Canadian Art: Coast to Coast to Coast

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Indigenous Art in Canada

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Colonialism is a term used to refer to the territorial expansion of European industrial powers, especially after 1870.

In effect, colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people over another, particularly in matters of the economy.

The result of this expansion was the formation of large overseas empires such as North America.

“England with it’s hands in various regions”
“Indians of Canada Pavilion,” Expo ‘67

Interior panels read...

- “You have stolen our native land, our culture, our soul... and yet, our traditions deserve to be appreciated, and those derived from an age-old harmony with nature even merited being adopted by you.”

- “An Indian child begins school by learning a foreign tongue.”

- “Dick and Jane in the storybook are strangers to an Indian boy.”
Norval Morrisseau, mural for the “Indians of Canada Pavilion,” Expo ’67

• Morrisseau was one of nine Indigenous artists commissioned for the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo ‘67.
  – His large-scale exterior mural showed bear cubs being nursed by Mother Earth.
  – Organizers raised concerns about nudity in the image so Morrisseau left the project rather than censor it.
  – The mural was changed and completed by his friend and apprentice Carl Ray.

• Morrisseau’s opposition represents one of the best known instances of an Indigenous artist from Canada preserving their right to artistic freedom.
Norval Morrisseau (1931 – 2007)

• Morrisseau was the first to paint ancient myths and legends of the eastern woodlands, stories previously passed down by oral tradition.

• He spent his youth in Northern Ontario, near Thunderbay, where his style developed without much outside influence.

• As the soul originator of the "Woodland" style, he has become an inspiration to three generations of artists.

• Morrisseau was brought up by his grandfather who introduced him to Ojibwa shamanism and told him the stories and legends passed down amongst the Ojibwa people. He was told by some that it was taboo to relate these stories.

• His work now hangs in all of the most prestigious museums in Canada and around the world.
Morrisseau and the “Woodlands” Style

• The “Woodlands” style or “legend painting” is a genre of painting among Great Lakes tribes.

• Founded by Norval Morrisseau during the early 1960s in Northern Ontario.

• Morrisseau was criticized by his community for disclosing traditional spiritual knowledge of Ojibwe stories and legends.

• The perspective is strictly frontal, two-dimensional, profile or aerial, lacking ground lines and indications of horizons. Colourful, figurative images delineated with heavy black form-lines and X-Ray articulations.

Roy Thomas – *Water Spirit* (date unknown)
Duane Linklater

*Tautology* (2011-2013)
• In 1974, artists Jackson Beardy, Daphne Odjig, and Alex Janvier joined Eddy Cobiness, Norval Morrisseau, Carl Ray, and Joseph Sanchez at an informal meeting at Odjig’s Winnipeg home to discuss the creation of an artist’s collective.

• Following this meeting, the artists sought to make their relationship official (and legal) by incorporating their name as the “Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation.”

• In Canada and the United States, the PNIAI is often referred to as the “Indian Group of Seven,” a nickname given to the group by Winnipeg Free Press reporter.
  — The name embeds the PNIAI below the Group of Seven in a hierarchy of art from Canada.
Daphne Odjig (b. 1919, d. 2016)

• As a child, Odjig sketched with her grandfather, a stone-carver. He taught her the legends and the use of the curvilinear design for which she has become revered.

• During 1960s, she began to focus on legends, joys and realities of Indigenous life, while simultaneously refining her signature style of vibrant colours, soft contours outlined in black, overlapping shapes and modernist, abstracted figuration.

http://www.gevik.com/gallery-phillip/odjig/
Alex Janvier (b. 1935)

- Janvier was raised in the care of his family until the age of eight when he was uprooted from his home and sent to the Blue Quills Indian Residential School near St. Paul, Alberta.

- Unlike many Indigenous artists of his time, Janvier received formal art training from the Alberta College of Art in Calgary and graduated with honours in 1960.

- A major retrospective of Janvier’s life and work opened 25 November, 2016 at the National Gallery of Canada, the first Indigenous artist to have a retrospective exhibition since Morrisseau.

http://www.alexjanvier.com/aa1.html
Jackson Beardy (1944 – 1984)

- Beady attended Residential School and studied art at the Winnipeg Technical Vocational High School and the University of Manitoba.

- His work draws on a deep knowledge of his native Cree tradition gained from a close relationship with his grandmother, and from his collection of myths and legends learned in Northern Manitoba during the mid-1960s.

- From 1982 through 1983, Beardy was senior arts advisor to the Federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, now Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Eddy Cobiness (1933 – 1996)

• A member of the Ojibwa Nation, Cobiness had a large studio in Buffalo Point on the shore of Lake of the Woods in Northern Ontario but was forced to move to Winnipeg in 1974 because of ill health.

• His work is in the private collection of Queen Elizabeth II, Prime Minister Jean Chretien, and actor Charlton Heston.

• Cobiness frequently painted stylized images of animals, and was known for being able to capture the essence of the various creatures or warriors with few deft strokes.
Carl Ray (1943 – 1978)

- He was hesitant to pursue a career in visual art due to the taboo of painting the sacred stories of his people.

- In the mid-1960s, Morrisseau had broken the taboos that had previously restricted Ray from pursuing his artistic abilities. He would later apprentice under Morrisseau.

- Ray would later teach art at numerous schools in communities including Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Wawa, Manitoulin Island, Sudbury, North Bay, Bracebridge, and Oshawa.

Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948)

- Born in Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, Sanchez was raised on White Mountain Apache Reservation in Whiteriver, Arizona.

- Sanchez lived in Canada in the 1970’s and was a founding member of the Professional Native Indian Inc.

- Known as both an artist and curator, his list of achievements include Director and Chief Curator of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

http://bearclawgallery.com/artists/joseph-sanchez/
Kent Monkman

Cree Master 1. 2002, acrylic on canvas
Kent Monkman, *Cree Master 1*. 2002, acrylic on canvas

Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Cocoran*. 1876, oil on canvas
Kent Monkman

The Daddies. 2016. 60”x 112.5”, acrylic on canvas
The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC)

• In 1670, King Charles II of England granted the Hudson’s Bay Company exclusive trading rights over the Hudson Bay watershed.
  – From its founding in 1670 until 1870 the fur trade was the chief focus of the HBC.

• The fur trade had a deep impact upon Canada’s Indigenous peoples.
  – As a result of their involvement in the fur trade, many abandoned their traditional lifestyles and economy, becoming reliant on European manufactured goods and foodstuffs for survival.
  – Many moved beyond traditional tribal territory, too, in search of fur-bearing animals and to obtain a better position in the trade.
Sonny Assu

1884-1951, Hudson’s Bay Point Blanket and copper cups modelled after grande Starbucks coffee (2010)
The “Indian Act” of Canada (1876)

- The era of colonialism saw policies of assimilation enforced by the Canadian government with the goal of assimilating First Nations people into the European-based Canadian culture.

- The Indian Act is a set of laws that applied just to the First Nations people of Canada.
  - It outlined mandatory residential school education, cultural bans, and resource-use restrictions were enforced through the Indian Act.

- The Indian Act has also enabled the government to determine the land base of these groups in the form of reserves, and even to define who qualifies as “status Indian.”
  - While the Indian Act has undergone numerous amendments since it was first passed in 1876, today it largely retains its original form.

- *Indian Act* speaks of colonization. The piece consists of all 56 pages of the Federal Government’s Indian Act mounted on stroud cloth and sewn over with red and white glass beads. Each word is replaced with white beads sewn into the document; the red beads replace the negative space.

- Between 1999 and 2002, Nadia Myre enlisted over 230 friends, colleagues and strangers to help her bead over the Indian Act. With the help of Rhonda Meier, they organized workshops and presentations at Concordia University, and hosted weekly beading bees at Oboro Gallery, where it was presented as part of the exhibition, “Cont[r]act,” in 2002.
Edward S. Curtis (1868 – 1952)

- American photographer and ethnologist.

- Curtis worked for thirty years and produced 40,000 photographs, from Canada’s north to America’s southwest.

- His magnum opus, *The North American Indian*, was funded by financier and philanthropist J.P. Morgan. The 20-book set was published in a limited edition between 1907 and 1930.
  - A set of the book sold for $1.44 million dollars in 2012.
  - The work charts the cultural practices, languages, and traditions of Aboriginal tribes in North America.

- *The North American Indian* is considered one of the most significant non-indigenous records of Native American culture.
“A group of Sioux warriors as they appeared in the days of intertribal warfare, carefully making their way down a hillside in the vicinity of the enemy's camp.”
Woman’s Primitive Dress — Tolowa, printed 1923. Museum of Photographic Arts Collections
Portrait of a Hesquiaht woman from the Central Nootka tribe
British Columbia, 1916
Photographer: Edward S. Curtis
PA-039476
"The Whaler"
British Columbia, 1916
Photographer: Edward S. Curtis
C-026050
KC Adams – *Perception* series (2014 – ongoing)
TERRORIST?

Look Again...

NIIGAAN SINCLAIR (ANISHINAABE)
Father, son, grandson, writer, editor, activist, professor, community organizer, and soccer player.
WHORE?

Look Again...

TANYA TAGAQ (INUIT)
mother, daughter, artist, dream chaser, balance seeker, bannock bum lover and hickey giver!
DRUG DEALER?

Look Again...

JAMES LATHLIN (CREE)
A father, son, youth counselor, motivational speaker, coach, author, rapper and an aspiring stand up comedian.
USELESS HALFBREED?

KATHERENA VERMETTE
A mom, writer, fiancée, educator, arts coordinator, volunteer, yogi, homeowner, little dog owner, Governor General Literary Award Winner, and still paying for grad school herself.

Look Again...
TOKEN INDIAN?

Look Again...

REUBEN BOULETTE (ANISHINAABE)
A son, brother, fiancé, uncle, artist, musician, youth mentor, high school teacher, taxpayer and homeowner.
HOOKER?

APRIL SINCLAIR (OJIBWAY)
A mother, daughter, girlfriend, sister, high school graduate, working mom, loves apple and coffee and is social assistance free!

LOOK AGAIN...
FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME?

Look Again...

NUNGOHS (Ojibway/Potawatomi)
A daughter, niece, straight ‘A’ student, YouTuber, violinist, track star and wants to be a veterinarian.
Walking With Our Sisters

- Walking With Our Sisters is by all accounts a massive commemorative art installation comprised of 1,763+ pairs of moccasin vamps (tops) plus 108 pairs of children’s vamps created and donated by hundreds of caring and concerned individuals to draw attention to this injustice. The large collaborative art piece will be made available to the public through selected galleries and locations. The work exists as a floor installation made up of beaded vamps arranged in a winding path formation on fabric and includes cedar boughs.

- Each pair of vamps (or “uppers” as they are also called) represents one missing or murdered Indigenous woman. The unfinished moccasins represent the unfinished lives of the women whose lives were cut short. The children’s vamps are dedicated to children who never returned home from residential schools. Together the installation represents all these women; paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth.
In Memory Of

Tanya Jean Brooks
The End