

THE TIME OF THINGS

The Continuum
of Indigenous
Customary
Practice into
Contemporary Art

Curated by
France Trépanier

Daphne Boyer
Maureen Gruben
Susan Pavel
Skeena Reece
Marika Echachis Swan

EXHIBITION

APRIL 11 ————— JULY 7, 2018



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Last year, Sherry Farrell Racette, Métis Canadian feminist scholar, author and artist, presented a public lecture at Legacy Art Galleries about writing Indigenous women's practice into Canadian Art History. She pointed out that, while generally Indigenous art was gaining recognition in Canada, Indigenous women's work was still greatly under appreciated and under represented. The enthusiasm, words and images of Indigenous women's work through the ages, including weaving, embroidery, and beading, that she shared fundamentally spoke to all of us working at Legacy. As a result, we felt a responsibility to expand education and recognition of these vital forms of art making. We were inspired to begin organizing an exhibition that would contribute to the building of a new "canon" of art history that raises up the work of women engaged in applying long held Indigenous world views and cultural practices within their contemporary art.

The first person we approached to run the idea past was France Trépanier. I was thrilled when France took up the topic with such sincere passion. Within minutes she told us that she has been thinking about such a project for years and that she already had many ideas. Since then it has been a great pleasure working with France on *The Time of Things* and having the opportunity to meet and explore the artwork of this group of women artists who are all working on Coast Salish Territory bringing their own approaches to customary practice within contemporary art. Thank you to France Trépanier, Daphne Boyer, Maureen Gruben, Susan Pavel, Skeena Reece, and Marika Echachis Swan.

Mary Jo Hughes
Director

Previous
Skeena Reece
Touch Me, 2013
(Video Still)

THE TIME OF THINGS

The Continuum of Indigenous Customary Practices into Contemporary Art

Think of magic as a tree. The root of supernatural ability is simply the realization that all time exists simultaneously. Humans experience time as a progression of sequential events in much the same way we see the horizon as flat: our reality is shaped by our limitations.

Haisla writer, Eden Robinson¹

I want to express my gratitude to the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations for allowing me to be active, as an artist and curator of Kanien'kehà:ka and French ancestry, on their beautiful, unceded Lekwungen territory.

For the exhibition *The Time of Things*, the artists I have chosen to present are five women whose work is informed by Indigenous worldviews: Daphne Boyer, Maureen Gruben, Susan Pavel, Skeena Reece and Marika Echachis Swan.

They come from various nations and backgrounds. There are many Indigenous people who are from other territories who now live on or near Coast Salish land. This situation raises a number of questions for artists. How do they locate themselves on new territory? How do they create art while being respectful of the cultural sovereignty of their generous Indigenous hosts? How do they respect local protocols and avoid cultural appropriation? How do these complex enquiries inform their artistic practice?

Historically, European explorers and settlers have imposed their own frameworks of understanding onto Indigenous socio-cultural structures. This had particular ramifications for Indigenous creators. The power and agency of Indigenous artists were mostly invisible to the newcomers. Indigenous art practices were, and are still, often misunderstood, devalued or simply ignored, as art objects became 'artifacts' or 'crafts'. These artworks rarely enter the elite gallery space reserved for 'high art'. Rather, they have been 'collected' – often stolen – by anthropologists and presented, anonymously, in ethnographic museums in Canada and around the world.

Before contact with Europeans, Aboriginal art was deeply ingrained in everyday life. Art was, and still is, a practice imbedded in worldview, cultural protocols and meanings. It did not neatly reflect the concept of 'art' as it has been understood from a Western perspective. Art objects were conduits for transferring knowledge and occupied the full spectrum of practice—sacred and ceremonial, customary and contemporary. As Gitsxan elder Doreen Jensen explained:

I would like to remind you of the Art that the Europeans found when they arrived in our country. They found Art everywhere. In hundreds of flourishing, vital cultures, Art was fully integrated with daily life. They saw dwellings painted with abstract Art that was to inspire generations of European painters. Ceremonial robes were intricately woven Art that heralded the weavers' identity and privilege in the community. Utilitarian objects, including food vessels, storage containers, and clothing, were powerfully formed and decorated with the finest, most significant Art. Each nation had its theatre, music, and choreography. The first Europeans found hundreds of languages in use – not dialects but languages. And in every language, our Artists created philosophical argument and sacred ceremony, political discourse, fiction, and poetry.²

² Words spoken at the opening of INDIGENA: *Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years*. Museum of Civilization in Hull, QC, 1992. Doreen Jensen, "Art History," *Give Back*. North Vancouver: Galleries Publications, 1992, pp 17–18.

¹ Eden Robinson. *Son of a Trickster*, Vintage Canada, 2017, p. 15.



With the exhibition *The Time of Things* I want to remember and honour the many generations of Indigenous women who have nurtured their own creative gifts, who have respected the land, who have perfected their skills, and who have generously transmitted their knowledge to the next generation. Today, women are noteworthy heroes of the current revitalization of Indigenous linguistic, cultural and artistic practices.

Indigenous artists are practicing in the aftermath of a cultural genocide. They are actively involved in preserving traditional knowledge while creating new work that speaks to the world we live in today. Quechua, Spanish and Croatian scholar Carol Kalafatic elaborates the idea that:

*...aboriginal artists ... hold an essential place on the series of interdependent circles that define community/nation. Aboriginal art... is a 'cultural record' for our living communities, rather than for museums, and provides the instructions we need for life. Our role as contemporary carriers of oral traditions that are rooted in the covenant is to examine and acknowledge our relationships with others, between people and the universe, between the physical and the spiritual; we are story keepers who help acknowledge our peoples' collective responsibilities to fight, laugh, and tell stories in order to live.*³

In this way, Indigenous art becomes a pursuit of knowledge that is continuous: an inter-generational exercise of gathering, understanding and passing the enormous sources of traditional knowledge contained in the world.

So, how does the concept of time, from various Indigenous perspectives, inform the production of Indigenous art today? How does time influence connections to materials, to processes? What role does intergenerational memory play in art making?

Previous

Daphne Boyer
All My Relations, 2018
(Detail)

³ Carol Kalafatic, "Keepers of the Power: Story as Covenant in the Films of Loretta Todd, Shelley Niro, and Christine Walsh," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault, eds. University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 116.

The exhibition *The Time of Things* proposes to challenge the binary of traditional and contemporary art. It considers the continuum of Indigenous customary practices into contemporary Indigenous art. This continuum is epistemologically rooted in Indigenous concepts of time where the past, present and future are interconnected. In Indigenous worldviews, time is circular and cyclical. Time is connected to land. Time is manifested through memory and oral traditions. Stories are linked through time and place.

As Leroy Little Bear explains:

*The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world. If everything is constantly moving and changing, then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns. For instance, the cosmic cycles are in constant motion, but they have regular patterns that result in recurrences such as the seasons of the year, the migration of the animals, renewal ceremonies, songs, and stories. Constant motion, as manifested in cyclical or repetitive patterns, emphasizes process as opposed to product. It results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion.*⁴

In this sense, "time plays a central role in Indigenous people's expression of sovereignty and struggle for self-determination."⁵ Temporal sovereignty and the possibilities of multiple temporalities can challenge Eurocentric notions of fixity, of consigning Indigenous people and their art forms to the past.

In contrast to Western art movements, which are often based on ideas of rupture and progress, Indigenous arts contain – and are nourished by – the continuous manifestations of interrelatedness. One can see this as a thread linking memory, knowledge and experience through the flux of time. In this sense, Indigenous artists are connected to deeply rooted artistic traditions that help navigate complex streams of meanings, even as they straddle Indigenous and Western worldviews, values and theoretical discourses. As Dene Elder Peter Bishop explains, "We've always adapted to new circumstances. We've explored new materials, new processes. We've embraced differences and influences. We've always been contemporary."⁶

⁴ Leroy Little Bear. "Jagged Worldview Colliding", *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* by Marie Battiste, University of British Columbia, 2000, p. 78.

⁵ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, Duke University Press, 2017, viii Preface.

⁶ Words spoken during a public consultation and reported: in France Trépanier. *Aboriginal Arts Research Initiative (AARI)*, Canada Council for the Arts, 2008, p. 17.



We are witnessing across the land – and in every artistic discipline – the strength, the audacity and the vision of hundreds of Indigenous women artists. These women are trailblazers. They create new ways of understanding for those of us who live on the territory now known as Canada. They remind each of us of our ancestors, and the places from which we come. They insist on our responsibilities to the land and to each other. Their work is recognized nationally and internationally.

I feel honored to bring together for this exhibition, *The Time of Things*, the artworks of five of these remarkable women artists, revealing the inventiveness, versatility and depth of their practices.

Daphne Boyer is a Metis artist who has recently moved from Montreal to Victoria. Her work is process-based and intuitive. It is activated through time and the observation of life cycles. Daphne harvests plant material – leaves, acorns, thorns, berries and reeds – to make iterative works. Her creative process is ingenious; she dissects, assembles, recombines, photographs, and then scales digital images before printing them on paper. The printed images are then embellished using women’s traditional handwork – stitching, braiding, weaving, embroidering, beading or hand tinting. These embellished pieces are photographed, further transformed and used as building blocks for larger works. Her contribution to the exhibition includes a new body of work exploring the juncture of time, memory and trace. It also celebrates her Prairie Métis heritage and the life of her late mother Anita – the family storyteller and archivist.

Inuvialuit artist Maureen Gruben employs similar strategies of disassembling and re-forming materials to create intimate and profoundly evocative artworks. The land is present in her choice of material – polar bear fur, moose hides and sealskins. She imbeds creative tension by juxtaposing new materials such as plexiglass, plastic tubing and beads. She brings the vastness of the frozen ocean into the gallery space. Her work establishes critical connections between rapidly changing realities of life on the arctic lands and pressing international environmental challenges. Gruben’s practice is permeated with activism while at the same time allowing generous room for her materials themselves to speak. While referring explicitly inwards to localized acts of hunting, gathering, communal preparation and sharing—and even to individual animals—her work extends decisively outwards, exploring new visual languages.

Previous

Maureen Gruben
Memory Bones, 2016

Susan Pavel (sa’hLamitSa) first learned to weave in the Coast Salish style during the summer of 1996 with master teacher subiyay – Bruce Miller of the Skokomish Nation. Each summer she would take three full months to produce one ceremonial blanket and then gift it to various elders of the tribe. After four years of this work someone suggested that she sell her creations and she embarked on that path. By the seventh year she was invited to teach weaving classes. Pavel, who is not Indigenous, is married to CHiXapKaid (Michael Pavel) of the Skokomish Indian tribe. She was chosen to carry on the technique by Miller, and has taught well over 2500 students to date. She explains:

*I knew that he saw something in me ... and that I would do my absolute best to be the strongest link in the Coast Salish weaving chain. ... when I think of Coast Salish weaving and my job there, ... it was never mine as a possession. It was only meant to pass through me and I was the conduit so that I could pass it on.*⁷

Skeena Reece is a Tsimshian, Gitksan, Cree and Métis multi-disciplinary artist whose practice includes storytelling, stand-up comedy, ceremony, theatre and visual arts. In her performance work she often embodies a persona modeled after the Sacred Clown and other indigenous Trickster figures — mischievous, impertinent characters who call out society’s failings and indiscretions. Her performances are honest, humorous, critically penetrating and hold the potential for raw exchanges with audiences. “Skeena Reece has created a substantial delectus of work that often features her own body. Whether through performance, photography or video installation, her body maps discourses of self-representation, spirit, trauma and the politic of each.”⁸

Marika Swan is a Tla-o-qui-aht multidisciplinary artist living on her home territory, on the west coast of Vancouver Island where she is reconnecting with her cultural roots. Her most recent work is inspired by research she conducted in the Tla-o-qui-aht collection at the Museum of Natural History in New York. The artist affirms:

*When I gave birth to my daughter, it was such a radical and unquestionably sacred miracle that I felt immediately connected to the women in my ancestry. I wanted to reach back past the imposition of the Christian values that feel embarrassed by the wetness of women’s bodies and understand how my ancestors saw women and women’s bodies.*⁹

Her current creative exploration focuses on dissolving this duality between contemporary and traditional artistic practices by embracing the core values of her people’s teachings and traditions. Through her research of museum items she has been looking for clues on how her ancestors celebrated women as portals to the spirit world.

⁷ Quote from a video interview with Susan Pavel produced by the Portland Art Museum, 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=101&v=Wyv1VZfdcs

⁸ Dana Claxton. *Embellished Indigeneity: The Art Making of Skeena Reece*, Oboro, 2017 (online essay). <http://www.oboro.net/sites/www.oboro.net/files/pdf/opuscules/opuscule-reece-web-en.pdf>

⁹ Quote from an email exchange dated December 26, 2017.

As a curator, it is essential for me that Indigenous ways of knowing inform my practice. My work is guided by the Indigenous principles of respect, relevance, relationality, responsibility and reciprocity.¹⁰ I always try to be aware of how I position my authority in relation to my many collaborators, artists and audiences.

I hope that the exhibition *The Time of Things* opens points of entry, moments of connection with the artworks. I also hope that the viewer attempts to establish these 'relations' on Indigenous terms. And in Indigenous time.

So just for a moment, don't worry about being on time. Be in time. Take your time.

France Trépanier
Curator, March 2018

Opposite
Susan Pavel
Our Healing
(Detail)

¹⁰ For more on Indigenous guiding principles, please see: Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, 2013.
Shawn Wilson. *Research is Ceremony, Indigenous Research Methods*, Fernwood Publishing, 2008.



Daphne Boyer

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Daphne Boyer creates works on paper that celebrate her Indigenous heritage and honour plants as the basis of life on earth. Her recent body of work honours her mother Anita and her maternal grandmother Clémence. As a process-based artist, she harvests plant material to make iterative works.

Working intuitively, she dissects, recombines, photographs, and then scales digital images before printing them on paper. The printed images are then embellished using women's traditional handwork (stitching, braiding, weaving, embroidering, beading or hand tinting). These embellished pieces are photographed, scaled, further transformed and used as building blocks for larger works. In 2017, Daphne presented a solo exhibition at Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, curated by Felicia Gay. Her work has been shown in both Canada and the USA, and is held by collectors in Montréal, Toronto, Saskatoon, Calgary and Strasbourg (France).

Maureen Gruben

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Maureen Gruben was born in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT. She studied at Kelowna Okanagan College of Fine Arts (Diploma in Fine Arts, 1990); the En'owkin Centre in Penticton (Diploma in Fine Arts and Creative Writing, 2000 and Certificate in Indigenous Political Development & Leadership, 2001); and University of Victoria (BFA, 2012). She has been recognized by the En'owkin Centre with both their Eliza Jane Maracle Award (1998/99) and their Overall Achievement Award (1999/2000). In 2011 she was awarded the Elizabeth Valentine Prangnell Scholarship Award from the University of Victoria. Gruben has most recently exhibited in the following group shows: Blink at University of Victoria (2012) and Custom Made at Kamloops Art Gallery (2015), 150 Acts: Art, Activism, Impact at Art Gallery of Guelph (2017-18), and as part of Landmarks/Repères 2017. Her first solo show, *UNGALAQ (When Stakes Come Loose)* opened at Vancouver's grunt gallery in 2017.

Skeena Reece

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Skeena Reece is a multi-disciplinary Tsimshian/Gitksan, Cree and Métis artist whose work includes performance art, spoken word, 'sacred clowning', writing, singing, and video art. Reece is based on Vancouver Island, on the west coast of Canada. She has performed and shown at venues including The Power Plant, Toronto, ON (2012), Modern Fuel, Kingston, ON (2011), 17th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2010), Nuit Blanche, Toronto, ON (2009), LIVE Biennale, Vancouver, B.C. (2009), Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, B.C. (2008), the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, B.C. (2008), and the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. (2008). Reece attended Northwest Community College, Prince Rupert; Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver, and has trained at the Banff Centre and grunt gallery as a curatorial practices intern.

Marika Swan

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Marika Swan is an artist and mother of mixed Tla-o-qui-aht, Scottish and Irish descent. Her main creative practice explores feminist Nuu-chah-nulth values through woodblock printmaking, sometimes layered with other visual arts techniques such as carving, stencil and photography. Currently based out of her home territory of Tla-o-qui-aht, Marika has been developing *The Nuu-chah-nulth Living Archive*, a community led research project that is locating and documenting the vast bodies of Northwest Coast ancestral objects and materials held in various institutions all over the world. Through this project, Marika is actively engaging with local elders and culture keepers to stimulate community discussion and create resources for the purposes of cultural revitalization. The study of ancestral objects and being immersed in community reflections on the roles of creative objects and images, has inspired the beginnings of a new body of work.

Susan Pavel

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sa'hLamitSa ~ Dr. Susan Pavel is a fiber artist living in Olympia, Washington. She first learned Coast Salish Weaving during the summer of 1996. Each summer she would produce one ceremonial blanket and then gift it to various elders of the tribe. By the fourth year she was selling the weavings. By the seventh year she was invited to teach weaving classes and has taught over 2,500 students. She has participated and later solo exhibited seven museum exhibits. With public and private collectors across the nation she continues to weave. 2016 marked 20 Years of Coast Salish weaving for her and more importantly – SQ3Tsyay – Weaver's Spirit Power.

France Trépanier

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France Trépanier is a visual artist, curator and researcher of Kanien'kéha:ka and French ancestry. Until recently, France was the Aboriginal Curator at Open Space Arts Society in Victoria, where she is co-curating, with Michelle Jacques and Doug Jarvis, the exhibition *Deconstructing Comfort*. She also curated the *Awakening Memory Project* with artists Sonny Assu, LessLIE and Marianne Nicolson. France was the co-recipient of the 2012 Audain Aboriginal Curatorial Fellowship by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Her essays and articles have been published in numerous journals and magazines. France was selected, by the Canada Council for the Arts, to be part of the International Indigenous Curators Exchange in New Zealand and the 2017 Venice Biennale. France co-authored, with Chris Creighton-Kelly, *Understanding Aboriginal Art in Canada Today: a Knowledge and Literature Review* for the Canada Council for the Arts. Along with Chris, France is currently co-directing *Primary Colours/Couleurs primaires*, a three-year initiative, which seeks to place Indigenous art practices at the centre of the Canadian art system.

Exhibition List

All works are in the collection of the artist unless otherwise indicated.

Daphne Boyer

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- All my Relations*, 2018
Collage of printed forms with magnets
120" X 20"
- Red Leaf and Hawthorn Tipi Cover*, 2017
Pigmented ink printed on Canson rag paper
63" X 32"
- Hemoglobin*, 2018
Weaving of printed paper strips
84" X 45"
- Acorn Caps (Green, Red, Gold) and Smoke Leaf in situ*, 2014
Limited edition archival print
33" X 25" each
- Maple Squares #1,2,3*, 2015
Limited edition archival print, Japanese paper, pigment, silk and linen thread
16" X 16" each

Maureen Gruben

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- Stitching My Landscape*, 2017
Print on Epson Hot Press + video
39.25" x 96"
Video, 6 mins. 10 secs.
- Message*, 2017
Polar bear guard hair, cotton thread, black interface
180" x 24"
- Gestation*, 2016
Polar bear guard hair, silicone wrap, polar bear underfur, white glue, thread
53" diameter
- POPs (The medicine from my body is poisoning our future ancestors the meat here has turned to glass)*, 2012
Wood, plexiglass
4' x 3" x 4"
- Memory Bones*, 2016
Plastic tubing, beads, moose hide
4", 90 pieces-30 per colour

Susan Pavel

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- Our Healing Wool*, 11' X 3'
- Third Eye Listening*, 2017
Mushroom dyed wool
28" x 15.5" x .5"
- An Affinity for Moss*, 2016
Acrylic wool blend
50" x 55" x .5"
- Morning Rise*, 2015
Wool
24.25" x 38" x .4"

Skeena Reece

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- Touch Me*, 2013
Video, 8 minutes
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia, Purchased with support from members of the Belkin Curator's Forum
- Conceptual Carving Performance*
June 7, 2018, 7pm
University of Victoria
Legacy Art Gallery

Marika Echachis Swan

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- As Above, So Below*, 2017
Carved and painted woodblock
20" x 24"
- My Grandmother's Regalia*, 2016
Carved wood panel
24" x 36"
- Becoming Worthy*, 2015
Painted print framed
31.75" x 26.5"
- I am Creation*, 2018
Reduction print
18" x 24"
- I am Creation*, 2018
Carved woodblock
18" x 24"
- Tlaaquiht Carved Woman*, 2017
Photograph
12" X 16"
- Deep In Our Bones*, 2014
Giclée Print
21.5" x 27.5"

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my teachers and mentors – the many Indigenous women artists who have inspired and guided my journey. Nia:wen'kowa to you respected ones. Thank you to Mary Jo Hughes, Director of the University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries, for extending an invitation to be a guest curator. I truly appreciate this opportunity to work with her and her dynamic team, and to present the exhibition *The Time of Things* to Legacy's multiple audiences. Thank you also to Chris Creighton-Kelly for his continued support and his editorial assistance.

—France Trépanier

Guest Curator: France Trépanier
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and the artists

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Opposite
Marika Echachis Swan
I am Creation, 2018
(Detail)





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