



# COYOTE SCHOOL

June 8 – August 19, 2017  
MCMASTER MUSEUM OF ART

Cover Image:  
Meryl McMaster, *Time's Gravity* (detail), 2015, Archival pigment print on watercolour paper, edition 3 of 3,  
76.2 x 114.3 cm. Collection of the Doris McCarthy Gallery, University of Toronto Scarborough

# COYOTE SCHOOL

*Coyote School* presents contemporary works by eight mid-career Indigenous artists who acknowledge the influence of senior Indigenous artists on the development of their own artistic practice. Through their visual and written stories, we learn that influence comes in many forms; familial and kinship bonds, formal or informal mentorships, and artistic inspiration. Whether literal and visible or subtle and conceptual, the influence of senior Indigenous artists on current and future generations of Indigenous artists is not taken for granted but rather held up, acknowledged, and honoured.

As Tricksters *in training*, this exhibition asserts that these eight artists continue to—unapologetically—push the boundaries of the institutional spaces carved out for them by senior Indigenous artists. By committing their own acts of survivance, they further disrupt and subvert colonial narratives wrapped up in contemporary art criticism. In doing so, they claim space(s) to negotiate Indigenous futurities by (re-)presenting Indigenous identity and (re-)imagining Indigenous creative potentialities in new and provocative ways.

*Coyote School*, together with the preceding exhibition, *Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance*, foreground continuity in Indigenous art and honour the interpersonal relationships that buttress the Indigenous art community.

*Unapologetic: Acts of Survivance* was on exhibition from January 8-March 25, 2017 and presented notable works from the 1980s by eleven foundational contemporary Indigenous artists. *Unapologetic* framed their works as acts of survivance that sought to assert Indigenous presence in spaces, both physical and intellectual, where representations of Indigenous peoples—and by extension, their cultures and artistic practices—were absent or merely seen as remnants or vestiges of the past. *Unapologetic* acknowledged these eleven Indigenous artists—and many others of their generation—as the original Tricksters in Indigenous art.

## **Rhéanne Chartrand**

Aboriginal Curatorial Resident  
McMaster Museum of Art

# Joi Arcand

*Post Card Series, 2004*  
printed postcards  
10 x 15 cm  
Collection of the artist

*Through That Which Is  
Scene, 2010-16*  
mixed media installation  
dimensions variable  
Collection of the artist



I remember nervously loitering around the entrance to the photography lab in my first year of classes at the University of Saskatchewan. I almost didn't go in. It was the fall of 2000, I was 18 years old, and I had recently moved to Saskatoon from my home of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation about 100 km north of the city. The high school I attended in the small town of Leask, Saskatchewan offered no art classes past Grade 9.

I thought I'd be waaaaay behind the city kids who probably had art-focused high schools (I'm thinking of the school from FAME) with functioning dark rooms and enthusiastic art teachers who wore berets. After some coaxing from a friend, I walked into the darkroom and stayed there for the next 4 years.

In one of my first photography classes, the instructor talked about the work of **Jeff Thomas** and showed slides from his *Indians On Tour* series. I remember feeling for the first time that I could be an artist. At school, I devoured the work of Indigenous artists like Jeff Thomas and **Shelley Niro** using photography to share contemporary Indigenous realities.

I'm glad I walked into that photography lab. I'm grateful to the instructors who pushed me to tell my story and to the artists who paved the way so that I could add to the conversation. I'm also grateful to my first-year advisor who told me I should go into Math & Sciences! But I'm glad I didn't listen.

**Joi T. Arcand** is a photo-based artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation currently based in Ottawa, Ontario. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 2005. In 2006, along

with Felicia Gay, she cofounded the Red Shift Gallery, a contemporary Indigenous art gallery in Saskatoon. In 2012, she founded *kimiwan* 'zine, a quarterly Indigenous arts publication. Arcand's work has recently been exhibited at the Contemporary Native Art Biennial – Art Mûr (Montreal), Kenderdine Art Gallery (Saskatoon), aka artist run (Saskatoon), Access Gallery (Vancouver) and internationally in Seattle, London UK, and Belgium. She was recently nominated by Jeff Thomas for the Karsh-Masson exhibit *Continuum*, an exhibition of emerging photo-based artists and will also be curating *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101 (Ottawa) opening in September 2017.

## Sonny Assu

***Choke on an Ovoid, 2014***  
digital intervention on an  
Emily Carr Painting (*Strangled  
by Growth, 1931*); ed. 1/5,  
74.3 x 57 cm. Courtesy of  
gallery Art Mûr, Montréal

***#idlenomore, 2013***  
acrylic on wood panel  
101.6 x 213.4 cm  
Courtesy of Katzman  
Contemporary, Toronto



I was visiting **Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun** at his studio once, and we discussed the impact of the Group of Seven on art in Canada. Our exchange could only be explained as a typical Yuxweluptun conversation: one part biting whimsy, two parts political commentary, and 150 parts complete teardown of the colonial establishment. Yuxweluptun noted that the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven era erased the Indigenous presence from the land. And that his own work, by contrast, places an Indigenous presence back into the colonial construct of this place now known as Canada.

Yuxweluptun's humour and politics emanating from conversations with him inspired the title of this work. *Strangled by the Growth* is an Emily Carr painting that perpetuates the perception that the Indigenous peoples have vanished, although, this was not Carr's intent, it was how we viewed and spoke of her work after the fact that led to this assumption.

Regardless, as I worked on this piece, I envisioned Yuxweluptun and I chatting at our usual spot; Gene cafe at Main and Kingsway. In his jaunty feathered cedar bark-hat, sipping on a coffee, we'd watch people stroll by, exchanging jabs at each other over our respective practices. We both use the Northwest Coast Ovoid heavily in our work. I imagined him, with a smirk on his face, coming up with a witty retort like: Go choke on an ovoid! *Choke on an Ovoid* is a tribute to Yuxweluptun's deep and ever-expanding body of work that combats the colonial whitewashing of Canadian history.

*#idlenomore* is from my on-going Chilkat Series, which investigates how we denote our social status in our modern social media world. The series was inspired by trying on Chief Billy Assu's (my great-great-grandfather) ceremonial Chilkat Regalia at the Canadian Museum of History. The Chilkat blanket is a unique five-sided woven robe, most prevalent to Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian. It was passed down to Chief Billy Assu as part of a dowry for a political marriage that united both the Martin and Assu families during a potlatch in the early 1900s. At its core, the series investigates the inherent status and stature that Chief Billy Assu gained over his life as an important Kwakwaka'wakw chief. The series juxtaposes his inherent status, gained through potlatching; against our social media driven desire to gather as many followers, likes, thumbs-up as we can, while we speak to the mundane importance of photos of our breakfast.

**Sonny Assu** (b. 1975) was raised in North Delta, BC, over 250 km away from his ancestral home on Vancouver Island. Having been raised as your "everyday average suburban white-kid" it wasn't until he was eight years old that he discovered his Ligwilda'xw/Kwakwaka'wakw heritage. Later in life, this discovery would be the conceptual focal point of his contemporary art practice. Having cut his teeth in Vancouver's art scene, Assu packed up and moved to Montréal to be with the love of his life. Five years later, along with his wife and beautiful daughter, Sonny moved back to BC, eventually settling back "home" in unceded Ligwilda'xw territory (Campbell River, BC). Assu received his BFA from the Emily Carr University (2002) and was the recipient of their distinguished alumni award in 2006. He received the BC Creative Achievement Award in First Nations art in 2011 and was long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2012, 2013 and 2015. Assu recently graduated with an MFA from Concordia University and is one of the REVEAL- Indigenous Art Awards Laureate for 2017. His work has been accepted into the National Gallery of Canada, Seattle Art Museum, Vancouver Art Gallery, Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Burke Museum at the University of Washington, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria,

Hydro Quebec, Lotto Quebec and in various other public and private collections across Canada, the United States and the UK.

## Jason Baerg

### *Primary Manifestos in Blue* 2009

acrylic on canvas  
243.8 x 243.8 cm

Collection of the artist

\*A different artwork from this series was selected for the exhibition. See addendum page 15 for description of that work.



photo: Ron Noganosh

I created *Primary Manifestos in Blue* after being selected by **Ron Noganosh**, the 2008 recipient of the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts, to receive the Emerging Artist Award for the same year. This work honours Ron's investment in my growth as an Indigenous artist, and more broadly, honours the relationships of mentorship within the Indigenous arts community.

*Primary Manifestos in Blue* is an abstraction of a buffalo and an aerial perspective of the city of Paris, acknowledging the time I spent travelling with **Robert Houle**—courtesy of the Canada Council for the Arts vis-à-vis Ron Noganosh—documenting and celebrating his installation of *Paris, Ojibwa* at the Canadian Embassy in Paris.

The *Primary Manifestos Series* grew out of a lexicon of 360 digital drawings, which pay homage to The Americas (Red), Asia (Yellow), Africa (Black), and Europe (White). From these locations, abstractions were created referencing lakes, cities, plants, and animals. This series reflects on the influential contributions of these foundational (Red, White, Black, and Yellow) cultures and the current international collision that is occurring organically in our multicultural environments and global media injected atmospheres.

***Onôcihitowipîsim*, 2016**  
acrylic, tempera and oil on laser cut canvas  
121.9 x 121.9 cm, Collection of the artist

*Onôcihitowipîsim*, or Cree for “September, The Mating Moon,” pays homage to **Norval Morrisseau** and **Alex Janvier**, two renowned Indigenous artists I spent time with on numerous occasions.

I had the honour of driving Norval to his final solo exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in NYC, just three weeks before he passed away. Norval has had a strong influence on my work, both chromatically as well as in terms of compositional dynamism. In *Onôcihitowipîsim*, I’ve drawn inspiration from a Norval Thunderbird composition to inform the laser cut. Interestingly, Norval’s traditional name translates as “Copper Thunderbird;” mine, given to me at a later time, is “Red Thunderbird.”

I enjoy the humourous conversation shared between Alex and I. He often calls me “the Carpenter.” I received this nickname from him when we were on a Banff Residency together in 2011. Over the years, I have traveled near and far to see his work and to hear him speak. I continue to be a huge fan of his work, and can think of no other artist’s circular work I would like to have in my own personal collection. His contributions to abstraction and the circle are unparalleled.

*Onôcihitowipîsim* is part of the *Oskâyi Askîy Series*, which is an abstract body of work that considers a disconnected rapport with the environment as a result of misdirected human desire. The Sky, Animals, and Land are processed through technology and are translated as flesh, fauna, and playful apparatus. As an artistic practice-based methodology, this process acts as an exploratory space to consider future solutions to the calamity at hand.

**Jason Baerg** is a Cree-Métis curator, educator, and visual artist. Curatorial contributions include developing and implementing the national Métis arts program for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Baerg graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelors of Fine Arts and a Masters of Fine Arts from Rutgers University. He taught at Rutgers University (2014-2016) and served as an adjunct instructor at The Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico (2016). Dedicated to community development, he founded and incorporated the Métis Artist Collective and has served as volunteer Chair for such organizations as the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective and the National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition. Creatively, as a visual artist, he pushes new boundaries in digital interventions in drawing, painting and new media installation. Recent international solo exhibitions include: The Luminato Festival in Toronto,

Canada, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia and the Digital Dome at the Institute of the American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Baerg has given formal artist talks at such institutions as the Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design, Auckland, New Zealand, New York City's Parsons School of Design and the University of Toronto. In 2008, Jason Baerg won the Emerging Artist Award for the Premier's Awards for Excellence in the Arts, granted on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Culture. He has sat on numerous art juries for and won awards through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and The Toronto Arts Council.

## Jordan Bennett

*Time Travel with Daphne*  
2017

acrylic and carving on  
cradled wooden panel  
121.9 x 152.4 cm  
Collection of the artist



photo: Candace Kennedy

This work acknowledges the late **Daphne Odjig**. I had the great pleasure of getting to know Daphne when I moved to Kelowna to pursue my Masters of Fine Arts. During the first couple of weeks in the first semester of my program in the Okanagan, I was asked to assist Daphne with a Skype meeting as she had an exhibition opening in Toronto and it coincided with her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. We went on a virtual tour of her exhibition at Gallery Gevik, where she saw a retrospective of her work, some of which she had not seen since the 1960s. At one point in our virtual gallery visit she turned and said to me that what we were doing felt like time travel. She found so much joy in explaining to me each piece that we viewed together, and she was instantly transported to the place and time she created the work or the moment of her inspiration- it was amazing to experience that with her. After that day, we created a strong friendship. My wife Amy and I visited her often, talking, spending time in her presence and sharing in a good laugh. Daphne is the reason that I decided to start drawing again, and

in turn the reason my drawings have developed to the point in which they exist today, as both two and three-dimensional works of art. Daphne became very special to me, a grandmother figure of sorts.

**Jordan Bennett** is a multi-disciplinary visual artist of Mi'kmaq ancestry from Stephenville Crossing Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland). Jordan holds a BFA from Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, Memorial University and a MFA from University of British Columbia Okanagan. He has participated in over 50 group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally. Jordan's ongoing body of work utilizes painting, sculpture, video, installation and sound to explore land, language, the act of visiting, familial histories and challenging colonial perceptions of Indigenous histories, stereotypes and presence with a particular focus on exploring Mi'kmaq and Beothuk visual culture of Ktaqamkuk (Newfoundland).

## Christian Chapman

***Three Kings, 2011***  
**mixed media on canvas**  
**76.2 x 99 cm**  
**Chaudhuri Collection**



As an Indigenous painter growing up in Northwestern Ontario, I had an aversion to **Norval Morrisseau's** Woodland School of Art. It was everywhere, and Indigenous artists in the area were expected to paint in this style. But as time passed, I gained a deeper respect for Morrisseau and the Woodland School. The vivid colour and meaningful content of his work motivated me to want to paint like him. So, I took an art school approach to learn how to emulate a master. *Three Kings* represents this learning experience. Woodland School imagery connects Anishinaabe people to place, and it helps to identify us as a people rich in story and song.

**Christian Chapman** (b. 1975) is of Anishinaabe heritage from Fort William First Nation, Ontario. He creates two dimensional mixed-media works of art that fuse elements of painting, drawing, and printmaking. Chapman uses storytelling as a main theme in his practice to create his images. The act of storytelling has been an important part of his life; it has informed him of his culture by shaping his identity, personal experiences, and worldview.

## Amy Malbeuf

*Prairie Wolves*, 2017  
beadwork and appliqué  
on tarp  
167.6 x 152.4 cm  
Collection of the artist



*Prairie Wolves* is inspired by artist and scholar **Dr. Sherry Farrell Racette** and artist **Edward Poitras**. Both engage in research-based art practices that illuminate Métis history and iconography through a critical lens. Their incredible bodies of work have inspired me to delve deep into Métis history, literature, and material culture. *Prairie Wolves* is a collapsing of times and geographies of Métis resilience in past and present. It features an originally hateful quote, pulled from a derogatory description of a Métis community by a government agent in 1827 at Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. This work is simultaneously a playful re-imagining of the quote and an interpretation of the battle flag that was flown during the 1885 resistance at Batoche, Saskatchewan.

**Amy Malbeuf** is a Métis visual artist from Rich Lake, Alberta. Through utilizing mediums such as caribou hair tufting, beadwork, installation, performance, and video, Malbeuf explores notions of identity, place, language, and ecology. Malbeuf has exhibited her work nationally and internationally at such venues as Art Mûr, Montréal; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Art Gallery of Alberta; and Pataka Art + Museum,

Porirua, New Zealand. Malbeuf has participated in many international artist residencies including at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia; The Banff Centre; The Labrador Research Institute; and in 2015 was one of two Canada Council for the Arts fellows at the Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico. Malbeuf holds a MFA in Visual Art from the University of British Columbia Okanagan. In 2016, Malbeuf received a Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Award and a William and Meredith Saunderson Prize for Emerging Artists in Canada from the Hnatyshyn Foundation.

## Meryl McMaster

***Time's Gravity, 2015***  
**archival pigment print on  
watercolour paper; ed. 3/3**  
**76.2 x 114.3 cm**  
**Collection of Doris McCarthy  
Gallery, University of Toronto  
Scarborough**



***Ancestral 6, 2008***  
**digital chromogenic print**  
**102.9 x 77.5 cm**  
**Collection of the artist**

***Ancestral 15, 2009***  
**digital chromogenic print, 102.9 x 77.5 cm**  
**Collection of the artist**

Art and creativity have been a part of my life from the day I was born, and that is because of my parents. I am grateful that they were passionate about the arts as that creative atmosphere in part made me who I am today, and in many ways, formed the artist I have become. I grew up watching my dad (**Gerald McMaster**) in wonder and curiosity, painting and drawing in our house. I saw the hard work and dedication it took to be an artist and that has always left me with a feeling of admiration for him as an artist and now as a curator. When I reflect on how my dad has influenced me, I feel that he has helped form my core artistic values: my connection to my Indigenous heritage and my

connection to the past; passion and dedication for my craft; and the push to be constantly learning and exploring the world. This mentorship has helped me to face my fears and has given me the confidence to believe in myself as an artist.

**Meryl McMaster** is an Ottawa-based artist and holds BFA in Photography from OCAD University. McMaster is the recipient of various awards and scholarships including the REVEAL Indigenous Art Award, the Canon Canada Prize, the Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship, the Doris McCarthy Scholarship, the OCAD U Medal, the Charles Pachter Prize for Emerging Artists, and was long listed for the Sobey Art Award 2016. McMaster's work has been included in exhibitions throughout Canada and the United States, including the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Indian, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, the Carleton University Art Gallery, the Mendel Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Her work has been acquired by various public collections, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canada Council Art Bank, the National Museum of the American Indian and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

## Bear Witness aka Ehren Thomas

***Strange Home Land -  
Part 1, 2009,  
09:30 minutes***

***Strange Home Land -  
Part 2, 2009,  
10:18 minutes***

**Courtesy of  
Vtape Toronto**



photo: Budda Blaze

Some of my earliest memories are of my father's work. I feel so fortunate to have been able to learn so much of my craft from my family. Even if our disciplines are different, my family taught me the parts of being an artist that go beyond technique—the kinds of things you don't learn in school. But I'm especially close to my father's work. Sometimes it feels like I grew up alongside it; it's the closest thing I have

to a sibling. When I was a boy, I didn't always know why my dad wanted to take all of these photos of me and I'm not sure he always did himself. But as I grew up, so did the purpose behind the photos he took of me. I became more aware of what my father was doing with these photos. I started to understand my role in my father's work and connected to the performative nature of being his subject. When I decided to start my own art practice, it was my father who pointed me back in the right direction. So to say that **Jeff Thomas's** work has influenced me is a huge understatement. He jokes that he raised the artist he needed and I try to live up to that every day. I am the son of Jeff Thomas and **Monique Mojica**, grandson to Spiderwoman Theatre; raised backstage and in the darkroom. I tried to get away—but it pulled me back in. They call it the family curse. But I feel so blessed. I was taught from a young age to ask the tough questions and to push myself, make challenging work, and that no matter how you feel—the work must continue.

**Bear Witness aka Ehren Thomas** is a multimedia artist, DJ, and filmmaker based in Ottawa, Ontario. A founding member of A Tribe Called Red and The NDN Talent Collective, Thomas (Cayuga, Six Nations) produces video installations and screen works that appropriate images and sounds to create video assemblages that address the representation/misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the mainstream media. Thomas is the recipient of four APCMA's and two Juno Awards for his audio and video production with ATRC; an Emerging Artist Award from the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival; and a 2017 laureate of the REVEAL Indigenous Arts Awards supported by the The Hnatyshyn Foundation.

\*Addendum

**Jason Baerg**

***Primary Manifestos in Yellow 2009***

**acrylic on canvas**

**243.8 x 243.8 cm**

**Collection of the artist**

I created *Primary Manifestos in Yellow* after being selected by **Ron Noganosh**, the 2008 recipient of the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts, to receive the Emerging Artist Award for the same year. This work honours Ron's investment in my growth as an Indigenous artist, and more broadly, honours the relationships of mentorship within the Indigenous arts community.

*Primary Manifestos in Yellow* is a composite of layers of abstraction. The base black and white passage is an aerial perspective of the city of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, acknowledging Treaty Six, the ancestral land on which I grew up on, as a Cree-Métis person. The red passage is an abstraction of a tobacco leaf, acknowledging my Indigenous ancestry, extended through my mother's line. The light blue passage is an abstraction of Lake Bodensee, a lake in Europe, that references my father's ancestral land. The top blue passage is an abstraction of Brasilia, the capital of Brazil and acknowledges a critical time of journey in my personal and professional development. Journey plays a significant role in this work; this series was produced after a time spent traveling with **Robert Houle**—courtesy of the Canada Council for the Arts vis-à-vis Ron Noganosh—documenting and celebrating his installation of *Paris, Ojibwa* at the Canadian Embassy in Paris. It is impossible to consider the tremendous contribution Robert has made to Indigenous Abstraction; I will always be grateful for our time spent together.

