



Wounded Knee

Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance

January 12 – March 25, 2017
MCMASTER MUSEUM OF ART

UNAPOLOGETIC: ACTS OF SURVIVANCE

The contemporary Indian artist as documentarian/historian plays an important part in the social/political/cultural life of his community, re-writing history from the Native viewpoint and illustrating for posterity the present period. The “new” art is thus, beyond an object of aesthetic pleasure, an important socio-political document.¹

Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance presents selected works of critical acclaim from the 1980s by eleven foundational contemporary Indigenous artists: Carl Beam, Bob Boyer, Robert Houle, Gerald McMaster, Shelley Niro, Ron Noganosh, Jane Ash Poitras, Edward Poitras, Pierre Sioui, Jeff Thomas and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun.

The 1980s represented a marked turning point; Indigenous artists began to unapologetically emancipate themselves from established stereotypes and expectations of Indian art², expressing that Indian art was not only rooted in myths and legends, but that it was also about issues and ideas impacting contemporary Indigenous life. As Gerald McMaster notes, “the idea of using art to address political issues was not new,” as Alex Janvier had politicized his art a decade earlier by signing his paintings with his treaty number (287) as an act of defiance.³ Inspired by the protest activities of the American Indian Movement and the political-territorial and social organizing of Indigenous communities across Canada during the preceding decade, Indigenous artists emerging during the 1980s began to speak out more vocally against the lingering effects of colonialism and systemic social injustice affecting Indigenous communities, through art.

They provocatively declared that the lack of Indigenous representation in major arts institutions across Canada was symptomatic of a broader historical and ongoing indifference to Indigenous peoples. Harnessing postcolonial and postmodern discourse, they began to resist the bureaucratic and institutional status-quo by visually documenting the realities of contemporary Native life in Canada, exposing the intimate connection between the personal and the public struggles faced by Indigenous peoples.

Cover Image: **Edward Poitras**, *Small Matters* (detail), 1985.
Nails, wire, paper, instasign. 75.5 x 176 x 5 cm.

The Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern. Purchased 1989. © Remai Modern

In the late 1980s, Saulteaux artist and curator Robert Houle lamented that few cultural institutions afforded Indigenous artists the opportunity – or provided the exhibition space – to counter inaccurate and stereotypical ‘authentic Indian’ images: “somehow we are not allowed to come into the 20th century. We are not allowed to interpret our own reality, the way our communities respond to everyday life. We are regarded as living museum pieces. This is perpetuated by even the lost lavish, most knowledgeable, professional representations of our cultural heritage.”⁴

Acting in defiance of permission from the established art world, the artists in this exhibition – and many others of their generation⁵ – enACTed survivance by asserting Indigenous presence through their art. Survivance, a neologism created by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, is defined as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories...Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.”⁶

Employing humour, irony and satire, they achieved their subversive objective by creating powerful and provocative visual and verbal dialogues that directly challenged dominant notions and codifiers of *Indianness* perpetuated by museums, galleries and the media. In place of such romanticized representations of Indigenous peoples, they asserted counter-narratives that foreground Indigenous peoples’ right(s) to self-representation, self-determination and sovereignty.

Claiming spaces to (re-)present themselves with their own voices and stories, this ‘school’ of foundational contemporary Indigenous artists demonstrated tremendous wit, tenacity and resilience – peppered with just the right amount of Trickster practice – to keep curators and audiences’ on their toes.⁷

By embracing their inner Trickster, these artists committed acts of survivance. Trickster practice, or Trickster discourse, is an action – a doing, that it is open-ended, unfolding, evolving, incomplete, multi-vocal, and at times, equally as subtle as it is overt.⁸ When utilized in visual contexts, it challenges the viewer to consider alternative viewpoints and counter-narratives.

Never simply creating “art for art’s sake,” these artists were undeniably unapologetic in their creative resistance to the curatorial exclusion of Indigenous art.⁹

Referring to several of the artists in *Unapologetic*, Allan J. Ryan, author of the seminal text, *The Trickster Shift*, aptly points out that “these individuals...constitute a loose alliance of socially active, politically aware, and professionally trained individuals of roughly the same age, who...exhibited together, wrote about each other, lectured on one another, curated exhibitions for one another, and to varying degrees influenced one another.”¹⁰

Thus, their legacy cannot be measured solely by the number of retrospectives they’ve had or by awards they’ve received. Rather, their work should be measured by its resonance. As visual storytellers, their work stands as both evidence of and a means of cultural survival + resistance = survivance; a legacy in and of itself.

Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance acknowledges their critical role in paving the way for a new generation of Trickster Indigenous artists and curators today.

- By Rhéanne Chartrand
Aboriginal Curatorial Resident
McMaster Museum of Art

Description of works in *Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance*

*Numbers correspond to location of artwork on gallery floorplan located in the centerspread of this brochure.

1 **Shelley Niro**

The Rebel, 1987; reprinted 2016
hand-tinted photographic print
Collection of the artist

The Rebel portrays Niro's mother, June Chiquita Doxtator, playfully sprawled out over the trunk of an AMC Rebel. Her body language conveys a bold, cheeky confidence that stands in stark contrast to the colonial portraits of seemingly passive, stoic Indians, forever ingrained in the public's mind through the work of 19th Century photographer Edward S. Curtis. With *The Rebel*, Niro and her active subject challenge social expectations and normative behaviour – dictated by patriarchal gender roles – of Indigenous womyn. *The Rebel* demonstrates that she unapologetically *owns* who she is, regardless of her community's or society's perception and expectation of the Indigenous, female body. Moreover, as Allan J. Ryan notes, "*The Rebel* challenges prevailing definitions of beauty and femininity while foregrounding the debatable marketing strategy of using sexy women to sell sexy cars."¹¹

2 **Pierre Sioui**

Inside Look, 1985
serigraph on paper
Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

With *Inside Look*, Huron artist Pierre Sioui both honours and creates a direct connection to the 19th century Huron painter, Zacharie Vincent (1812-1886). By superimposing his own self-portrait within a triangle over that of Zacharie's own self-portrait, Sioui both embodies and carries forward the same bold sense of pride as an Indigenous person.

Sioui's artistic approach is not for the sake of nostalgia. Rather, he states "[for me], the context of the image is crucial...the artistic sense is important also, but the original meaning has to be there...the sensibility of its usage comes with intuition and integrity of purpose."¹² Serigraphy proved to be a logical choice for the personal and thought-provoking narratives Sioui wanted to explore, as it allowed for the layering of multiple sources of imagery of self, both literal and abstract. *Inside Look* was included in the 1988 exhibition *In the Shadow of the Sun*, curated by Gerald McMaster for the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History).

3 **Gerald McMaster**

In His Hands He's Got the Whole World, 1984
graphite on paper
McMichael Canadian Art Collection
Gift of the artist

In His Hands He's Got the Whole World portrays Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, the protagonist behind Canada's westward expansion in the late 19th century. MacDonald holds an orb in his hand, which represents his unyielding power to control the fate of those he governed, over a map of a grid system used by government land surveyors when plotting and (re-)assigning land. For Native and Métis communities residing on the Prairies, MacDonald represented the destruction of their ways of life and the forced removal from land they had seen as their own.

McMaster commits a powerful act of survivance with this work by directly pointing a finger at a prolific Canadian figure, who Canada venerates as a father of Confederation, for his role in stealing Indigenous lands.

In His Hands He's Got the Whole World was part of the 1985 exhibition, *Riel Remembered*, a solo exhibition of 16 works on paper by McMaster created on the occasion of the 100th commemoration of the Red River Rebellion by Louis Riel and the Métis, curated by Carol Podedworny for Thunder Bay Art Gallery. As a Plains Cree, McMaster utilized graphite on paper to emphasize the historicity of the subject matter as well as to express his personal relationship to the people and events depicted.

4 **Bob Boyer**

Custer Gets a History Lesson, 1987
oil over acrylic over chalk pastel on flannel blanket
Collection of the McMaster Museum of Art
Purchase, 2010

With *Custer Gets a History Lesson*, Boyer extends his examination of Native-white/settler relations and his powerful critique of negative colonial practices on Indigenous peoples, which began in earnest with earlier works on canvas such as *Little Big* (1982) and *Dancing with Green Blueberries* (1982), and his first blanket paintings, *A Smallpox Issue* (1983) and *A Government Blanket Policy* (1983).

Like these four works, *Custer Gets a History Lesson* references events surrounding the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, also referred to as

“Custer’s Last Stand,” wherein the combined forces of the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes defeated Custer’s regiment of the US Army. The title suggests that Custer, who died in battle, got his comeuppance, and that by extension, the viewer learns something – a history lesson – from his actions against Indigenous peoples.

The mirrored tipis in the center of the blanket are a recurring motif in Boyer’s blanket paintings and refer to Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty and spiritual beliefs. Juxtaposed with the inverted tipi shape in the top center, this work depicts the spiritual imbalance that settler/colonial society wrought on Indigenous communities and serves as a metaphor for a [their] world forever turned upside-down.¹³ The stepped motifs further allude to Plains cultural beliefs in a spiritual paradise or afterlife.¹⁴

Boyer’s works combine his keen and ironic sense of humour and his deep understanding of Plains iconography and spirituality. The titles become critical to understanding his works; however, their multiple meanings shift attention away from a simple literal reading of the works (sometimes resulting in ambiguity), but Boyer acknowledges that an Indigenous worldview enhances understanding and appreciation of his work.

5 Carl Beam

The Artist with Some of His Concerns, 1983

mixed media on paper

Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

During the 1980s, Beam’s already iconic imagery expanded to incorporate commentary on international events. Not shy to share his voice on political or social events, Beam created this work in response to the assassination of Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. In 1984, Elizabeth McLuhan curated *Altered Egos: The Multimedia Work of Carl Beam* for the Thunder Bay Art Gallery and described the work as “a summary piece with the central figure of the artist leaning on weaving batten flanked by his now familiar recurrent images. The Sadat assassination and a series of horse heads flank the artists on the left, an eagle’s head and eagle in flight on the right. The eagle, according to the artist, was perceived in Indian culture “as a messenger...a metaphor for the higher self...the God self, if you will [while] the image captures the artist in a state of becoming, a state of choice; the past (horse) and the present (Sadat’s death) weighing heavily against the artist’s attempts to grow, free himself (the alter ‘eagle’ on the right).”¹⁵

The Artist with Some of His Concerns would, a few years later, be included in a major exhibition curated by Gerald McMaster for the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) titled *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1988). This exhibition was intended to provide a contemporary complement to the now-infamous *The Spirit Sings* exhibition organized by the Glenbow Museum 1988. The two exhibitions were intended to travel together, however, following extensive criticism from inside and outside the museum world by Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices alike, they were toured separately.

6 Ron Noganosh

Shield for a Modern Warrior, or Concessions to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art, 1983

mixed media on leather

Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

When asked by art historian Ruth Philips “What is a shield for a modern Native person?”, Noganosh’s response was, “well, it’s alcohol.” He later admitted that he conceptualized the work after a night of hard drinking in Gatineau.¹⁶ Noganosh positions *Shield for a Modern Warrior* as a commentary on stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples. Both confounding as well as foregrounding expectations of “Indian Art”, he points out that he added the fringe, the feathers, and the beads primarily to appease white viewers, who, when looking at contemporary Indigenous art, would say “Where are the beads? Where are the feathers? Where is the leather?” so he said, “Okay, you want it, here it is.”¹⁷ Moreover, the work comments on the “drunken Indian” stereotype, revealing that too often we are quick to judge and far less quick to understand the trauma and negative experiences that lead many Indigenous people to “the drink.”

7 Ron Noganosh

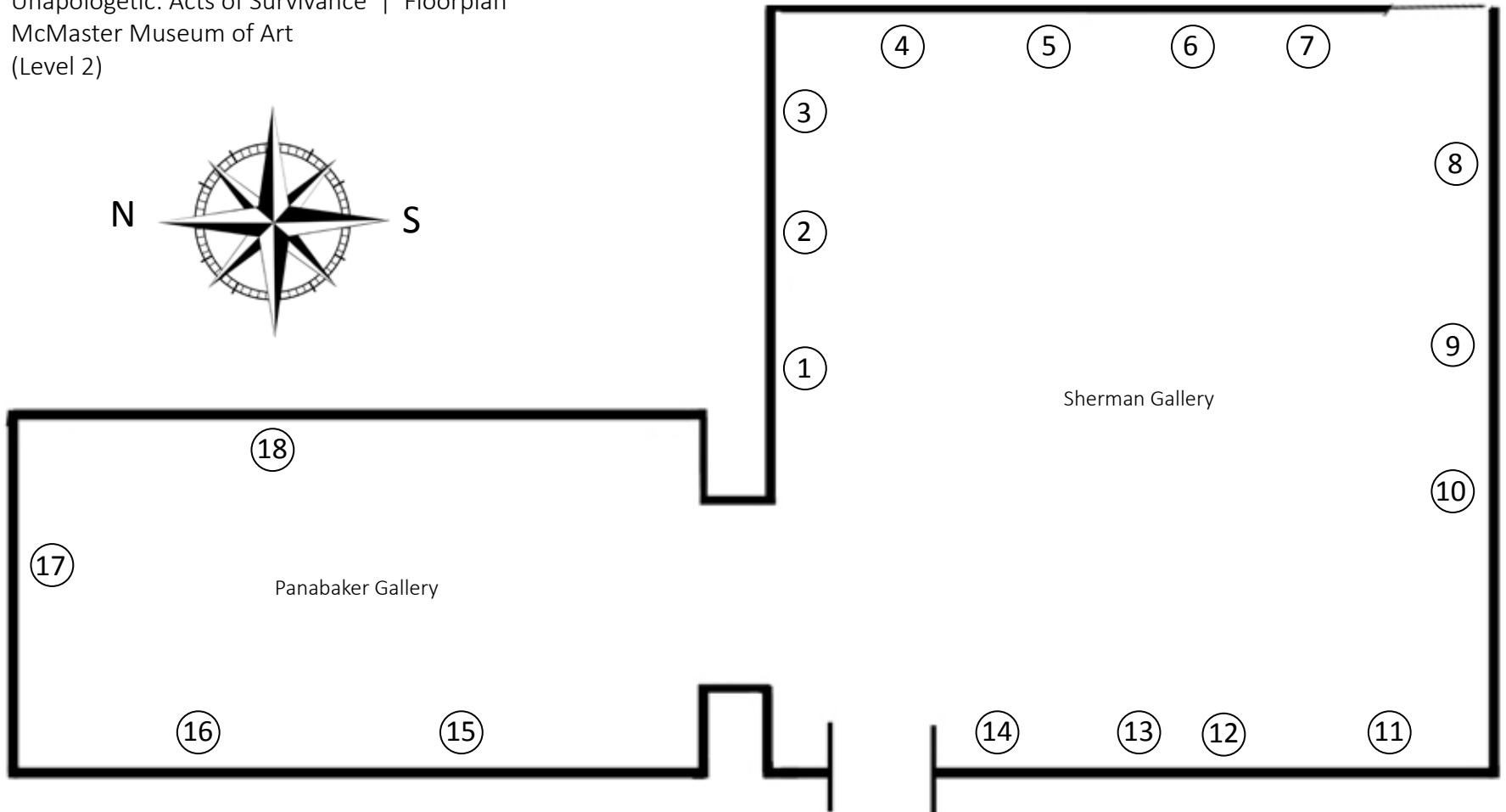
Invoice 1985, 1985

mixed media

Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

Noganosh indigenizes the accounting/transaction process by issuing an “Indian” invoice to reinforce what it is that is being acquired: *Shield for a Modern Warrior, or Concessions to Beads and Feathers in Indian Art*. Whether or not it was received as a legitimate invoice by staff members at INAC’s Aboriginal Art Centre is beside the point; *Invoice 1985* embodies Noganosh’s unwavering satirical humour and ironic wit that pervades much of his body of work.

Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance | Floorplan
McMaster Museum of Art
(Level 2)



8 **Bob Boyer**

Sun Dance Shield, 1980

mixed media on canvas

Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

Sun Dance Shield is a pivotal transitional work. Its loose abstract form suggest a shield, and it is one of his first works to incorporate geometric motifs such as triangles, pyramids, and arrows derived from traditional Northern Plains designs.¹⁸ Boyer's movement toward abstraction reveals his awareness of trends in western art at the time, but never at the expense of expressing his heritage. Abstraction for artists like Bob Boyer, Robert Houle, Carl Beam and many others, became a mechanism through which to break free of the traditionalist expectations of Indigenous art at the time, and instead, express their individuality as artists. In this way, it could be said that abstract expressionism became a 'shield' Indigenous artists utilized to battle stereotypes and expectations of Indigenous art that pervaded the larger art world at the time.

Sun Dance Shield was part of the ground-breaking exhibition, *New Work by a New Generation*, curated by Robert Houle and Bob Boyer for the MacKenzie Art Gallery in 1982.

9 **Jane Ash Poitras**

Shaman Never Die: Return to Your Ancestral Roots, 1989

mixed media (oil, paper, plastic, silver print) on canvas

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery

Acquired with funds from The Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc.

Throughout the late 80s and early 90s, Poitras made several works titled *Shaman Never Die*, however, each work explored a particular concern Poitras had with the world around her. *Shaman Never Die: Return to Your Ancestral Roots* is a powerful triptych that speaks to the viewer, emphasizing the power of language to paint a picture.

The left panel includes two prayers, one written in Cree syllabics, the other in English. Poitras' continuous use of Cree in her work is an act of survivance. It is subversive in that it conveys a message only certain viewers can decode, and it emphasizes the importance of the continuance of Indigenous languages in the reconstitution of cultural identity. Extending this dialogue, the central panel, using the colonizer's language, commands the viewer to "Preserve our Language and Culture." With this work, Poitras reveals that "language is understood not as a transparent means of communication but as a powerful determinant in the construction of identity."¹⁹

In the right panel, Poitras depicts the Lubicon Cree response to the Glenbow Museum's 1988 exhibition, *The Spirit Sings*. They boycotted the exhibition on the grounds that it not only portrayed Indigenous peoples as stuck in an ethnographic past, as relics/artifacts of cultures now extinct, but also, because the exhibition failed to consider current Indigenous struggles for cultural renewal and sovereignty. The Lubicon Lake Cree First Nation in Alberta were embroiled in an unsettled land claim dispute with the provincial and federal governments. Displaced from their traditional lands and suffering from significant health issues as a result of oil drilling throughout the 1970s, the announcement that one of the companies (Shell Oil) exploiting oil on their traditional lands was to be the major corporate sponsor for an exhibition celebrating the glories of early-contact Aboriginal cultures struck the Lubicon Cree "as the ultimate hypocrisy."²⁰ In the years, that followed, *The Spirit Sings* controversy would serve as the impetus for significant museological reform. The exhibition revealed that institutions, as vestiges of colonialism, are not spaces of unbiased scholarship, but are inherently and intimately involved in representational politics; museums and galleries are a reflection of the socio-cultural values of the dominant culture, and oftentimes, these values run contrary to the needs and objectives of contemporary Indigenous peoples.²¹

10 **Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun**

Redman! Dance on Sovereignty, Dance Me Outside Anywhere I Want, 1985

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

While this artwork was not part of a major exhibition of Indigenous art during the 1980s, *Redman!* is a reflection of and commentary on the identity politics of the decade. The struggle for self-determination and sovereignty are at the 'centre' of *Redman!*; the gaping hole in the figure's chest suggests the less than complete recognition of his identity as an autonomous First Nations citizen, and his continuing status as an involuntary ward of the federal government.

Exposed to Indigenous-governmental relations from an early age, Yuxweluptun observed and absorbed the subtle, subversive strategies employed by Native politicians when dealing with government bureaucrats, incorporating this dialogic tactic into his artistic practice.²² *Redman!* is one of many paintings in which Yuxweluptun has created verbal and visual dialogues that contest dominant colonial/government narratives and assert Indigenous perspective in its place.

11 **Gerald McMaster**

Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys, 1983
graphite on paper
Collection of the artist

This large graphite on paper drawing is based on a photograph of fellow Saskatchewan artist Edward Poitras' grandfather dressed up as a cowboy; the title, an ironic riff of a popular country-western song recorded by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. McMaster once commented that, as a child, he and his friends would play cowboys and Indians and that "everyone wanted to be the cowboy, but nobody wanted to be the Indian."²³ McMaster's obsession with cowboy culture was so strong that at one point, he managed to convince his mother to buy him the proper attire, boots and all.²⁴ Carl Beam was similarly obsessed with being a cowboy as a child. Beam is cited as saying, in relation to his 1990 work *Self-Portrait as John Wayne*, "at that time, you didn't see any positive images of Indians doing anything. I didn't want to be the guy getting shot off the horse...you had to choose one or the other."²⁵ McMaster's playful exploration of the Indian/cowboy dichotomy reveals the profound internal struggle / identity crisis many Indigenous people face at some point in their lives; the inability to "fit in" despite sometimes appearing to. Moreover, it reveals how pervasive the "Wild West" imagery perpetuated by Hollywood films has inextricably bound the Indian and the cowboy together. However, as McMaster wryly notes, "it is easier for an Indian to be a cowboy, than a cowboy to be an Indian."²⁶ There is a modern catchphrase in the Indigenous community that echoes McMaster's paradoxical statement, "everyone wants to be an 'Indian', but nobody wants to be an Indian." What both statements allude to is that in role-playing, one can be someone other than who they are, but living the reality of the "Other" is not desired.

12 **Jeff Thomas**

Amos Keye, Iroquois, from the series *Strong Hearts: Powwow Portraits*, 1982; printed 2014
pigment print on archival paper
Collection of the McMaster Museum of Art
Gift of the artist, 2014

This portrait of Amos Keye – a well-known traditional dancer, singer and traditional faith keeper from Six Nations of the Grand River – was taken by Thomas at the Turtle Powwow in Niagara Falls, New York in 1982. As with the other portraits in *Strong Hearts: Powwow Portraits*, Thomas sought to convey the powerful sense of self exhibited by dancers on the powwow grounds.²⁷ In response to the taxonomical

images created by early colonial photographers such as Edward S. Curtis that depicted Indigenous subjects as frozen in time, Thomas' portraits pull back the ethnographic curtain to reveal the dynamic context in which such cultural activities takes place.

13 **Jeff Thomas**

Michael Dunkley (aka Raccoon), Ojibwa, from the series *Strong Hearts: Powwow Portraits*, 1982 printed 2014
pigment print on archival paper
Collection of the McMaster Museum of Art
Gift of the artist, 2014

Also taken at the Turtle Powwow in Niagara Falls, New York in 1982, this portrait of Michael Dunkley begs the question, "what is he looking at...or toward?" Like Keye, Dunkley's body language suggests that he is not a passive subject. Both subjects convey a tangible sense of presence; of movement and excitement – emotions that permeate the air at powwows. Their active sense of presence is an act of survivance because they assert control over their image, how they are (re-) presented, regardless of whether it adheres to codifiers of *Indianness* or not.

During the middle of the 20th century, powwows became the nucleus around which many communities across the Canada gathered to reignite traditional dances, songs, stories and social relationships in and between communities. Over the years, as powwows have grown and multiplied, non-Indigenous awareness of such cultural gatherings has increased. Often seen as a form of entertainment or spectacle, non-Indigenous peoples do not always understand the cultural protocols at play during such gatherings. Thomas, wanting to find social meaning beyond the touristy veneer of powwows, has created a large body of images that capture the humanity and reality of powwow life.²⁸ Thomas continues to attend and photograph at powwows.

14 **Ron Noganosh**

If You Find Any Culture, Send It Home, 1987
mixed media
Collection of Eileen Smith

Ironical in tone, *If You Find Any Culture, Send It Home* reveals the struggle contemporary Indigenous peoples face in trying to balance the trappings of modernity with holding onto elements of culture. The idea that an Indigenous person would sell their (material) cultural heritage may seem paradoxical, particularly when so many Indigenous communities are actively working to reconstitute and reclaim cultural

heritage objects, stories and traditions. However, Noganosh's work reveals the extent to which colonialism and Western consumerist culture has impacted individual perception of what is important and valued.

If You Find Any Culture, Send It Home was included in the 1989 exhibition, *Beyond History*, curated by Tom Hill and Karen Duffek for the Vancouver Art Gallery. *Beyond History* was as a response to the Glenbow Museum's controversial exhibition *The Spirit Sings* in 1988, which failed to include contemporary Indigenous art in its survey of Native art in Canada.

15 **Bob Boyer**

Parfleche; Handle with Care, 1980

acrylic on canvas

Saskatchewan Arts Board Permanent Collection

An early painting in Boyer's exceptional body of work, *Parfleche; Handle with Care* reveals his hybridization of abstraction and Northern Plains Indian motifs that would later characterize his more famous blanket paintings. A rawhide suitcase folded like an envelope and used to carry food, clothing, personal items amongst other things, the parfleche was and is a significant cultural item in Plains culture. Boyer's title for the work can be interpreted two-fold. On the one hand, it is a witty reference to the parfleche as a modern-day crate for storing and shipping artworks.²⁹ On the other hand, it evokes a sense of responsibility to care for and maintain one's culture and thus, however subtly/delicately, suggests a call to action.

16 **Edward Poitras**

Small Matters, 1985

mixed media installation (nails, wire, paper, vinyl type)

The Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern

Purchased 1989

Small Matters is perhaps one of Poitras' best known works, and a haunting lesson in the power of subtlety. Pages torn from Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, a 70s work of non-fiction that recounts the history of late 19th century American expansionism and its negative effects on Native Americans living in the American West, are crumpled and wedged into tiny fences resembling reservation plots. Below each is white vinyl lettering that names a notable Indian massacres- Summer Snow, Trail of Tears, Wounded Knee and Sand Creek. Falling towards the floor and nearly out of sight are the names of some of the Indigenous tribes that became extinct as a result of the effects of colonialism.

As Helga Pakasaar expresses in her curatorial essay for the 1988 exhibition *Revisions* at Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff Centre for the Arts), "the delicate

presence and miniature size of this memorial sculpture intensifies a sense of disappearance, forcing an engaged look at what are not small matters...Poitras' compelling objects are expressions of a personal and political response to the genocide of Native peoples."³⁰

In addition to *Revisions*, *Small Matters* was also included in Poitras' 1988 solo exhibition *Indian Territory* curated by Matthew Teitelbaum for the Mendel Art Gallery, and in the 1989 exhibition *Beyond History*, curated by Tom Hill and Karen Duffek for the Vancouver Art Gallery.

17 **Carl Beam**

Self-Validation in Columbia Ice-Fields, n.d.

mixed media (monoprint, photolithograph, pen and ink wash, acrylic) on paper

Art Gallery of Hamilton

Gift of Wintario, 1980

Self-Validation in Columbia Ice-Fields represents one of Beam's earliest experimentations with serigraphy and photo-transfer. It is also the first work in which Beam confronts the viewer with a photo image of himself (bottom left corner).³¹ His presence- or self-validation- suggests that the artist and his work cannot be separated.

Beam's incorporation of images of the buffalo and the eagle- symbols of *Indianness*- creates a powerful parallel between the extinction of animals associated with Indigenous culture, and the destruction of Indigenous ways of life. Beam reclaims these symbols of *Indianness* and reinvests them with presence and contemporary meaning. In doing so, he reveals that despite years of cultural genocide toward Indigenous peoples and their ways of life, they are- like the buffalo and the eagle- *still here*.

18 **Robert Houle**

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Indians from A to Z, 1985

acrylic, raw hide, wood, linen

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery

Acquired with funds from The Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc.

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Indians from A to Z consists of 26 parfleches arranged on a painted ledge, with each parfleche marked with one of the letters of the English alphabet. Above each of the parfleches is the name of 26 Indigenous tribes of the Americas, beginning with the Aztecs and ending with the Zuni. Though only 26 out of hundreds of tribes/nations from across the Americas are listed, those not recorded are implicated in the work as well, namely because many- if not all- tribes/nations of the Americas have fully accepted the European language as evidenced by their own use of the names given them by that society. The original name/definition of themselves has thus been replaced by a European definition. The implication for the

redefinition/reorganization of many aspects of Indian culture is further insinuated in the work.³²

A wry and ironic title, Houle's work questions the act of naming, highlighting the challenges faced by contemporary Indigenous peoples of the Americas in trying to reclaim their individual and collective identities through the assertion of their right(s) to self-representation, when they too, have embraced the colonizer's language in reference to themselves. ...*Indians from A to Z* reveals the insidious power of words as purveyors of cultural stereotypes, for identity is often shaped by the socialized processes of naming and labelling.³³

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Unapologetic is the first of two interrelated exhibitions of Indigenous art curated by Rhéanne Chartrand. The second exhibition, *Coyote School*, will be on display from June 9 to August 26, 2017 and will feature works by emerging and mid-career Indigenous artists who cite influence via artistic inspiration, mentorship or familial connection to the eleven artists presented in *Unapologetic*. The intent of *Coyote School* is to acknowledge and respect the contributions that senior Indigenous artists have made to personal and collective Indigenous artistic practices.

Endnotes

- 1 McMaster, Gerald, "The Politics in Canadian Native Art", in *Mandate Study, 1990-93: An Investigation of Issues Surrounding the Exhibition, Collection and Interpretation of Contemporary Art by First Nations Artists*, ed. Robert Houle and Carol Podedworny. (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, 1993), citing Podedworny, Carol, *The Permanent Collection* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1986), 6.
- 2 Indigenous art was historically referred to as Indian art or Native art, and later Aboriginal art. Each of these terms of reference for describing Indigenous art – as it is now commonly referred to – reflect how the politics of identity are often indicative of the mindset of the time period.
- 3 McMaster, Gerald, "The Politics in Canadian Native Art", in *Mandate Study, 1990-93: An Investigation of Issues Surrounding the Exhibition, Collection and Interpretation of Contemporary Art by First Nations Artists*, ed. Robert Houle and Carol Podedworny. (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, 1993), 16.
- 4 Ryan, Allan J., *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Washington: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 14, citing Houle, Robert, with Clara Hargittay, "The Struggle against Cultural Apartheid," *Muse* 6(3), 1988, 60.
- 5 The following artists, though not represented in this exhibition, are equally deserving of attention and respect for their contributions throughout the 1980s to advancing Indigenous art in Canada: Lance Belanger, Domingo Cisneros, Ruth Cuthand, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, David General, Faye HeavyShield, Mike MacDonald, Alan Michelson, David Neel, Joseph Sanchez and many more. For anyone I have failed to acknowledge, please accept my deepest regrets.
- 6 Vizenor, Gerald, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Post-Indian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.
- 7 Lucy Lippard, in "Laughter, Tears, Laughter, Tears: The Art of Ron Noganosh", in Hill, Tom and Lucy Lippard, *Ron Noganosh: It Takes Time* (Ottawa and Brantford: Ottawa Art Gallery

and Woodland Cultural Centre, 2001), 45-57, states, "Whether or not outsiders should get the 'jokes' that underlie such work is a point of contention among Native scholars and artists. The debate continues about the extent to which Native artists should (or are forced to) translate their cultural concerns and negotiate their identities within the larger arena." While this statement is made in relation to Noganosh's work specifically, it could be applied to the work of all the artists in *Unapologetic*.

- 8 Ryan, xiii (citing Vizenor, 1989) and 5.
- 9 Vizenor, Gerald, "Native Cosmototemic Art", in *Sakahan: International Indigenous Art*, ed. Greg A. Hill et al. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013), 42-52.
- 10 Ryan, Allan J., *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Washington: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), xi.
- 11 Ryan, 64.
- 12 Mainprize, Gary, *Stardusters* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1987), 15.
- 13 Martin, Lee-Ann, *Bob Boyer: His Life's Work* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2008), 39.
- 14 Personal correspondence, January 2017.
- 15 McLuhan, Elizabeth, *Altered Egos: The Multimedia Work of Carl Beam* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery 1984), 6.
- 16 Hill and Lippard, 32.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 Martin, 27.
- 19 Pakasaar, Helga, *Revisions* (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1992), 6.
- 20 Philips, Ruth B., "Moment of Truth: The Spirit Sings as Critical Event and the Exhibition Inside It," in *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 49.
- 21 For a more comprehensive overview of *The Spirit Sings* exhibition controversy, see Philips, 2012: 48-70.
- 22 Ryan, 218.
- 23 Personal correspondence, September 2016.
- 24 Ryan, 39.
- 25 Ryan, 41.
- 26 Ryan, 33.
- 27 Thomas, Jeff, *Strong Hearts: Powwow Portraits*. URL: <http://jeff-thomas.ca/2014/04/strong-hearts-portraits/>
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Martin, 29.
- 30 Pakasaar, 4.
- 31 McLuhan, 11.
- 32 Podedworny, Carol, *Eight from the Prairies: Part One* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1987).
- 33 Pakasaar, 6

