

InFlux

Mentorship/Kinship/Authorship
in Indigenous Media Arts



DATE

In This Issue

This special edition of InFlux explores, through words and images, the multiple aspects of knowledge transmission in the practice of Indigenous artists who work in the media arts. These include photography, film, video, sound, augmented and virtual reality, etc.

The contributors to this issues were asked: What roles do mentorship and kinship play in the development of your art practice? What values inform that process? What Indigenous protocols are activated? Is your work informed by Indigenous ways of knowing? Do you see yourself a part of intergenerational knowledge transmission? Do you find it important to create balance between Indigenous traditional knowledge and technological/digital knowledge? If so, how do you achieve that balance? How do you approach the potential tensions between concepts of collective knowledge and individual authorship? How do you hold space for shared authorship?

Cover

Scott Benesiinaabandan
little resistances, 2016

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“In Indigenous cultures, family units go beyond the traditional nuclear family living together in one house. Families are extensive networks of strong, connective kinship; they are often entire communities.”

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Opposite

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living memory: beothuk belonging XXVI-26, 2016



home



Curator's Message

I acknowledge my privilege to live and work on the territory of the WSÁNEĆ Peoples¹ and on the territory of the Lkwungen Speaking Peoples, known today as the Songhees & Esquimalt Nations. I am grateful for the generosity of the Elders, Knowledge Keepers and artists that have helped me to deepen my connection to this land and to better understand the world views, values and protocols that inform the cultures here.

* * *

As an artist and curator, I am attentive to the complex transmission systems of artistic knowledge in Indigenous communities. In many oral based cultures, observation and stories play an important role in remembering and learning. In this way, knowledge is often held collectively and Indigenous Protocols become important intergenerational tools to respect Ancestors, Elders and Oral Traditions when creating new work.

Indigenous systems of knowledge-sharing contrast sharply with Western-based educational institutions, where the acquisition of knowledge is more individualistic and structured for personal gain.

¹ I am using capitalization as recommended by Gregory Younging in *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*, p. 77- 81.

How do contemporary Indigenous artists who straddle these two systems approach the potential incongruities that arise between concepts of collective knowledge and individual authorship?

This was one of the tensions that I had in mind when MediaNet invited me to be guest editor of this current volume of the InFlux Journal.

My editorial intention was to explore, through words and images, the multiple aspects of knowledge transmission in the practice of Indigenous artists who work in the media arts. Some of these media practices include photography, film, video, sound, augmented and virtual reality. I was particularly interested in creating a space for emerging and mid-career artists to share their experiences of kinship and mentorship in relation to the authorship of their art. I wanted to bring together voices from different Indigenous Nations, different cultures, different practices and different regions of the territory now known as Canada.

So I invited six media/multidisciplinary artists to reflect on this. I encouraged these artists to consider the following lines of inquiry:

What role do mentorship and kinship play in the development of your art practice, in your authorship of a media artwork?

What values inform that process?

What Indigenous protocols are activated?

Is your work informed by Indigenous ways of knowing?

Do you see yourself as part of intergenerational knowledge transmission?

If so, do you find it important to achieve balance between Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and technological/digital knowledge?

How do you hold space for shared authorship?

These artists are:

asinnajaq, also known as Isabella Rose Weetaluktuk, an Inuk visual artist, filmmaker, writer and curator based in Tiöhtià: ke (Montreal, Quebec)

Scott Benesiinaabandan, an Anishinaabe (Obishkkokaang) intermedia artist who works primarily in photography, video, audio and printmaking. He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Steven Davies, a filmmaker and media artist of Snuneymuxw and European descent based on Lekwungen territory (Victoria, British Columbia)

Casey Koyczan, a Tlicho Dene interdisciplinary artist from Yellowknife, NT, who works with audio-video and VR/360/XR environments. He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Soleil Launière, a Pekuakamilnu multidisciplinary artist and director from Mashteuiatsh who combines performance art, movement, theatre and song. She lives and works in Tiöhtià: ke - Mooniyang (Montreal, Quebec)

Meagan Musseau, a L'nu (Mi'kmaw) artist from Elmastukwek, Ktaqmkuk territory (Bay of Islands, western Newfoundland) working with customary art forms and new media: basketry, beadwork, land-based performance, video and installation.

The responses of each of the six artists are quite different stylistically, yet they share common elements in terms of content. The most obvious one is the critical importance of relationality in the development of artistic practices - connection to family; connection to communities; connection to land and non-human beings; connection to ancestors; and connection to other Indigenous artists and their work.

The notion of reciprocity is also central to the Indigenous process of knowledge-sharing and learning. It holds potential growth for both the mentee and the mentor. The give-and-take gestures described by the artists are often informal, day to day exchanges. The artists evoke offerings that manifest across time and include supernatural worlds. Understood as a foundational Indigenous value, then, reciprocity reflects respectful intentions and it feeds the creative flow from one generation to the next.

It is well known that storytelling is of critical importance in Indigenous cultures. Generously, and with a certain level of vulnerability, the artists share some of the stories that have shaped who they are in the world and how they embrace their ongoing artistic journeys.

These six short essays offer you fresh perspectives and insights into the creative world of Indigenous media artists. It is my hope that their stories transform your relationship to their individual Indigenous cultures, to their art practices and ultimately to their artworks.

I want to thank Peter Sandmark and Cat Lewis for inviting me to be guest editor of this volume of InFlux Journal focused on Mentorship / Kinship / Authorship in Indigenous Media Arts. It is always a pleasure to collaborate with MediaNet. Thank you to Isanielle Enright and Primary Colours / Couleurs primaires for providing translation. Finally, my appreciation to Chris Creighton-Kelly for his editorial comments and continued support.





Stewarding Knowledge

Asinnajaq

My Name is Asinnajaq, I'm an Urban Inuk raised in the unceded territory of Tiohtià:ke. My parents are Carol Rowan and Jobie Weetaluktuk. My father's family is from Inukjuak, Nunavik and my mother's family is from all over Europe, although she was raised in Tkaranto and Tiohtià:ke. I have two brothers, Naluturuk and Zebedee. I have a caring family. In our own ways, we all contribute to the project of Inuit strength and resilience. In its simplest form, the project of Inuit sovereignty is really about one thing: wisdom. It is about gaining, stewarding and passing on wisdom. This knowledge serves its stewards by informing our decision making. This decision making in turn shapes our world. Wisdom serves those who listen to, learn from and work with it on this journey of being human.

The knowledge I carry is shaped by my life, people and events: for example what my parents taught me and the way that my family raised me. It's hard to quantify the lessons and values that parents pass on. It's hard to see them from inside, but they are there at the root motivation of my actions.

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Asinnajaq
Three Thousand, 2017
(Video Still)

I learned a lot from characters that inspired me in books, movies and the internet. One summer I read at least one book a week. I loved so much being introduced to new ways of being and thinking. In the digital realm, I searched for Carmen Sandiego and cared for my Neopets. I scoured the pages of Tumblr for beautiful images of the world's many flora and the incredible environments they create and inhabit. Regardless of such an expansive world to witness and participate in, I slowly realized that - even in those hours reading, playing games and sports outside of my school hours - I had learned many lessons which are part of my being still, yet they did not offer me grounding. In those years I did not really come to understand who I was, and how I wanted to live my life. In a sense, at that time I was floundering to make meaning of life. I kept my chin up and finally in my last years of university I started to understand. It might sound silly because it's been true my entire existence, but I found myself when I centered my Inukness. Inuvunga.

When I think back on it, there are two important events to share. The first is actually two events, the births of my nibblings¹ Jane and Maina. Those two were the first babies that I held all swaddled in love and blankets. I watched them grow and crawl and walk. My nibblings made me an auntie and being an auntie has revealed the infinite love that lives inside me. Being an auntie is a call to arms where the arms are not weapons of destruction, but tools of health and healing. This is the event that made me want to have the power to give the entire world to someone.

The second event that took me back home in my own soul happened in my last year of university when my anansiaq passed away. I went to Inukjuak to grieve and help my cousins and aunties deal with all after-death things. My family had a way of operating and getting the important work done of cleaning her home and distributing her belongings through the family. Being a part of my family at the difficult time of our matriarch passing on made the hard event have soft edges.

When I returned to school, I handed in my essay for my craft class late to an understanding professor. This essay was one of the first times I wrote about Inuit art, it was about my anansiaq's baskets that she wove with sea lyme grass collected from the shores around Inukjuak. The passing of my anansiaq was difficult because I wanted to learn everything she had to share, although that wasn't how our relationship worked. However all is not lost, because through my family I still learn from her, and from her baskets and carvings I do as well. All is not lost, as my role is to do my best to pass any learnings that I do have onto my nibblings. It's as simple as that.

¹ Word used by the author as a gender neutral term for nieces and nephews

I had a good foundation from my family on how to behave on what is important in life. As a child and youth I lived in a white physical world and in a majorly white online world. It was only once I was in my twenties that I finally started really searching for Inuk expressions with which to paint my world. I learned that online I could find music - I was reconnected with Beatrice Deer's classic song Nunaga which I had previously only heard on my niece's battered up iPod-mini.

I was invited to work with the entire collection of Isuma's online archive at Isuma.tv which continues to be a treasure chest of a website, constantly changing and growing. Even with the quirks of the Isuma's.tv website, it remains grounded in the knowledge of Elders. So many interesting and important topics can be explored and learned from their videos. I even got to read some creative writing made by Inuit. Most notably to me were the words of Siku Allooloo, I googled her name and parsed through the findings to read as much of her writing as possible. I wished then and I still wish that there were more of it! I stitched together a patchwork of beautiful messages from the ends of the internet.

All of a sudden my world changed and I could see something of myself all over the place. This is the magic that I hope my nibblings can connect with. I think from this place of listening and watching I learned about my voice. I learned how my voice could be useful. I am still always learning and trying to pay attention to what I can uniquely offer.

In my art making practice, the foundational intention and purpose are informed by my desire to steward Inuit knowledge. Particularly a value system, and the recognition of one's own dignity. I hope that my offerings help myself and any participants to the work in an enrichment of understanding of how to be a "good" person in this world. For example, in Inuit storytelling traditions, the same story is told to all ages. At any given moment in one's life the story can change meaning. The main theme can change and then the take-away shifts. The story is a matrix for a listener to grow through, as they plus the world as they understand it, shift and change. It is my belief that good art invites this space.

I make my offering. Sometimes, it feels like I let it blow in the wind and I do not even know if anyone will listen, understand or care. I still do so because I want to learn from those before me, and I want to pass on to those who follow me.

My artworks will be a trail of crumbs filled with my ideas and understandings of this world. And to my peers and to our future ancestors, they aren't a map to anywhere.

They won't be a key to a treasure. My offerings are a matrix for one's mind to play on, a sign of faith and trust that those who pick it up will use the tools buried in my artwork to continue this journey of trying.

When things get tough I remind myself that passing on knowledge is like the slowest game of hot potato ever. You are playing it with people who have been long dead, and people who have not yet been born, and some beautiful people that walk the earth with you today. So always keep your nose sniffing and eyes peeled because you never know where the next lesson will come from!

I found my way out of the hole where I was confused about what mattered to me. I was not clear about what the purpose of my life was. I loved making art: but why make it? I did not want to have empty actions, but I did not know with what to fill them. I always wanted to communicate to people through art, but I was not sure what I wanted to say. That meaning was found when I grounded myself in my Inuit culture.



Scott Benesiinaabandan

There are two stories I'd like to share that touch on all three thematic areas and show an entangled nature of mentorship, kinship, and authorship.

My experience of mentorship in the visual arts was never quite a direct or formal structure; it is a less strategic and formalized way of being in relationship with those around you. Knowledge keeping and sharing in the arts is directly related to one's experience in the discipline. The more you participate through exhibitions; through artist talks; through residencies and collaborations; the more your art-making becomes a reciprocal relationship - both giving and sharing of knowledge. Both within and without the contemporary arts community, Indigenous communities are built of these specific knowledge based relationships

These reciprocities - the way we are in relationship to one another, both as artists and individuals - bring us; from moment to moment; day to day; from one generation to the next.

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Scott Benesiinaabandan
cloth, quill, ghost lands, 2021

The continual telling/re-telling of all those little/big, funny/sad, teasing/serious stories both about and from Aunties and Uncles and Kookums and Mishooms act as vehicles for this mentorship process. These engagements - whether directly related to the arts or just in life more generally - are built on the continual flow of all the little exchanges - the words, the actions that set our trajectories, drawing the contours of the art we make and the people we become.

Two relationships come to my mind when I sit down to reflect on the intent of this article. First, each story is about a relationship that shaped who I am, albeit in various ways and at different times in my life. Both central characters are incredibly powerful Anishinaabekeweg: that is the most critical part. Each, in their own way, gave me an incredible gift of mentorship, even if they did not know its importance at the time. One of which I still call “cuzzin” and one I do not call at all.

Story number one is about Diane Corbiere. Diane is an Anishinaabe woman living on Rankin Reserve in Ontario, just beside Sault Ste. Marie. She was one of the first and one of the only women that worked on the Alaskan pipeline as a welder. She had three beautiful daughters. She was also my first foster caregiver. I first met her when I was ten years old.

Now a foster-carer enacts a very special and personal type of mentorship. Taking in another person's child to care for and teach them is pretty intimate, extraordinary, and incredible. The story that stuck with me about my time at that house was that she saw what my future might hold after a time, for better or for worse. She knew my backstory, and she knew she had to teach me particular things about life.

Diane Corbiere grew up in Detroit in the '60's and she was a legit badass. Diane knew that a young Anishinaabe boy starting out in the foster care system was going to be able to fight, or at least have an attitude that fighting was an option. So, that is what she taught me - all of her street fighting tricks; how to kick out a knee because you will probably be on the ground; how to punch a throat - after all, no matter how big someone is, they can't do much about that. She said that she came by these things honestly and these skills were needed more than a few times in her life. She saw what I might need and passed them on to me. She told me not ever to take these things for granted, to use only in emergencies.

Since that afternoon, I have never really needed to use them, but knowing I had those gifts helped me through some tough times with certain confidence. Recognizing the urgency of a moment and what it might require of us is the overarching lesson I got from Diane Corbiere. While we lost touch shortly afterwards, I often reflect on that particular type of mentorship and how it continues to impact me.

Story two is about a time when I was working for Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg, when Rebecca Belmore flew in to create a new performance piece called *Back to the Garden*. She had just flown in from installing a show in Italy. It was an all-hands-on-deck kind of day at the gallery. Everyone was doing multiple tasks and was at-the-ready to assist the artist in any way she might need. We were all gathered around the conference table, and Belmore was drawing out a map of the performance, which consisted of orchestral performers, trucks, and people dressed with white gloves. She was showing us, the assistants, where and when to move throughout the scene. After some time, I was a little confused and being art-naive, I asked her, "Yea, but.. what is it supposed to all mean?". She didn't even look up and said "Never mind what it means, just do the work." We all laughed, a bit nervously.

Fast forward 15 years, and we still work together, and I reflect on this moment and what it taught me about art-making. It was only a small interaction, but it conveyed a seriousness and intensity of thought and process that each artist is fully engrossed in as they are installing, creating, problem solving, and most often, barely managing it all. Sometimes mentorships are formalized things; sometimes they are rooted in the collective work we are already doing, sometimes they grow into friendships, sometimes they do not. The shifting boundaries of these relationships allow reciprocal growth for both artists, each bringing to the table the unique perspectives and depth of experience that give both sides the potential for the exchange of meaningful gifts.

“Never mind what it means, just do the work” was one such little gift that formed a foundation of how I work as an artist.

“The side of the knee is a weak spot if you need to just survive” was other advice given much earlier, yet still as vital.

Two essential pieces of advice from two important Anishinaabekweg.

The process of becoming aware of the possibilities sourced from all those little conversations we engage in is important to me - those quiet observations as people work and the intentional listening to the stories of others. These are the important mentorship moments. When one acknowledges these little gifts, you tie yourself to that relationship in meaningful and ongoing ways that continuously shape and contour our good future selves. As an artist and as a matter of acknowledgement and authorship, I try for a continual effort towards maintaining a map of the good things you have received and the good people that have freely given these good things. Acknowledging these moments seems an important way to decolonize the idea of the “self” and to ensure that we remain connected to community, in whatever way we can.



Na'tsa' maht shqwaluwu

Steven Davies



in

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I am a filmmaker and media artist of Snuneymuxw and European descent (Danish, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and English). We are from a big family up and down the west coast on my dad's and late paternal grandfather's side - the Peterson family - with relatives in Snuneymuxw, Stz'uminus, Cowichan, and Penelekut. Although there was disruption and a cultural gap in my family, they have supported me and my practice and we have worked hard together to repair what could have been lost.

The Hul'q'umi'num' title above was shared with me by Elder Tsumkwaat (Lucy Thomas) while recording her interview on the banks of the Cowichan River during the production of our collaborative documentary. This documentary centred acts of spiritual, cultural, and political resurgence on Vancouver Island in 2019. During our film, Lucy, who works at Hiiye'yu Lelum in Duncan, shared the meaning of the expression Na'tsa' maht shqwaluwun, which means to walk and work together - with one mind, one body, one soul. Lucy also described witnessing acts of revitalization and unity within her communities across the Cowichan Valley.

I am forever humbled, grateful, and honoured to have had the opportunity to witness and learn from numerous Elders, cultural and language leaders, scholars, and youth across Vancouver Island and the province of British Columbia. Their trust, friendship, and generosity have enriched my life and artistic practice. A few of my mentors over the years have included the late Ray Peter, Jessica Sault, J'SINTEN (John Elliott), C-tasi:a (Geraldine Manson), Laxiya (Dave Bodaly), and Tutakwisnapšił (Joe Martin). Witnessing their words and actions - sometimes recording them with a camera - has been a huge blessing and privilege for me that I never take for granted.

Previous

Steven Davies

Goldstream Salmon, 2015

(Video Still)

For me, to collaborate and to be mentored in culture and story with Elders and other cultural ambassadors, is to feel connected and engaged in a way unlike any other experience or education. Relationships are complex. They are vital to the stories that I like to share, unique to each project and require a level of flexibility and reflexiveness. That being said, seeking to honour the old ways of knowing and doing with the contemporary legal world requires special care and time. That seeking can create unanticipated tensions and challenges.

To be mentored, to share ideas, to work together with delicate cultural stories, requires complete dedication and trust. I approach community collaborative work as an investigative life-long learner and a humbled student of the hul'q'umi'num' language, culture, and communities. I feel my art is most successful when it can be shared widely and bring all people together.

Working with Elders and other knowledge keepers is a pleasure and an enriching experience for anyone, no doubt. However, when working with community stories, there is always a possibility of creating a film that can bring tensions and conflicts to the surface. Making some voices and stories visible, privileging certain voices over others, and sharing them publicly and widely can be conflicting.

There are projects that I worked on that were not shared publicly once completed. I also felt the need to walk away from some other projects that did not uphold the integrity of the relationships. At the same time, I feel I must ensure that my collaborators have the choice to withdraw from the project once completed when the final cuts are shared. It is important to honour and uphold the self-determination of each individual that I collaborate with, and even more so when it relates to woven narratives that feature a number of perspectives and voices.

Last year, while co-writing a documentary with master carver and land defender Joe Martin about his life called *ᓴaʔuuk^wiath* (Tla-o-qui-aht) Dugout Canoe, Joe shared cultural teachings and natural laws with me and our team. I am thankful for the support that I have received to work with cultural leaders like Joe Martin and others. Special thanks are also due to a number of organizations, including the Indigenous Screen Office, National Screen Office, Canada Council for the Arts, BC Arts Council, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. They, along with other organizations, have supported me, my collaborative efforts, and mentorship goals.

Working as a mentor has been another huge source of inspiration for me and my life. To work and learn together is an important Indigenous methodology, and to me is what it means to be Indigenous. As an educator and mentor of Indigenous youth and adults in tribal and public schools, I have been lucky to receive opportunities to share my knowledge and perspective with many isolated Indigenous communities across what is now known as British Columbia.

Students of all ages are the best teachers and working with them and other Indigenous educators always brings new meaning and value to me as I continue to look for ways to challenge and destabilize Western biases and stereotypes. As a filmmaker of Coast Salish and European descent, I am humbled to work with youth and adults who direct me in ways that can be more meaningful and impactful to more people across what is now known as Canada.

All my relations.

Re-imagine : Casey

Ever since I was a child I have been fascinated with technology and our interactions with it. In early adulthood I started my journey of rekindling with my culture and roots in the North, as I spent the majority of my life in the South away from home. These two learning processes have found their way into almost everything that I create; whether it be through direct influence or subtle inspiration.

I'm sure there are many people in the same situation who feel somewhat disconnected from their culture, and that is okay. Immense knowledge of hunting, trapping, language, and spiritual practices don't define us as Indigenous people; whether we practice traditional knowledge all of the time or not is our choice. Our people in the North have come a long way in regard to digital literacy despite our small pool of media resources and environmental challenges. There are so many ways of earning a living and artistically expressing ourselves that the possibilities are virtually endless.

Re-examine Koyczan

I am grateful to have been introduced to new forms of technology to work with; triggering inspirations and channeling artistic expression through the use of virtual reality, 3D software, and 360 cameras. To create with unrestricted freedom. To make the unrealistic a reality. To imagine objects in environments unbound by the laws of physics. To see our land, people, stories, and animals in the future. These are media that have been implemented into my creations that assist with an existing knowledge of sculpture, installation, and audio works.

Your location and proximity to your homeland is a variable that exists in the present day as our lives and careers take us all over the world, and sometimes influence us to relocate. I have lived all over Western Canada throughout my life. I have also lived in Yellowknife for a fraction of that time. Often I have lived in places that resonate with other Indigenous nations and cultures as Indigenous ancestors are the original occupants of that land. I have spent a lot of time admiring and respecting artworks, public sculptures, and languages of other cultures. I found the amount of Indigenous artworks and languages in places like Whitehorse, YT, and Kamloops, BC, have acted as foster parents that have taken me under their wing and taken care of me, while at the same time encouraging me to find my own path.





This situation later on in life influenced me to learn as much as I can about my culture and language through online resources and digital communication tools such as Tlicho language apps and dictionaries. This scenario was personified within my MFA thesis exhibit “Ełexiiṯ ; Ehts’q̱ / Connected ; Apart From Each Other” which opened at Urban Shaman Contemporary Indigenous Art Gallery in Winnipeg, MB, in the spring of 2021.

The hanging logs mimic the power of nature and the relationship that we all have with the land. The resonance of sound and song from within the logs triggered by the viewers proximity emphasize the steps towards finding the connection to culture. The multi-channel Dene drum, electronic instruments, guitar and chanting occupies the space as people explore and interact with the surroundings and discover their own composition. The experimental visuals with the Dene Laws converted to binary code reference the exploration of this digital path motivated by a thirst for knowledge, personal reflection and understanding of cultural identity.

Previous

Casey Koyczan

Ełexiiṯ ; Ehts’q̱ / Connected ; Apart From Each Other, 2021

There are nine Dene Laws in my culture: Share what you have. Help each other. Love each other as much as possible. Be respectful of elders and everything around you. Sleep at night and work during the day. Be polite and don't argue with anyone. Young girls and boys should behave respectfully. Pass on the teachings. Be happy at all times. These laws are something that I've grown up with and they were reinforced by my father as he spent the most time raising me as a single parent. While navigating through life I haven't been the best at following these rules at all times, but I have always returned to them in order to learn from my mistakes.

The process of converting these laws into binary code is a way of visually communicating my efforts of engaging and learning about my culture through digital means by way of text, video, and online resources. Binary code is the root of all digital data made up of a series of ones and zeros. A friend of mine came up with the term "Digital Dene" many years ago, and I resonate with that immensely as I grew up fascinated with technology, video games, how systems work, and expressing myself with a heavily digital influence. It's a term that challenges the stereotypes of what it means to be a Northern Indigenous person in Canada, and means that I am no less Dene than those that live a strictly traditional life. Instead I house a whole other skill set that benefits living a contemporary urban lifestyle.

Even though the knowledge I acquired as a child and teen was vastly different from what our youth is learning today, I feel through learning a lot of self-taught skills, that I have a responsibility to share knowledge with new generations so that they can let their imaginations explore new realms of creation and expression. Very early in my career I started hosting workshops with various organizations in remote communities in the North using different media; mostly music production at first, then spanning into audio-video editing, now 3D/VR software. This process is fascinating as the host sometimes learns something from the people they're teaching. The reciprocal nature of that exchange is important to our understanding of much new technology and who we are as people.

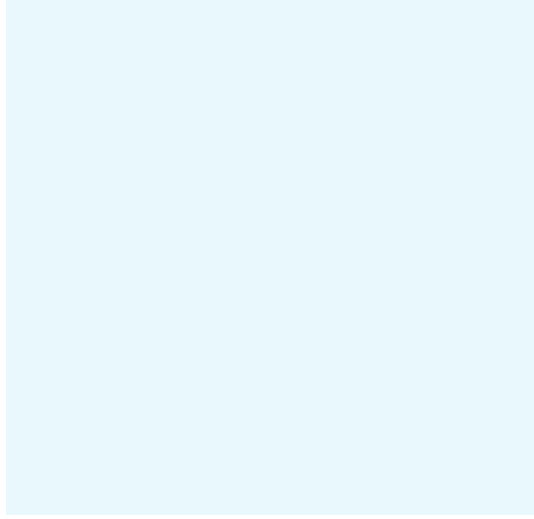
This summer I hosted a VR/AR workshop with Western Arctic Moving Pictures (WAMP) and Yellowknife Dene First Nation (YKDFN) in Yellowknife/Ndilo, NT, to Indigenous youth over a span of two weeks. One of the organizers for the YKDFN knew my grandparents and was able to tell me a lot about their history and lives within the North; places they have lived and funny stories.

This was very important to me as I grew up mostly outside of the NT in my youth and teenage years, and have felt somewhat disconnected with a lot of my culture. It was nice to sit with an Elder and feel that genuine connection and care as we talked about our relatives that have now passed on and how life has developed since then. Going from that remembering mode into workshop mode was an interesting transition as it made me reflect on my own journey and how inspiration comes from all directions, even from within.

Whenever I'm back home in Yellowknife I try to spend as much time on the land as possible; whether it be helping my mom at her cabin, engaging in cultural events and gatherings, or simply spending time by the rivers and lakes. There is a recharging that happens in these cases; you are giving your time looking, listening, and feeling the land, and it is giving back to you, speaking to you, and engaging in conversation that we seem to have forgotten about.

The relationship between traditional and technological knowledge is vital to my practice as they are constantly influencing each other. I believe strongly in the intrinsic relationship of the two and that they are able to grow together rather than apart. I enjoy using multiple media and experimenting with different combinations in order to achieve an output I am content with. This process fascinates me as the evolution of technology is enabling us to tell our stories and reflect our culture in new ways.

Currently I am spending a lot of time in VR/3D modelling northern animals for three different VR/AR/2D projects. I find myself gravitating towards the animistic realm within this medium, and have a lot of fun in the process. We respect our animals and nature so much. We feel it's a reciprocated relationship but have naturally veered away from that with the development of urban areas. I feel that to recreate them gives them a new sense of understanding and empowerment as a reminder that we all share this planet.



Kermode

Soleil Launière

My body knows no hierarchy
It knows that we are no greater than elements
or animals,
That we are no greater because we are older,
or younger,
And that indeed, we are greater in that we do not
pretend being great
The Kermode mother does not feel superior to her cub
but she knows that she matters
Her word inspires and creates harmony

Without Kermode, balance is lost
Kermode, in her legend, cannot exist without Crow
I am Crow, but I know that she exists beyond myself

The Mother of Art is a Spirit Bear, Kermode
We say that mother bears are solitary beings, but mine fuses
often with me for the time of a feast
We both are animal
Animal exiting its den more often than planned
Often, I pour my head out for her in a great basket
She unravels, sorts it out, and returns it to me
Threads, relations, connexions
This practice is simple, imbued with respect,
without expectations
It is constant, slow, ebbs and flows
Like the river water when I close my eyes
Except that the sound of the waves turns to breathing
A similar sound, just as constant

We grow alone, together, thirsty and satisfied

My heart knows no hierarchy
It loves and lives in cycles
It dismantles colonial barriers as best it can

Together, I, my heart, my body, and Kermode,
We work to decolonize the physical shell
We belong just as much to the earth as we do the air,
A connexion with a vertical gaze stripped of social ranking
Kermode connects me to my inner feeling
in which I dive without judging, while my body gets all
wrapped up
Living matter, nesting spirit. Two spirits connected and discreet

The blood running in my root-veins is a cycle
My muscles contract and relax
Micro turns to macro

My work would not be the same without Kermode
I do not know who I am without her either
Kermode's role is extremely precious
Some kind of vital connexion
I dare to believe that the feeling is mutual
That we meet at the crossroads as equals
Like music notes closing ranks in a zipper-like fashion

Kermode and I come from different lands
but our corporeal bark is familiar with the other
Spiritually familiar

Despite this complex closeness slipping beyond the spiritual,
I could not say with confidence that my art practice is directly
linked to traditional practices
I am unsure, sometimes, of what qualifies as tradition

However, I hope that it becomes tradition in some way or
another through my voice and my actions
A positive duality,
Duality with which I am confronted at every turn
I find in its chaos a form of harmony
Somewhere in-between worlds that I enjoy
A kind of contrast to my life
In functional opposition

Natural meets supernatural,
Supernatural meets reality
Reality and technology
Fusion, technological territory
The territory is an evolved version of technology
My body, this other territory, is the same

I believe my connection to kermode is technological
It transcends the scientific understanding of technology
It's the old Innu in his shaking tent traveling across the land,
connected with the ancestors
The one in time of hunting seeing through branches better
than we see through the lens of a binocular
It is difficult for our present understanding to believe the
stories of the ancient ones
We evoke the legend, the tale

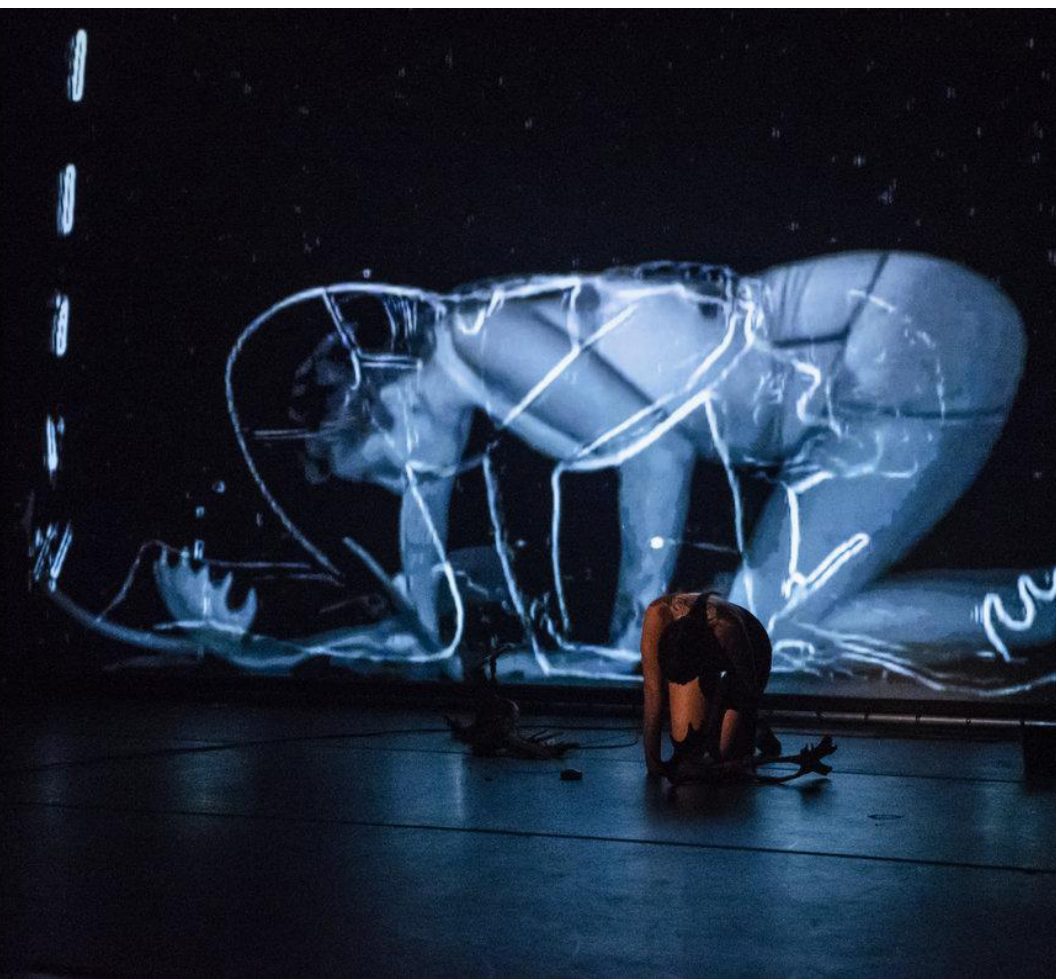
As if we forgot that any technology is not external to the
territory since it is composed of this same territory

We transform to the point of forgetting the source
The cycle starts again
We push “technology” further and further
Making it more and more human, more connected
with the territory
Calling to a future where computers will be interwoven
with the brain
The more “technology” advances, the more it returns to its
natural form
Our brain contains the technology that today’s human tries to
recreate
As if our threads were so mixed up that we had to turn them
over, like my head basket
Return to its source, sort, reconnect

I use in my art what is called “new technology” to allow our
untrained brains to see what our ancestors saw
I aspire to understand dreams and visions like the image
projected in front of us when we listen to a movie
I use sensors to make us hear the song of plants, those whose
language we have forgotten
I approach “technology” as I approach the territory
The body, the territory is an incredible machine
But just as humans can destroy themselves, the territory also
has the capacity to do so

So I dissect, I learn, I tame just as the crow and the kermode
have tamed each other
You must turn around and look at the territory as an equal

Nature has no hierarchy.
To decolonize the body and the territory is to deconstruct this
irrational hierarchical need
We are atoms, particles
We are sensory, we are technology, we are nature





Mon corps sait qu'il n'existe aucune hiérarchie
Que nous ne sommes pas plus grands que les éléments,
que les animaux

Que nous ne sommes pas plus grands puisque nous
sommes plus âgés ou plus jeunes

Qu'au fond, nous sommes plus grands de ne pas
prétendre être grands

La mère Kermode ne se sent pas au-dessus de son petit
mais sait qu'elle est importante

Sa parole inspire, et crée un équilibre

Sans la présence de Kermode, il y a un déséquilibre

La Kermode dans sa légende n'existe pas sans le corbeau

Je suis corbeau, mais je sais qu'elle existe au-delà de moi

Ma mère d'art est une ourse esprit. Kermode

On dit des ourses qu'elles sont solitaires, mais la mienne
se greffe souvent à moi l'instant d'un repas

Nous sommes toutes deux animales

Animal qui sort de sa tanière plus souvent que prévu

Je lui déverse souvent ma tête dans un grand panier

Elle démêle, trie, puis me le retourne

Des fils, des liens, des connexions

La pratique est simple, dans le respect, sans attente

Il y a une constance, une lenteur, un flux et un reflux

Comme l'eau du fleuve lorsque je me ferme les yeux

Sauf que le bruit des vagues s'est transformé en
respiration

Un bruit similaire, tout aussi constant

Nous grandissons seules ensemble

Assoiffées et rassasiées

Mon cœur ne connaît pas la hiérarchie
Il aime et vit en circularité
Il déconstruit les barrières coloniales du mieux qu'il le peut
Ensemble, moi, mon cœur, mon corps et Kermode, nous
travaillons à décoloniser l'enveloppe corporelle
Nous appartenons tout autant à la terre qu'à l'air
Une connexion au regard vertical sans hiérarchie sociale
Kermode me connecte à ma sensation intérieure
J'y plonge sans jugement, mon corps est enveloppé
Une matière vivante contenant l'âme. Deux-esprits connectés
et séparés

Le sang qui coule dans mes veines-racines est circulaire
Mes muscles se contractent et se décontractent
Le micro devient macro.

Mon travail ne serait pas ce qu'il est sans l'apport de Kermode
Je ne serais pas qui je suis sans sa présence non plus
Le rôle de Kermode est extrêmement précieux
Une sorte de connexion vitale
J'ose croire que cette sensation est partagée
Que nous nous rencontrons à tous les tournants
dans la même mesure
Une musique où les notes s'entremêlent comme un zipper

Kermode et moi venons de différentes terres
Mais nos écorces corporelles se connaissent depuis longtemps
Connectent spirituellement

Malgré cette connexion complexe à saisir au-delà
de cette spiritualité,
Je ne peux pas dire avec confiance que mon travail d'art est
directement lié aux pratiques traditionnelles
Je ne suis pas certaine de savoir parfois ce qui est tradition
Mais j'espère d'une manière ou d'une autre qu'il le devient par
le biais de ma voix et de mes mouvements
C'est une dualité positive
La dualité avec laquelle je me frappe à tout tournant
J'y trouve dans son chaos une balance
Un entre deux mondes qui me plaît
Une sorte d'antagonisme à ma vie
En opposition fonctionnelle

C'est la rencontre entre le naturel et le surnaturel
Le surnaturel et le réel
Le réel et la technologie
La fusion, le territoire technologique
Le territoire est une version plus évoluée de la technologie
Mon corps, cet autre territoire, en est une aussi

Je crois que ma connexion avec kermode est technologique
Elle transcende la compréhension scientifique que l'on accorde
à la technologie

Le vieil innu dans sa tente tremblante voyageait à travers les
terres, connecté avec les ancêtres

Celui en temps de chasse voyait à travers une branche de bois
mieux que l'on voit à travers la lentille d'une jumelle

Il est difficile pour notre compréhension présente d'en croire
les récits des anciens

Nous évoquons la légende, le conte

Comme si l'on oubliait que toute technologie n'est pas
extérieure au territoire puisqu'elle est formée de ce même
territoire

Nous transformons au point d'en oublier la source

Le cycle reprend

Nous poussons la "technologie" toujours plus loin

La rendant de plus en plus humaine, connectée
avec le territoire

Évoquant un futur où les ordinateurs seront imbriqués au
cerveau

Plus la "technologie" avance plus elle retourne
sous forme nature

Notre cerveau contient la technologie que l'humain
d'aujourd'hui essaie de recréer

Comme si nos fils étaient tellement mêlés qu'il fallait
les retourner, comme ma tête panier

Retourner à sa source, trier, reconnecter

J'utilise dans mon art ce qu'on appelle la nouvelle technologie pour permettre à nos cerveaux non entraînés de voir ce que les ancêtres voyaient

J'aspire à comprendre les rêves et les visions telle l'image projetée devant nous lorsque nous écoutons un film
J'utilise des sensors pour faire entendre le chant des plantes, ceux dont nous avons oublié le langage
J'aborde la "technologie" comme j'approche le territoire
Le corps, le territoire est une machine incroyable
Mais tout comme l'humain peut se détruire lui-même, le territoire en a aussi la capacité

Alors je décortique, j'apprends, j'apprivoise tout comme le corbeau et le kermode se sont apprivoisés
Il faut se retourner et regarder le territoire comme un égal

La nature ne présente aucune hiérarchie.
Décoloniser le corps et le territoire c'est déconstruire ce besoin hiérarchique irrationnel
Nous sommes atomes, particules
Nous sommes sensoriel, nous sommes technologie,
nous sommes nature





Presence

Meagan Musseau

Previous

Ta'sik Amujpa Iknmaulek (how much do we have to give you), 2021

Land-based performance on Mi'kmaq and Beothuk Territory in St. George's, Ktaqmkuk
(Video Still)

Her sapphire blue velvet shoes caught my eye as we rounded the circle with our introductions. The colour grounded me down as my heart beat increased. I felt a strong sense of many ancestors in the room as we gathered. Alanis Obomsawin introduced herself as an Abenaki filmmaker, singer, storyteller, and artist and she continued by sharing about her experiences using film technology to tell stories. I was so nervous to speak within the circle.

At the time, I was twenty-five and had just moved across the country to Lkwungen territory, as an uninvited guest. This was my first time living away from home. While I may not have understood then, my most valuable education came from growing up within a matrilineal family structure on the island of Ktaqmkuk. As a child and throughout my youth, I depended on the arts as an essential form of communication. It was my way of articulating the world around me while accessing an outlet for my emotions and visions.

Once the group mentorship session ended, I spoke with Alanis and told her a little more about where I was from. She stood facing me and held onto both my hands, “the stories of the Beothuk need to be told from Indigenous perspectives”. I pushed back my tears as she looked me in the eye with a grounding yet urgent smile.

People of the Dawn

A Mi'kmaw elder led the sunrise ceremony. We were on Wabanaki territory for the 2016 Petapan: First Light Indigenous Art Symposium. There was a strong sense of pride in the Indigenous Arts community, a feeling of agency and voice in our presence. During the light of the morning sun, France Trépanier gifted me with a book "The Beothuk Saga" by Cree author Bernard Assiniwi. I was excited to read a version of the history from an Indigenous storyteller. By the end of the symposium, I was on stage with Ursula Johnson giving a collaborative presentation we had created over the weekend. As I stood on the stage, I felt that surge of heartbeat in my stomach again. I projected my artwork "Beothuk Belonging xxiv-26" on the screen and spoke. This was the most present I had been in my voice to date. Breath shook through my vocal cords while spirit pushed the sound out.

Courage comes from the spaces where we gather on our own terms

The winter settled in and I moved back home to Ktaqmkuk. During a trip across the island to St. John's, NL, I was granted access to 'study Beothuk artifacts' at The Rooms Provincial Museum and Archives. A large collection of caribou bone pendants, the ones not on display in the museum, were brought out of the vault for me to spend an hour with. My heart beat increased and I felt many ancestors present as we gathered. I took my time to consider how to be present and what form of care to bring forward.

To hold and engage with objects created by artists is a form of knowledge transfer. To close my eyes and listen to the images that emerge is a form of communication. To emanate love from my heart to my hand and into the belonging is a form of care. This is one way I embody knowledge transfer. I approached entering that room in the same way I would a ceremony - humble. I am in the space to respect and listen to the elders and the ancestors. In this case, the belongings are the elders and when an elder asks you to do something, you do it. I prioritize this form of learning rather than reading the books and information written about the 'artifacts' and our relatives from non-Indigenous perspectives.

Pi'tawkewaq

Five years following that powerful moment with Alanis on Lkwungen territory, I finalized a body of work that seeks to tell a story of our relatives from my perspective as L'nu. Pi'tawkewaq, meaning our people up river, is an exhibition consisting of a series of human scale pendants made from plexiglass; a 22 foot sculpture made of braided fabric installed on a wooden plinth cut into the shape of Red Indian Lake; an archival photo of Santu Toney; and a video of my land-based performance titled “becomes body of water interwoven with territories beyond the sky”.

My goal with this body of work was to value the transmission and embodiment of knowledge as a form of renewal. There are many mentors and community members who play a significant part in these works. I honour all those who shared their knowledge and experiences to support me in the process. In a small way, I hope that the exhibition serves as a resource for the past, present, and future generations; a contribution to the continuum of which we are all a part.

The ancestors are present

Knowledge exists in all directions at once, in-between and through the multiple worlds that make up a Mi'kmaq worldview. Indigenous Media Art is an area to transmit information and narratives by blending old and new technologies through an artistic lens. I could not speak about my work within this area of the arts without acknowledging the mentorship that continues to contribute to my artistic path. Mentorship played an important role in developing my skills and confidence as an emerging artist to pursue my practice professionally. Therefore, supporting emerging artists by providing safe spaces to share, receive advice from mentors, and experiment with new media to tell stories can have a significant impact on developing an artist's foundation. These spaces are a form of intergenerational knowledge transmission through the arts.

Next

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FLUX
MEDIA GALLERY