locations across Turtle Island, emerges from their own distinct perspectives on political agency and expression to allow unique meditations upon the ways that our networked histories link all peoples of this land together into the future. Ultimately, these artists create the conditions for better understanding settler claims to space as a taken-for-granted and naturalized history of rights and political knowledge. In this sense, my analysis shows how the works I examine create space for greater understanding of and respect for Indigenous peoples' political philosophies and values.

As a researcher I am situated within this project in ways that are influenced by my personal, artistic, and curatorial backgrounds. I have selected the artworks which I analyze in this dissertation from a knowledge-base that I have cultivated from within my professional practice as a curator. I have also developed an interest in the research question through my curatorial practice where I have worked with artists to answer similar questions. For example, in 2012 I curated an exhibition for the Thunder Bay Art Gallery called *Setting: land* which featured the works of artists Kaoru Ryan Klatt, Kevin Lee Burton, Anna Tsouhlarakis and Kade Twist. With this exhibition I was interested to examine the kinds of desires, dreams, and relationships that Western society projects onto the landscape. I looked to the work of these artists to shine a light on the various ways in which these investments within the land are manifested. In working closely with these artists, the project turned to look at ideas of nature and culture (Morrisette 2012), which relates to many of the ideas included in this dissertation.

I learned a lot from the artists in the show, whose works steered the project in directions that I had not imagined at the outset of the project. At the conclusion of the exhibition I felt that there remained a need for me to continue to investigate the ways in which contemporary Western liberal subjects are tied to histories of philosophical thought at the site of the land. That is, I continued to explore how reports of disputes that take place upon the land and in relation to land-related issues often belie the philosophical investments and politically informed worldviews which inform these situations. This was the seed that I brought into my doctoral program in Social and Political Thought in 2013, and that I have since developed through this research project which marries critical philosophy with artistic practice.

My approach to research has been multi-modal in that it has at times required me to think like a curator, an artist, and an academic. It is worth stating that these roles are not mutually exclusive, but that each lends skills and knowledge to the others. To complete this project I began, as is common to my practice, by looking at the artworks themselves. These works were selected based upon my observations about the shared interests and common threads which spanned across the practices of many Indigenous artists. The common thread that draws together these artworks is the representation of Indigenous political thought which problematizes normative conceptions of land and history. My observations about these works and their shared interests and concerns has been substantiated through knowledge that I have cultivated through my curatorial practice where I have worked with artists and with gallery collections. My project is therefore the cumulative product of conversations, relationships, and work, which initially took place before I began this course of study in Social and Political Thought.

Guided by the information that I have gained from working with artists as a curator, I began to explore research related to the context and content that was addressed in the artworks.

This part of my dissertation project was not unlike exhibition creation, which in my understanding involves processes of identifying relationships between visual forms and the ideas that they contain. Looking at these relationships between artists and artworks was crucially informative to my process, and this has helped to shape the themes which I use to organize the discussion in this dissertation into discrete, yet related, chapters. The idea of identifying relationships extends beyond the discussion of comparing physical artworks to considering the content and histories which are called into question within the works themselves.

Within this dissertation there were two kinds of histories that were evoked in the research. The first and most immediately evident has to do with histories of Indigenous political thought since the 1960s. This aspect of the research was supported by extensive research into the effects of liberal discourse upon Indigenous rights in North American, and at times global, contexts. The second idea of history which was brought forward within the dissertation research relates to *Setting: land*, the exhibition that I curated in 2012. When examining the collection of artworks that together came to form the subject of my analysis it became necessary to look back on the history of Western liberal thought, as it pertained to developing perceptions of Indigenous political presence within a racialized present. Through the analysis I illustrate how expressions of Indigenous political presence are perceived in a context which privileges histories of Western thought and consequently, of ideas that dictate how Indigenous people are to behave in a liberal society. This sustained inquiry is carried out through the literature which I highlight in Chapter 2, and in conversation with actual artworks.

To gain a deeper understanding of the artworks addressed in this dissertation, I conducted a number of interviews with some of the artists whose works are addressed in the following chapters. These artists were approached with the intention of gaining further insight into the

artist's intentions with the specific artwork that I include in this analysis. In some cases this was a matter of addressing a lack of information on this artist or artwork in curatorial publications or artist statements. In other cases, interviews were conducted to gather a wider range of research materials to support the analysis. The interview questions were designed to give the artist an opportunity to identify themselves and their practices. The three basic interview questions were:

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Can you describe how this artwork originated?

What is the ideal viewing situation for this artwork?

These research questions were asked to all artists. Since the dissertation looks at a number of different and specific artworks, each interview also included other questions which looked directly to the pieces that I had identified for this analysis. In this sense, each of the artists were approached with a shared intention to grow my knowledge of their work, taking their perspective into consideration, within the context of the dissertation project.

Reflecting upon the centrality of curatorial methods to the research project reminds me to consider the history of representation that has necessitated Indigenous curatorial intervention, where Indigenous people's artistic contributions have been simultaneously devalued and studied from within Western European frameworks of knowledge. In this research I have placed Indigenous political thought centrally, both in artworks and in the form of demonstrations, and I have problematized the lack of knowledge which surrounds contemporary and mainstream understandings of this knowledge. Looking to artworks to tell this story has helped me to articulate conversations that I have identified between existing artworks, which signals a deep

investment in these issues within the arts. Working with artworks I have been able to tap into the knowledge that these artworks contain as objects of research-creation, which I have translated through the lens of this dissertation project. The organization of the research in this way resembles a curatorial project, which involves both the authorship of artists and curators in the presentation of a new narrative that is bound in new ways to the site and scope of the exhibition. The role of the curator as a part-author is one which brings me back to the importance of sensitive and informed methods for approaching the study of artworks by Indigenous artists.

These aspects of my methodology are in some way rooted within my knowledge as a trained and professionally practicing curator. By coming from this background I have approached the dissertation research with an awareness of historical knowledge as well as social and political concerns that inform how we read artwork in contemporary times in North America. As an Indigenous curator, I bring other specialized knowledge to this study which further supports the interpretation and contextualization of artwork. As outlined in the Preface for this dissertation, I come to this study with a particular form of knowledge related to Indigenous political presence that is rooted in my family. This knowledge is rooted in a lived experience within the colonial condition, and driven by anti-colonial thought and theory to mobilize productive and positive futures for Indigenous peoples. Although I do not practice in the same profession as my father and my uncle, whose work I look up to all aspects of my life, I draw upon the ideas of family and community that they have instilled in me to motivate this research as far as it can be a part of identifying injustices and seeking solutions. This motivation to create positive futures is a part of what I have come to know as Indigenous curatorial practice.

Although it is etymologically linked to practices of care-taking objects in the Western European tradition, it is important that I consider curation as an Indigenous practice. This is



because the history of taking care of ideas and objects has always been a part of my culture, as it was taught to me by my family. I have been raised alongside trusted elders who have taught me about the ways in which stories are told, but also how they are kept. In my family I have learned about how we make meaning of the stories that we are told, and of the names that we are given, and that this is a part of a life-long process of self-directed inquiry which is inextricably interconnected with the health of one's family and community. I have a lot of respect for the knowledge I have received in my life, and that I am perpetually tasked with making sense of from a vantage point that is respectful and kind. It is similar for me, when I am looking at works of art which also contain and convey information from the artist's frame of reference. As a curator I am constantly considering my role as someone who has received information from artists that I am responsible for tending to as a care taker. I care for this information by situating myself as a researcher, and by giving space for the artist to represent themselves in the research. At the same time, this role is also intertwined with the role of the academic, which is in part to make contributions to knowledge through the analysis of artworks. In my work, and in this research project, I have taken the role of curatorship to be one of responsibility to artists, to artworks, and to Indigenous peoples whose lives and experiences are not adequately represented in historical knowledge, due in large part to ideas of race which I take up in this dissertation. It is also a responsibility to myself, to speak with clarity of intention and honesty for who I am and where I come from. I consider my practice as a form of care-taking which is certainly related to the Western tradition of curation, but that also draws upon my knowledge as an Indigenous person as well as my awareness of colonial history to help combat these histories of misrepresentation.

While I do not claim to speak on behalf of any individual other than myself, I do feel that this idea of curatorial practice is one significant way in which Indigenous knowledge is being produced today. This is a future practice for Indigenous peoples which takes into consideration the past and present to foster sites of exchange in which all peoples can take part in conversations and knowledge building.

### **Indigenous Political Philosophy in the Context of Settler State Liberal Democracy**

As I write in the context of contemporary liberal politics, I am aware of the ways in which the artworks that I have selected for analysis appear to agitate or confront accepted ideas of history and belonging. When voices on the margins speak their truth in search of positive change for their families and communities, dominant forces often position their words as radical activism. I want to problematize this characterization, which continues to influence the discussion of anti-normative political expression within liberal democracy. As a concept predicated upon the thrust towards political and/or social change, the term “activism” has unfortunately been co-opted by the language of contemporary society to refer to the behaviours or devious actions of bad or maladapted citizens according to the moral compass of liberal thought. A liberal understanding of appropriate behaviour presupposes the “normal” state of affairs as the natural concept of rights delivered justly to citizens. This understanding, however, fails to challenge the ways in which privilege has historically operated to dispense rights only selectively and often, with extreme prejudice.

If the only way to create change is to appeal to the status quo, then expressions of Indigenous knowledge may naturally fall on partially, if not completely, deaf ears. Due to the tendency of liberal democratic ideologies to misinterpret Indigenous knowledge of history and

law as secondary or subsumed to the Canadian political framework, I use this dissertation in part to advocate for an alternative framing of Indigenous people's political challenge to settler-state knowledge. In short, instances where Indigenous people occupy land in defence of their rights within and responsibilities to the land can be viewed as something other than disruptive to the operations of the settler state or the lives of its citizens. While the camps upon Unis'tot'en territories might appear to occupy space in demonstration and protest to resource extraction companies, the Wet'suwet'en peoples are clear that they are neither demonstrators nor protestors; rather they are living upon their land as their ancestors have done for millennia. Similarly, and since the beginning of their occupation of the lands proposed for the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Standing Rock Sioux have claimed their title as water protectors and *not* as protestors or activists. Allison Hargreaves and David Jefferess, for example, recode the barricade as a symbol that represents less of "an obstacle and threat, and more as something erected to protect 'all of us,'" and as a way through to another kind of relationship with the land and with one another (Hargreaves and Jefferess 2015, 209-210). These examples nevertheless reveal how the abilities of individuals in Canadian society to listen to Indigenous perspectives have been constrained by a vision of land and social relations that has always been colonial. Under these conditions, Indigenous perspectives remain within the realm of activism which continues to be regarded negatively in settler society.

The refusal to assume the role of antagonist is an important one because it rejects outright the structures that oppose Indigenous political presence as a legitimate source of reasoned power. The artists I have selected for discussion in this dissertation similarly reject these structures in ways tied to their own individual relationships to the land, history, and knowledge. Each of the artists whose works I address in the following chapters are participating in the creation of new

pathways for connecting Indigenous political thought in the present context across chasms of philosophical difference.

My research looks for the source of contemporary political tensions within philosophical knowledge, identifying the pathway by which racial knowledge enters and constitutes colonial relations as liberal political philosophy. Indigenous people, guided by their own distinct political philosophies and knowledge, have historically resisted the framework of liberal modernity for conceiving of the relationships that exist between people, and between people and the land. The interventions offered by the artists examined in this dissertation represent the active expression of these philosophies in ways that hold space for Indigenous thought and knowledge outside of what is typically offered to Indigenous people by the structures of liberal thought.

Leroy Little Bear's analysis of Indigenous philosophies within a Western worldview provides an appropriate starting point for understanding these tensions. For him, all existence is animated, imbued with spirit, in constant motion, and cyclical (Littlebear 2000, 77). While it would be impossible to homogenize the views of Indigenous peoples across many nations and diverse geographies, these sentiments are consistent with the work of other Indigenous scholars, such as Taiaiake Alfred, who describe Indigenous perspectives rooted in respect, peace, and relationships (Alfred 2005, 471). Scholars advocating Indigenous methodology describe the application of such concepts in practices of researching and writing (Smith 1999; Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008). Their understandings contrast with the Western European value system – imported to North America through colonial exploration and settlement – as linear, static, and objective (Littlebear 2000, 82). The incongruities between these two ways of knowing oneself in the world have consequences for ideas of social contract, government, and determinations of land use when Indigenous people are subsumed within settler frameworks. “The problem with

colonialism is that it attempts to maintain a singular social order by way of force and law,” writes Littlebear (2000, 77). Thus, the preeminent liberal view offers a singular idea of social order determined from outside of Indigenous thought. The imposition of this social order, including ideas of citizenship and belonging that impact relationships with and to the land and between people, takes place through institutions that reflect the values of the colonial state.

The imposition of these values constrains Indigenous peoples’ rights to access and live by the worldviews and knowledges that are unique to different nations and communities across Turtle Island. From similar colonial experiences, expressions of political presence by Indigenous peoples share a resistance to the dominant force of liberal political philosophy, which contains within it an intrinsic racialized order. In this sense, “Indigenous political presence” describes a connection between liberal thought and contemporary utterances of resistance by Indigenous peoples. The key aspect of my analysis, which brings together the political philosophies of Indigenous individuals and nations of distinct histories and knowledge, is that all forms of political expression addressed in this dissertation stand in opposition to the ongoing expression of liberal thought.

I use the term “Indigenous political presence” to describe the array of ways that challenge how liberal thought renders its own layered and prejudiced image of Indigenous subjects without disregarding the nuances and intricacies of each individual expression. Within this framework there remains room for each individual and nation to conceive of their own understanding of the colonial histories that have brought them into the present moment. These include discourses of sovereignty (Goldberg-Hiller 2011; Simpson 2014) and self-determination, which provide platforms from which to assert political control and autonomy upon and over Indigenous lands.

Although some scholars have argued for the significance of Indigenous sovereignty in a settler-colonial context (Barsch & Henderson 1980; Byrd 2014; Kanani 2008), others have challenged its utility as a framework due to its provenance in Western thought (Alfred 2002; Byrd 2014), which has had very real and material consequences for Indigenous and other racialized peoples. In a similar sense, scholars have questioned how self-determination has been co-opted by liberal-pluralist recognition politics (Coulthard 2014, 2), an argument that I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2. Beyond the debates over these terms, scholars have offered new frameworks for conceiving of Indigenous political expression in the context of settler state boundaries, including resurgent practices that imagine the assertion of Indigenous identity, worldview, and practices in ways that do not rely upon state structures for validation (Alfred 2005, 19; Coulthard 2014, 154; Simpson 2011). Since the beginning of Idle No More in 2012, the notion of nation-to-nation relationships has increasingly described a way for Indigenous and settler governments to relate to one another as equal and autonomous governing bodies. Legal scholars are negotiating these ideas from within state structures (Borrows 2002) by interrogating the ways these structures give rise to particular ideas of identity, citizenship, and rights (Lawrence 2005; Palmater 2008).

The multiple perspectives discussed here reflect the ways that colonial experiences vary according to Indigenous peoples' historical and contemporary experiences of colonialism. Whether discussing political presence in relation to ideas of sovereignty, self-determination, or nation-to-nation relationships, the racial histories of liberal modernity influence and press up against Indigenous peoples' expressions of political knowledge and history in this land. Keeping in mind the multiple perspectives that inform Indigenous political presence, each of the artists I bring forward by this dissertation emerge from their own individuated and community-specific

interpretations of liberal political philosophy. Their artworks, then, become a primary source for understanding the tensions which persist in contemporary times.

### **John Trudell's Halluci and ALie Nations as Metaphors**

The poems “We Are The Halluci Nation” and “ALie Nation” by the late-Indigenous activist and poet John Trudell offer a useful metaphor for guiding this analysis (see Appendix A and B). Both of these poems embody Indigenous political presence while further explicating some of the ontological distinctions between settler and Indigenous perspectives. It is one example of how Indigenous artists are creating artworks that allow diverse publics to engage with difficult questions of belonging and identity upon this land we now share. Whereas the incommensurability of worldviews may appear to perpetuate differences that divide Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in ways that highlights racial tensions, I contend that Trudell's Halluci and ALie Nations create a new concept of social relations through which we can imagine collective work towards peaceful and just coexistence that elides racial configurations and instead focuses upon principles of respect and friendship.

As the title and opening track of Indigenous electronic music group Tribe Called Red's 2016 release (Appendix A), “We Are The Halluci Nation” features prominently in popular culture. The album, which features collaborations with Indigenous drummers and singers, as well as other musicians, draws its inspiration from Trudell's cutting yet hopeful message. Presented as spoken-word, Trudell introduces listeners to the Halluci Nation, an imagined and self-declared community who gain coherence from their shared experiences in the face of colonial pursuit: they are called “Indians,” “Native American,” “hostile,” “Pagans,” and “militant” by others; they derive ancestry from “the earth and the sky,” linking themselves across temporal lines into the

past and future (Trudell & Northern Voice 2016). In a later track, *ALie Nation* (Appendix B), listeners learn about the philosophy of animacy and interconnectedness which connects the Halluci Nation to all things as sacred (Trudell, Pimenta & Tagaq 2016). Despite the evidence that suggests that members of the Halluci Nation have witnessed cruelty and oppression, it is also apparent that this has not extinguished their beliefs, values, and compassion. These beliefs and values are in line with the Indigenous philosophy and worldview outlined earlier in the work of Leroy Little Bear.

Contrasted with the Halluci Nation, the ALie Nation are “subjects and citizens” bound together by “material religions.” They do not observe the world as interrelated, and the earth and sky are regarded as resources for exploitation by industry. Their experiences are mediated through trauma and, despite their religion, nothing is sacred (at least not in the same sense as the Halluci Nation recognizes). In this analysis, the ALie Nation upholds values that closely resemble the Western liberal tradition as viewed from an Indigenous perspective.

Who are the people who make up these nations? Although “We Are The Halluci Nation” makes reference to the people who have been called “Indians” and “Native Americans,” its precise membership cannot be determined beyond names that have been applied as misconceptions. “ALie Nation” does not provide any clear indication of its members beyond the beliefs that they hold. Reading “ALie” as “a lie” reveals the fabricated nature of its worldview, alluding both to its culpability in creating constructs of oppression (witnessed by the Halluci Nation) and to its impermanence as a structure of social organization and political domination. By analyzing the worldviews that give way to the Halluci and ALie nations rather than their racial characteristics, these poems provide important space within which to imagine a future premised upon shared respect for one another and for the land. Membership in either of these



nations is a choice that one makes for oneself, not one that is predetermined by ideas of race that are socially inscribed onto individuals. The question becomes: Do we put our energy towards a political mission which focuses upon a philosophy of reciprocal and respectful relations with the land and with each other, or do we dwell inside a philosophy that denies these values and instead supports further exploitation and derision?

Trudell's poems open up space for all people to participate in understanding Indigenous political presence, which ideas of race attempt to shut down. Inside of this space, Trudell constructs a potential for greater knowledge and tolerance, while ensuring that these are led from within Indigenous thought. In response to their oppression, Trudell articulates the resilience of the Halluci Nation: "We are the human beings. The callers of names cannot see us, but we can see them." These words are not new; they have been spoken many times before by my ancestors and the ancestors of other Indigenous people. Although they have not always been spoken from the place of the most privilege and power, these words can be seen to represent a kind of strength that has been galvanized through communal action and the study of one's oppressor.

Two important qualities of Trudell's spoken word poetry guide my methodology in this dissertation: its unapologetic and incisive critique, and the inclusivity of the Halluci/ALie Nation concepts. These poems disrupt preconceived ideas about what it means to be an Indigenous person, and position Indigenous people as the ultimate authority of those representations in the future. This authority is already being exercised by Indigenous artists today, and in my role as a researcher I am casting a spotlight on the work they are producing to illustrate the complex negotiations of citizenship and social responsibility that they offer to diverse audiences across Turtle Island. Although I do not consider myself to be an authority on the whole of Indigenous art and political expression, I put forward this dissertation as a contribution to knowledge that

places Indigenous thought at the fore of critical dialogue on political relationships upon Turtle Island.

The inclusivity of the Halluci/ALie Nation concepts makes important discursive space for engaging in productive conversations about a more just future for all peoples of Turtle Island. Drawing from Trudell's conception of the Halluci and ALie Nations I seek to foster a space for discussion which is welcoming to all people, led by Indigenous perspectives that reimagine politically engaged discourse around contemporary art and Indigenous artists. I offer this contribution, not just to those involved in Indigenous arts but rather to all peoples who live and move through this land. As a researcher, I imbue my work with this purpose from the teachings that I have received from my family and community, through gatherings and ceremonies that centre practices of inclusivity, patience, understanding, and above all, love for all things under creation.

These are the values that I strive to uphold in my work, driven by my understanding of my own position as an Indigenous person. Implicit within these values, which I have applied in my research, is the expectation of responsibility and accountability to others. I would also suggest that this accountability also extends to those whose perceptions of Indigenous political presence have necessitated this investigation. This is the need, as Trudell describes, to better understand the root causes of the problem of perception as it manifests in contemporary attitudes and beliefs. I am responding to this need from the knowledge that I hold about my sense of community, which draws from Indigenous ways of knowing oneself in relation to other beings, including the land.

As a researcher, I draw upon networks and relationships that I have cultivated over the span of my career as a curator. There is accountability within this structure as well. The artworks

that form the analytical core of this dissertation were selected from among these networks, which have grown and extended through conversations with other professionals. I have chosen these works for their ability to change the way that audiences relate to timely issues of political expression and agency facing Indigenous peoples. The methodologies that guide my investigation are grounded in several of what Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls the twenty-five Indigenous research projects (Smith 1999, 142). Specifically, I look at artists' works as a form of *testimonial*, which positions artists as witnesses and respondents to contemporary social issues (Smith 1999, 144). These artworks, and the analysis of them that I provide *intervene* in what is often considered to be the normal state of affairs, in the quest for changes that will have a direct benefit to Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999, 147). The resulting argument provides a critical reading of Western historical knowledge, an imperative which Smith states is “motivated partly by a research drive to establish and support claims, but also by a need to understand what is informed by internal colonialism and new forms of colonization” (Smith 1999, 149). This is a process of interrogating the systems which surround perceptions of Indigenous political presence, while looking intimately at the ways that Indigenous artists are engaging in acts of self-*representation* that provide more in-depth views of Indigenous experiences (Smith 1999, 150).

My hand is apparent within this dissertation, which clusters these artists together in a way that highlights their contributions within a broader field of discourse – a thematic way of looking at contemporary art production that is not always apparent when artworks are produced, exhibited, and sold in locations that are not otherwise linked. Intentionally, this research resists the periodization of artistic production common to history disciplines. Instead, I put forward this research as a link in a complex and non-linear net of contributions that will continue to be woven within the production of artwork and changing social and political conditions.

Over the past many months I have worked to sculpt this project in a way that serves the artwork, to advance artistic practice as a form of research-creation and knowledge production. While the resulting research is expressed in the words that follow, I consider this project to rest only temporarily within these pages as the artworks discussed are taken up elsewhere, and other artworks are produced, which participate and further this conversation.

### **Chapter Overview**

This dissertation examines the philosophical underpinnings of perceptions of Indigenous political presence in order to better understand the mechanisms by which these views have taken seed in the past, and how these same concepts are perpetuated in the present. In this sense, the epistemological influence on historical knowledge is of central concern. In the later chapters of this dissertation I look specifically to the work of select Indigenous artists whose practices can be read as responding to the divide between the realities of Indigenous people and liberal thought by constructing challenging new pathways for diverse audiences to negotiate their positions upon Indigenous land. My analysis positions these artists as strategists for contending with the contemporary political climate. Through their artworks they conscript audiences into difficult negotiations about our place and relationships within the land we now share. In the chapters that follow I illustrate how these artists engage with a history of ideas that continues to limit and constrain political knowledge that emerges from outside the spaces established by settler states, in this case from within Indigenous thought. Constrained forms of political knowledge – those both represented and reflected by these artists – are linked with those individuals who stand in political defiance to the assumed supremacy of settler states. Their political presence, while far

from homogenous, stands in opposition to understandings of just and appropriate inclusion promoted by the liberal colonial state.

In Chapter 2, “Theorizing Indigenous Political Presence and Settler States: Conceptual Framework,” I describe the connections between perceptions of Indigenous political presence and artistic expression. I outline the trajectory of liberal modernity, looking specifically to the racial character of this history which continues to operate through new permutations in present liberal democratic structures. I describe the Canadian government’s changed relationship with Indigenous peoples as an outcome of this liberal tradition, looking specifically to precedents such as the 1969 Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (commonly known as the White Paper), and recent discourses of reconciliation. I draw upon the work of reconciliation scholars who address the problem of recognition as a new liberal pluralist mode of dealing with Indigenous peoples within the framework and purview of the Canadian state. From this analysis, I contend that the problems with the politics of recognition have implications for the history of contemporary Indigenous art. Moreover, I challenge the idea that mere inclusion can provide meaningful platforms for artistic discourse when considering the works of Indigenous artists whose works challenge the implicit attachments we continue to hold in contemporary times to the racial logics of liberal modernity.

In Chapter 3, “A History of Ideas Surrounding Perceptions of Indigenous Political Presence,” I draw on artworks that illustrate an awareness of, and subversive strategizing with, Western narratives of citizenship, government, and belonging that exist in North America today. Artists discussed in this chapter examine the ways in which colonial histories naturalize Western perspectives, and provide us with the means to challenge and subvert our own investments in these systems of knowledge. I will explore how these artworks illustrate the normalization of

Western narratives to the benefit of settler-subjects and their histories and knowledge of place. As such, these artists call out the prevalence of colonial amnesia that fails to comprehend historical and contemporary Indigenous political knowledge and rights to the land. Artists Bonnie Devine and Kent Monkman are discussed for their contributions to exposing and breaking down the perceived opacity of narratives of liberal modernity, and for their strategies confronting the privilege that these narratives afford to some but not all citizens.

Chapter 4, “Claiming Indigenous Land, Confronting the Liberal Subject,” turns to an exploration of the ways in which colonial narratives of land expropriation and state formation are threatened by contemporary expressions of Indigenous political presence on the land. Indigenous scholars have shown how settler legal systems impart a sense of political liberty onto Indigenous realities that are not always compatible with Indigenous knowledge of historical negotiations, or Indigenous rights and title (Barsch and Henderson 1980; Cardinal 1999; Deloria Jr. 1985). While the racist origins of many of these legal relationships have been acknowledged by settler governments and by advocates of liberal theories of recognition, I aim to highlight how race continues to impact perceptions of Indigenous people despite the proliferation of liberal inclusionary discourse. Artists examined in this chapter include Kade Twist, Christian Chapman, Susan Blight and Hayden King of the Ogimaa Mikaana Project in Toronto, and Cheryl L’Hirondelle – both as a solo artist and with her long-time collaborator Joseph Naytowhow.

The question of how to appropriately refute the casting of Indigenous political presence as acts of aggression under the rubric of liberal democracy provides the focus of Chapter 5, “Resisting and Reframing Perceptions of Indigenous Political Presence as Violence.” Specifically, this chapter looks to those artworks that may elicit discomfort and unnerving responses in settler audiences to differentiate between the threats to the privilege and rights of

the liberal subject. Keeping in mind the origins of race and racial subjugation, I will focus my discussion on works that employ aesthetic tactics in response to colonial violence. My analysis will consider and challenge the idea that such confrontations are merely expressions of violence, suggesting instead that Indigenous peoples are construed as illiberal subjects in order to discredit Indigenous political presence and their claims to lands and rights. I explore how these works respond to the colonial violence felt by Indigenous peoples through incisive acts that cut to the quick of Western political supremacy. To frame this discussion, I will draw on the work of anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon who acknowledges the psychological relationship between colonization and ideas of race (Fanon 2008). Artists included in the discussion are Carl Beam, Merritt Johnson, A Tribe Called Red, and Fallon Simard.

Throughout this project I look to provide a critical reading of works by selected artists as a means of reflecting on the epistemological forces driving competing claims to space, and the historical and contemporary power dynamics which affirm the supremacy of settler-state narratives of land and territory. I work to bridge theory and practice to consider the ways that artists engage with – and in some cases embody – the logics of liberal colonial values in order to unsettle normalized narratives of belonging in North America. I conclude in Chapter 6 with my reflections on the ways in which this research enables new critical approaches to the work of art within contemporary settler society. In this way, I aim to show the contributions that Indigenous artists are making both broadly to society and specifically to interdisciplinary fields of knowledge that link art history with Western philosophy and Indigenous thought. I am responsible both to these artists and to my community of peers and colleagues. Furthermore, I strive to make this contribution in a way that pushes against the terms of liberal inclusion to identify trends in contemporary Indigenous art practice that assert Indigenous political

knowledge on its own terms. I position this research as a catalyst for further interdisciplinary exploration into the contributions of artistic practice to theoretical knowledge. Ultimately, I hope that the research exposes the continued impact of colonial values upon perceptions of Indigenous knowledge and political presence in a way that helps to facilitate a reconsideration of the strained relationship that continues to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects within Canada and globally.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Theorizing Indigenous Political Presence within a Racialized Settler State: Conceptual Framework**

Study of the white man will make a great field for future Indian psychologists and psychiatrists  
(Cardinal 1969, 64).

...race is the child of racism, not the father (Coates 2015, 7).

#### **Introduction**

I am not one of the psychologists or psychiatrists who Cardinal alludes to in the first epigraph for this chapter, but as an artist and as a curator I am finding that the study of those who have historically developed and nurtured the concept of race has an important significance for the way that I approach an analysis of artistic practice for Indigenous people. In this dissertation, I contend that the mainstream characterization of Indigenous political presence as hostile, anti-progress, or anti-state constitutes a problem of colonial perception. This characterization is both limited and exclusionary, fundamentally and inherently lacking an appreciation, meaningful inclusion, and understanding of Indigenous knowledge. Arising from the racial stakes of liberal modernity, Indigenous-settler relations continue to operate under the confines of liberal ideals that rest upon the concept of race – an unnatural system of categorization which stems from racist attitudes and beliefs.

In this chapter I outline this reductive characterization of Indigenous political presence, by tracing some philosophical pathways in dominant Western thought that have led to this

perception by way of the naturalized vision of acceptable actions by citizens within a colonial state. Specifically, I look to the evolving conception of property in liberal thought against the political thrust of social contract theory in a colonial context (Anaya 2000; Arneil 1994; Henderson 2000; Hobbes 1997; Ivison 2003; Locke 2003). I place literature on this subject alongside interdisciplinary scholarship on recognition theory (Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2011), which illustrates the ways in which settler states have attempted to manage Indigenous peoples within an ongoing colonial framework. I show how dominant Western systems of thought have, in many cases, given rise to the characterization of Indigenous political history and knowledge as hostile, militant, and anti-state. I suggest that these interpretations represent the skewed outlook of the settler state, which favours Western understandings of Indigenous-settler relations and naturalizes race-thinking. Finally, I show how these arguments are key for understanding the contributions of contemporary Indigenous artists who are challenging settler state priorities and formations of citizenship through their artworks.

To theorize Indigenous political presence within the settler state I review primary and secondary texts of Western philosophy, liberal theory, and recognition theory. I come to each of these areas of study with the intention of analyzing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, within an understanding of the lived realities that these respective identities bring to the issues. Although in many ways distinct from one another in the stakes that they represent, these areas of study are intimately related in the ways they cross disciplinary boundaries that might otherwise protect the knowledge of a given field from critical debate. Altogether, this literature assists in showing the negative impact that narratives which promote the supremacy of settler social structures and concepts of governance have upon Indigenous peoples in a colonial setting.

The philosophical ideas I trace in this chapter directly connect with visual history through the historical representations found in art. Representations of Indigenous people commonly encountered in colonial settings such as Canada have until recently reflected to a large degree ideas stemming from Western interpretations of Indigenous life (Chaat Smith 2009). While a re-assessment and revision of disciplinary knowledge and a new pedagogical awareness of Indigenous knowledges and histories have promoted positive changes in education and public spaces, this has come at a cost. Vestiges of dominant Western thought persist in artefacts of material culture – artworks for example – as well as in discursive form through conventional and commonly held societal beliefs and stereotypes expressed in text. Hence, both material culture and discursive formations rooted in European and settler societies continue to have a direct impact upon the way that Indigenous people are viewed and valued in society today.

As Emma LaRoque indicates, paintings by George Catlin and Paul Kane and photographs by Edward Curtis, for example, document what was believed to be a disappearing culture (LaRoque 2005, 146) – an assumption wrapped up in concepts fundamental to liberalism’s investment in civilization: superiority, progress, race. The driving theme of these artworks directly inform and define Indigenous people as disappearing at best and perhaps entirely absent. Whether or not these artworks fairly depicted Indigenous peoples, their images tell stories of this land from a perspective based in Western European experiences during a time of global exploration, colonial expansion, and frontier procurement that reveal commonly held views about settler rights to claim space, and the inevitability of Indigenous demise. In other words, the immediate consequences of this interpretation of early settlement is the erasure not only of an Indigenous presence but also a granting of permission for colonial expansion that nullifies possibilities for Indigenous presence in the unfolding of history and its outcomes.

Many of the ideas about Indigenous peoples that we gather today from historical narratives, popular culture, and political relations stem from seeds sown by these early observers of the land now known as North America and its First Peoples. The presence and intrinsic colonial expression authored by European settlers continue to foreground and inherently motivate and define the construction of narratives that privilege the supremacy of settler knowledge over Indigenous perspectives. After all, because Indigenous people are either disappearing or wholly absent from the physical landscape of history, they do not figure into the constructed discourse in any meaningful way. When we hear in the news of political demonstrations that position Indigenous people as protestors, activists, or even as militants or disruptors, we are confronted by a vision of this land under settler state control, where Indigenous voices are classified either as citizens within, or antagonists to, the state.

Both of these characterizations construct Indigenous identity in service to settler colonial needs. Thus, the prevailing ideas of Indigenous people in relation to the land resemble a production of space described by postcolonial theorist Edward Said. In regard to the Western view of the Orient, he writes of the “enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, 1979, 3). While the Orient reflects a particular relationship to the colonial project, as a produced space it lends an understanding to settler perceptions of Indigenous political presence in North America: Both were created within dominant Western thought for the purpose of asserting settler supremacy over the racialized Other. In the case of Indigenous political presence, Western perceptions marginalized and occluded its expression. As a consequence, representations of such societies – both pictorial as in art and discursive as in commonly understood social articulations

– reveal the exercise of colonial domination over people and places in ways that became increasingly normalized in a myth that North America was peaceably settled.

This dissertation is at once a project of identifying and dismantling the intricacies of such myths, which preside over Indigenous thought and consequently impact the spaces occupied by Indigenous artists. The discussion of Western political democratic development lurks always in the background of this work, defining the limits on expressions of Indigenous political presence. The advocacy of Indigenous curators, artists, and arts administrators over the last 50 years<sup>6</sup> has helped to address the historical lack of inclusion of Indigenous artists within mainstream institutions and canons of knowledge. Scholars such as Sherene Razack confirm the ways that settler mythologies and race have rendered Indigenous knowledge subordinate in hierarchies that privilege whiteness within a settler-legal framework (Razack 2002). Artworks that take a position on, or provide a means of denaturalizing, readily accepted ideas about settler claims to space, expose the ways in which liberal modernity's racial stakes impact the intelligibility of Indigenous political thought. Without the language to struggle with how dominant Western thought normalizes colonial concepts of land and space, the Indigenous artists in this study present difficult knowledge that many might misinterpret as a threat to settler futurity.

Informed by the inherent colonial nature of dominant Western thought and its colonial development, this analysis focuses on works by Indigenous artists that influence how society reflects upon Indigenous people's rights. Rather than merely re-writing erroneous and damaging histories that denigrate and misrepresent Indigenous peoples and their exercise of political

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Hill's curatorial hand in the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67 is commonly regarded as a watershed moment for Indigenous curatorial practice and intervention within mainstream culture.

knowledge and philosophy, these artists are constructing an awareness of Indigenous knowledge and philosophical pathways. As a result, audiences are asked to complete the difficult task of consciously situating themselves as active participants in the trajectory of colonial history. Their work takes place at sites of negotiation where often-difficult tensions arise always already in relation to inhabiting this land as shared space. This is a challenging project that requires audiences to call many Western forms of knowledge into question. These artists are participating in a project that extends beyond the reversal of Western historical representation to include a deliberate engagement with the mechanisms of colonial history within Western philosophical thought. In doing so, they give name to the pathways of control which impact perceptions of Indigenous political presence. Their work necessarily complicates the naturalized influence that race has upon the exercise of forms of political knowledge which reside outside settler state structures.

Scholars such as Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua have explored the impact that ideas of race have had and continue to have upon the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples despite recent shifts in anti-racist discourse (Lawrence and Dua 2005). Others have described aspects of the intertwined relationship between conceptions of race and the distribution of Indigenous rights (Palmater 2008). My research takes place in allegiance with these scholarly investigations in its focus on the racialized perception of Indigenous political knowledge as peripheral, secondary, irrelevant, or counterproductive to settler knowledge. Following those Indigenous scholars whose work offers foundational knowledge of Indigenous political philosophies (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Barsch and Henderson 1980; Deloria Jr. 2000), my work questions the idea that meaningful and lasting social change can take place within a system that continues to devalue Indigenous political history and presence. While incidences of racist expression are often

dismissed as individual cases, authors such as David Goldberg claim a more systemic and deeply rooted problem where, even in so-called “post-racial” times, “[t]he inheritors of historical racial privilege deny its racist expression, while insisting that its occasional occurrence is individualized to the isolated bad apple” (Goldberg, 2015, 81). Exploring the mechanisms of racial expression in the contemporary moment reveals how settler knowledge relies upon race, thereby predisposing Indigenous people to perceptions of belonging and history that are based in narrow understandings of racial origins and colonialism.

Drawing on John Trudell’s critique in his poem “We Are the Halluci Nation,” which establishes some ontological distinctions between settler and Indigenous perspectives on the relationship between people and land, I orient my research toward a discussion of race as the predominant factor in understanding the barriers facing Indigenous people and their expressions of belonging and history in this land. In order to contend with the scope of this barrier, I begin by reviewing the work of select Western philosophers as a means of looking back to the origins of race as a structure of valuation and control, one that “pretends to universality” (Goldberg 1993, 4), and that influences ideas of government and citizenship from the distinct position of European experience and knowledge. Scholars of critical race (Anderson 2007; DaSilva 2007; Goldberg 1993) and social justice (Razack 2002) look to the influence of ideas rooted in European modernity. Indigenous theorists have also examined the legal and governance frameworks of settler nations to determine the lasting influence of liberal ideologies upon Indigenous peoples’ contemporary experiences (Borrows 2002; Cardinal 1969; Coulthard 2014; Little Bear, Boldt, and Long 1984; Turner 2006). Whereas racialized peoples have been rendered subjects of study in Western canons of knowledge, both in the past and in the present, this scholarship turns the gaze back to examine the beliefs that provide dominant Western thought

with support and guidance. At the same time, the research is grounded in the primacy of Indigenous political knowledge of land and history, a position historically unrecognized and misrepresented. Here, there is opportunity to assert and challenge the supremacy of settler state structures.

### **An Ideal Society, Its Citizens, and Their Rights**

As a dominant political philosophy underpinning our contemporary situation, liberal thought as a subset of Western philosophical knowledge has had an important role in determining the ways that Indigenous people are mapped onto or located within particular roles in the settler state. While seeming to represent an evolution towards an egalitarian state and society, liberal thought continues to marginalize, limit, and define political realities and relations for Indigenous people in important ways. In particular, liberal settler society's racial ideas of citizenship and belonging place limitations upon Indigenous people and art by Indigenous artists when they are viewed within the narrow confines of settler society's relationship to the land, for example, through property and markings that divide and separate. Contemporary expressions of liberal thought may appear to represent the benevolent outcomes of a political philosophy that responds to difference in the wake of significant and profound oppression. But if we look at the historical evolution of liberal thought we can see the racial stakes that have always existed and that have been essential in naturalizing racialized ideas of justice, rights, and belonging for Indigenous and settler peoples alike. From this vantage point we can understand the limited capacity that this political philosophy holds for understanding and addressing the histories and philosophies that drive Indigenous political presence in the present.



The historical evolution that I examine in this section begins with the intersection of liberalism, modernity, and race in the sixteenth century. Goldberg frames this relationship indicating the ways in which liberalism propelled modernity as its defining doctrine (Goldberg 1993, 4). As a set of values aimed at preserving individualism, universal principles, rational reform, progress, and equality, liberal political philosophy bolstered modernity's push to "material, moral, physical, and political improvement" in the service of promoting and developing the project of civilization (Goldberg 1993, 4). Goldberg advances the concept of race as the central invention of modernity, an attempt to create social cohesion from within modern thought.

Some context surrounding race-relations during modern development is useful for determining the significance of the concept to modern thought.<sup>7</sup> As a time of tremendous social and political change in the structure of civil society across Europe, modernity is often characterized by simultaneous sentiments of optimism and fear. Also during this time, global exploration and colonial development in the Americas and across the globe was gaining force at an accelerated rate. The maturation of race as a concept during these times dovetailed with the perceived need for civil society to grapple with the purpose of humanity. While writing from distinct political contexts in nations across Europe, philosophical writers converged upon the topic of what it means to be "appropriately human" within an ideal society (Anderson 2007, 1).

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<sup>7</sup> I look to Goldberg's (1993) calculation of the period called modernity as "emerging from the sixteenth century in the historical formation of what only relatively recently has come to be called 'the West'. This general self-understanding becomes self-conscious in the seventeenth century, reaching its intellectual and material maturity in the Enlightenment, and solidifies as Western world hegemony the following century" (3).

Oddly, for those living in a Europe plagued by civil unrest and political instability, ideas of barbarism and savagery provided useful scapegoats to explain the ails of a Western society, which nevertheless held itself in high esteem as the universal arbiter of civility. Writing about the character of modern Europe, Chickasaw and Cheyenne legal scholar James Sákéj Youngblood Henderson writes, “[t]error and suffering have always been integral to European life and thought. Modern European political thought is constructed on the idea that terror is a legitimate source of sovereign power and law” (Henderson 2000, 11). This terror, Sakej Henderson argues, was shaped against the context of the state of nature – a place temporally located before government, and marked by scarcity, competition, distrust, fear, and the individualistic drive for self-preservation (Henderson 2000, 15-16). Shifting ideas of morality and social organization in modern Europe factor into the terror Youngblood Henderson describes because they represent the order that was necessary to quell fears associated with political instability and civil unrest.

In England for example, political philosopher Thomas Hobbes wrote in the context of the seventeenth century social upheaval in England of the Civil War. In his work, he grappled with describing reforms to political knowledge and social organization in a changing society. As pointed to in the work of legal scholar S. James Anaya, Hobbes’s prescriptive negotiation of political reform rested upon his conception of “the state of nature as life outside of civil society, a state of war” (Anaya 2000, 39):

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is  
Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live  
without other security, than what their own strength, and their own intervention  
shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry;  
because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no

Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes 1997 [1651], 70).

Here Hobbes advances his support of a political reform that turns away from the so-called squalid origins of man in a state of nature. Hobbes was not alone in his investment with the state of nature trope. Social contract theorist Jean-Jacques Rousseau similarly looked to the state of nature as a means of comprehending global difference against a context of political change in Geneva and elsewhere in Europe. When Rousseau writes, “[m]an is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” he was speaking about the limitations to freedom imposed upon European subjects in the modern state (Rousseau 1997 [1775], 41). Although Rousseau looked to Indigenous societies, in this case Tahitians, as representative of a harmonious way of life in contrast with the social conditions experienced in Europe, he nevertheless positioned these peoples as living in a yet-undeveloped version of society that too will spoil as had European civil society. By the modern dictum of progress and using Tahitians as an example of society before modern times, Rousseau defines the kind of inequality seen in Geneva as natural law.

Reliance upon the state of nature trope in seventeenth century social and political theory assisted in the consolidation of sovereign power during the Enlightenment while aiding in the affirmation and justification of capitalist, colonial exploits. Political theorist Barbara Arneil has written about the perceived necessity of civil society to transcend the state of nature in order to usurp Indigenous lands and to assimilate “natural man” into civil society (Arneil 1994, 609).

John Locke contributed to this project in several fundamental ways, largely through his articulation of the concept of private property as the organizing factor that simultaneously reforms the state of nature while constituting the basis of civil society (Arneil 1994, 609).

Locke's conception of property fundamentally supposes that land exists to sustain humankind – a perspective that deserves further attention. To this effect Locke writes, “[t]he earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being” (Locke 2003 [1689], 274) With man thus located at the centre and in a dominant position to the land, Locke then outlines the processes by which humans make meaningful sense of the land when they render it into property:

[E]very man has a property in his person....That labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state of nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property (Locke 2003 [1689], 274).

He extends this justification with the following statement:

As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labor does, as it were, enclose it from the common (Locke 2003 [1689], 276).

In this way Locke assigns ownership and title to men who, by their labour, put the land to use: “Thus labour, in the beginning, gave a right of property wherever anyone was pleased to employ it...” (Locke 2003, [1689], 283). By articulating the means by which land becomes property Locke spoke to a social order that would support and protect the interests of property owners who had invested in this system. Locke writes, “civil government is the proper remedy

for the inconveniences of the state of nature” (Locke 2003, [1689], 267). Under the operation of colonial processes aimed at the procurement of land, the implementation of political structures becomes the means to manage property in the interests of men who expend their labour, and to “defen[d] of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good” (Locke 2003 [1689], 262). Scholar James Tully describes the stakes involved in Locke’s formulation of civil government as the mechanism by which a citizen’s property is maintained and regulated (Tully 1993, 137). Likewise, scholar Barbara Arneil writes, “[i]f property was to be preserved, allocation of land must be strictly organized around townships,” and in order to sustain this organization “Locke recognized both the need for well managed property and established laws” (Arneil 1994, 607). Through his articulation of property as a means of understanding man’s relationship to the land and to society, Locke established liberal modern thought as a set of universal values in the service of the greater good. Given that the state of nature trope allows only some individuals to access the bounty of the greater good, settler supremacy gets written into the origins of colonial states.

Locke’s developing ideas of government, in this case within the context of what would become the United States of America, drew upon liberal ideas of freedom and equality that informed the creation of civil subjects who were labourers of the land. Yet, when Locke wrote that the “appropriation of any parcel of land” was not “by, improving it, any prejudice to any other man,” he suggested that liberty came with some unstated inferences about who it served (Locke 2003 [1689], 277). The activity of making private property from the land as an act of appropriation provides a useful entryway into how colonialism erased Indigenous labour, and by extension, Indigenous rights to use and exist upon the land. Locke’s definition of wasteland (Locke 2003 [1689], 284), the unenclosed and underutilized tracts of land that characterized

early colonial North America, provides a useful vantage point from which to observe the limited scope of the citizenry determined by this schema (Locke 2003 [1689], 280). Locke explains that God bequeathed the land unto the industrious and rational, qualities that for him describe the exclusive interests of European settlers and not Indigenous people who had worked the land in their own industrious fashion (Locke 2003 [1689], 277). As art curator, and writer Richard William Hill has written:

[Locke's] appeal to labour and private property became the central justification of North American colonization. It was the Indian's failure to farm and have private property that seemed to be the problem, and this was mentioned repeatedly, even in regards to Indigenous nations like the Haudenosaune (Iroquois) or the Cherokee, which actually had farming cultures (Hill 2006, 8).

To labour, and labour correctly, stands as an important qualification for citizenship in the social order prescribed by Locke's notion of property. When Arneil writes about Locke's idea that the "lands should only be increased in proportion to the number of men available and colonies should be founded on laws which insure the liberty and industry of its citizens," one can begin to draw conclusions about who exactly had access to the liberty granted by the idea of property Locke envisioned (Arneil 1994, 607). It would be generous to say that Indigenous peoples' relationships to the land were perceived as merely different than this system. For Locke, the expropriation of Indigenous lands represented the natural and just consequences of Indigenous peoples' inherent lack of capacity to abide by appropriately human standards.

The idea that the Indigenous peoples of this land belonged to the past, which naturally limited their entitlement to the rights of civil society, belongs to the deeply racialized history of liberal modernity. As I have outlined in this section, the notion of a "state of nature" provided a

useful and shameful representation of pre-civilized society within which fear of the chaos that characterized early modern times could be placed. As racialized beings, inhabitants of this “state of nature” represented an evolutionary predecessor to civil society that affirmed the status of “progressed,” albeit struggling, civil societies in Europe. This perspective facilitated the application of universal standards of humanity onto so-called barbarous beings. This last consideration has had especially profound material consequences for Indigenous peoples, and indeed all racialized peoples, enabling and sustaining determinations of who enjoys the rights and benefits of land ownership and therefore of civil society.

In this section I have highlighted the ways in which social contract theory deployed the “state of nature” trope to affirm the supremacy of dominant Western European social and political thought which have their roots in the racial stakes of liberal modernity. The degree to which these understandings of social relations persist in the present moment are evidenced in both the common understanding of land as property upon which humans are said to dominate, and in the continued derision of Indigenous peoples who exercise their political presence. The former suggests a subjugation of the land, an idea which differs from the views of Indigenous people who consider themselves stewards of the land. Within my own family I have been taught to consider myself and others as a part of, and not separate from, the land. In this dissertation, I endeavor to denaturalize dominant Western perceptions and to reveal, as Sakej Youngblood Henderson writes, the “artificial context of European thought” (Henderson 2000, 11-12). I offer this analysis of the racial stakes of liberal modernity and its impact upon Indigenous people’s lives, in alignment with Trudell’s description of the actions of the Halluci Nation, an imagined and self-declared community of anti-colonial thinkers: “We are the tribe that they cannot see....The callers of names cannot see us....But we can see them.”

## Conceiving a “Just Society”<sup>8</sup>

European encounters with difference have utilized an array of different colonial tactics – each unique to specific locations – to affirm and reproduce the supremacy of dominant Western European social and political thought. Nevertheless, it is possible to look broadly at moments of encounter to examine the inherent presence of liberal modernity’s ideals, and to determine the *shared limitations* that these have placed upon the original inhabitants of the land now known as North America. As Métis-Tlingit curator Candice Hopkins writes, Indigenous people at the time of first contact and early settlement “were not only at Europe’s outer edge,” but also “at the very boundary of European knowledge itself” (Hopkins 2016, np). As a demonstration of critical ontological resistance, this dissertation reorients the picture to centralize Indigenous political presence, as expressed by artists themselves, while remaining cognizant of the philosophical pathways that have placed Indigenous political presence at the edge of understanding.

By looking at the current political landscape as an extension of liberal modernity’s forward-thinking vision, this research unravels the taken-for-granted understanding that contemporary liberal societies somehow represent a radically altered and just future for Indigenous peoples. But by observing the lineage of liberal modernity we can begin to dismantle

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of a “just society” is wrapped up in the history of liberal thought, which in various ways determines what is best for individuals within society. The idea of a just society has particular resonance in Canada thanks to Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s Liberal government, which often called upon it in the context of “a promise of a revised Canadian constitution that would guarantee personal and political liberties, protect minority rights, and offer greater opportunities for underrepresented or underprivileged regions and social groups” (Riendeau 2000, 330).



the naturalized supremacy of Western European social and political thought upon Indigenous lands.

The very fact that Indigenous peoples and governments have not been seen, that is understood, by liberal modernity has had grave consequences for the lived experiences of Indigenous people. Like many other peoples, Indigenous people in the land now known as Canada have experienced what it means to not be considered appropriately human by racial standards that measure cognitive development and capacity, despite recent attitudes towards inclusion and reconciliation. In 2017, a year marked by celebrations of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> year, which have highlighted the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) report, the country seems to be trying to come to terms with its long history of assimilationist and genocidal policies and practices. For instance, shifting attitudes have resulted in changes in the representation of Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives in education and social programming, a response that has been hastened by the TRC's report.<sup>9</sup> These changes are taking place, however incrementally.

In the context of a contemporary liberal democracy in Canada, which has followed in the wake of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative leadership, it might be tempting to expect that acknowledgement of past injustice and a stated commitment to equity and recognition would signal a productive framework for envisioning a positive future for settler-Indigenous relations. Harper's 2008 apology to former students of residential schools is a recent

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Lakehead University implemented a new requirement that all undergraduate students take an Indigenous Studies course during their degree. Other universities, such as the University of Winnipeg have adopted similar program requirements.

gesture towards such ends. The apology, which outlined the intentions and outcomes of these church-run schools aimed at eradicating Indigenous languages and ways of life and replacing them with the English language and so-called civilized practices, seems to suggest the contemporary settler government's willingness to address its historical complicity in administering educational programming that directly harmed the lives of countless Indigenous children and subsequent generations of their families.

While the apology recognized the errors of the past, it nevertheless gestured toward a rectification of historical wrongdoings from within a framework of settler permissibility that does not necessarily leave room to question the adequacy of such a framework. Without discounting the need for healing to take place in families and communities that continue to contend with the legacy of residential schools in their lives, I wish to suggest that the operation of historical redress which takes place exclusively from within this framework risks obscuring the continued influence of racism upon Indigenous people's lives. For instance, the continued and systematic underfunding of Indigenous children on Canadian reserves speaks to the persistence of attitudes that devalue Indigenous lives by undercutting Indigenous peoples' successes.<sup>10</sup> The persistence of policies and practices that directly impact Indigenous lives in severe and negative ways despite public acknowledgement of past harms hints at the inadequacies of Harper's apology to address the root causes of these problems. While the 2008 apology grapples with problematic attitudes of the past, it leaves open the question of racism's continued presence and impact in contemporary state operations.

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<sup>10</sup> Here I am referring to the initiatives of scholar Cindy Blackstock, whose advocacy with the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society has brought to light the Canadian government's systematic underfunding of children on reserves on the basis of race and ethnicity.

The continued impacts of race thinking, as Goldberg reminds us, represents the evolution of liberal thought where “[r]ace is irrelevant, but all is race” (Goldberg 1993, 6). Such forms of “[l]iberal meliorism takes it that we have largely progressed beyond these racist social formations of the past” without assessing the ways in which racist thinking has become imbricated within systems of government (Goldberg 1993, 7). The history of the 1969 “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy” ties these sentiments of liberal meliorism directly to government policies and practices, particularly those that have insufficiently or inadequately recognized Indigenous political presence outside a racial schema. The document, authored by then-Indian Affairs and Northern Development minister Jean Chretien under the leadership of Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s liberal government is now commonly referred to as The White Paper, a name given to government policy papers that in this case took on other (racist) connotations. Intended to address issues deeply ingrained within the Indian Act, The White Paper sought to remove all “legislative and constitutional bases for discrimination” by repealing the Indian Act and extending the rights and freedoms entitled to all Canadian citizens to Indigenous people, thereby enabling progression toward a “just society” by liberal standards (Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy 1969, np).

The proposed policy changes met strong reactions from Indigenous peoples who rejected what they saw as the dismantling of Indigenous legal status under the federal government. Although The Indian Act is an inherently flawed and discriminatory law founded upon histories that inadequately address Indigenous political presence within the land now called Canada, its repeal would have had tremendous consequences for Indigenous people who hold treaties with federal, and not provincial governments. Harold Cardinal’s 1969 *Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians* responded to Chretien’s proposal claiming it represented a “thinly disguised

program of extermination through assimilation” that effectively sought to absolve the federal government of its responsibilities to recognize and uphold Indigenous rights (Cardinal 1969, 1). In 1970 the Indian Chiefs of Alberta published *Citizens Plus*, now commonly referred to as the Red Paper, in response to Chretien’s initial proposal, which further denounced the objectives of the Liberal government to eradicate Indian policy at the federal level. In responding to the White Paper and outlining the consequences that its repeal would have upon Indigenous peoples and communities, writers such as Cardinal found themselves in an uncomfortable position. They appeared to be speaking against equality:

Its clever and diabolical reference to discrimination constitutes an attempt by the government to sneak through the thoroughly illegal and immoral abrogation of Indian rights. Canadians who are not aware of the legal and moral implications of the government’s policy are put in the difficult position of appearing to argue for discrimination if they oppose the government position (Cardinal 1969, 115).

At the heart of this dilemma resides a deeper problem: the unquestioned and constitutionally recognized location of Indigenous peoples within the purview of settler state governance. Scholar Elizabeth Povinelli conceives of the “governance of the prior” as a “mode of political imaginary and manoeuvre” (Povinelli 2011, 14). The location of Indigenous subjects within the political imaginary of settler state governments upholds the problematic assumption that this land was peaceably settled by methods which give Indigenous subjects equal standing within Canadian society. Moreover, the naturalized ways in which Indigenous peoples are located within the settler state framework conveniently obfuscates the ways in which liberal principles and their attendant racial logics continue to govern Indigenous subjects. As a political philosophy, liberalism in its contemporary manifestations rests upon a historical conception of

citizenship granted only to those regarded as civilized or human. As outlined in the previous section, Indigenous people, alongside other racialized peoples, have been historically denied entry into the category of human, thus limiting their access to the rights and freedoms afforded by that category. Recent trends towards inclusion, for example, under the rubrics of multiculturalism or recognition, have attempted to rectify these histories of injustice by bringing those previously marginalized by ideas of race into the fold of society to reverse the “distortion” that misrecognition has inflicted upon their identities (Taylor 1994, 25). The assumption underlying the White Paper that Cardinal and the Indian Chiefs of Alberta questioned was that Indigenous people are merely disadvantaged by their racialized status, which had been given to them in error. Instead, their responses affirmed this error while at the same time asserting the pre-existence of Indigenous political presence and the continued relevance of its exercise in relation to the activities of the Canadian state.

### **The Problem With Recognition**

The coherence and continued relevance of contemporary liberal political philosophy is called into question when its historical fixation on universal principles, which have influenced ideas of government and citizenship from the position of European experience and knowledge, have been found to rely upon distinct forms of racial exclusion (Goldberg 1993, 4). Contemporary forms of liberal recognition have attempted to transform this historical relationship through the acceptance of difference that previous social and political influence disallowed. Contemporary liberal scholars such as Will Kymlicka have defended the continued relevance of liberal thought against a so-called “communitarian” critique, stating that liberalism perpetually seeks the “good life,” the idea of which has been and continues to be refined over

time (Kymlicka 1989, 10). For Kymlicka, contemporary liberalism seeks equality in all parts of a culturally plural society, which includes minority cultures, and among them Indigenous cultures.

Other approaches that seek to reconcile liberal thought with historical and contemporary exclusions stemming from race have sought different methods for dealing with Indigenous peoples. The concept of “citizens plus,” first advanced in 1963 in *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies* (also called the Hawthorn Report),<sup>11</sup> describes a class of citizens whose rights draw from those granted by Canadian state as well as from their unique status of Indigenous peoples. As a participant in the proceedings which led to the Hawthorn Report, scholar of political science Alan Cairns advocated for “citizens plus” as a third-order government meant to address the failures of past government attempts at assimilation through “parallelism,” which takes as its model the Guswentah, or two row wampum that depicts a nation-to-nation relationship illustrated by the side-by-side paths of two boats (one driven by Onkwehonwe<sup>12</sup> people and one by European states, in this case the nation of Holland) and defined by mutual practices of respect and non-interference (2000, 6).

In his book, *This Is Not A Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, Anishinaabe scholar Dale Turner critiques the ideas of both of these liberal thinkers. He writes that their attempts to reconcile Indigenous political presence take place within an inherently

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<sup>11</sup> *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*, commonly referred to as the Hawthorn Report after its author Harry B. Hawthorn, was commissioned by the federal government to provide a fuller knowledge of the state of Indigenous life in Canada.

<sup>12</sup> Mohawk word for First Peoples.

limited and limiting state purview. He is suspicious of Kymlicka's classification of Aboriginal rights as a form of cultural rights and for the way it seeks to administer Aboriginal rights from the legitimacy from the state (Turner 2006, 57). His criticisms of Cairns and the "Citizen's Plus" framework are rooted in the inability of this understanding of Indigenous political presence to address the fundamental questions of nation-to-nation relationships (Turner 2006, 38). For Turner, the political relations described by Kymlicka and Cairns are not the benevolent gestures, or "peace pipes," that they claim to be. As modes of thought which draw upon liberal political philosophy's understanding of racialized difference, both seek to redress the state of Indigenous political engagement without considering the legacy of colonialism, the sui generis rights of Indigenous nations, the presumed supremacy of Canadian sovereignty, or the necessity of Indigenous participation in determining theories of Indigenous rights (Turner 2006, 15).

While proponents of liberalism still hold a torch for the capacity to progress toward more just forms of governance and social relations, Indigenous scholars such as Turner remain critical of the ability of such change to occur from within a system which has shown its historical unwillingness to *conceive of* Indigenous difference from outside of state structures. Problems arise when liberalism's structural reliance upon the concept of race continues to frame ideas of equality and citizenship. Housed within this framework of understanding, the politics of recognition – a liberal strategy for overcoming racial inequality and marginalization – now represents one more problem for Indigenous political presence.

The concept of recognition draws its history from the work of G.W.L. Hegel who conceived of self-consciousness as a condition met by the recognition of one's self by another (Hegel 1967 [1807], 111). His often-cited work, "Lordship and Bondage," describes the master-slave dialectic as the necessity of another self-conscious being to one's own existence and

freedom, which always involves a struggle to overpower the other (Hegel 1967 [1807], 111-12). While Hegel's relationship to traditional liberalism is debated in contemporary scholarship (Franco 1997), his contributions to understanding the human subject as a complete and rational being are useful for determining one's ability to participate in society as a whole subject. Contemporary scholars have adopted Hegel's concept of recognition to describe the detrimental effects of misrecognition – that is, the problems that arise from the failure to see and understand a person for who they truly are. In describing the conditions of, and need for, recognition scholar of political philosophy Charles Taylor writes that,

[O]ur identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor 1994, 25).

For Taylor, recognition forms a necessary component of equitable social relations, and he traces the source of inequity to moments of fundamental misrecognition. His work promotes the adoption of recognition as an ameliorative strategy for bringing previously marginalized individuals and groups into the fold of a society that had previously disallowed their full participation.

This concept, however, fails to take into consideration the ways in which processes of recognition have always operated differently for colonized peoples within a colonial setting. Martinique-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon expressed the problem with recognition when he discussed the deeply psychological relationship colonized people have with white colonizers. In



his seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon explores the lived experience of colonized, racialized people. He describes the conditions in which the colonized grow to identify with the cultural values of the colonizer (Fanon 2008). He writes that colonization ruptures the identity of the colonized because, “the more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become” (Fanon 2008, 2-3). These are highly alienating and corrosive conditions affecting colonized subjectivity. Here Fanon describes how the recognition of blackness within colonial spaces – as a form of cognitive distortion – denies, rather than allows freedom for the colonized. Importantly, this cognitive distortion takes place at the locus of race.

Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard writes that, for Fanon, “recognition is not posited as a source of freedom and dignity for the colonized, but rather as a field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained” (Coulthard 2014, 17). This social condition, he states is “equally as applicable to contemporary liberal recognition-based approaches to Indigenous self-determination in Canada” (Coulthard 2014, 16). Fanon’s implicit critique of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic proves useful for Coulthard who similarly challenges the idea that recognition by the Canadian state can provide a productive platform for transformative Indigenous politics (Coulthard 2014, 16). By describing a shift wherein Indigenous people, once framed by federal policies as wards of the state, are now seen as subjects of recognition, Coulthard introduces suspicion of liberal pluralist models of recognition that can be said to represent new practices of dispossession when they take place within the supremacy of state structures and jurisdiction.

The acceptance of Indigenous peoples by way of their racialized difference into the fold of contemporary liberal societies represents a misapplication of ameliorative strategies for Indigenous people because it reaffirms race as the original referent for conferring citizenship and

rights. Such logics of inclusion limit the space afforded to Indigenous political knowledge and philosophy that reside outside of the structures of liberal modernity, which this literature review shows to be underpinned by race. When liberalism recognizes the errors of the past, as in Canada's recent reflections upon its participation within the racial project, it seeks strategies such as recognition to rectify historical injustice. Such strategies, however, reproduce and further ingrain the category of *human* vis-à-vis the category of race. The fact that formerly disadvantaged populations are "lifted out" of the latter category and granted access to the rights and benefits of the former does not negate the existence of race as an original construct of liberal modernity. Moreover, doing so fails to interrogate the seemingly neutral character of the category of human addressed in earlier parts of this chapter. In addition, as Tuner and Coulthard have expressed, while liberal pluralist strategies for addressing issues of equality for Indigenous people may appear to represent the benevolence of a reformed society, they do not necessarily equate to the recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples as the First Peoples of this land.

Paradoxically, the misapplication of liberal pluralist strategies to the lives and activities of Indigenous peoples sets up a framework for viewing acts of resistance and challenge to liberal recognition as racist themselves. Coulthard writes that to defy the politics of recognition and reconciliation risks appearing as racist or essentialist (Coulthard 2014, 70). This sentiment echoes the passage above in which Cardinal articulates how opposing the 1969 White Paper, which advocated for a vision of equality, could be construed as promoting the continuation of discrimination. In light of these claims, it warrants mentioning how the ideas of freedom and equality espoused by theories of recognition themselves rest upon shaky ground. At the time when Hegel penned and published what we now know as his master-slave dialectic, slavery referred to the metaphorical tyranny of times before modernity (Buck-Morss 2000, 821).

Historical context imbues this passage with a certain emancipatory potential and allure for those who seek to rectify past injustice. However, as scholar Susan Buck-Morss has argued, it is reasonable to deduce that Hegel's use of the word slavery had much more sinister consequences for racialized peoples given his awareness of slavery as a practice of exploiting non-European bodies for the purposes of advancing European economies through labour in the colonies (Buck-Morss 2000, 844). Her conclusion: Hegel was either uninformed of colonial slavery (which she is by no means convinced of) or, the description of relations defined in "Lordship and Bondage" advocates for the naturalness of slavery (Buck-Morss 2000, 844), which has impacted racialized peoples in various and sinister ways across Turtle Island. Her analysis reinforces the foundational problem of recognition (and not of Indigenous resistance *to* recognition) that relies, and has always relied, upon race.

The impact of liberal views on Indigenous political presence in contemporary times is found in the silent frameworks that constrain the political activities and mobility of Indigenous peoples and their nations. It cannot be taken for granted that Indigenous peoples' expressions of political presence that reside outside of minority and "Citizens Plus" frameworks will be recognized. The strong unwillingness of settler governments, whose histories rest upon the lineage of liberal political philosophy, to act reflexively upon these histories positions such expressions as hostile, anti-progress, or anti-state.

### **Beyond Inclusion: The Intelligibility of Indigenous Art**

By identifying the problem with recognition and its impacts upon expressions of Indigenous political presence I aim to set the conditions for forwarding two interrelated claims about the reception and circulation of contemporary Indigenous art today. The first contention is that the

problems of recognition mirror the challenges facing the inclusion of Indigenous artists in mainstream institutions and canons of knowledge over the last 50 years. Second, despite the increase of inclusionary mentalities, Indigenous artists continue to work within a context that privileges settler claims to space. As a consequence, artists whose works take a position on, or provide the means by which to denaturalize readily accepted ideas about settler claims to space continue to operate upon unstable ground.

Above I showed how Coulthard contextualizes the shifting views that transitioned Indigenous peoples from wards of the state to subjects of recognition beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Just after Confederation in 1867 Indigenous peoples became wards of the state under the Indian Act. Coulthard argues that the shift towards viewing Indigenous people as subjects of recognition was initiated by the interplay of several co-determining events: the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Coulthard 2014, 4), the setting of significant precedents in Canadian law during the *Calder* case, which established the partial recognition of Aboriginal title, and the oil crisis of the 1970s (Coulthard 2014, 5). As a result of the increased visibility and action of Indigenous activism, settler governments were unable to ignore, and were forced to contend with, Indigenous political presence on an unprecedented scale.

A similar negotiation of the maligned histories of representation of Indigenous peoples took place in concert with these events in the arts sector. Until only recently Indigenous peoples have existed outside of the purview of histories dedicated to the triumphs of civilization for reasons directly related to the consequences of falling outside the category of human. As wards of the state, Indigenous people were subject to legislation that attempted to exterminate cultural practices deemed to be a part of uncivilized societies. For example, on the west coast of Canada, Indigenous practices such as the Potlatch, which functioned as an economic system embedded in

governance linking Indigenous nations and communities through systems of exchange, were outlawed. While many ceremonies continued in secret under the Potlatch Ban, which was in effect from 1884 to 1951, this legislation nevertheless impacted communities in a multitude of ways, including by limiting their production of cultural objects that would have been traded or used for performance in ceremony. Objects were taken from communities and destroyed or relocated to museums as ethnographic specimens.

Oddly, alternate forms of value were later ascribed onto these objects when many were acquired by the government for use in federal projects symbolizing the pride of a fledgling nation.<sup>13</sup> The history of Indigenous art's use within the nation-building project is extensive, and is the subject of Indigenous scholar and curator Linda Grussani's research. She writes, "[t]he Canadian government has participated in the aggressive promotion of Inuit, First Nations and Métis art, especially during the period spanning from 1960s to the 1980s" which was "out of proportion to the marginal position of Aboriginal people in Canada's political economic and cultural life" (Grussani 2003, 1).

To combat these histories of discriminatory policies and attitudes, Indigenous curators have taken charge of representational forums in museums, galleries, and in critical scholarship. Tom Hill's curatorial work at the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67 is often noted as one of the first instances of Indigenous representation on behalf of Indigenous artists. Two exhibitions in 1992, *Land, Spirit, Power* curated by Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, and *Indigena* curated by Gerald McMaster and LeeAnn Martin, were staged at the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Museum of Civilization respectively, both in strong rejection of the celebrations marking the 500-year anniversary of Christopher Columbus's

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this subject, see Hawker (2003).

first landfall in the Americas. These and other exhibitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s drew unprecedented attention to Indigenous arts, which had been severely marginalized by canons of art dominated largely by white, male, European, and settler contributions. In the short time that has passed since Indigenous curators and administrators began to take hold of Indigenous representation in the arts we have witnessed tremendous changes to the structures that engage with artists, including major funding bodies and national galleries.

Although important inroads have been made in the span of a short time, Indigenous artists continue to work within a context that privileges settler claims to land and knowledge. Two broad questions brought me to this research and bear asking at this point. Although inclusion has been envisioned as a model for addressing glaring omissions in the artistic milieu, are there ways that this strategy risks performing the functions of the liberal-pluralist model of recognition? And, how do strategies of inclusion impact the *intelligibility* of artworks when broader public audiences have yet to struggle with concepts that exist outside of Western normative conceptions of people and place? By placing the seemingly positive changes that have resulted from greater inclusion of Indigenous voices in mainstream institutions within debates around the politics of recognition I seek to pose difficult questions about the work that remains to be accomplished. I see this work involving the labour of all citizens of this shared land and not just Indigenous peoples.

It is at this point that Indigenous political presence and artistic practice converge in my analysis. As I write, thousands of people of all nations are congregating at Standing Rock to support the Sioux people in protecting the water from the interests of big business and the oil industry. The Wet'suwet'en peoples continue their defence of unceded Unis'tot'en territory against several pipelines that have been proposed without the prior and informed consent of the

community. The long-standing blockade remains strong at Grassy Narrows after twelve years of protecting the land from logging. While these and many other peaceful acts of protecting the land are taking place in response to specific histories of injustice, they present a shared resilience in the face of persistent and egregious acts against Indigenous lives and the land. They also share in the fact that the broader public and the media commonly misunderstand and devalue their purpose and intent. With this dissertation, I will show how, in a society where Indigenous bodies are still racialized as impediments to progress within settler territory, and governments continue to take a back seat to these issues, we cannot afford to write about art without a theoretical framework that questions the lasting influence of liberal modernity's racist stakes.

### **Conclusion**

Broadly speaking, Indigenous visual culture has historically been a subject of interest to the settler state, which appropriately positions visual practice as a site for artists and filmmakers to engage historical and contemporary colonial commentary in the present. As I have outlined in this chapter, perceptions of Indigenous political presence as activism are rooted in the racial stakes of liberal modernity. I have explored how colonialism employs ideas of race to construct ideas of a just society and its citizens. While often regarded as a problem of this past, race continues to impact perceptions of Indigenous actions upon Indigenous lands. This reductionism exemplifies the problem of recognition, which impacts all Indigenous peoples, and the problem of inclusion impacting Indigenous artists. Through this analysis, I caution against too readily accepting inclusion as the end game for Indigenous artists. Instead, I put forward the argument that a greater intelligibility of Indigenous political presence is needed in broader society in order

to understand and appreciate works of art by Indigenous artists who challenge frameworks of belonging that rely on the historical legacies of liberal modernity.

As Cree artist and curator Cheryl L'Hirondelle recounts, her mentors instructed her to “do things for the healing of mother earth and all her beings’ and ‘to come up with at least two solutions instead of just being aware of the problem’” (L'Hirondelle 2014, 149). In this chapter I have outlined the problem as I see it, and in the next four chapters I turn to artists whose deliberate and thoughtful works offer a multitude of possible solutions. In the pages that follow I provide an analysis of artworks that, equipped with an understanding of the philosophical pathways articulated and analyzed in this chapter, provide us with another way through the problems faced by Indigenous peoples within contemporary liberal democratic societies.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A History of Ideas Surrounding Perceptions of Indigenous Political Presence**

#### **Introduction**

The characterization of Indigenous political presence as hostile, anti-progress, or anti-state represents a problem of colonial perception, which arises from the racialized history of liberal modernity. The continued elision of Indigenous political philosophies has resulted in a climate inadequately prepared to understand the possibilities for Indigenous political expression, and for respectful coexistence upon this now shared land.

Indigenous artists are creating works that influence how society understands Indigenous people. Through their artworks they ask audiences to engage with difficult questions about the ways that dominant historical knowledge has dictated the terms of citizenship and belonging within contemporary liberal society. Simply by their presence, viewers are situated as participants in negotiations. Thus, artists create strategies for challenging forms of liberal thought, which has have historically asserted political and intellectual supremacy over Indigenous people. Each of the artists discussed in this chapter participates in reframing contemporary knowledge about Indigenous political presence and expression. By analyzing artworks that complicate naturalized visions of history I further consider the ways in which race continues to inflect the exercise of political knowledge outside of state structures.

Importantly, the artists whose works I discuss here are not simply revising history, or creating an alternative to dominant knowledge. Instead, I argue that their works facilitate conversations that contain the inherent possibility to create dynamic changes in contemporary

relationships between members of the public. By strategically and subversively playing into particular aspects of liberal morality, these artists foster the conditions for viewers to begin to question the stories of the past that we have all inherited, and to consider their roles in perpetuating these stories.

To begin, I turn to Bonnie Devine's recent exhibition *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest: An Anishinaabe Encounter*.<sup>14</sup> I argue that Devine's research, material processes, and presentation of the "Doctrine of Discovery" from her perspective as an Anishinaabe person positions viewers to confront the atrocities of conquest that history commonly rewrites as celebratory narratives of discovery and first encounter. By highlighting materials and elements of visual culture from fifteenth century Spain and Italy and forming them into objects that call upon or resemble European standards of beauty in visual art and music, Devine invites viewers to question the ideas that reside inside of even the most beautiful forms, and to inquire into their own investments in these historical narratives.

I then turn to consider Kent Monkman's site specific installations, first looking at the reframing of colonial narratives in the exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Civilization*<sup>15</sup> and second, analyzing the presentation of difficult scenes from Canadian history in *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*.<sup>16</sup> I argue that Monkman interrogates the history of ideas contained within the term "civilization" in the first exhibition, and in doing so destabilizes the progress narratives that have historically figured Indigenous peoples as inferior to colonial settlers and their

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<sup>14</sup> This exhibition ran from September 17, 2016 to January 8, 2017 at the Art Gallery of Peterborough.

<sup>15</sup> This exhibition ran from October 15, 2015 to January 10, 2016 at the Gardiner Museum.

<sup>16</sup> This exhibition ran from January 26 to March 4, 2017 at the University of Toronto Art Centre.

governments. By playing off visual signifiers and forms of civilized culture in modern Europe, and placing these into the context of a buffalo jump – a steep cliff used to hunt American bison on the prairies by corralling and channelling herds of Bison to fall to their death – Monkman strategically recasts historical narratives to suggest another vision of the future for Indigenous peoples. Whereas racial ideas parading as civilization have been used to legitimate settler activities and government policies aimed at eradicating or assimilating Indigenous people, Monkman shuffles these narratives to place Indigenous peoples, as not only alive and well, but as active participants in dismantling the ideological structures that have ensured domination over lives and lands.

The impact of these ideological structures upon Indigenous experiences is brought to light in Monkman's exhibition *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* in ways that illuminate the systemic nature of Western society's racial leanings. Throughout this exhibition Monkman's recurring character and alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, a "gender-bending-time-traveller," who "lives in the past, present, and future" plays historical witness to innumerable acts of Indigenous resilience (Monkman 2017, 4). In this second exhibition Miss Chief narrates the history of colonial encounter from an Indigenous perspective. Using the familiar and alluring genre of history painting, and curating these works in conversation with other objects of material culture, Monkman speaks to the racial ideas that have placed Indigenous people into particular forms of subjectivity within Canada's colonial reality. I extend my analysis to show how Monkman's exhibition draws upon aesthetic tropes from the Western canon that, similar to the work of Devine, destabilize our investments in systems that continue to thrive upon racially-inflected liberal definitions of citizenship and belonging.

## **An Appeal to European Aesthetics**

The artworks resulting from Bonnie Devine's research at La Rábida, a Franciscan monastery in Spain, provide the critical context that allows audiences to engage with the idea of race as an unnatural concept that has both historical roots and contemporary expressions in relation to Indigenous people. Her 2016 exhibition *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest: An Anishinaabe Encounter* (figure 2) assembles these artworks, providing a space of critical contemplation on atrocities enacted in the name of conquest. Devine's use of materials and forms from European aesthetic traditions point to the ways that these violent histories of conquest have been overlooked or naturalized, while challenging contemporary investments in these histories. My analysis focuses primarily upon Devine's research journey, which critically placed her body within the setting of European history, representation, and knowledge. She then drew upon the mediums of video, audio, sculpture, and painting to support viewers in their own interrogations of colonial histories and to disturb the myth of peaceful settlement. In this sense, Devine's research participates in acts of reframing historical knowledge by taking control of the histories that have viewed Indigenous peoples from European perspectives (Smith 1999, 153).

The pervasive nature of these myths in contemporary times stems in part from the persistence of ideas and morals in European thought that have paved the way to the concept of race as we know it in its contemporary expression. These ideas and morals have influenced an historical narrative that naturalizes and celebrates colonial violence. In this exhibition, Devine draws upon the history of the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus and his so-called "discovery" of the Americas in 1492. The racial undercurrents of Columbus's voyage are evident against the social context of the time. As David Goldberg argues, the development of the European consciousness as a sense of "we" relative to other parts of the globe coincided with the

development of racial consciousness in the mid-fifteenth century (Goldberg 1993, 21). The treatment of Indigenous peoples encountered during travels outside of Europe directly correlated to the perception of Indigenous peoples as inferior beings. To this effect, Goldberg writes,

In the sixteenth century, hierarchy was the definitive feature of the universe: Dominion of the inferior by superior was considered a natural condition, and so of slaves by masters, of American Indians – like monkeys – by men. American Indians were portrayed as cannibalistic, as slavish in their habits, as barbaric – not just barbarian. Wars against American Indians and their subsequent enslavement were taken to be justified, therefore, because of their slavish disposition to obey, to prevent their barbarism and so to save their innocent victims from harm. (Goldberg 1993, 25).

The negative impact of such social hierarchies upon Indigenous lives since the moment of first contact are innumerable and persist into the contemporary moment. Although the celebration of the Columbus quincentennial in 1992 has been criticized for overshadowing the gross atrocities committed against Indigenous lives as a result of Columbus's voyages (Martin & McMaster 1992; Houle, Nemiroff & Townsend Gault 1992), state sanctioned celebrations during annual Columbus Day celebrations in the United States continue to normalize this problematic understanding of historical justice. The creation of the fact of conquest, writes Michel-Rolph Trouillot, belongs to a kind of fiction-making practice, one in which "the Other finally enters the human world" (1995, 114) and that produces "a number of silences" in its deployment (1995, 130). These silences pertain to both the strategic interpretation of historical events to support the idea that Columbus has come to represent and to the undermining of histories of people and place which came before Columbus's arrival (Trouillot 1995, 130). Investment in these historical

narratives is in no way bound by national borders but rather influenced by the legacy of race to form a bond that ties colonized subjectivity across Turtle Island.

Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Bonnie Devine's exhibition *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest*.  
Photograph by the author.

Figure 2

To prepare for this exhibition Devine researched the voyages of Christopher Columbus which led her to focus upon the evangelical justifications that legitimated his travels (Devine 2017). These justifications are deeply rooted in the racial logics that have contributed to the construction of an ideal liberal subject and, stemming from this are ideas of justice that have historically pre-empted Indigenous presence and ways of life. An example of these intentions can be found in the Bull *Inter Caetera* (otherwise known as the “Doctrine of Discovery”) by Pope Alexander VI, which describes the role of the Spanish in the spreading of the Christian faith within the lands of the so-called “New World.” In it he states that any uninhabited land was

available to be discovered or claimed by Christians, and that the Christian faith must be spread “that the health of the souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself” (Devine 2016). Thus, the Christian faith was said to be given to Indigenous subjects in an implied attempt to resolve the moral deficiencies that their ways of life and worldviews. This form of logic is consistent with ideas of racial difference that social contract theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries linked to changing social dynamics due to evolutionary progression, a belief which I outline later on in this chapter. At the end of the fifteenth century, when the influence of religion had yet to wane in the shift from medieval Christianity to modern times, the Doctrine of Discovery represented a particular form of authority both in the political decisions it outlines and the moral beliefs it advances. In Devine’s *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest* this text hung unassumingly on the wall of the gallery in both the original Latin and in English translation.

The exhibition comprised four medium-specific explorations on the subject of Christopher Columbus’s first voyage to the Americas. Also covered in the exhibition were the resulting conflicts between Indigenous people and European explorers and colonists, many of which directly impeded Indigenous ways of life. The artworks include a series of eight small-scale sculptures made of wood and glass mounted on plinths, a two-channel video projection, a large-format painting on canvas, and a choral work by Anishinaabe composer David DeLeary. A small gallery-produced brochure reveals that the choral work draws upon text from the *Dudem siquidem*, the supplement to The Doctrine of Discovery issued in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI. Visitors approached the exhibition by descending a ramp guided by the sound of DeLeary’s choral work emanating from below.

The title of the exhibition alludes to the purpose of Devine's research to seek out the evangelical justifications for conquest. The results of her site visit to La Rábida, the Franciscan monastery where Columbus lived prior to his first expedition in the late fifteenth century, are found in the subjects of Devine's video work. Her work evokes the time and place through attention to the visual languages of European architecture and sculptural forms at this and other sites of significance to Columbus. For instance, the two-channel video projected onto two perpendicular walls that meet at a corner shows images of historical sculptural and architectural forms from her travels interspersed with video of the Rio Tinto at the shoreline (Devine 2017). Devine also alludes to her research travel in the glass-cast looking glass forms that rest in globe-like stands on plinths at the centre of the gallery (Devine 2017). One of these sculptures, for example, *Cristobal Colón* (figure 3), depicts a monument to Christopher Columbus found along the Rio Tinto near La Rábida. Another, *Bartolomé de las Casas* (figure 4), takes its reference from a monument found in Seville, Spain dedicated to this Dominican Friar who initially participated in, and later renounced, the atrocities committed against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Pagden 1992, xvii). These visual references transplant actual locations into the gallery, allowing viewers mediated access to the places from which Columbus began his journey to the Americas.

Devine's inclusion of these images in her own artwork presents a curated narrative of history through sculptural and architectural monuments, those that privilege European supremacy and those that highlight the atrocities it masks. Drawing upon the work of Denis Holier, Richard William Hill calls these forms of architecture "materialized ideology" as a means of calling attention to the beliefs and attitudes that are inherent within built forms (Hill 2012, 75). Extending this characterization to the sculptural and architectural examples Devine highlights in



her video works casts these forms as reflections of the values and beliefs of the particular social and political climate in which Columbus's so-called discovery of the Americas was heralded by figures representing the institution of the Church. Devine features various figures such as Antonio de Marchena, the Franciscan monk who first heard Columbus's plans to search for another route to Asia, in her videos (Phillips Jr. & Phillips 1992, 117). As materialized ideology these forms are both products of, and complicit witnesses to the decisions and activities that surrounded Columbus' voyage. In this sense, they bare both the values of their makers and the actions of European subjects who located this "New World." In this sense, La Rábida and the sites/monuments of significance around the monastery could be said to encase the "Soul of Conquest" that Devine refers to in the exhibition's title.

Figure 3 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Bonnie Devine's *Cristobal Colon*.  
Photograph by the author.

Figure 3

Figure 4 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Bonnie Devine's *Bartolomeé de las Casas*. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3

The sculptural and architectural references that form the subject of Devine's material explorations belong to a recognized canon of art and architectural knowledge that has historically privileged a distinctly white, Western European perspective. These perspectives often begin with Europe in classical antiquity, extend through medieval Christianity to the development of Western European modernity, and progress towards the contemporary moment. The study of artistic contributions by global cultures has typically taken place from within a Western European perspective. Devine's research travels in Spain and Italy as an Anishinaabe person critically interjects another perspective – an Anishinaabe one – into locations where canons that have repeatedly placed Indigenous people into degrading, demeaning, and compromising positions emerged. In this sense, Devine's research takes an ethnographic approach to the study

of Western European consciousness that reverses the study Indigenous peoples are typical subjected to as foreign subjects (as was the common practice of anthropological knowledge until only recently). Travelling to La Rábida as an Anishinaabe person, Devine enacts an encounter with Western European ideas, many of which were developed to eradicate or, at the very least change, Indigenous peoples through the perpetuation of Christian morality.

Her research methods are particularly relevant to discussions of race when viewed in relation to historical knowledge-production related to art and culture affirming the centrality of Western European thought from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. For example, the Grand Tour was once considered the cornerstone to a well-rounded liberal arts education in Europe (Black 2003, 1). Accessible primarily to a white, wealthy elite, or to those otherwise endowed through sponsorship, the Grand Tour was an educational rite of passage that brought students from all over Europe to observe and study the trajectory of liberal humanist progression at the so-called origins of civilization. Although Devine's research physically traces Eurocentric knowledge to its sources in much the same way that participants in the Grand Tour would have, her critical ethnography grants a new and specific purpose to her journey, one which interrogates the forms of value which rest at the roots of European ideas of civilization and cultural expression.

One way that these roots are interrogated lies in the artworks included in *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest* that call upon ideas of beauty as a vehicle for communicating the stakes that reside within traditional fine art forms. Drawing from materials and methods that share a history with the European notion of Fine Art (that is, painting, sculpture, and choral music), and using these to reflect Columbus's expedition and the colonial conquest of the Americas, Devine involves viewers in a contemplation of the history of ideas that reside inside of art forms that have been

deemed important and beautiful. The relationship between these objects and European standards of beauty are intertwined, despite their depiction of content that challenges the lineage and intentions that are invested in those histories. As a result, viewers are asked to question the narratives inherent in objects, and to more deeply engage with the morals which determine beauty.

Devine's method of narrating atrocities tied to Columbus's voyages implicate the concept of beauty within a broader discourse of colonial violence. The question of beauty's capacity to adequately represent difficult subject matter has been taken up in recent literature related to art practice. For instance, in his book *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics* cultural critic David Levi-Strauss reacted to an article written by art critic Ingrid Sischy, who challenged the work of Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Selgado in a 1991 *New York Times* article. In Sischy's original article they took issue with Selgado's aesthetic reduction of his subject's anguish, claiming he had produced inauthentic representations that "threaten[ed] the boundary between aesthetics and politics" (Levi-Strauss 2003, 5). Sischy wrote that "[b]eauty is a call to admiration, not to action," a statement which suggests that beauty might always be in collusion with histories that suppress authentic documentary practice (Sischy in Levi-Strauss 2003, 5). In response, Levi-Strauss argues against the conflation of beauty with decadent bourgeois values, a reaction he sees typified by leftist critics who view beauty and social justice in opposition to one another (Levi-Strauss 2004).

These ideas have also been taken up in Indigenous art circles in recent years, particularly in thinking about the possibilities of beauty to address and activate colonial legacies in the Americas. In her contributions to the catalogue for the multi-venue exhibition of Indigenous art called *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years*, curator Candice Hopkins invokes the dialogue

spawned by reviews of Selgado's photography in her essay titled "Why Can't Beauty be a Call to Action?" to suggest beauty's emancipatory potential for engaging Indigenous political agency in art (Hopkins 2015, 67). Indeed, as this article and the work of numerous Indigenous artists has shown, the possibilities for aesthetic practice to represent the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, and the issues they face in contemporary times are numerous. At the same time, and as I have argued in this section, there are moral investments in the naturalized concept of "beauty" that deserve the type of interrogation that Devine's exhibition confidently provides through her choice and use of material and subject. In this sense, Devine's exhibition poses important opportunities to question how "the act of admiration" cannot be objective, and that this act has intimate ties to *specific moral values*. In this sense, the relationship between beauty and morals can be said to guide our actions *by way of our politics*, which may reside at any point along the political spectrum. In the context of her exhibition *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest*, Devine's fixation on the forms and aesthetics of fifteenth-century Spain and Italy to convey a counter-hegemonic narrative of conquest from an Anishinaabe perspective subverts the moral ground upon which typical understandings of beauty rest, and which otherwise disregard Indigenous ways of life and claims to land in the Americas. Not only does Devine disrupt the expected political leanings that correlate with particular artistic forms, she also makes room for audiences to question the very legitimacy of this expectation.

Ideas of beauty are shaped by normalized ideas of history, which so often mask the fruits of privilege as truth. In the case of conquest narratives, such truth-making practices obscure atrocity. In this exhibition, Bonnie Devine guides audiences through content that challenges the myths of peaceful settlement in the Americas by Europeans in ways which both allure, through the appeal of her works, and repel through the difficult histories of race and conquest that they

convey. Through her research into specific aspects of this historical moment, texts such as *Inter Caetera* and *Dudem siquidem*, and her preparation of artworks drawing upon monuments to a marred history, Devine finds entry into the canons of knowledge typically written from European perspectives. Her artworks draw upon aesthetics that exploit the relationship between beauty and moral values, using critical inattention like a covert cloak that allows her entry into the Soul of Conquest, which she and her viewers can begin to dismantle from within.

### **What is Civilization?**

The act of dismantling also forms a critical element in the work of artist Kent Monkman, who participates in the critical subversion of knowledge structures that have historically limited the lives of Indigenous people. Working from within structures that have enabled and legitimated colonial processes upon Indigenous lands, Monkman's art opens up space to reconsider a history of ideas that have impacted relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples. In this section I argue that by challenging the racial ideas used to legitimate the assimilation and eradication of Indigenous people (e.g. residential schools), Kent Monkman reverses narratives of power that have historically placed Indigenous people in inferior positions to so-called civilized society. Like Devine's *La Rábida*, Monkman's exhibition positions Indigenous people as participants in the dismantling of ideological structures that attempt to ensure the domination of racial thought over Indigenous lands and life.

Figure 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman's exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Civilization*. Photograph by Jimmy Limit.

Figure 4

In the exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Civilization* Monkman interrogated the term civilization as an unnatural concept that continues to limit the actions and beliefs of Indigenous people. It is a concept that serves to affirm the hierarchical superiority of Western thought over Indigenous peoples and their ways of life. In undertaking his critique, Monkman destabilizes narratives of progress that support the idea of civilization, and are imbricated within the racial logics of liberal modernity. By playing on visual signifiers of civilized culture in Europe, and placing Indigenous people as positive characters within these images, Monkman recasts historical narratives to suggest another vision of the future, one which involves the active participation of Indigenous people.

Monkman's detailed installation intertwines references from Western and Indigenous histories which challenge ideas of history and linear time. The main feature in this installation, a diorama buffalo jump,<sup>17</sup> rose from the gallery floor to form a cliff that confronts viewers as they enter the gallery. Monkman's alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, stands atop this landform dressed in a red sequined skirt, sheer red cloth, and strands-upon-strands of red beaded necklaces (figure 5). With her right arm outstretched, Miss Chief ushers three bison that look as if they are galloping around her, towards the edge of the cliff where they will presumably meet their demise. Four other bison forms are already on the ground. Unlike those on the cliff, these figures are simply outlines of bison made from metal tubes and stretched pieces of hide. A pile of broken bone china lies on the ground at the base of the cliff amidst other rubble, including skulls made of painted porcelain, bicycle seats, and handlebars, suggesting other bison that have perished there (figure 6).

On the walls surrounding this scene, two-dimensional representations of bison suggest the movement of a herd around the gallery and towards the cliff (figure 7). These representations recall cave paintings that may initially seem to reference the history of Indigenous visual culture in the Americas. However, these drawings also reflect the aesthetic sensibilities of cave paintings found in Europe, such as those discovered in present day France at the caves of Lascaux, rendered by pre-historic peoples. This reference to pre-historic visual culture in Europe in the form of two-dimensional bison that move in a suggested direction towards the buffalo jump (their *rise*) where they will tumble off the cliff (their *fall*) offers insight into Monkman's

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<sup>17</sup> Buffalo jumps are landforms that have historically been used to hunt bison by restricting the movement of herds of bison as they ran towards steep cliffs in the landscape where they would fall to their death.



challenge to the idea of civilization. The title of this exhibition references this movement, activating the bison as a signifier of civilized culture, which places these figures within a field of representation related to European development.

Figure 6 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman's exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Civilization*. Photograph by Jimmy Limit.

Figure 6

Understanding civilization as a concept that originated in Europe is consistent with the work of Anthony Pagden, a scholar of political philosophy who unpacks the construction of civilization over the course of many centuries. He writes that the adjective “civil” was initially used during the mid-sixteenth century to refer to the values of those who lived in cities, and by the eighteenth century, had come to confer a particular vision of mannered behaviour (Pagden 1988, 33). These are the qualities, as Pagden writes, which separated “social man from the

savage” who resides within the state of nature, a place populated by savages (Pagden 1988, 33). According to the work of scholars like Pagden, early modern Europeans used the state of nature and its savage and barbarian inhabitants to “guarantee the primacy of the European moral and social order” by implicating two distinct groups: the civilized and the not yet civilized (Pagden 1988, 35-36). As Pagden suggests, this history shows how civilization developed as a concept imbued with a twofold logic: the action of *civilizing* and also the human result – the *civilized* persons who can then create structures of comparative knowledge against their savage origins (Pagden 1988, 33).

Figure 7 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman’s exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Civilization*. Photograph by Jimmy Limit.

Figure 7

Such distinctions are evident in the work of social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau, who each leaned upon the concept of human progress to support an understanding of society that could make sense of the changing nature of European social and political conditions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of these writers looked to the relationship between global peoples and European society as a way of understanding its origins in a less developed source from which humans evolved. This perspective is found in the work of Hobbes who, as we have seen, wrote in fear of uncivilized disorder during times of profound civil unrest in England (Hobbes 1997 [1651], 70). Rousseau, on the other hand, looked to progress narratives to help explain Europe as a degeneration from the purity found within the state of nature. He argued that the inequalities found in Europe at the time were attributable to that society's deviation from the harmonies of life in a state of nature, fostering an image of so-called savage man as a stage of human development that preceded contemporary European society (Rousseau 1984 [1775], 86).

Although they initially appear to represent opposite views of historical development, proponents of these frameworks, otherwise known as theories of chronological primitivism (Boas & Lovejoy 1935, 1), nevertheless converge upon a shared belief in the fundamental inferiority of peoples in the state of nature. Despite Rousseau's acknowledgement of the constructed nature of civilization, he nevertheless regarded peoples in a state of nature as living along an evolutionary spectrum prior to civilized man (Rousseau 1997, 86). These works drew heavily upon the concept of progress to describe the evolution of human capacity. Many of these theories situate so-called "savages" in developmentally inferior positions to Western subjects, rendering them intrinsically barbarous, subservient, or in need of salvation. As outlined in Chapter 2, these core assumptions about the "savage" contributed to the theories of racial

hierarchy that developed out of normative values reinforced by notions of European civility and from explorations and encounters with difference outside of Europe. Within a process of perfectibility, civilization has been generally regarded as an ideal destination towards which all people of good morals strive.

Figures 8-12 have been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Pablo Picasso's series *The Bull (Le Taureau)*

Figures 8-12

Monkman, however, plays on the visual signifiers of European cultural production and art history in ways that serve to destabilize the progress narratives ingrained within the normalized concept of civilization. Within his installation, Monkman deploys the bison as a symbolic reference to civilization, a concept shown to have been constructed from European negotiations of difference by way of racial frameworks, as in the work of social contract theorists. Monkman calls into question the permanence of this structure when his two-

dimensional bison transform from prehistoric drawings into realistic taxidermy before morphing into skewed and abstract forms as they tumble off the cliff.

In these moments of transformation Monkman opens up a space for considering the legacy of modern thought. Here, Monkman draws a clear reference to the work of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and his Bull series from the mid 1940s, which was comprised of a suite of prints that depicted incremental abstractions of the bull form. For example, Monkman replicates several of the plates from the series *The Bull (Le Taureau)* in his sculptural representations of the bison figure formed by metal armatures. His work *Bull in a China Shop* (figure 13), found lying on the floor amidst pieces of broken china, mimics the materiality and construction of Picasso's *Tête de Taureau / Bull's Head* (figure 14) of 1942. The exactness of this mimicry nods to Picasso's prominence as a figure of modern art, a discourse commonly affiliated with the tastes of civilized culture. The pile of bone china, broken into pieces, recalls the crushed limbs of the actual bison, whose bones were once ground into a material used in the creation of ceramic wares produced for sale in Europe (Rinella 2008, 178).

These visual signifiers are tied to an image of Europe as the locus of civilized knowledge. As a leading figure of modern art (a Western invention), Picasso in many ways represents taste as it is tied to the values of European liberal modernity. The art canon, however, enacts a particular violence upon Indigenous subjectivities. Monkman states that "modernity has been forced on [Indigenous peoples] over the past 150 years, fracturing us from the continuum of our own cultural traditions and languages" (Monkman 2015, 16). By deconstructing the bison form as we know it in realist terms, Monkman interrupts viewers' visual readings of these objects and interjects a critique, one that points to the constructedness of these forms – an analysis that can be equally applied to the notion of civilization. Civilization is thus critiqued in this exhibition as

a concept that has injured Indigenous people through its perpetuation of damaging racial hierarchies. The journey of the bison from cave painting to three-dimensional taxidermy form, to the Picasso-esque pile of broken china on the ground tells the narrative of European progress, not as a journey towards the perfection of civilization but rather, towards its inevitable demise. Miss Chief, an Indigenous figure, stands commandingly over the scene. Her face does not register remorse or any other emotion, a telling indicator of her focused intent and purpose in the scene. She is the informed Indigenous subject who observes the artifice of civilization and progress. As such, Miss Chief's gesture aligns with perspectives of the Halluci Nation, as described by John Trudell and outlined in Chapter 2. She disentangles the histories of ideas rooted ideologically in liberal modernity. The exhibition identifies these ideas as a fundamental source of oppression since first contact, and powerfully disassembles them to create a space of critical contemplation for viewing publics.

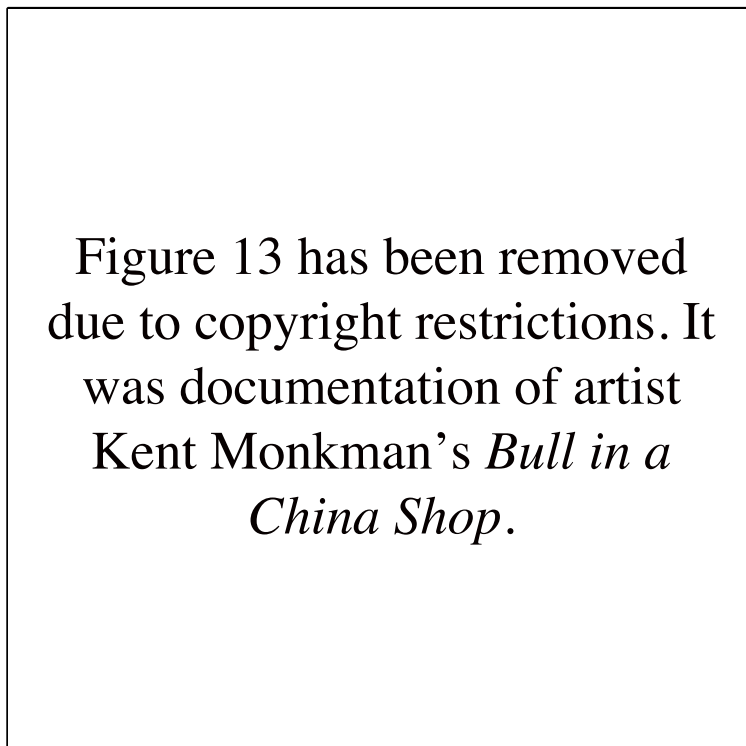


Figure 13

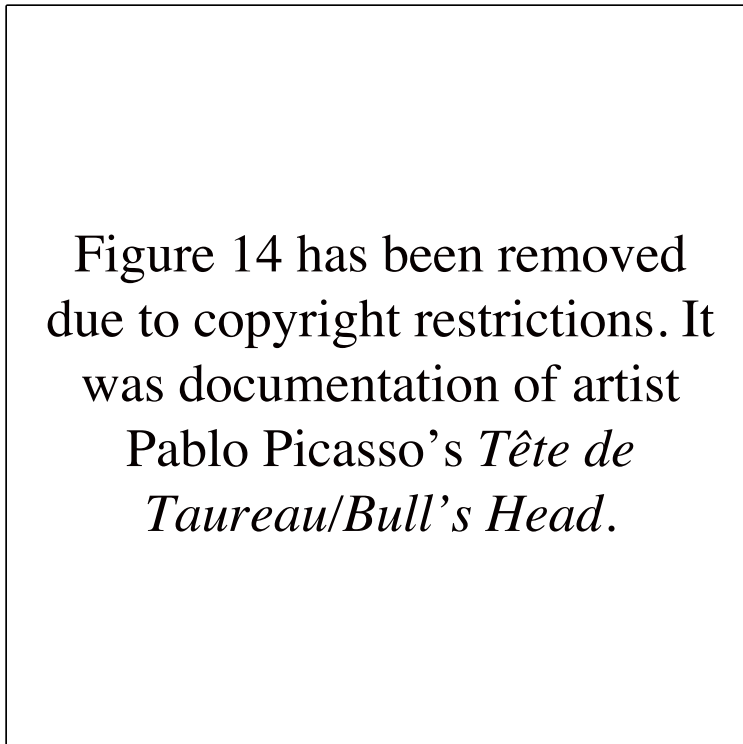


Figure 14

Using images and forms from European history Monkman exposes the artifice of dominant frameworks of understanding that have profoundly disturbed Indigenous experiences. In their place, Monkman suggests a vision for Indigenous peoples' futures in which they are active participants in the redirection of priorities that turn away from frameworks of power premised upon racial subjection. His exhibition prods the lack of critical attention paid to concepts such as civilization and progress, which continue to provide the yardstick by which racialized peoples are measured in spite of the inclusionary push of contemporary liberal paradigms. In this way, Monkman does more than simply suggest that our common definition of civilization has arisen as an honest mistake; his work suggests the deeper ideological influences that have fed this definition with roots in ideas of race.

## Unmapping Indigenous Subjectivity

Evidence gleaned from philosophies of race expressed through social contract theory during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries speaks to the existence and prevalence of ideological structures that have had (and in many cases continue to have) material consequences for Indigenous peoples. The impacts of these ideological structures are laid bare in another exhibition by Kent Monkman called *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, presented by the University of Toronto Art Gallery as its contribution to the array of programs offered in conjunction with Canada 150 celebrations in 2017. Through the presentation of subversive narratives in art forms that draw upon strong references in Western European canons of art, such as historical genre paintings, Monkman offers audiences an entryway into difficult subjects that challenge, or even threaten, the image of Canada as the pristine nation that many subscribe to. His artworks, paired with objects drawn from museum and gallery collections across Turtle Island, highlight recent instances of social injustice and in doing so, illuminate the ongoing prevalence of racial thought within contemporary liberal traditions.

The exhibition design takes visitors through the experiences of Indigenous people in the context of the Canadian nation over the last 150 years. The experiences are drawn from *Miss Chief's Memoirs*, a short text that accompanies the exhibition doubling as an organizing element of the design. In the gallery space chapters are presented as thematic signposts that interrupt the expected chronology common to ideas of history based on notions of progress. The diversity of experiences that Miss Chief speaks to in her text, which blend moments in time from the past and present, further express this disruption. For example, upon entering the exhibition visitors are greeted first by a life-size sculptural diorama of the nativity scene, only it is not the scene of Christ's birth but of Miss Chief's own entry into the world on the "Rez" (a colloquialism for a



First Nations reservation). Pop culture references locate the scene in the contemporary moment while also imbricating it within a network of contemporary social justice issues related to Indigenous peoples such as food sovereignty (marked by two-litre soda bottles) and cultural appropriation (denoted in the jersey worn by Miss Chief's father, which depicts a beaded likeness of the Washington Redskins logo). Miss Chief then takes visitors back through time, stopping to discuss attempts to destroy Indigenous cultures throughout colonial history, social issues facing Indigenous people in Winnipeg's urban centre, and the disproportionate rate of incarceration of Indigenous people in Canadian prisons (Monkman 2017, 17).

Figure 15 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman's *The Scream*.

Figure 15

These contemporary issues are put into context in areas of the exhibition dedicated to residential schools and the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their homes, as is evident in Monkman's painting *The Scream* (figure 15). In other works, Monkman addresses the

strategic deprivation of Indigenous people by settlers who decimated the bison populations that were so crucial to Indigenous ways of life and sustenance (Monkman 2017, 15). Twentieth century Indian Affairs policies are brought to light in artworks that thematically address Indigenous people as wards of the state or, as the “Indian problem,” a phrase attributed to former minister of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott. Finally, towards the end of Miss Chief’s tour of the last 150 years of Indigenous experiences, visitors are brought to the moment of Confederation and then the establishment of colonies upon the lands now known as Canada.

Performing more than the duties of a well-studied tour guide, Miss Chief, speaks from first-hand knowledge, having been present herself at many of the events and activities depicted in Monkman’s paintings and installation. Her presence serves to support Indigenous experiences by recalling the bias and prejudice inherent in the nation-building project. For example, in his painting *The Subjection of Truth* (figure 16), Monkman depicts the persecution of revered Indigenous leaders Poundmaker and Big Bear as they sit in shackles in a parliamentary office where they are presumably awaiting transfer to Stony Mountain Penitentiary for their involvement in the North-West Rebellion. In this scene, a painting of Miss Chief dressed in royal garb hangs behind the politicians, who include John A. Macdonald, indicating that she is privy to the injustice of Poundmaker and Big Bear’s detainment. In another painting, *The Daddies of Confederation* (figure 17), Miss Chief reclines in the nude in front of a reproduction of a painting called *The Fathers of Confederation*, where she shifts the focus from the nation’s founders at their meeting at the Charlottetown Conference in 1864 to her own hypersexualized figure.

Figure 16 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman's *The Subjection of Truth*.

Figure 5

Figure 17 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kent Monkman's *The Daddies of Confederation*.

Figure 6

It is important to distinguish between the perception of these scenes as fiction based on the historical accountability Miss Chief's character facilitates, and her role as a provocateur whose presence and testimony serve to degrade the artifice of Canada's historical benevolence. Beyond the playful interjections Miss Chief makes within the historical events depicted in Monkman's paintings, the gravity of the issues at hand are conveyed through exhibition texts that Indigenous perspectives on history often occluded or elided by settler perspectives. These texts provide details on the history of Canada from an Indigenous perspective, and they often elaborate upon the social conditions that have led to contemporary problems that disproportionately impact Indigenous people. In this sense, the works in the exhibition, and Monkman's work as a whole, are not figments of some revisionist history, nor are they merely playful fictions; they are actual histories of grave consequence to Indigenous people. Monkman expresses this gravity by juxtaposing his artwork with select objects from museum collections across Turtle Island. For example, Monkman's painting *The Scream* (figure 15), depicting the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes at the hands of the Royal Canadian Mountain Police and members of the clergy, was installed in a small, darkened room surrounded on both sides by dozens of empty *tikinagen* (cradle boards). By this point in the exhibition audiences have grown accustomed to Miss Chief's textual explanations, which in this room are noticeably absent. The only words that Miss Chief offers in this space are: "This is the one that I cannot talk about. The pain is too deep. We were never the same" (Monkman 2017, 16). The placement of the painting alongside the *tikinagen* and this limited text provide the pieces of a puzzle that visitors are left to assemble on their own to form a truthful representation of Canada's racial treatment of Indigenous peoples.

Monkman's presentation of events and perspectives from the last 150 years deepens viewers' understandings of Indigenous experiences within Canadian settler society. In this sense, the exhibition serves audiences with the tools they need to recognize the lies in national myths that have historically placed Indigenous people into the kinds of racialized subjectivities described in the first two exhibitions introduced in this chapter. Although contemporary forms of liberal thought often advance the idea that society has transformed to address the errors of the past, the kinds of critical commentaries Monkman offers are especially relevant in the context of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, and the recently released report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These two events are often cast in celebratory language as marking a move beyond the influence of race, suggesting just how far we have advanced as a nation despite the continued prevalence of intergenerational traumas and social conditions stemming from the conception of Indigenous peoples as racial subjects. Monkman's use of the history genre painting oeuvre, paired with his curation of objects from museum collections draws audiences into frank conversations about the material consequences that settler ideologies have brought to bear on Indigenous subjectivity.

### **Conclusion**

Mainstream historical narratives have consistently and systematically undermined Indigenous peoples' presence and knowledge within Turtle Island, that continue to influence public consciousness of Indigenous experiences in ways that negatively impact perceptions of Indigenous people, their rights, and ways of life. Bonnie Devine and Kent Monkman are two artists whose recent exhibitions interrogated these narratives with cunning exactitude. Both artists provide access to these narratives in ways that casting doubt upon their authority as

“truth,” instead offering insight into the authorship of historical knowledge that has served to affirm settler ideas within the territories that currently demarcate Turtle Island. The awareness these artists show in their artworks extends beyond a re-representation of historical errors. Their artworks encourage audiences to engage with these narratives in ways that reveal contemporary Western society’s problematic attachment to race in a liberal democratic society. Thus, the exhibitions ensure that historical injustices linked to racial thought cannot easily be explained away as something that we, in the contemporary moment, have moved beyond. David Goldberg writes: “Liberal modernity denies its racialized history and the attendant histories of racist exclusions, hiding them behind some idealized, self-promoting, yet practically ineffectual dismissal of race as a morally irrelevant category” (Goldberg 1993, 7).

The artworks addressed in this chapter work against the concept of race as a morally relevant category, instead showing its roots deep in Western knowledge of the world and early encounters with difference. Through the presentation of historical narratives in ways that challenge dominant knowledge, these artists facilitate a consideration of race not as a concept that has been emptied of its past damaging associations but as an organizing structure that continues to have an intricate and nuanced relationship with structures of power and knowledge production in the twenty-first century.

Justifications for conquest in the Americas relied upon concepts of civilization and progress that in many ways remain wrapped up in the moral values of today. As a template for social life that explorers and settlers brought with them to the so-called New World, these concepts have assisted in the construction of government and legal systems that first positioned Indigenous people as subjects of the state and then as previously wronged subjects who are now worthy of full entry into the category of civilized society.

The exhibitions outlined in this chapter each open up space for viewing publics to engage with difficult knowledge related to racialized perceptions of Indigenous people, which have been called upon to legitimize the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples throughout colonial times. Furthermore, they show how race is a subject that continues to inflect the exercise of political knowledge outside of state resources. Each of these artists work from an awareness of the histories outlined in the previous chapter, and they use this knowledge to create strategic interventions into contemporary liberal thought, which may not otherwise consider the link between race, morality, and contemporary institutions. Their artworks have the potential to influence how society reflects upon knowledge of Indigenous people, and in their own ways these artists ask their audiences to engage with difficult task of rethinking Indigenous people as objects of history in ways that privilege the liberal subject.

In *La Rábida, Soul of Conquest: An Anishinaabe Perspective*, Bonnie Devine grants audiences access to histories of conquest inlaid with aesthetics and visual forms. I have argued that Devine's research and use of specific materials position viewers to confront the atrocities of conquest in ways that involve them as participants in the construction of history and potential comrades in its dissection and destruction. Monkman's *The Rise and Fall of Civilization* similarly draw upon tropes of Western art history, in this case to interrogate concepts of civilization and progress. Monkman strategically recasts historical narratives that rely upon racial formations to suggest another vision of the future for Indigenous peoples, one in which they have dispelled the ideological forces that continue to frame Indigenous presence within Indigenous lands. This assertion is especially relevant in the contemporary moment marked by discourses of reconciliation. In *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience* Monkman illuminates the systemic racism of Western society, showing how race is woven into the fibres of Canadian history and

identity, which are as much a part of the present moment as they are rooted in the past.

Together these artists boldly assert space for Indigenous people to critically analyze the histories we have been given, and to assess their relevance and accuracy for representing our own experiences. They create artworks that influence how society reflects upon systems of power that have overdetermined Indigenous subjectivity throughout colonial history. Understanding the barriers they and other Indigenous people face in contemporary liberal democratic society, these artists enlist the help of their audiences to push back against historical knowledge that continues to frame Indigenous experiences and limit the exercise of Indigenous political knowledge. These exhibitions serve as examples of how contemporary Indigenous artists are creating critical space for audiences to challenge normative conceptions of history and their investments within it.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Claiming Indigenous Land, Confronting the Liberal Subject**

#### **Introduction**

Indigenous artists are creating works that influence how society reflects upon knowledge of Indigenous people in ways that take into account the colonialism that continues to inform Indigenous peoples' expression of political knowledge. In this chapter I extend the discussion of Indigenous political presence through an analysis of artworks that call attention to the ways that Indigenous knowledge is commonly received within settler society. I argue that these works confront the beliefs underlying settler state assertions of supremacy over Indigenous rights and title to the land. Indeed, their shared point of departure is the assertion of Indigenous rights to the land. This assertion involves the liberal subject in perceptions of Indigenous political presence, whom I define in this chapter by its philosophical investment in the structures that continue to limit Indigenous land rights. In calling out this liberal subject, the artists open up the potential for Indigenous people and other settler subjects to work together to unravel the unnatural vision of North America as a peaceably settled land. From this shared point of departure, each artist employs a set of tactics to confront the liberal subject – the symbolic container of our moral investment in the racial histories of liberal modernity that have defined the present.

Artists Kade Twist and Christian Chapman have created artworks that address the liberal subject in ways that critically examine the perceived ontological neutrality of contemporary liberal thought. Other artists, such as Hayden King and Susan Blight of the Ogimaa Mikana project, assert Indigenous history and presence in contemporary landscapes in ways that involve the liberal subject in the recalibration of values that guide interactions in city spaces. I conclude

the chapter with a discussion of a song written by Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Joseph Naytowhow, and a solo artwork by L'Hirondelle developed from this song. These works invite a renewed consideration of the constructedness of settler state territories in ways that invite audiences to reimagine contemporary relationships within these now shared lands.

My analysis is informed by a critical impasse that often emerges in disputes over land between Indigenous peoples and citizens of settler states, as is exemplified by the so-called Oka Crisis in 1990, and the blockades at Caledonia beginning in 2006. These disputes, while originating in tensions between Indigenous and settler priorities for the land, are uniquely expressed in public sentiments that normalize the derision of Indigenous political presence. The liberal subject is one who holds influence over discussions of Indigenous rights and title within legal discourse. In doing so, the liberal subject employs and safeguards liberal morality as discussed in Chapter 2, which permeates interrelated settler institutions in government, law, and the economy. Institutions that have arisen from the imagination of liberal modernity represent a type of fiction that ensures ontological space for the liberal subject in perpetuity and that dehistoricizes law. The artworks that I discuss in this section highlight strategies to for engaging with liberal subjectivity in a moment marked by the liberal politics of recognition. By linking the liberal subject (and its moral attachment to race) with the operation of contemporary settler institutions I make evident the motivations that underpin expressions of aggression towards Indigenous political presence.

### **Naming the Liberal Subject**

In the preceding chapters I discussed how the history of liberal thought as a facet of dominant Western thought has fashioned Indigenous people as racialized subjects. This

formulation belongs to a lineage of liberal political thought that has impacted perceptions of Indigenous political presence. By locating this perception within the liberal subject, I consider it here as a symbolic container for understanding contemporary Western society's continued investment in forms of racialized knowledge. I begin by illustrating the perceptions from which ideas of justice have developed within settler frameworks of law and government, which are intricately tied to liberal political philosophies that have evolved since the origins of modernity. Goldberg's conception of the intimate relationship between race, liberalism, and modernity, highlights qualities of the liberal subject that are of particular relevance to this discussion. He writes that liberals are united by a shared commitment to individualism, universal principles, and progress, in addition to a concept of equality (Goldberg 1993, 5). The question of what defines a good liberal subject can be answered in part by the legacy of ideals and moral values that guide this form of political thought, particularly the idea of equality. Institutions of liberal modernity within the realms of religion and science have helped to facilitate this legacy by providing the means of facilitating the transmission of colonial ideas.

The persistent impact of Western liberal thought on contemporary Indigenous experiences on Turtle Island is apparent when settler nation state narratives assert and affirm the supremacy of their political structures. Guiding liberal moral values have contributed to the ongoing colonization of Turtle Island through the operations of sovereign settler states that espouse liberal democratic ideals while refusing to recognize the unique rights of Indigenous peoples. The monocular vision of rights and freedoms that flows from the current state of relations within colonized North America has grown out of Western liberal paradigms that have historically privileged and centred white Europeans as liberal subjects while defining immigrant and Indigenous people as minorities indistinct from one another.

As a result, unspoken caveats are applied to the liberal ideal of universal rights of freedom that limit or preclude the ability of racialized subjects to access the same benefits as the liberal subject. In this sense, the liberal subject shares in common a history with the category of “human,” which Kay Anderson argues has been extended an undeserved ontological neutrality (Anderson 2007, 11). The extension of the category of human to those the liberal subject previously excluded may appear to open up membership in liberal subjectivity to racialized or otherwise marginalized persons, allowing them the same access to rights and freedoms; however, the mere removal of longstanding caveats does not necessarily resolve the issue when the liberal subject, which shares a deep connection with the concept of “human,” remains the measure of individual and collective success (Anderson 2007, 11). The initial act of violence rests within the constitution of the liberal subject itself, and not the resulting injustices it has continued to perpetuate.

These conditions are uniquely problematic for Indigenous peoples as the First Peoples of these territories whose ways of life, philosophies, and knowledge are intricately tied to the land. As Haudenosaune artist, curator, and scholar Jolene Rickard stresses in her scholarship on the reception of Indigenous art in the context of other nation-states, Indigenous peoples have historically rejected the category of minority status granted to them by liberal political formations, asserting themselves instead as autochthonous nations within their ancestral lands (Rickard 2017). Discourses of sovereignty (Alfred 2002; Basrch and Henderson 1980; Byrd 2014; Goldberg-Hiller 2011; Kanani 2008) and self-determination (Coulthard 2008; Marule 1984) provide advantageous platforms for many Indigenous peoples to critically reflect positions of nationhood outside of settler state structures while demonstrating and affirming unique rights

within settler occupied territories in ways that reflect the highly specific circumstances of each nation's colonial encounter.

These related, and at times intersecting, discourses trouble the liberal subject, which holds a profound investment in a vision of freedom that has long served to secure the interests of settler cultures first. To claim Indigenous lands and rights antagonizes the liberal subject's presumption of preeminent sovereignty, which may help to explain the initial reluctance of the Canadian nation (and others) to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, it might also help to explain the continued reluctance of settler governments to implement UNDRIP's recommendations even after they finally adopted it.

The territorial sovereignty claimed by settler nations is facilitated by ideas drawn from Western liberal thought as outlined in chapter 2, within which Indigenous re/claiming of lands through acts of political presence grounded in an ancestral knowledge of rights and responsibilities to the land, and either related on a nation-to-nation basis or superseding settler nations' relationships to territory, are rendered illiberal. In other words, Indigenous people are often perceived as bad liberals, incapable of managing the conditions of modern life and calling into question the freedoms and equality of so-called "everyday citizens." As a potential threat to

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<sup>18</sup> In 2007 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted with 144 states in favour, 4 against, and 11 abstentions. The four countries that voted against the adoption of UNDRIP were Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada. In 2016 the government of Canada announced its full support of UNDRIP, although an understanding of how this support translates in practical terms into the relationship between Indigenous people and the state has yet to be fully demonstrated.

the privileged equality and freedoms of so-called “good liberals,” Indigenous political presence interrupts narratives of liberal recognition, which seek Indigenous participation within the realm of permissibility as outlined and instructed by settler nations. In this sense, the claiming of space enabled by the liberal subject creates racialized geographic knowledge that necessarily negates Indigenous knowledge. Troubling the characterization of Indigenous political presence as illiberal (i.e. hostile, anti-state, or anti-progressive), those who denaturalize narratives of the liberal subject that place dominant settler knowledge and understanding of land above Indigenous political philosophies, open up new space in which to negotiate and create new possibilities for just coexistence in the future. This is the important work that the artists addressed in this chapter take part in.

### **Confronting the Liberal Subject**

Analyzing artistic representations that point to tensions in relationships of rights and responsibilities to the land helps to identify and locate the privileges enjoyed by the liberal subject and threatened by Indigenous political presence. By identifying and pressing up against the values and beliefs of the liberal subject, artists Kade Twist and Christian Chapman denaturalize contemporary investments in the narratives that allow settler governments and institutions to determine the current political order. For many, this process of denaturalization may be obscured by the taken-for-granted realities of day-to-day life within settler society. Cherokee artist Kade Twist’s two-channel video installation, *Our Land, Your Imagination: The Judeo-Christian Western Scientific Worldview and Phoenix*<sup>19</sup> (figure 18), looks to these moments

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<sup>19</sup> This artwork is durational and involves both video and audio components. For further information see Works Cited.

of day-to-day reality in ways that help to identify the quiet operations of liberal desire and ideology in the city of Phoenix, which rests on Indigenous lands.

The title of this artwork itself is an assertion of Indigenous land (“Our Land”) within a geography – Phoenix – fabricated by settler desire (“Your Imagination”) through the operations of modern knowledge production (“Judeo-Christian Western Scientific Worldview”). This knowledge production is located within dominant Western thought. The title thus participates in a project of naming Indigenous lands, while gazing outwards and back in time to observe the histories of thought that have been brought to bear upon Turtle Island and the people who have inhabited this space since time immemorial. The title establishes an important and integral lens through which to view the artwork. The videos, which play on two screens and are projected onto two walls where they meet at a corner, juxtapose people and song with scenes of suburban Phoenix. On the left, five videos loop, each featuring a different woman who sings a song by the Carpenters: “Close To You,” “We’ve Only Just Begun,” “I Need to Be in Love,” “I Won’t Last a Day Without You,” or “Yesterday Once More.” While at times uplifting, the lyrics of these songs speak generally to unfulfilled future desires, loss, and lament. These videos are synchronized with five corresponding videos that loop on the right channel: a sunset over a busy roadway, a hot air balloon landing on a residential street, a rushed tour of a foreclosed home,<sup>20</sup> a nearby sandstorm from a rooftop patio, and an upward gaze towards a set of palm trees swaying in a cloudless sky. The association of song with scene paints a melancholic view of the city, and of all people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who are represented by or implicated in the

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<sup>20</sup> These scenes were drawn from YouTube by the artist in 2008, the year following the impactful financial crisis wherein many Americans lost their homes due to numerous interrelated factors that included the irresponsible handling of mortgage debts by banking institutions.

artwork.

One way of reading this artwork is to consider it a type of “community portrait” (Morrissette 2012). To create the artwork, Twist sifted through an estimated 20,000 videos uploaded to YouTube and tagged with the geographic location “Phoenix” (Twist 2017). The content of these videos represents the desirous lens of the Western worldview within that geography. The presence of this worldview is evident in the voices of the singing women, and in the subtext offered by melancholic lyrics that describe a love that they long for but has either been lost or has yet to arrive.

Figure 18 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Kade Twist’s *Our Land, Your Imagination: The Judeo-Christian Western Scientific Worldview and Phoenix*. Photograph by Klaus Rossler of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

Figure 7

The liberal subject shares an intimate relationship to histories of colonial domination. Read through this lens, this artwork offers a representation of desires laid bare in the women’s songs and projected onto the land. By associating these scenes with colonial imagination, the artist



creates space to question the origins and fabrication of the worldviews that have given rise to colonial desire. The fact that Twist locates this worldview in images of particular people can be separated from the salience of race. The artist writes:

[t]he focus of this series is not on a particular race or ethnicity of colonizer descendancy, but on the inherited ideology of the colonizer – supported by perceptions, beliefs, institutions, political systems, economic systems and individual actions – that continues to dominate the postcolonial experience and act upon Indigenous land as a virus. The installations reflect the results of social media storytellers proclaiming, recording and documenting the byproducts of their ideology and their right to freely enjoy the promises of altered landscapes (Twist, nd).

Twist's vision of race is similar to John Trudell's conception of the Halluci and ALie Nations. In both cases, the racial referent is identified and refused. Instead, these artists examine the underlying ideas that help to explain colonial processes that continue to cohere individuals along ideological – and not racial – lines. The artwork furnishes these ideas with visual and audio representation that antagonizes the values and beliefs of the liberal subject, and thus provides audiences with tools to engage in an activity of self-introspection – to consider their own investment in ongoing systems of power.

The idea of Phoenix as an “altered landscape” (Twist, nd) invented to sustain the needs and desires of non-Indigenous peoples links to Ojibway artist Christian Chapman's screen print *This Is Indian Land One* (figure 19). In this artwork, Chapman points to the ways that Turtle Island has been encoded with narratives that serve to communicate and contain a sense of

belonging from within a perspective of settler nationalism or civic pride. Such narratives serve the liberal subject whose sense of home is predicated upon the idea of private property discussed in Chapter 2, which assertions of Indigenous lands can be said to threaten. This artwork looks at the specific geography surrounding the area now known as the city of Thunder Bay. In the background of this image appears a landform on Lake Superior commonly recognized and referred to as the Sleeping Giant. The story of the Sleeping Giant relates how the rocky landform facing Thunder Bay from across Lake Superior came to be. One common telling attributed to a former alderman named Henry Limbrick, who also went by the moniker “Wendigo,” tells of a silver mine shown to the Ojibway peoples by Nana Bijou<sup>21</sup> on condition that its location be kept secret from settlers (Limbrick nd, np). The Ojibway subsequently became known for their silver, which caused envy in neighbouring tribes (Limbrick nd, np). Eventually a member of the Sioux tribe secretly infiltrated the Ojibway camp in order to gain knowledge of the mine’s whereabouts only to be manipulated into revealing the location by two white traders who got the Sioux man drunk on “firewater” (Limbrick nd, np). Keeping his promise, Nana Bijou turned himself to stone when the location of the mine was revealed, covering the mine preventing any access to the silver deposits to this day (Limbrick nd, np).

The layers of authorship in this story are unclear at best, with little in the way of Indigenous oral or written history available to the public.<sup>22</sup> Without these perspectives, it is

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<sup>21</sup> This spelling reflects that used in Limbrick’s *Tales of the Tom-Tom*. Other spellings of this figure’s name that I am more familiar with include Nanaboozhoo/Nanabozho.

<sup>22</sup> The City of Thunder Bay’s website makes reference to other “[a]ctual Ojibway legends and stories” that “came directly from Ojibway elders” and that were published in newspapers, although it also indicates that the authenticity of these entries are unverified.

difficult to differentiate the way a story functions within Indigenous communities and the way it is adopted, changed, and deployed to benefit settler society. Comanche curator and writer Paul Chaat Smith has shown how the latter can lead to “the continued trivialization and appropriation of Indian culture, the absolute refusal to deal with us as just plain folks living in the present and not the past” (Smith 2009,18). In the city of Thunder Bay, such refusals to deal with Indigenous people as real people are palpable on streets and in neighbourhoods where racist attitudes continue to impact Indigenous peoples’ day-to-day lives in profound and devastating ways, despite the fact that the city’s history and relationships with neighbouring bands are longstanding. In this case, it may be that the tendency to redeploy Indigenous content in trivial ways is at play within the retelling of this story in non-Indigenous circles today. At the same time, even Limbrick’s telling of the story offers two useful lessons that challenge the supremacy of settler claims to the lands that comprise the city: first, that settlers have an insatiable desire for the land; and second, that their methods for obtaining and exploiting the land are and always have been less than trustworthy.

Although questions of authenticity and authorship are important in discussions of Indigenous representation, my interest in this story lies primarily in its widespread adoption by residents and visitors to Thunder Bay and the surrounding areas. For instance, the city of Thunder Bay has appropriated the image of the Sleeping Giant in its flag (figure 20), and its likeness can be found on tourist memorabilia, and in photographs or prints, to the extent that this particular landform has come to represent a type of cultural currency. While these gestures alone do not claim the Sleeping Giant in a physical sense, they nevertheless participate in a cognitive claiming of the land through the construction of a vista symbolic of civic life in and around the

Thunder Bay area. In the process, histories of Indigenous presence have been rendered useful accessories to decorate the settler nation's conception of land as territory.

Figure 19 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Christian Chapman's *This Is Indian Land I*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Figure 19

Chapman's representation of the Sleeping Giant differs from these symbolic investments in a way that is difficult to ignore. He has chosen to depict the likeness of the Sleeping Giant in hues of purple, pink, and yellow using the recognizable Ben-Day dot printing technique prevalent in comics and the work of the well-known painter Roy Lichtenstein. Emblazoned atop the image Chapman has printed "THIS IS INDIAN LAND" in bold, silver ink – a move that most efficiently differentiates his work from other common representations of the Sleeping Giant. This statement rubs up against settler definitions of land where Indigenous histories and presence have been systemically and persistently erased. In this case, the claiming of Indigenous

land poses a challenge to the symbolic claim that good liberal subjects hold over the land by resisting the reductive framing of land as territory under settler purview.

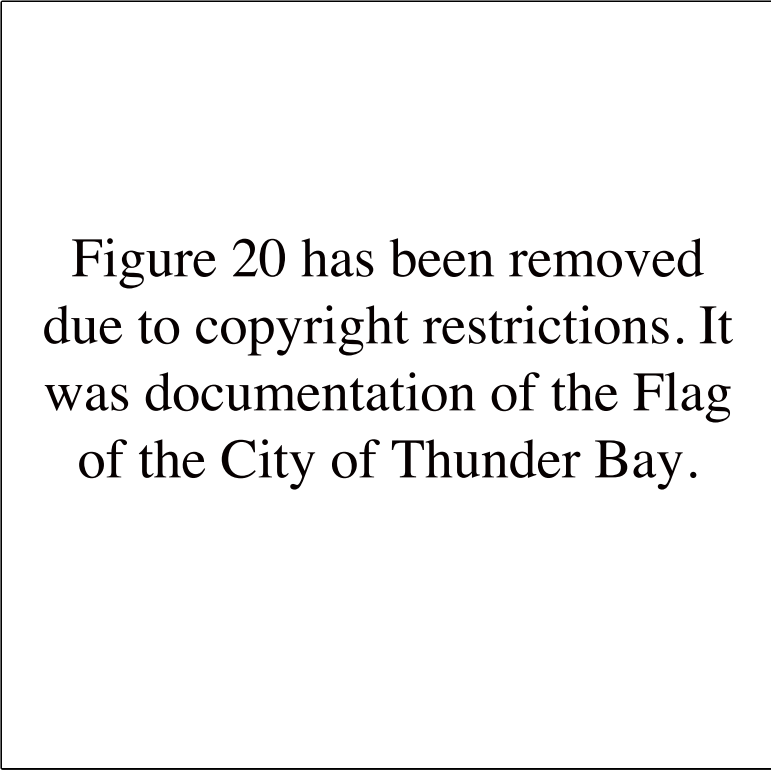


Figure 20 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of the Flag of the City of Thunder Bay.

**Figure 20**

*This is Indian Land I* is one of a suite of prints that each depicts a different location in Northern Ontario east of Thunder Bay, together asserting Indigenous lands across a wide geography (Chapman 2017). In a more recent series titled *Seven Days in June* (figure 21), Chapman focuses exclusively on the likeness of the Sleeping Giant, further highlighting how this image has become wrapped up in an economy of signs that do not necessarily serve Indigenous people's histories and presence in the land. The artist's actions – both in terms of producing the images and later selling them – can be considered a type of performance that resists these problematic and powerful significations of the Sleeping Giant. To create the latter series, which

includes seven unique prints, Chapman took a photo of the Sleeping Giant from the shores of his home on Fort William First Nation each day for seven days. As with *This Is Indian Land I* (figure 19), he then transferred the photographs to screen and printed the images in multiples. Instead of the words “THIS IS INDIAN LAND,” Chapman screened the date and time each photograph was taken in silver ink across the centre of the images. The serial nature of printmaking practice lends both expediency and intention to the series, allowing Chapman to replicate his images en masse in the same way that other images of the Sleeping Giant are sold through the tourism industry. It is not accidental, then, that Chapman sells the resulting artworks in this series at the Marina, a hub for tourism in Thunder Bay.

Figure 21 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Christian Chapman’s *June 17, 2013*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Figure 8

The critique brought forward by the content of this series transforms the cognitive claiming of the Sleeping Giant through the artist's mimicry of production and his sales methods, which appeal to the tourist market. His images contain enough recognizability to operate freely within this field of representation, although such readings are disrupted by the date and time stamp, which points conspicuously and unusually to their serial nature (and therefore their unoriginal quality). As Chapman's earlier work demonstrates, the claiming of Indigenous lands challenges the idea that land functions as an image that liberal subjects map their sense of belonging and identity onto without consideration of Indigenous histories and presence. Through his artwork Chapman disrupts a system of signs that have been authored and maintained by settler states and their publics, which may not necessarily recognize the presence and value of Indigenous lives. Chapman thus opens up space both within the artworks as well as in the tourist market (through the participatory space created at the Marina), within which to unpack the assumed supremacy of settler state purviews over Indigenous lands, and to imagine other possible frameworks for co-existence.

### **Asserting Indigenous History and Presence**

Twist and Chapman's works show how physical and cognitive claiming of space can lead to the proliferation and naturalization of the Western ideological constructs that continue to assert the supremacy of settler states and their citizens on Turtle Island. These constructs are deeply informed by liberal ideological conceptions of equality and freedom, which have historically placed racialized bodies at the contours of humanity, and assisted in legitimizing the theft of lands from Indigenous peoples. Although the places where the residents of Turtle Island live and work are the products of this history, this is a critical intervention that is less often

heard.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the history of the place now known as Canada is commonly framed within a narrative of peaceable, inevitable settlement.

Historical myths have contributed to problematic ideas about the types of places where Indigenous people either belong or do not belong, which influence opinions of Indigenous political presence. As Evelyn Peters and Chris Anderson write in the introduction to their book *Indigenous in the City*, “[t]he association of ‘authentic’ Indigenous identities with non-urban locations positions urban Indigenous cultures as inauthentic and less legitimate” (Peters and Anderson 2013, 1). The practice of associating Indigenous or racialized peoples with particular geographies as a measure of authenticity completely overlooks colonial histories that have deliberately placed Indigenous peoples at the margins of settler society in the name of “progress.” The resulting colonial logic not only renders Indigenous bodies inauthentic or less legitimate but also helps to support the idea that settler governments and ideas of justice, which are centred in urban spaces, hold supreme authority over Indigenous political knowledge and understandings of justice in the land. These ideas of truth are not far removed from the dominant Western ideologies addressed by Twist and Chapman – they are a continuation of those narrative traditions that routinely diminish Indigenous political presence.

Although they are not the only spaces in which these narratives operate to constrain Indigenous experiences, urban spaces form generative sites through which to analyze the problem of perception facing Indigenous political presence. They are ideal sites due in part to the

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<sup>23</sup> In recent years there have been some important changes in policy and practice, which appear to signal a positive gesture in the direction of telling the full story of colonization upon Indigenous lands. In 2016 for instance, the Toronto Public School Board began implementing protocols to acknowledge traditional territories as a part of morning announcements.



tendency described by Peters and Anderson to associated Indigenous peoples with locations that are removed from urban spaces, and in part to public ignorance in regard to Indigenous history and presence within city spaces. While such ignorance might arguably stem from a confluence of many factors, including inadequate education and misinformation about Indigenous people and settler history in news media, it remains the case that the public at large is routinely instructed to ignore Indigenous perspectives. There is little expectation or accountability to ensure that individuals within settler society will contend with these issues in a personal and meaningful way.

This context positions the city itself as a canvas for artistic intervention. The Ogimaa Mikana project guided by Anishinaabe artists and scholars Susan Blight and Hayden King uses public space as a site to communicate with diverse audiences about Indigenous history and presence on the land. Their work has involved the renaming of street in Toronto using Anishinabemowin<sup>24</sup> translations, and taking over billboards – both in Toronto and elsewhere – to assert Anishinaabe presence and relationships to the land. Some of these interventions take place through guerilla actions. The renaming of Queen Street as *Ogimaa Mikana* (figure 22) during Idle No More in downtown Toronto represents one such action. Borrowing the visual format of Toronto street signs, Blight and King designed signs to blend in with those around them along one of Canada’s busiest and most renowned streets. Only two elements of their sign’s design differed from the original: the replacement of the text “QUEEN STREET” with “OGIMAA MIKANA,” and “#Idle No More” in place of the site marker “Art + Design District.”

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<sup>24</sup> The language of the Anishinaabe, also referred to as Ojibwe or Ojibway language.

Figure 22 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist collective Ogimaa Mikana Project's installation *Ogimaa Mikana*. Photograph by Ogimaa Mikana Project.

Figure 9

In a presentation about their work, Susan Blight spoke of the significance of drawing upon Anishinaabemowin language to assert Indigenous history and presence, because the philosophy of the Anishinaabe people resides within the language itself (Blight 2017). Their translations from English to Anishinaabemowin modified the original street name meanings through the application of this philosophy – *Ogimaa* means leader or chief and *mikana* means trail (Blight 2017). The artists do not merely look to translation as a way of substituting text; rather, they use words that reveal Anishinaabe values and shift meaning away from, in this case, the monarch as a source of residual sovereign power. By reframing Queen Street as a trail, Blight and King reorient our interaction with the history of a city that has always been traversed by Indigenous people. They expose what scholar Julie Nagam has argued are the “concealed geographies” (borrowing from Katherine McKittrick) of the city of Toronto (Nagam 2011, 7). That is, they

point to those histories that have been covered over, although not erased, by settler narratives of place. In this sense, their guerilla action speaks both to the renaming of space and the reclaiming of Indigenous perspectives and values in the land – two objectives that guide the artists in their work (Blight 2017).

The group has also reclaimed and renamed Spadina Street in downtown Toronto as *Ishpadinaa* (figure 23), an Anishinaabe word that refers to a hill or a mountain. In this case the Anishinaabe word literally describes the land that rises up from the shores of Lake Ontario toward the elevated plateau where Casa Loma stands today. Here the artists placed a plaque (figure 24) that resembles the one marking Casa Loma, an early twentieth century mansion that today functions as a heritage museum. It describes the political imperatives of their project. In Anishinaabemowin it reads:

MII ZHIGWA JI-AADODA-MAANG, NINDANISHAINAABE-WAKIINAAN.  
GINWENZH NIGIJIIGEWYAAZHAGAAMIN, GEYAABI NIBIMOSEMIN  
OMAA. GIMINOPIITOOGAAGONAAWAA  
NINDASHIIKWININAAG AANDI WENJI NISITAWINAMAN?

NOW IT IS TIME WE TELL A STORY ABOUT IT, OUR ANISHINAABE  
LAND. WE WALKED ALONG THE SHORE FOR A LONG TIME. WE STILL  
WALK HERE. WELCOME TO OUR COMMUNITY. HOW DO YOU  
RECOGNIZE IT?

The artists have borrowed the visual format of heritage signs that exist throughout the city to convey alternative narratives that assert Indigenous history and presence in place of information that uncritically continues the colonial legacy. In this case, they have drawn upon a

typography also commonly found at sites of civic significance throughout Ontario. Although in many ways their signs are aesthetically similar, Blight and King begin their text in Anishinaabemowin, a language that many may not recognize, or that at the very least defies, common expectations in Canada where public signs commonly appear in one or both of the country's official languages: English or French. Beneath this inscription they provide a translation that explains the necessity of their project for claiming Anishinaabe land. Their plaque reinstates knowledge of the city as a place that Indigenous peoples traverse, both historically *and* in the present. They assert this land as the site of their community, which makes the question, "How do you recognize it?" all the more pointed. Rather than merely serving to pique public curiosity, the question prompts audiences to engage in reflexive thinking, which implicates their own presence in relation to Indigenous histories in Toronto. One possible follow-up question might be, "Why do you recognize it that way?"

Figure 23 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist collective Ogimaa Mikana Project's installation *Ishpadinaa*. Photograph by Ogimaa Mikana Project.

Figure 23

The Ogimaa Mikana project confronts viewers with forms of Indigenous knowledge not readily available within systems of public education. The artists mimic signs that normally function as wayfinding tools, both in the sense that they provide physical direction and in the way that they dictate a particular vision of knowledge and history related to geography. In this sense Blight and King co-opt systems of knowledge in ways that disrupt and temporarily disorient their audiences. The artists implicate their viewers as participants in conjuring new and different relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within the city. They sign their plaque with the hashtag “#OGIMAAMIKANA PROJECT,” thus providing a resource for further self-guided investigations into Indigenous history and presence in the city.

Figure 24 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist collective Ogimaa Mikana Project's plaque. Photograph by Ogimaa Mikana Project.

Figure 24

On the surface, the project appears to serve a primarily educational purpose. It presents facts and narratives conspicuously absent from the historical record. At the same time, the method by which Blight and King present these narratives suggests that rather than merely passing down knowledge, they are also passing along a responsibility to audiences to reflect upon the knowledge that they carry with them, and to question its source and legitimacy. This responsibility is framed in their takeover of the Casa Loma plaque, as well as in their 2016 billboard (figure 25) installed prominently along Queen St. West near Dufferin Street in Toronto. The billboard read:

Giishpin waanda  
kendamaawnen  
gegoo,  
aadbideg ntam  
g'gagwejikendaan  
maanda.

If you want to learn something, first you must learn this.

Between the two passages the artists placed an image of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum, which artist, curator, and scholar Lisa Myers describes as a treaty “negotiated between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to share the sustenance of the bowl, the land north and south of the Great Lakes” (Myers 2014, 15). Made of quahog and whelk shells, wampum belts were woven to depict agreements between nations. The

Dish with One Spoon is a living treaty, which writer Leanne Simpson describes as having given us,

an ancient template for realizing separate jurisdictions within a shared territory. It outlines the “rights” and “responsibilities” of both parties in the ongoing relationship, and it clearly demonstrates that our ancestors did not intend for our nations to be subsumed by the British crown or the Canadian state when they negotiated those original treaties (Simpson 2008, 38).

Through this pairing of text and image, Blight and King point to the lack of attention paid to this important treaty despite the fact that it covers the geography occupied by the city of Toronto and its present day citizens. They suggest that knowing the meaning of the image, the Dish with One Spoon wampum, can serve as a foundation for growing new knowledge in any shape or form.

Figure 25 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist collective Ogimaa Mikana Project's *Giishpin waanda ken-damaawnen gegoo, aabideg ntam g'gagwejikendaan maanda*. Photograph by Ogimaa Mikana Project.

Figure 10

The responsibility that this billboard instils in its public emerges when it becomes clear that pedestrians and drivers travelling along Queen Street West may not recognize either the meaning of the text or the agreement depicted in the wampum. Thus, the artists disrupt the relationship that people usually hold with the billboard format, commonly used to convey simple messages to consumers quickly while leaving a lasting impression. Instead, Blight and King's message might elicit a double take when the message of both the Anishinaabe text and the wampum are not readily clear. The words provide a hook that requires the audience to ask questions about what it is they are being asked to learn. The message thus confronts the limitations of public knowledge about the history of place, and while it does not provide an outright answer to the question of our individual relationships to Indigenous land, it does invite passersby to become participants in the act of learning.

Contemporary understandings of the land as settled space present unique challenges for the assertion of Indigenous land, history, and presence. This is especially the case in locations where the privileges of the liberal subject remain largely unquestioned. In the city of Toronto, the artists behind the Ogimaa Mikana project offer numerous challenges to the liberal subject's privilege by asserting Indigenous history and presence. Their challenge resides within the methods that they employ to disrupt some of the small, but not innocuous, ways that city spaces remain the privileged space of the liberal subject, secured by ignoring Indigenous peoples' histories with the land. The work reveals the ideological underpinnings of our relationships with the land, using city signs as sites to involve liberal subjects in a recalibration of values toward a more just experience of coexistence.



## **Learning, Responsibility, and the Inclusion of Non-Indigenous Perspectives**

Who holds the responsibility to educate the public on Indigenous presence and history on Turtle Island? This is a question that I have heard asked on numerous occasions within academic circles. While there is certainly a push to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are represented in conversations of all kinds, I have also heard some express dissatisfaction with the added labour that is often required to educate students and others about the systemic and networked issues persisting from ongoing colonialism in North America. Such labour can be especially difficult when the liberal subject remains invested in preserving the privileges that liberal notions of property and social contract ensure. Celia Haig-Brown refers to practices of “studied amnesia” or a “refusal to engage with the historical relations underpinning all of what we do” (Haig-Brown 2008, 18). Artists Blight and King, through their work to reclaim and rename city spaces (Blight 2017), reverse the expectation that in order to learn one must be instructed. Instead, they seize the opportunity public space offers to provide the necessary tools for diverse audiences to engage in their own study – both of themselves, and of the structures that support knowledge. In doing so, the artists reframe the question by placing the responsibility to learn in the hands of their audiences.

This shift of responsibility creates a participatory framework, which is similar to the ways in which artist Cheryl L’Hirondelle relates to audiences through her interactive new media installation, *pimâtisiwin kimâmawey witahtpisomitanaw* (*life is tying everything together*) (figures 26-27). I invited L’Hirondelle to create this artwork in 2015 for an exhibition I was curating for Harbourfront Centre and Planet Indigenous, a multidisciplinary arts festival for Indigenous artists in downtown Toronto. As the curator for the exhibition *our land, together* at the Harbourfront Gallery, I brought together artworks by three artists whose works cohered around a critical

examination of the inherently political relationships that all people hold with the land and with each other. The exhibition was mounted when the city of Toronto hosted the Pan Am Games, and we anticipated a mix of tourist visitors in addition to regular gallery-goers and residents of the Greater Toronto Area.

L'Hirondelle's created her work in response to a song that she wrote with her long-time collaborator Joseph Naytowhow. The song, written in Nêhiyawêwin<sup>25</sup> and titled "kitaskinanaw" (Appendix C), was recorded by the Indigenous women's singing group M'Girl and appeared on their 2007 album *Fusion of Two Worlds*. The song is sung from the perspective of someone who is looking out in all directions around them. They describe "our land," as a shared and boundless space that emerges from "the place of the sunrise" (the east) "towards the sunset" (the west), and "from the north...to the south." The lyrics provide listeners with a template of experiences with the land – forged in respect, based in Indigenous thought, and accessible to all people regardless of their background. The song describes a framework for living in relation to all living things, and which is inclusive of all living things. This is a counternarrative to the framework provided by colonial histories and supported by liberal thought, a type of highly racialized thought which has been delivered to us in the present by way of dominant Western philosophy. In this present moment marked by conversations about reconciliation and developing new ways forward through histories of injustice, it seems especially important to look to frameworks such as the one L'Hirondelle and Naytowhow illustrate to understand our individual and collective responsibilities within the land.

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<sup>25</sup> Cree language.

Figures 26-27 have been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was documentation of artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *pimâtisiwin kimâdawêy witahtsisomitanaw* (*life is tying everything together*). Photograph by Tom Bilenky and Harbourfront Centre.

Figures 26-27

Unfortunately, as discussed previously, these individual and collective responsibilities are not uniformly upheld when it comes to understanding and privileging Indigenous people's histories and knowledge. Like Blight and King, L'Hirondelle was artistically active during the Idle No More movement. L'Hirondelle performed a version of "kitaskinanaw" at an Idle No More event where she made one slight, yet profound modification to the title and lyrics. In place of "kitaskinanaw," meaning "our land together," L'Hirondelle instead sang "kitaskîhkânaw," which altered the meaning to "our reserve/fake land together."

L'Hirondelle has written about this change, explaining that "iskonikan askiy" translates to "leftover strip of land" (L'Hirondelle nd, np). Another way of saying "reserve" is "askîhk" where the 'hk' references, in L'Hirondelle's words, "the instance" of "being fake or pretend"

(L'Hirondelle nd, np). By making this small, yet significant change, L'Hirondelle effectively altered the implied meaning of the other lyrics as well. Instead of looking out over the land in all directions to suggest the unbounded qualities of those places, “kitaskîhkânaw” alludes to the histories of colonial occupation that have authored the land. The idea that Canada represents a “fake or pretend” place echoes Rickard’s sentiment that Indigenous people are autochthonous nations living within their ancestral lands (Rickard 2017), a relationship which has certainly been overwritten, although not altogether erased by colonial processes.

When I invited L'Hirondelle to create a new artwork for the exhibition at Harbourfront Centre, I approached her with an interest in this song and its two significantly different iterations. Her response to my invitation was to create *pimâtisiwin kimâmaŵey witaŵpisomitanaw* (*life is tying everything together*) (figures 27-28), which took the form of an immersive new media environment using MAX jitter technology. Infrared cameras and lights activated specific video and audio responses within a demarcated area of the gallery. The work began to operate fully when visitors entered into an area marked on three sides by the walls of an alcove and a fourth false partition wall that separated the work from the rest of the gallery space. Once inside, viewers found themselves surrounded by a large format video projection on each wall. Each video depicted a different scene, featuring footage that L'Hirondelle had sourced from locations around the city of Toronto (L'Hirondelle 2015). The artwork was silent until one or more visitors activated by motion sensors an audiotrack featuring L'Hirondelle’s own singing voice. The interactivity of the artwork created a space of play in which visitors encountered and intuitively explored the relationship of their own bodies to the images and sounds that surrounded them.

Through this artwork L'Hirondelle invited viewers to occupy the same position that she and Naytowhow describe in their song, “kitaskinanaw.” In creating this space L'Hirondelle not

only offered to share this perspective, she also allowed it to become the place from which other peoples' perspectives could be located. Her gesture is both one of inclusion and sharing. At the same time, it remains rooted in the respect for the land that is evidenced in the song that she wrote with Naytowhow, and which conveys these two Cree artists' perspectives. As a space of sharing, the installation was also a space of learning about one another through the relationships that we hold with the land.

The artwork provided a participatory framework through which L'Hirondelle could influence how audience members reflected upon their own positions in relation to the perspective of an Indigenous artist. Although the artwork was not itself confrontational in the typical sense of the word, it nevertheless addressed the liberal subject's philosophical investment in structures that easily refute a vision of this land as Indigenous land. While far from aggressive, L'Hirondelle's invitation to her audience to enter into a designated space, where perception is highlighted as a concept, and relationships with Indigenous people are foregrounded, responded to the need to create positive spaces of encounter in a society that has to this day inadequately addressed its racist attitudes towards Indigenous people. The choice to enter into the installation was a decision that each visitor made and, in this sense, the artwork functioned as a site of consensual exchange where participants were given space to observe the contours of their own, and other people's, perspectives in relation to the place we now call Toronto. By pointing to perception in this way, the artwork strongly alluded to the city's highly politicized history, which has become so because of a continued reluctance to consider these lands as Indigenous land. In this sense, the artwork opened up opportunities for audiences to engage in an act of self-introspection through play.

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by identifying and characterizing the liberal subject as an entity who employs and safeguards liberal morality. The liberal subject refers not to a single person but rather to a tendency or set of beliefs that everyone is susceptible to in much the same way that John Trudell's two poems from A Tribe Called Red's recent album *We Are the Halluci Nation* position The ALie Nation and the Halluci Nation not as racially determined groups but as modes of thought which can either foster divisions between people and the land or bring people together in productive and positive ways. In this chapter I have highlighted how the liberal subject usefully encapsulates contemporary Western society's continued investment in racialized knowledge and racialized geography. In doing so I point to the ways perceptions of Indigenous people are impacted by racialized liberal thought when the latter develops and confers ideas of justice within a settler state. The liberal subject can be said to skew contemporary visions of equality, because it is guided by the moral values of white European male subjectivity originally conceived to exclude Indigenous people or any other racialized person. The liberal subject creates space for Indigenous people to access equality and freedom only from within settler frameworks of legality. Therefore, problems arise when Indigenous peoples reclaim their lands, because such claims threaten the authority and perceived benevolence of liberal inclusion. By conceiving of the liberal subject in this way, I show how the mischaracterization of Indigenous political expression is an issue rooted in the foundations of liberal political thought.

As illiberal subjects, Indigenous people who express political presence outside normative and accepted settler legal structures occupy a position that is disadvantaged by the settler state. Their position is not synchronous with the objectives of liberal recognition, which looks to constrain Indigenous political presence within liberal permissibility. Rather, through their

political expression Indigenous people assert the importance of foregrounding Indigenous thought and knowledge of this land as the foundation upon which future relationships between all people must be built.

This is the work that each of the artworks addressed in this chapter performs. Artworks by Kade Twist, Christian Chapman, the Ogimaa Mikana project, and Cheryl L'Hirondelle challenge the liberal subject through acts of naming, problematizing, rupture, and invitation. For Twist, this includes the identification and representation of different institutions of knowledge, which he sees inside the various actors who continue to move through the lands now referred to as Phoenix while carrying with them the influences of dominant Western liberal thought. Chapman's screen-printed works involve a series of gestures meant to problematize the in the Northwestern Ontario city of Thunder Bay, which I have argued continues to serve the wants of settler agendas. The text-based works of Blight and King, the two artists behind the Ogimaa Mikana project, create moments of rupture within urban spaces often perceived as non-Indigenous. Through her critical use of Nêhiyawêwin, L'Hirondelle examines the politicized history of Canada, which is today shared by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Her invitation to audiences to co-create a vision of shared space is rooted in Indigenous thought and perspectives on land. While motivated by a critique of the ways in which Indigenous lands have been usurped by the privileges and priorities of dominant Western society, each of these artworks takes an approach that asserts and affirms the importance of Indigenous knowledge in ways that invite audiences to reflect on and engage with their own relationships to the liberal subject.

Troubling the characterization of Indigenous political presence as an act of illiberality, by first denaturalizing narratives of the liberal subject that place dominant settler knowledge and

understandings of land above Indigenous political philosophies, opens up new space to negotiate and create new possibilities for just coexistence in the future. The artworks that I have described peel away the edges of the mischaracterization of Indigenous political presence, and establish sites for growing knowledge and understanding between all peoples, from a foundation in Indigenous thought.



## CHAPTER 5

### **Resisting and Reframing Perceptions of Indigenous Political Presence as Violence**

#### **Introduction**

By undertaking an analysis of the racial underpinnings of liberal modernity, which continue to impact Indigenous peoples' expressions of political thought, this dissertation contributes to a growing understanding of both the continued operation of colonial power through institutions of liberal thought and the ways in which artists expose these ideas through their practices. This analysis has identified the history of thought that underlies negative perceptions of Indigenous political presence (Hegel 1967; Hobbes 1997; Kant 2000; Locke 2003; Rousseau 1984, 1997), and has been supported by the analysis of contemporary scholars in critical race theory (Anderson 2007; Bernasconi 2001, 2002; DaSilva 2007; Mills 1999) and Western philosophy (Anaya 2000; Arneil 1994; Franco 1997; Henderson 2000; Ivison 2003; Pagden 1988). Their work collectively contributes to a critical praxis that holds institutions accountable for the racist ideas that rest at their foundations. Identifying this history is crucial for creating a better understanding of the barriers that stand in the way of a robust expression of Indigenous political knowledge in the present. In this chapter, I advance the critique further by differentiating between the privileges and rights of the liberal subject. In the context of a recognition-based liberal paradigm, where the inclusion of formerly marginalized voices is often heralded as the solution to histories of injustice, it is imperative to extend ideas of justice beyond merely acknowledging past wrongdoing (not continued wrongdoing) so that Indigenous political presence cannot be written off as the actions of "bad liberals." In this sense, the analysis

provided in this chapter attends to the limited utility of recognition-based solutions, and to the problem of “the good liberal” standing in as the measure of ultimate citizenship.

I conclude my analysis in this dissertation by looking at artworks that challenge settler perceptions of Indigenous political presence as antagonistic by making obvious acts of colonial violence that have been historically perpetrated against Indigenous people. Art is appropriate for this analysis because, as previously argued, I consider these forms of expression to be intimately tied to Indigenous political thought. Art is a mediator of necessary and purposeful demonstrations on the land. In selecting artworks for inclusion, I have chosen pieces that clearly identify and seek to dismantle mechanisms of colonial violence. I intend to illustrate methods for reconceptualizing Indigenous political presence that steer away from equating it with aggression and violence. Importantly, I contend that such characterizations fail to attend to histories of colonialism, which includes the importation and replication of European knowledge based in liberal thought.

Crucially, resisting the assertion that Indigenous political presence is an act of violence requires the viewer to imagine new structures for understanding Indigenous knowledge that reside outside of a liberal paradigm of inclusion. I suggest that new structures must be built by Indigenous thought, in which all people can join as collaborators. This is a proposal that rubs up against solutions posed in existing scholarship by others such as Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows, whose framework for conceptualizing justice resides within and in relation to existing structures of power. In his book *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*, Borrows looks for solutions in legal frameworks for Indigenous people. He argues that Canadian law must draw upon Indigenous legal knowledge in proceedings that impact the regulation and administration of Indigenous issues (Borrows 2002, 5). He makes a series of suggestions for how

this approach might work while acknowledging the barriers that stand in the way of full and adequate adoption of Indigenous legal knowledge into settler legal frameworks. In this sense, Borrows sees an opportunity to create spaces for Indigenous legal structures to exist in relation to settler legal structures.

Borrows's analysis highlights the problem of perception facing Indigenous political presence that I foreground in this dissertation. That is, he describes the ways in which Indigenous political presence is often interpreted as an impediment to life as usual upon Indigenous lands and not as the purposeful and necessary actions of individuals whose lives have been threatened by colonial violence for hundreds of years. Although he describes the current situation accurately, Borrows does not defend the legitimacy of Indigenous political expression when he writes:

In the absence of formal tools to allow for communication, Indigenous peoples must use very blunt instruments to make their point, such as highly charged political demonstration, blockades, and litigation. These adversarial approaches often serve to increase hostility and intransigence on the other side and to escalate conflict. The perceived necessity of direct confrontation and violence to protect a way of life thwarts the potential of law within democracy to mediate such conflict. (Borrows 2002, 43)

By "formal tools for communication," Borrows refers to federal legislation that would enable and protect Indigenous interests within settler legal frameworks (Borrows 2002, 43). Indeed, without these tools – or the sanctioned authority to use their own tools to affirm their rights and title – Indigenous people are often left with limited ways to exercise political agency without confronting the legal system itself as a flawed system.

Dale Turner's characterization of liberal political moves toward inclusion as mislabelled "peace-pipes" (Turner 2006) further describes the inadequacies of current gestures of inclusion, where barriers erected by liberal permissibility continue to prohibit a robust expression of agency through Indigenous political presence. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the historical limitations placed on Indigenous political agency have been manufactured by systems of liberal thought that grant white European bodies, their social contracts and justice, supreme authority, with profound consequences for the meaning of equality and freedom as they are widely understood today. Borrows's suggestion that political demonstrations, blockades, and litigation are adversarial approaches that "often serve to increase hostility and intransigence" uncritically neglects these important contexts (Borrows 2002, 43).

The tendency to view confrontation as the work of "bad liberals," as outlined in Chapter 4, perpetuates a perception of these activities as acts of hostile or violent aggression aimed at the seat of justice. The conceptualization of Indigenous political presence as the work of bad liberals bolsters the racist view that Indigenous people have not adapted to changing social relations under liberal modernity through colonization. An alternate approach would dispel such misconceptions. Here I show how Indigenous political presence might feel like a threat to *the rights* of liberal subject, and how it actually represents a threat to *the privileges* of the liberal subject. In this sense, the work of bad liberals, which threatens the freedom and equality of good liberals, is not directed at actual bodies, but at systems of thought that are deeply entrenched within the racialized origins of liberal modernity. This distinction is critical. In situations where the liberal subject neglects to engage critically with these systems of thought, Indigenous political presence might be perceived as violent due to a failure to distinguish between privileges and rights.

Noted anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon famously wrote that “[d]ecolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder” (Fanon 2004, 36). While Fanon’s specific contributions to the study of decolonization are deeply entrenched in the racial politics of Martinique, Europe, and North Africa during the mid-twentieth century, Indigenous scholars today can look to Fanon for his characterization of the challenges facing decolonial practice in the North American context (Coulthard 2015; Tuck & Yang 2012). In their article, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe the unsettling quality of decolonization to necessarily upend the centrality of settler perspectives (Tuck & Yang 2012). They suggest that the concept of decolonization has been uncritically adopted into the common parlance of so-called progressive advocacy and scholarship, when the work of decolonization actually requires a more destabilizing approach to settler narratives (Tuck & Yang 2012, 1). Their work, like Fanon’s, shows how the relocation or removal of the liberal subject’s privileges as the frame of reference that anchors and stabilizes settler rights over Indigenous rights might be perceived as an act of violence.

The equation of an Indigenous political presence that makes evident histories of colonial violence with acts of hostility seems particularly problematic given that Indigenous peoples have themselves been the recipients of immensely destructive and devastating acts of violence since the colonial imagination first took hold upon Indigenous lands. I argue that rather than describe Indigenous political presence as hostile, aggressive, or violent, we might consider how deliberately instigating disorder in systems of knowledge that stem from the violent history of liberal modernity can and should be viewed as catalytic, a beginning point for dislodging our current investment in the old story of liberal modernity. As Hargreaves and Jefferess put it, the

blockade (or in this case, utterances of Indigenous political presence), is not an impediment to, but a way through to, new ways of thinking (Hargreaves & Jefferess 2015, 209).

In this sense, the actions that Borrows depicts as hostile must be recast within another language by broader settler society in order to more completely understand and appreciate the necessity of Indigenous political presence as a pathway to peaceful coexistence upon Indigenous lands. Rather than thwart the law, as Borrows suggests, I argue that Indigenous political presence, which might be perceived as a violence to the privileges of good liberals, participates in pointing out the indebtedness of institutions (such as law) to the racial histories of liberal modernity. At the same time, it contributes to the constitution of more just social relations by foregrounding how racial knowledge from liberal modernity continues to rest at the foundation of contemporary forms of social inequity.

The artworks that I address in this chapter contribute to unsettling relationships in which Indigenous people continue to find themselves relegated to positions of inferiority. I begin my analysis with a discussion of a work by Carl Beam, whose multidisciplinary practice broke ground, not only for Indigenous artists in the mainstream but also for Indigenous political presence in art, by antagonizing the liberal subject. I pair this artwork with an analysis of video pieces by Merritt Johnson, which describe the condition of being Indigenous within a domineering liberal political framework, and some of the ways in which Indigenous political presence intelligently circumvents these dynamics. My analysis also draws upon an example from popular music; a song produced by the Indigenous DJ group A Tribe Called Red, which samples from popular culture in ways that playfully challenges narratives of privilege such as those perpetuated by the American story of Thanksgiving. I conclude with a discussion of a video work by Fallon Simard, which utilizes aesthetic strategies that deliberately elicit a sense of

discomfort in viewers as a means of altering media narratives and highlighting the violence aimed at Indigenous people which has necessitated Indigenous political presence. These artists recast the idea that discomfort is necessarily bad, especially when it is intended to disrupt the comfort that is ensured for some but not all people. These artists choose representational forms that highlight and expose colonial violence, targeting the beliefs that secure systems of knowledge and privilege wherein Indigenous lives are maintained as subordinate. By applying the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2 and expanded upon in Chapters 3 and 4 to an analysis of artworks that could be perceived through a language of violence, I move towards a greater intelligibility of Indigenous political presence, which includes artworks such as these.

### **Performances that Deny and Transform the Dynamics of Liberal Privileges**

So far in this dissertation I have focused on artworks produced within the last ten years. This decision was in part the result of an approach to research that grew out of conversations I have had and relationships I have built over the course of my career as an artist and as a curator. Although the artworks discussed up to this point are linked by their relative newness, I prefer to think of their unifying factor as a shared conceptual concern with the structures of liberal modernity (which I suspect has been a subject of Indigenous thought since not long after first contact).

One artist whose work has helped to make such contributions is Carl Beam, an Anishinaabe artist from M'Chigeeng First Nation. Beam was born in 1942 and passed away in 2005, and in the part of his life that he dedicated to art making, he demonstrated a consistent commitment to identifying and deconstructing institutions that wield power over Indigenous people. In his video work from 1989, *Burying the Ruler* (figure 28), Beam performs this

deconstruction through simple metaphor and gesture. Audain Curator of Indigenous Art Greg Hill wrote about this artwork in a catalogue essay for the large touring retrospective *Carl Beam: The Poetics of Being*, which first opened at the National Gallery in Ottawa in 2010. Describing the work and its meaning Hill wrote,

In the video *Burying the Ruler* (1989, cat. 11) Carl's simple but eloquent act is to take a 30-cm ruler – the kind that a young school student would be familiar with for science and math – and bury it in the earth. The ruler acts as a metaphor for western science and knowledge. The video is brief as it pans down from a bright sun in a troubled sky to the ground. A man (Beam) walks up to where a ruler lies on the ground. He picks it up and digs a hole in the earth, places the ruler in the hole and covers it over. Carl's act deposits the system of knowledge represented by the ruler into the land. There is a sense of finality and permanence in this gesture but it also makes what the ruler represents inaccessible, hidden and powerless. The ruler is buried, pun intended (Hill 2010, 25).

As Hill suggests, the title of this artwork offers two possible readings of the gesture that Beam performs in the video. In a literal sense, the work depicts the burial of an object: a common wooden ruler. However, the ruler's symbolic connotations stem from its use as a tool that measures and assesses value according to Western institutions of knowledge. With this second reading the gesture of burial becomes more complex. It is a burial of forms of knowledge that have underpinned the oppression of Indigenous people under colonial systems. Beam's action is straightforward and leaves no room for subtlety: Western knowledge no longer holds preeminent power over Indigenous lives.

In a society where Western knowledge forms the taken-for-granted framework through



which most people live, work, and play upon Turtle Island, Beam's gesture in this video may be perceived as an antagonistic one, aimed toward any number of Western institutions which at some point have presided over North American subjects – the Crown or the contemporary settler state, for example. For those who believe that Europe brought civilization to Indigenous people, the idea that Indigenous people might reject these structures would be inconceivable. Most any online news article about Indigenous people will be accompanied by a long list of comments expressing the sentiment that Indigenous people must get over the past and accept their future within contemporary society – one marked by Western liberal thought. In such a context, the burial of the ruler represents a threat to the equality and freedom of good liberals when it proposes to radically transform the social organization that upholds the current frame of reference.

Figure 28 has been removed  
due to copyright restrictions. It  
was a video still from artist  
Carl Beam's *Burying the Ruler*.  
Photograph courtesy of the  
National Gallery of Canada.

Figure 11

In its investing of the ruler as a symbol of Western knowledge, Beam's gesture relates to Kade Twist's video installation discussed in Chapter 4, *Our Land, Your Imagination: The Judeo-Christian Western Scientific Worldview and Phoenix*. Both works register the need to identify and critique systems of Western thought that manifest as latent forms of power in the everyday lives of contemporary people. In the case of Beam's video however, the critique of knowledge represented by the ruler remains within the symbolic realm where the ruler (an object) – and not actual people – stands in for the privileges of particular governing bodies that enable the continued oppression of Indigenous subjects. By physically burying the ruler (the object), Beam participates in dismantling the privilege of the liberal subject, which affirms the rights and power of liberal thought upon Indigenous lands. In doing so, Beam confidently reclaims the agency that Western institutions and the privileges contained therein stripped from Indigenous subjects.

Such a reclamation of agency by an Indigenous person could be seen as a threatening move because it denies the racialized order which liberal modernity has ingrained within the social conscience of North American society. Although symbolic in the ways that I have just outlined, Beam's burial of a ruler might also represent the interment of an actual person – the one who presides over others through unequal social relations and force. If however, the ruler is read as a symbol of the knowledge that actual rulers uphold, Beam's gesture becomes one of putting away the tools that have been used to affirm the privileges of liberal subjects, and not a gesture of violence. In this sense, the qualities and characteristics of the liberal subject can be considered separately from the bodies that contain them. Any perceived violence contained within the phrase “burying the ruler” are recast as a retirement of the ideas of the institutions of liberal modernity that the ruler represents, which have had lasting and negative impacts upon Indigenous people's lives. As Hill suggests in the above excerpt, the gesture of burying the ruler

renders it “inaccessible, hidden, and powerless,” (Hill 2010, 25) thereby releasing its stronghold and thus providing opportunities to transform social relations along new modes of relationality.

Beam’s knowledge of the systems of power that have a hold upon and dictate Indigenous experiences and expressions of political knowledge enables this simple performative gesture to convey his message with precision and clarity. The artwork is a product of an awareness of what it means to be colonized and to understand the mechanisms of that colonization, which John Trudell expresses in the phrase, “[t]he callers of names cannot see us, but we can see them.” Merritt Johnson also performs the colonized subject in her video *Knowing Your Place* (figure 29), which is part of an ongoing series called *Exorcising America*, which describes the conditions of being subject to Western and colonial knowledge frameworks that dictate the places Indigenous people can occupy. In *Knowing Your Place*, Johnson uses her own body and voice to demonstrate a series of exercises that instruct viewers on how to understand Indigenous political presence placed at the edges of contemporary society.<sup>26</sup> This act of placing relates to the idea of liberal permissibility which I have outlined in previous chapters, and which dictates the terms of so-called appropriate actions by good liberals.

Although she makes no overt reference to Indigenous people in the video, Johnson’s mixed Indigenous identity and her reference to this identity in other works within this series and other artworks, codes her reference to the experience of “knowing your place” with meaning specific directly related to Indigenous experiences. Through the narrative structure and phrasing characteristic of an instructional yoga video, Johnson introduces audiences to the purpose of the exercises. The activity is one of low stakes, which she describes as accessible to anyone, “I

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<sup>26</sup> This artwork is durational in nature and can be viewed in its entirety online. See Works Cited for further information.

thought you might like to see some exercises for knowing your place. What's great about these exercises is you don't need any special equipment or special outfit. You can practice in whatever you have on, wherever you are." As the video progresses Johnson's narrative instructions fade in and out, offering both straightforward and encouraging descriptions and demonstrations of the activities that she is asking viewers to participate in. However, as in Beam's work, the literal interpretation of the video's title differs from the symbolic meaning, which she reveals as the video progresses. Inlaid within the verbiage and tone of the instructional video, which might be associated with a sense of calmness, Johnson inserts directions for questioning other possible meanings:

To start turn your head to the right, then to the left. Be sure to look over each shoulder. Look up, and down. Pay attention to your surroundings as you practice. Assess the distance to any doors or window you might use for escape. Notice obstacles, hiding places, and potential threats. Notice what you can throw, and what can be thrown at you. Continue to breathe, and keep your shoulders relaxed.

Knowing your place involves an awareness of the possible need for escape or places to hide, or that obstacles and threats represent likely, if not inherent, qualities of the place in which you are located. This awareness shifts the meaning of Johnson's instructional video away from a literal one and toward defensive strategies for existing on dangerous terrain. Viewers become increasingly aware that knowing your place is not as simple as merely studying where you stand; it is also a matter of preparing for impending danger. How these instructions relate to Indigenous political presence becomes clear in the subjects of the other videos in Johnson's *Exorcising*

*America* series, which similarly address the ways in which Indigenous people's actions are forced to fit within liberal definitions of permissibility. Other works from this same series, such as *Water Exercises*, draw inspiration from the contamination of water and land by extractive industries and relate to the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was resisted beginning in 2016 by the Standing Rock Sioux and other allied Nations and groups from around the world.

Figure 29 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was a video still from artist Merritt Johnson's *Knowing Your Place*.

Figure 12

With such contexts in mind, it becomes clear that the need to know one's place as an Indigenous person relates to competing visions of land use and Indigenous rights. The meaning of the work expands to include a studied approach to understanding and articulating the perspective of Indigenous political presence in the face of powerful forces that challenge both the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous political knowledge – not in the interests of Indigenous people or Indigenous lands, but in the interests of maintaining and growing the scope and power

of Western and settler nations' economies and industries. What Johnson's work illustrates is that knowing one's place is not a matter of preparing for the possibility of a challenge to Indigenous political presence, but to be ready to articulate where you stand, and to be prepared to do so with integrity when this challenge inevitably arises. In the video, Johnson encourages audiences to practice because, "[y]ou will need to know everything when you are challenged about your place." Her instructions warn of the ways in which the progress narratives of liberal thought routinely undermine Indigenous rights and responsibilities to the land. The negation of Indigenous rights and lands represents a powerful vestige of liberal thought that positions the privileges of the liberal subject over and above the lives of Indigenous peoples and the health of all our relations, including to the land.

Although the activities of the water protectors at Standing Rock, who are referenced in Johnson's video *Water Exercises*, were peaceful and grounded in prayer, widespread perceptions of them as violent can be inferred from the rationalization of the violent force used against them by law enforcement in the form of rubber bullets, tear gas, and pepper spray. This perception of Indigenous political presence as a threat is something that Johnson describes in *Knowing Your Place*:

Now bring your ear to the ground. This practice provides a nice neck stretch after having your nose to the ground. It has the added benefit of being non-threatening and romantic. When your place is in question or you feel uncertain of your safety, dropping an ear to the ground is a great way to buy some time.

Johnson's directives for appearing non-threatening and romantic relate to the problematic association of Indigenous people with a time before modernity, which I describe in Chapters 3 and 4. Comanche curator Paul Chaat Smith points out that romanticizing Indigenous people

continues to preclude a meaningful engagement with Indigenous people as people (Smith 2009, 18). The history of this practice is linked to the racialization and dehumanizing of Indigenous people throughout the history of liberal modernity, where justifications for conquest emerged from and facilitated practices and policies that placed Indigenous peoples into positions of inferiority. In this segment of the video however, Johnson (perhaps sarcastically) encourages audiences to play into perceptions of romanticism as a method of evading perceptions of violence. In this way, she introduces “playing romantic” as a tactical manoeuvre meant to diminish the appearance of Indigenous political presence as hostile or violent, especially in situations where the safety of people who stand for Indigenous political presence is of concern.

Through the format of an instructional video, Johnson provides audiences with an understanding of the experience of being situated as an Indigenous person within a social context that has historically constrained experiences and expressions of political knowledge. For Indigenous people, the video operates as a representation of the ways in which we are placed as subjects of a liberal Western order, and describes the ways that this placing continues to impact our lives. It is a call to praxis, showing the ability of Indigenous political presence to circumvent the strategies of liberal thought that seek to reduce the contributions of Indigenous knowledge and values when they are perceived as a threat to liberal privilege. For non-Indigenous people, it offers a temporary empathetic framework within which to begin to understand the experience of being Indigenous within a social order that has always intended to erase and supplant Indigenous presence. Whether as a representation of Indigenous experience or as a framework for growing an understanding of what this experience might feel like for Indigenous people today, the artwork enlists audiences in an act of recasting perceptions of Indigenous political presence.

The idea that Indigenous political presence represents a form of violence helps to ensure

the primacy of liberal thought, which persists throughout Western institutions that measure and define value and progress in contemporary North American society. Both Beam and Johnson's artworks use performative gestures to demonstrate how the perceived violence of Indigenous political presence stems from beliefs that have unjustly undervalued Indigenous knowledge and rights. In doing so, they offer spaces to enlist others in a project of embodying acts of destruction, not as threats to people but as alterations to the privileges that support the liberal subject's continued supremacy.

### **Threatening History**

Such acts of destruction may be misconstrued when revered institutions or, for example, history, which has been written from the perspectives of white European settlers, are the subjects in question. Thanksgiving represents an historical institution that continues to pose problems for Indigenous people because it perpetuates the myth of peaceful settlement. In 2014, Indigenous DJ collective A Tribe Called Red released a track titled "Burn Your Village to the Ground" (figure 30) that disturbs the narrative tied to Thanksgiving in which pilgrims and Indigenous share peaceably in the bounty of the land.<sup>27</sup> Their intervention into this narrative re-envisioned this historical event in ways that challenge versions of the story that continue to occlude the violence perpetrated against Indigenous people at that time and ever since.

This song samples from popular culture in a way that playfully challenge narratives of liberal privilege at their site of colonial origin in North America. The song takes inspiration from a scene in the film *Addams Family Values* (1993) in which Wednesday Addams, a precocious

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<sup>27</sup> This song is available for listening through A Tribe Called Red's YouTube channel. See

Works Cited for further information.



and morose young child from an equally morose family, is acting in a Thanksgiving play. Wednesday plays an “Indian,” indicated by her buckskin costume and the headband around her forehead in which a feather is perched so as to stand upright at the back of her head. The play begins according to the scripted narrative: Wednesday joins another girl named Sarah Miller on stage, who is dressed as a pilgrim, to whom she offers a turkey for the dinner feast. Sarah accepts the turkey, bemused by the gesture of goodwill that challenges her preconceptions about Indigenous people. Unwilling to accept the errors of her prejudice, Miller says, “Why you are as civilized as we, except we wear shoes and have last names,” to which the largely non-racialized audience responds with a good chuckle. Wednesday Addams is then offered a seat at the Thanksgiving table, but she gestures for her fellow Indians to stop and begins an off-script monologue.

We cannot break bread with you.

You have taken the land which is rightfully ours. Years from now my people will be forced to live in mobile homes on reservations. Your people will wear cardigans and drink highballs.

We will sell our bracelets by the roadsides. You will play golf and enjoy hot hors d’oeuvres.

My people will have pain and degradation. Your people will have stick shifts. The gods of my tribe have spoken. They have said, “Do not trust the pilgrims – especially Sarah Miller.”

And for all these reasons, I have decided to scalp you, and burn your village to the ground (*Addams Family Values* 1993).

At this point in the movie Wednesday directs those behind her to attack. The set, its cast,

and the audience members soon find themselves involved in a version of history turned upside down when the youths, dressed as Indians, transform the scene to reclaim the historical narrative. Indigenous people are the victors and the pains of colonization are successfully sidestepped. Although the scene relies upon the familiar romantic trope of the Indian, the film's subversion of the common understanding of how North America came to be anything other than the wastelands inhabited by inefficient savages articulated by early liberal social contract theorists such as John Locke describes a counter-narrative supportive of Indigenous political presence and seldom reflected in mainstream representations. Although it portrays a dramatic event, the scene is light-hearted and funny at the expense, not of Indigenous people but of all those who seem content to replicate the violence that the story of Thanksgiving occludes.

Figure 30 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was album art for Tribe Called Red's single *Burn Your Village to the Ground*.

Figure 13

To construct the song “Burn Your Village to the Ground,” A Tribe Called Red sampled directly from Wednesday’s monologue, leaving out only the named reference to her adversary, Sarah Miller. They released the song a week before Thanksgiving Day in the United States in 2014 in a gesture that fuelled critical anti-Thanksgiving sentiments, likely due in part to the potential to read Wednesday’s monologue as an act of aggression towards the institution that Thanksgiving has come to represent. The overall tone of the track is one of drama and impact, building through a crescendo of electronic and physical drum beats that progressively quicken in pace and intensity.

Because the story of Thanksgiving is so revered in Western culture, Wednesday Addams’s speech in *Addams Family Values* confronts the expectation that a young, non-Indigenous child might have something to say about the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people. Through the subversion of normalized attitudes, this monologue offers a challenge to the liberal subject, who has a direct investment in the myth of peaceful settlement. The counter-narrative offered by this subversion replicates the acts of pillage and warfare that have historically been aimed at Indigenous people. A Tribe Called Red’s sampling of Wednesday’s speech makes palpable the types of colonial violence that Indigenous people have been subject to since first contact. The implications are perhaps frightening because it is not clear whether the sampling references a joke or reality. By creating disharmony in the reading of historical narratives that support the privileges of the liberal subject, A Tribe Called Red creates an opportunity to recognize and process how these privileges are actually tied to feelings of comfort, and to celebrate through dance acts of critical re-evaluation.

### **Denying Comfortable Points of Reference**

Like historical narratives written from the perspective of white European colonizers, contemporary images of expressions of Indigenous political presence that the public receive in print media or television news provide incomplete, biased, and erroneous representations that either favour or defer to settler notions of justice and rights. In this sense, it is not unusual in North America to see images of Indigenous people defending their lands and communities without adequate context and knowledge to help explain the necessity for their demonstrations. The result is complacency with the images and the messages they obfuscate: that Indigenous political presence represents an act of disruption and a threat to the state of liberality. Fallon Simard's *Continuous Resistance Remix* (figure 31) draws upon existing video and audio footage to disrupt such images.

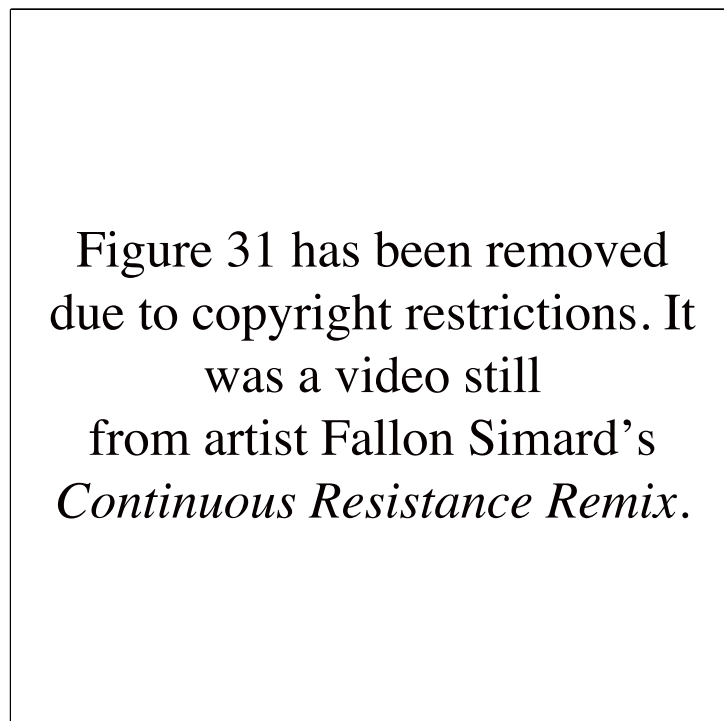


Figure 14

To create this work, the artist sourced clips from coverage of events such as Idle No More rallies and the 2013 blockade at Elsipogtog First Nation, as well as archival footage of residential schools and other government propaganda.<sup>28</sup> The artist assembled the video by cutting single frames out of individual video clips and remixing them into a larger five-minute video work (Simard 2017). Each frame is placed side-by-side without transitions, such that when the clips are played back they appear to begin and end rapidly without any apparent relationship between one and the next. A sampling of audio tracks from these events is also present, and these start and stop periodically, although not in a way that necessarily links to the images. The resulting work presents a frenetic assemblage of sight and sound that refuses any form of linear narrative that might have been apparent in the original video clips.

If the liberal subject perceives threats to its privileges as acts of violence, then Simard's selection of video clips from various sites of resource extraction could be said to represent this threat. Road blockades feature prominently, and the sights and sounds of confrontation between various stakeholders appear throughout the five-minute video. The content speaks to demonstrations of Indigenous political presence that threaten the privileges of the liberal subject, such as the right to live and work upon Turtle Island without considering the violent and brutal histories of colonialism that secured the settler state's claim to the land. Because the work presents the very events that Borrows refers to when he discusses the actions of Indigenous people that serve to ingrain hostility, it is possible to read this artwork as an expression of violence against Western liberal frameworks. Simard's editing style, however, presents the images in a way that destabilizes the liberal subject's investment in narratives of rights and

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<sup>28</sup> This artwork is durational in nature and can be viewed in its entirety online. See Works Cited for further information.

belonging. The potential to read this artwork as a violent threat to liberal subjectivity is therefore twofold within the artwork: it is apparent in the privileging of specific images that are easily coded with the language of illiberality, as well as in the denial of narratives that assist in making sense of these images within the framework of liberal permissibility.

The bombardment of disjointed and sometimes strobing images may also elicit a type of physical discomfort that could compound the disorientation prompted by the lack of a linear narrative, particularly one that has reassuring qualities for the liberal subject. Returning to Fanon's idea that decolonization operates as a program of disorder (2004, 36), we can consider how Simard's choice of content and editing could be said to cultivate a kind of discomfort as a method of dislodging narratives that assuage and comfort the liberal subject. The result is a program of disorder, one in which it is difficult to tell up from down and leaves out the familiar interpretations of these events. Another interpretation highlights how Simard's editing reveals the reliance of the liberal subject on these narratives. The artwork illustrates the necessity of Indigenous political presence as a point of deliberate disjuncture from the normalized operations of liberal thought upon Indigenous lands. It shows that disorder can create catalytic processes, which Hargreaves and Jefferess describe as a way through to another way of seeing (2016, 209). By taking the raw material of news coverage and other historical documentation of atrocities committed against Indigenous bodies and relationships to the land and reconfiguring them into a single video, Simard instigates the disorder that can help to create new frames of reference upon which new social relations can be built.

## Conclusion

The artworks I have introduced in this chapter reveal the potential for perceptions of violence to arise when the privileges of the liberal subject are threatened. Although these artworks may be perceived as violent affronts to these privileges, it is not my intent to suggest that these artists seek to instigate violence or unnecessary conflict. Rather, by illustrating acts of violence that have been perpetrated against Indigenous people since first contact, they name violence and begin to cultivate strategies through which audiences may also participate in this act of naming. Through different forms of visual representation, these artists provide an opportunity for viewers to observe how Indigenous political presence might be perceived as acts of violence in ways that puncture the social construction of “normal” life in North America. These are the comfortable narratives that the liberal subject relies upon, and that the artists in this chapter deny.

Through their works, these artists illustrate the impact that colonial violence has had upon Indigenous people, and this impact is made tangible by the condition of discomfort elicited in different ways by each of the artworks in question. These are not new acts of violence; they belong to a history of violent actions that have been thrust upon Indigenous people and rationalized through the various means outlined in Chapter 2. To recognize Indigenous political presence as violence is to misconstrue the potential for Indigenous thought, to continue to subsume it to the rubric of liberal modernity. In this chapter I have shown how viewing Indigenous political presence as violence against the liberal order fails to attend to histories of colonialism, which include the importation and replication of European knowledge based in liberal thought. Ultimately, this analysis is offered in the interest of moving toward a greater understanding of the conditions that lead to misunderstandings of Indigenous political presence. This is a gesture that has the potential to open up possibilities for greater understanding between

Indigenous people and all people, to create new pathways for relating to one another and to the land on Turtle Island.



## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

It's a nation with racism,  
here since the start of it.

Hard to let go  
'cause its carved in the heart of it.

Relation to the land  
and arise we're a part of it.

Roots where I stand,  
I could never depart from it.

(Sumner 2016)

### Reflection

This analysis of artworks that challenge Western liberal frameworks for making sense of land and people have attended to the research question that I set out to investigate, which was: Where do the perceptions of Indigenous political presence in contemporary North American society derive, and how does this both impact how we think about art by Indigenous artists which provide a challenge to normative conceptions of history and belonging in this space? I have positioned these artworks as antagonists to such perceptions, showing the opportunities that they provide for creating generative and challenging sites for knowledge production and exchange.

This dissertation is my contribution to the study of negative perceptions surrounding expressions of Indigenous political presence in North America from my perspective as an Indigenous artist, curator, and writer. I not only identify some of the sources of these perceptions but also consider how art writing, which engages with a history of philosophy and representation, can participate in creating more just pathways toward peaceful relations upon Turtle Island. The research grew out of my own lived experience as well as scholarly research into the ways in which the full expression of Indigenous political thought has been, and continues to be, limited by normalized narratives of Western thought. Before coming to York University my interest in this topic was kindled by my work in the arts, where I observed that the space being made for Indigenous art continues to provide only limited resources for understanding Indigenous artists' contributions because of the continued dominance of Western-normative frames of reference. I also noticed that there are many artists whose practices over many years have addressed perceptions facing Indigenous political knowledge. Throughout the course of my studies, the urgency of this research grew alongside the increasing pressure that the actions of Idle No More and various demonstrations throughout Canada and the United States have placed upon the broader public to grow its understanding of Indigenous rights and to contribute to the creation of more just social relations upon Turtle Island. The understanding of Indigenous political knowledge that I have gained from my family, which I outline in the Foreword, have influenced my observations of these professional and personal encounters with goings-on in the world. Through this path of research, I have worked to address the urgency to understand just what it is that continues to preclude meaningful engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when it comes to issues of rights and belonging.

One way to address this need is through the analysis of artworks that challenge perceptions and encourage positive change. The artworks examined here help to critically reframe recent trends toward inclusion, reconciliation and a greater intelligibility of Indigenous thought. Throughout this dissertation I have been guided by theory and critical frameworks that help to explain the history of thought surrounding the perception of Indigenous political presence as hostile, anti-state, or anti-progress.

### **Evaluation of the Process**

I have approached this research from my own perspective, and from knowledge stemming from my family relationships and my professional role as an artist and curator. My interests lie primarily in demonstrating the significance of understanding the ways in which Indigenous political presence is rendered inherently violent within a liberal framework. Uncovering this knowledge has been a matter of identifying the histories at play, understanding the values which continue to influence these perceptions in the contemporary moment, and demonstrating how the threat that Indigenous people are said to represent stems from erroneous and problematic origins.

To begin, I conducted extensive research into liberal thought as a form of Western thinking that has very particular origins and persistent implications in the present. I then reflected on artworks I had seen in the past, as well as my own past curatorial projects. I brought this understanding to more recent artworks I witnessed during the process of writing this dissertation, which required some unexpected but necessary shifts in the direction of my writing. For example, I finished writing during Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> year as a nation, which saw artworks produced that responded to this narrative. These became integral to my analysis. To better understand how

these artworks contributed to the discussion, I researched the context of their production and exhibition, specifically considering how they operate as sites for engaging audiences in conversations about the occupation of shared space in the present moment. To understand the premise and intentions that prompted the creation of these artworks, I read texts and listened to artist presentations. In some cases I spoke with the artists directly where it was necessary to grow my understanding of their intentions for these artworks. By engaging in a process that drew on both archival knowledge and firsthand information, I broadened my interpretation and expanded my analysis of the relationship between art and political thought.

### **Outcomes of the Research**

To better comprehend the problem at hand, I drew upon the work of critical race scholars who have demonstrated the relationship between liberal modernity, which represents a particular set of values that influence social relations, and race (Anderson 2007; Goldberg 1993, 2015). I focused on the ways in which ideas of race and liberalism developed simultaneously (Goldberg 1993, 4), and how racial thought has long contributed to determinations of human worth while denying the liberal rewards of equality to racialized peoples, including Indigenous people. As a dominant and taken-for-granted political philosophy, liberalism offers a strange lens through which to view Indigenous political presence, because it is predisposed to undermine and devalue these contributions. In analyzing this literature in relation to recent scholarship on the politics of recognition in Canada, I have aligned myself with the work of other scholars who identify the need to question liberal thought (Cardinal 1969; Turner 2006) as a framework for understanding conceptions of justice that privilege liberal subjects. In contexts of “recognition,” Indigenous people are not recognized as Indigenous people, but only as formerly maligned subjects now

granted entry into the state of freedom and equality as defined by liberal thought. From this vantage point, it is possible to see how recognition fails to account for liberal thought, which has always been a fiction dispensing the label of race to people for the express purpose of creating division, distinction, and hierarchy. The mere act of inclusion within a recognition framework thus neglects to challenge this history, and fails to create meaningful spaces for other ways of looking at the world. This is a problem that impacts Indigenous artists when the intelligibility of their perspectives remains sheathed in the logics of a Western liberal point of reference. This issue is the focus of Chapter 2, which I carry forward into my analysis of artworks in subsequent chapters.

The works I examine contribute to a process of unmasking histories of racial liberal modernity, which invisibly supports the continued denigration of Indigenous voices within liberal democracy. In Chapter 3, I looked at the work of two artists – Bonnie Devine and Kent Monkman – who each contribute to the study of the ways in which Indigenous people have always been mapped into positions of inferiority by liberal colonial values. I concluded that these artists create sites for viewing publics to engage critically with historical narratives that routinely undermine Indigenous peoples' presence and history upon Turtle Island. These artists both create accessible avenues for audiences to assess and process the difficult knowledge that liberal thought is not a neutral or natural occurrence but a deeply rooted philosophical investment that pervades contemporary space in, for example, narratives of conquest.

In Chapter 4, I turned to the work of Kade Twist, Christian Chapman, the Ogimaa Mikana Project, and Cheryl L'Hirondelle. I described the contributions these artists have made to both identifying and challenging the liberal subject – the symbolic container of liberal values and the safeguard of liberal morality in contemporary times. Here, I introduced the idea of good and

bad liberals, where the former includes white, European, male bodies for which equality and liberty have always been secure as inherent rights. And I discussed Indigenous political presence as an example of the latter, where expressions of Indigenous thought come to be associated with states of illiberality or transgressions upon the liberties of good liberals. The selected artworks in this chapter problematize perceptions of Indigenous political presence by inviting audiences to participate in processes of growing new knowledge about social relations formed from within Indigenous thought.

Together, these two chapters narrow in on practices that disturb the liberal consciousness by denaturalizing historical narratives of conquest and challenging associations of Indigenous political presence with states of illiberality. The analysis that I put forward stems from the idea that art practice offers the generative site through which to learn about the tendency to view Indigenous peoples' expressions of political knowledge in this way, while also providing opportunities for audiences and artists to collaborate and create new forms of knowledge based in Indigenous thought. In Chapter 5, I turned back to the notion of Indigenous political presence as inherently aggressive or threatening to ideas of progress and the settler state. Such perceptions are not easily reconfigured, especially when the threat that Indigenous political presence represents has not been adequately described. To respond to this problem, I considered the ways in which Indigenous political presence has come to represent a threat to the liberal subject, suggesting the importance of critically differentiating between threats to rights and to privileges. To better understand this difference, I analyzed works by Carl Beam, Merritt Johnson, *A Tribe Called Red*, and Fallon Simard. I argued that viewing these works only as expressions of violence directed at the liberal subject is enabled by an uncritical acceptance of liberal privilege, which historically has come at the expense of the rights of all racialized people. Moreover,

assertions of Indigenous land and the sui generis rights of Indigenous people are uniquely impacted by this lack of criticality, especially when the ways that violence has always been (and in many ways continues to be) directed at Indigenous people is left conspicuously unaddressed. The result of this discussion is an interpretive framework that promises a better understanding the problem of perception facing Indigenous political presence, illustrated by the work of these artists.

In each of these chapters, the artist whose work I focus on highlights the importance of refuting historical narratives that position Indigenous people as the willing subjects of liberal history. The works offer insight into the ways that we might identify the liberal subject as a symbolic container of the values and morals that have historically held unjust power and authority over Indigenous people. In order to move toward more just social relations, perceptions of violence must be recast as the product of liberal thought, which mistakes its privileges for rights in the face of Indigenous political presence. Although this analysis is steered by my own research in theory and philosophy, I consider these artworks not only as expressions of Indigenous political presence in and of themselves, but also as cultural texts leading the kinds of critical conversations that I aimed to participate in with this research. They have helped me to understand the capacity of this approach to dispel negative perceptions of Indigenous political knowledge. Although these artists may not be working collectively towards this objective, their artworks cohere in this subject, which I help to mobilize in new ways through this dissertation.

### **Implications of the Research**

I have emerged from my research with a renewed appreciation for the work of Indigenous people, whose political expression remains a site of derision and ignorance in contemporary

society. I have contributed to a better understanding of the sources of perceptions and the racial mechanisms that continue to support practices of viewing and characterizing Indigenous peoples' actions. By describing these sources and mechanisms in the text of this dissertation, I contribute to ongoing dialogue how contemporary liberal thought continues to breed the conditions in which Indigenous thought is challenged, and barriers continue to stand in the way of Indigenous communities and their expression of knowledge despite the profound resilience of Indigenous people in the face of colonial violence. Through an analysis of the artworks included here, I hope to recast perceptions of Indigenous political presence as something other than threatening acts of violence.

This assessment of art in the context of a contemporary political moment in North America marked by both discourses of reconciliation and examples of continued colonial violence directed at Indigenous bodies, provides an opportunity to gauge the lack of success of recent attempts at liberal inclusion. What I offer in this dissertation is a framework for viewing the production and exhibition of art within a broader conversation about the political responsibility of settler peoples and institutions to negotiate and reframe their views on Indigenous people and their rights and responsibilities in the land now known as Canada.

As long as the problem of perception facing Indigenous political presence persists, there will remain a need to critically destabilize the existing structures that limit Indigenous people's expressions of political knowledge and to contribute to projects that, in their place, seek the constitution of more just social relations. What this dissertation contributes to these ongoing projects is a framework that understands the ongoing problem as deeply rooted within a philosophical legacy, a legacy that cannot be removed merely through ameliorative strategies that remain tied to dominant Western thought.



## **Contributions to the Field**

As an interdisciplinary project, this dissertation makes contributions to many interrelated fields, strengthening existing disciplinary relationships and forging others anew. As doctoral research within the Department of Social and Political Thought at York University this dissertation creates links between Western philosophy, critical race scholarship, and Indigenous thought. These areas of study represent sites of contribution within social and political thought however, the relationships which I have highlighted between these forms of knowledge sheds new light on the importance of further interdisciplinary investigation. I would like to see further research in this area develop, for instance, to show how Indigenous thought can help to understand the history of colonialism within Western thought. This is, as the late John Trudell has written, a matter of both understanding ourselves as Indigenous people and using this as a means of garnering an understanding of Western thinking. The act of knowing is a reversal of the common historical narrative that has sought to comprehend Indigenous experiences from a Eurocentric point of view, while failing to recognize this worldview as anything other than normal. The dissertation participates in a broader project that is concerned with disrupting these forms of knowledge, and creating new pathways to build knowledge from within Indigenous thought. Considering that Indigenous peoples are contemporary peoples who are imbricated within global systems, it is even more pressing to undertake research that situates Indigenous peoples as contemporary thinkers. This dissertation makes this assertion, and holds space for others to engage in similar kinds of analysis within social and political thought.

The dissertation also makes contributions in the area of Indigenous Studies, which I understand is itself an interdisciplinary site of knowledge-production. This is not unlike the work that I lend to social and political thought, as it is my understanding that knowledge that is

produced through Indigenous studies makes contributions that grant critical space for Indigenous voices. As a new faculty member in an art and design college who teaches Indigenous studies, I am learning through my students about the vast potential for unlearning histories that continue to marginalize and denigrate racialized peoples. I see this dissertation as a contribution to Indigenous studies by its interruption of ideas of history and the present that have that have failed to adequately consider and represent Indigenous experiences. I take the ideas brought forward by this dissertation with me into the classroom where I teach students about the ways that Indigenous peoples have been framed by Western thought, and how this continues to manifest in social and political relations today. These area ideas that I continue to refine in pedagogical spaces, and that have opened up opportunities for me to consider the role of Indigenous studies within an art and design setting.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the methodology which I have undertaken to complete this study drew heavily from my past and present experiences as a curator. This approach has allowed me to experiment with ideas in art in an academic context. Here I have been able to deepen my research while continuing to practice a curatorial methodology. That is to say, I have been able to work closely with artworks and the ideas that they evoke in their content and the contexts in which they are presented and received. Using an artist-curator approach to research I have been able to begin my analysis from the artworks themselves, bringing in research to support the reading and interpretation of these works against the context of contemporary liberal society. As a core component of my research methodology, a curatorial approach has been integral to the way in which this knowledge was formed and the way it has been presented in this dissertation with the three analytical chapters. This approach, as I have highlighted in Chapter 1, is informed simultaneously by my training and knowledge of curatorial practice as it has

extended from the European tradition as well as by my experience as an Indigenous person. While there are ways in which these forms of knowledge could be said to be at odds with one another, I tend to think about them creating a type of generative tension within which I practice. Despite the problematic histories of representation involving Indigenous peoples that are contained within the history of curatorial thinking, I am not concerned by my participation within this structure. Rather, I consider how Indigenous curatorial practices, which I define for myself in Chapter 1, can shift and modify these spaces and the beliefs that they contain.

Even though this is my intention, I sometimes take for granted the importance of these shifts. A couple of weeks ago I took my nephew to an exhibition of virtual reality pieces by Indigenous artists that had been organized by the Initiative for Indigenous Futures at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. I was moved by the way in which he was able to relate to this work, and to see himself reflected in these representations modeled in digital technology. I witnessed my nephew participating in the exhibition and I thought about how he might be imagining his own Indigenous present and future. I am beyond excited to learn from him in the years to come about how he will make sense of these ideas of Indigenous futures in his own way. Visiting the exhibition was a brief moment in our lives, and yet I saw it catalyze something by the excitement that he had retelling this experience to his dad (my brother) later that evening. As a curator I think about how representations might be a part of imagining futures for my family where we feel proud and respected as Indigenous people. This work speaks to the field of curatorial studies, and shares with it community-driven motivations for looking at artistic representation.

### **Further Research Related to the Dissertation**

My next step will be to bring the results of my analysis into my curatorial practice through the cultivation of new research creation projects that deliberately engage with audiences to identify, confront, and assess the legacies of liberal modernity and its impact upon public perceptions of Indigenous political presence. The research contained within this dissertation positions artworks as sites of a consensual exchange of ideas, that confront narratives of history and place promoted by settler states and bolstered by traditions of liberal thought. In this dissertation I have focused upon the intentions of artists, and an assessment of the potential for their work to pose particular kinds of conversations within Turtle Island. It remains to measure the responses and levels of engagement of the audience members who visit and view these works. The latter represents another project, one which I see growing out of this dissertation as a research-creation opportunity in curation. The research in this dissertation creates space for this new line of inquiry through curatorial projects that seek public engagement, particularly in public spaces where audiences that may not otherwise frequent galleries might encounter the work.

The first opportunity that I will have to work with these ideas again in my curatorial practice will be with the upcoming exhibition *On Being Illiberal* that will be hosted at Prefix Gallery in October 2018. The exhibition draws upon the research included in this dissertation to question the seemingly benevolent quality of current settler government moves in Canada and the United States while Indigenous political thought continues to be marginalized and at times rendered the enemy by those same governments and the big business interests that they represent. Taking cues from some of the conclusions offered by my analysis in Chapter 5, this exhibition problematizes the ways in which Indigenous political thought has been misconstrued as the actions of illiberal subjects when they threaten the privileges of the liberal subject. At the

time of writing this conclusion the list of artists will have been near to confirmed. The artworks will take the form of photo- and video-based works, with some digital installations using objects that involve performance and interactivity.

Although this exhibition is still in the development stages, I would like to share my aspirations for the show insofar as it relates to the outcomes of the dissertation research and my ideas for addressing audience engagement through exhibition design. One of the concerns that this dissertation describes is the difficulty that the liberal subject has with engaging ideas that threaten its privileges within the so-called “normal” operations of Western liberal society. In this dissertation I am careful not to personify the liberal subject as any particular individual. Liberal thought is a widely apparent and accepted mode of engaging with the world, and in this sense it is not necessarily as simple as labeling some people liberal subject where others are safely outside of this definition. Taking this analysis into my practice I am interested to consider the investments that many contemporary peoples have with this system of knowledge. While I think that it is important to disrupt the thinking that allows Indigenous peoples’ political thought to be easily written off, I also strongly feel that it is important to take care of all people. As a curator I want to be a part of sharing difficult knowledge without alienating audiences.

The artworks that I have selected at this early stage in the exhibition planning are challenging pieces. They present narratives that might easily disturb and threaten the sensibilities of the liberal subject. As I note in Chapter 5, this is related to the idea of chaos that Fanon describes as necessary for decolonization to take place (2004, 36). I have selected these works for this reason. However, in presenting these works I am not interested cultivating a context for receiving this work that might push audiences away from a sustained engagement with the ideas. Rather, it is my curatorial intent to find strategies that will serve to engage audiences in a

consideration of the distinction between privileges and rights, and how this understanding might impact Indigenous peoples experiences and expressions. As a curator I will facilitate confrontations with difficult knowledge. Some strategies might include the use of curatorial text in the gallery space and the arrangement of works and furniture in a way that encourages long-term engagement. I will be producing a text for the exhibition that will be available to audiences in the gallery and possibly online in which I will explore the challenges that are apparent in the works. I am also hoping to explore public programming to involve the artists as well as others who can speak to the issues that are apparent within the works from other disciplinary perspectives. These other perspectives are integral as a method for broadening the opportunities that audiences will have to access the ideas which these artists are contending with in their work. I see my role in this exhibition as someone who is responsible for the care of these artworks, and the careful orchestration of conversations with unexpected audiences.

The research contained within this dissertation has looked specifically at the contributions of Indigenous artists to identify, diagnose, and propose resolutions to the problem of reception facing Indigenous political presence, there is also work by many non-Indigenous artists whose practices could also be said to contribute to this dialogue. While my decision to privilege Indigenous artists here remains an integral component of my analysis, I see great value in also hearing from non-Indigenous artists who bring their own subject-positions to the analysis of contemporary relations upon Turtle Island. These perspectives, in conversation with the work of Indigenous artists, will lend another layer of depth to the knowledge of how we have arrived in the present moment and where we intend to go as citizens of this land. I expect to explore these ideas further in future curatorial projects that I undertake.

In reflecting on the ideas put forward in this dissertation I have arrived at a synthesis of the research question and the answers which this research has led me to develop. The implications of this research are outlined in the above paragraphs to illustrate the new knowledge which this dissertation advances, while highlighting the contributions that I am making to a series of related interdisciplinary fields. I have identified further areas of research that will take this new knowledge and transform it into research-creation projects which apply and push the ideas that I have developed in this dissertation. I have highlighted how this research has been driven by an artist-curator approach to research, and this dissertation has brought me back to this practice-based form of knowledge production where I will continue to disseminate the information contained within these pages in new and dynamic projects.

As addressed in this dissertation, Indigenous people continue to live under conditions contained by the normative and acceptable standards and definitions of a liberal society, which creates hierarchies of profound injustice upon Indigenous lands. These conditions stem from the persistence of racial thought, which has evolved along a trajectory of dominant Western thought. My discussion has problematized the continued disregard of Indigenous peoples' political knowledge through a sustained analysis of the racialized knowledge that continues to influence Indigenous lives through institutions such as law, where justice is defined by liberal notions of social contract, liberty, and equality. By bringing this discussion into an analysis of artworks by Indigenous artists, I have illustrated how a history of liberal thought continues to inflect upon and inform the practices of many contemporary artists. Through their art practices, the artists studied here destabilize these histories and participate in the cultivation of spaces in which to imagine new modes of social relations led, not by liberal ideas of humanity, citizenship, and belonging, but by Indigenous thought rooted in our relationships with the land.

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Appendix A: Excerpt from John Trudell's poem "We Are The Halluci Nation," as spoken by Trudell on the first track of A Tribe Called Red's album *We Are the Halluci Nation* and transcribed by Suzanne Morrissette.

This text has been removed due to copyright restrictions. See Works Cited for directions to access these lyrics.

Appendix B: Excerpt from John Trudell's poem "We Are The Halluci Nation," as spoken by Trudell on the fourteenth track of A Tribe Called Red's album *We Are the Halluci Nation*, "ALie Nation," and transcribed by Suzanne Morrissette.

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Appendix C: Lyrics of Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Joseph Naytowhow's song *kitaskînanaw* (L'Hirondelle, nd).

This text has been removed due to copyright restrictions. See Works Cited for directions to access these lyrics.

Appendix D: Lyrics of Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Joseph Naytowhow's song *kitaskîkânaw* (L'Hirondelle, nd).

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