

Contemporary Art Curating and its Long Christian Shadow
by
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Abstract

In order to tackle the under-representation of racialized artists in Canadian art galleries, it is useful to gain familiarity with the Christian ideologies that bolster Eurocentric race representation. Although secular Euro-Western society is culturally Christian, museologists rarely consider how residual Biblical values may underpin gallery pedagogy. This paper combines museum studies, critical race scholarship and theology to argue that modern exhibition practices deal in valorization that was developed by the medieval Church and continues to justify the power of dominant groups. Namely, that museum visitors and subordinate staff encounter binaries that alienate difference and trigger shame and insecurity. Three curators committed to equitable race representation offer counter-strategies to these binaries through epistemic disobedience, which springs from their marginalized identities. For example Michelle Jacques and Geneviève Wallen celebrate and restore Black Canadian art history, and Wanda Nanibush invokes Anishinaabe pedagogy in the gallery, centering respect, love and intuition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Coming from a mixed raced Asian family of immigrants, I am moved by the critical race lens of museum scholars who have revealed reasons why contemporary art galleries often feel alienating to my family and I. Museum and contemporary art scholars and curators (Gagnon (2000), McMaster (2004), Fatona (2011), Luo et al (20106) highlight institutional policies and systemic barriers that marginalize people of colour¹. Their findings reveal a systemic bias against Black, Indigenous and artists of colour, and a set of institutional strategies that have steadily undermined equitable racial representation in the arts in Canada.

This paper argues that the under-representation of racialized artists in contemporary Canadian exhibits is also unconsciously bolstered by racial hierarchies that are based in Christian categories and schemas. I do not claim that art gallery staff consciously espouse Christian tenets; instead my goal is to scrutinize the deep roots of European Western logic, further back than colonialism or capitalism, to its basic valorizing schemes. These are Christian – a religion that European colonial agendas have appropriated since the eleventh century to justify expansion and profit. Even though Canada is a secular society, its colonial institutions are rooted in European Christian sensibilities of morality, sin and virtue (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The History*, Part 1: 2015, 24).

¹ writer Monica Kim Gagnon documented the contestations of racialized artists and activists fighting exclusionary Canada Arts Council policies and cuts to provincial arts budgets; in 2004 curator Gerald McMaster fought critics of the National Museum of Indian Art who denied that Indigenous worldviews could constitute a legitimate exhibitionary principal; in 2011 curator and scholar Andrea Fatona's doctoral dissertation revealed that arts council policies prioritize a European sense of national identity; and in 2016 Amy Luo et al. published findings in *Canadian Art* that exhibition practices silo and tokenize artists of colour across the nation.

Christianity demands that the faithful discern and enforce binaries of virtues and flaws. This includes people, races, and works of art. This binary, and the paranoia and insecurity that it breeds, is reinforced sometimes out of profit or hate, but most often out of conformity or simple inertia. It is deployed as a teaching tool and storytelling framework in modern Euro-Western² political and cultural institutions, including galleries, and creates a host of side-effects of which racial under-representation is just one, including a sense of visitor alienation and professional burnout amongst staff, particularly in major art institutions. I investigate this process and discuss the strategies of three curators who actively work to make space for racialized artists in their practices.

What has emerged from this research, and what I hope to offer curators and art historians, is the beginning of a conversation about how certain Christian modes of thought continue to be deployed by institutions, and how they inform our roles as art professionals. The questions this research seeks to explore are the following. Does the gallery deal in residual Christian values? Is the under-representation of racialized artists a result of these values? And what are some strategies for epistemic disobedience³?

This first chapter outlines my methodology. Chapter 2 surveys selected texts from critical museology, theology, and critical race studies. The thread that runs through these texts is the construction of racial hierarchy, first developed in Christianity and then codified in the gallery. In Chapter 3, I analyze interviews conducted with three curators – Michelle Jacques, Chief

² I follow Rinaldo Walcott's use of the "Euro-" prefix to distinguish between the European Western hemisphere and the Indigenous Western hemisphere.

³ This term, expanded in the interview section, comes from Walter D. Mignolo's 2011 essay "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and. De-Colonial Freedom."

Curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; Wanda Nanibush, the Art Gallery of Ontario's Assistant Curator of Canadian and Indigenous Art, and Geneviève Wallen, programming coordinator at Xspace Cultural Centre. I discuss their professional motivations and interventionist strategies to increase racial representation in their respective galleries, and I appraise my methods in the conclusion in Chapter 4.

Research Methodology

My research draws on text analysis, a recent survey exhibition of contemporary artists, and interviews with three curators. I adopt a lens that assumes that race and racism are social constructs rather than biological, and in this case spiritual, constructs. I explore three academic disciplines: museum studies; critical race theory and theology, in order to problematize widely-held, naturalized Euro-Western beliefs around race, morality, shame, virtue, and how they manifest in exhibition practices.

Interview Methods

Three curators were selected for their histories of commitment to tackling the under-representation of artists of colour and Indigenous artists in the sphere of Canadian curatorial practice. Michelle Jacques has spent two decades curating in major national art galleries, has taught in three Canadian art universities, and is committed to diverse racial representation. She has relocated to British Columbia but is originally from Toronto where she accrued fifteen years of experience at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) her last position being the Acting Curator of Canadian Art. I first saw her speak about her objective to promote racial diversity at The State of

Blackness: From Production to Presentation, a 2014 conference that examined Black Diasporic artistic representation in Canada. Jacques' curatorial work at the AGO won the 2008 Untitled Arts Award for Best Curated Exhibition⁴ in a Public Gallery ("Win-win situation," 2006). She has also juried prominent art awards including the annual Sobey Award. It is worth noting that she did not have the opportunity to mount the Toronto survey exhibit that would have been the AGO's first racially diverse survey of Toronto artists. The project was curtailed, which Jacques discusses in our interview – and a similarly diverse Toronto survey was not realized until Wanda Nanibush's 2016 exhibit, which will be discussed next. Jacques now works as the Chief Curator of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV).

Wanda Nanibush is a curator and outspoken Indigenous activist, which she credits, in our interview, to her traditional Anishinaabe values as a member of the Beausoleil First Nation near Penetanguishene. For example she has candidly told the Toronto Star that "galleries and museums come out of colonialism" and that "The AGO is on and in indigenous territory, land, and I think it's important to have that marked out as a priority." (Warren, 2016) She curated a Toronto survey exhibit and mounted it with all of the racial diversity that Jacques had envisioned, calling it *Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989*. It is a large-scale exhibit that runs until May 2017, and its opening in September 2016 was a ground-breaking moment for Toronto's Indigenous artists and artists of colour. During the opening one of the artists, Black activist and dub poet Lillian Allen took to the stage and declared that her only previous relationship to the AGO had been as a protester outside. She added that "it's good to be on the inside" (opening event, September 29, 2016). For this exhibit, Nanibush also installed the AGO's

⁴ Annual awards gala produced in partnership with the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art.

first wall texts in Anishinaabemowin, positing them as a “visual strategy” in order to push past the gallery’s exclusive acknowledgement of colonial English and French, and open up the exhibition space to Indigeneity.

Geneviève Wallen is the youngest of the three curators, having graduated from OCAD University’s Critical Curatorial Practice program in 2015, and her practice as a cultural worker attempts to revision possibilities for inter-communal healing. Wallen is a core board member and curator for the innovative curatorial collective Younger Than Beyonce, which ignited social media buzz and culminated in the Vice Magazine headline “This is the nomadic art space that you need to know about” (June 2016). She curated exhibitions for YTB Gallery which questioned Canadian multiculturalism and the politics of the land. She was also guest curated for the Nia Centre for the Arts, and in conversation with Black Lives Matter Toronto, curated an exhibition about self-care and communal care. She is currently a programming coordinator at the artist-run-centre Xspace. Wallen’s practice as a curator toggles between traditional exhibition practices and popular culture.

Interview Format

Each interview was an hour in duration and followed a semi-structured framework. I began with standard questions and allowed the conversation to diverge naturally from the script. The interviews were audio-recorded alongside handwritten notes. Two of the interviews were conducted in person, and one by phone. I then transcribed the interviews and coded them thematically. See Appendix C for interview questions.

Ethical Consideration

The interviews were exempt from Research and Ethics Board review because they engage with three curators who represent public institutions. This grants the exemption of Article 2.3 (b) of the Ethical Conduct Statement: the individuals or groups targeted for observation have no reasonable expectation of privacy.

Chapter 2 Race, Christianity, and Curatorial Practice

Scholarly writing pertaining to the construction of racial hierarchies within Christianity and critical race ground my discussion in this chapter. I will examine the root of Christian race hierarchies dating back to the medieval era, and consider the Toronto-based contemporary art survey exhibition *One and Two and More Than Two* – which ran at Toronto’s Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery from September 2013 to January 2014 – in order to explore the persistence of the under-representation of racialized and indigenous artists in exhibition practices.

Contemporary Art Galleries and the Marginalization of Race

Writing about cultural production and race proliferated through the 1980s and 1990s in Canada as protests and conferences examined the marginalization of Black, Indigenous and artists of colour. This writing highlighted racial inequity in the arts and was disseminated through magazines, newspapers, exhibits, artist run centres and artist collectives founded in the seventies and eighties. Art critic and scholar Monica Kim Gagnon documented these movements and discussed contestations by marginalized artists, as well as analyzed racist arts funding policies in her books “Other Conundrums” (2000) and “13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics” co-edited by Richard Fung (2002). “13 Conversations” also included critical essays by artists, curators and scholars such as Alanis Obamasawin, Ken Lum, Richard Hill and Sharon Fernandez who shared their perspectives on racial exclusion in the arts. In the 1998 book “Challenging Racism in the Arts,” Tator, Henry and Mattis also documented concrete examples

of controversial cultural events in Canada including two major exhibits – the Royal Ontario Museum exhibit “Into the Heart of Africa”(1989) and the Art Gallery of Ontario’s “Barnes Exhibit,” (1994) both of which provoked protests from Black communities. Tator et al. also highlighted the formation of “Minquon Panchayat,” the coalition of Black, Indigenous and women of colour that confronted racial marginalization at the 1992 conference of the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres⁵. Curator and scholar Andrea Fatona’s 2011 doctoral dissertation “Where Outreach Meets Outrage”: Racial Equity at The Canada Council for the Arts,” looked at the broader picture of Canada’s cultural agenda and documented the sidelining of Black, Indigenous and artists of colour from the Canadian imaginary. In her 2014 chapter “Arts Funding, the State and Canadian Nation-Making Producing Governable Subjects,” she reiterated that Canadian identity evolved through deliberate strategic institutional agendas that prioritize European cultural practices and disparage the cultural expression of other cultures, especially Black and Indigenous cultures (Fatona, 2014).

Indigenous curators and cultural scholars continue to add to the discussion on the under-representation of race in the gallery by exploring its philosophical underpinnings. Curator and art critic Richard William Hill examines the disconnect between dominant colonial philosophies in the gallery and Indigenous worldviews. In a 2004 article he explains how he reinstalled the AGO’s McLaughlin Gallery by combining Indigenous and European objects on a level playing

⁵ These records of under-representation continue in recent statistical analysis. York University’s 2012 Waging Culture report testified that discrimination accounts for the drastically small number of people of colour who can afford full time artist careers, stating that only around “11.2% of living artists in Canada identify as Indigenous or as a member of a visible minority” (AGYu 2014). Along the same lines, Canadian Art Magazine reported in 2015 that 85% solo exhibits by white artists in 2015, and none of these were women of colour. The article also argues that when art galleries combine artists on the basis of their respective ethnic groups, it reduces them to metonymies of their race and silos them, in other words segregates them from a Eurocentric canon.

field that the gallery's Eurocentric primacy had not previously allowed (Hill, 2004). The principal curator assigned to that AGO reinstallation was Cree scholar and curator Gerald McMaster, who also oversaw experimental Indigenous curating at the Smithsonian National Museum of American Indian (NMAI). At the opening of the NMAI, critics protested for Eurocentric curating conventions to be restored, which McMaster rebutted in the article "2020: Creating a New Vision for Native Voice." He asked, "can the National Museum of the American Indian take control of the discourse that throughout history has created sparing information, misinformation, or just plain untruths?" (2011, 85). McMaster argued that ethnographic exhibition practices historically subsume Indigenous worldviews, when they should instead be treated as guiding principles. As a result, Indigenous artists, curators and communities are disparaged, misrepresented and dismissed in favour of European narratives.

In her chapter in the book "Curating Difficult Knowledge," Inuit cultural scholar and art critic Heather Igloliorte writes about how Christian residential schools destroyed Inuit cultural practices by forbidding spiritual and cultural traditions, labelling them as heathen and savage (2011, 27). She argues that colonization degrades Indigenous forms of expression in order to establish and promote Christian European primacy. In "Understanding Aboriginal Art Today, A Knowledge and Literature Review" (2011) France Trepanier and Chris Creighton-Kelly conducted a literature review of Indigenous oral knowledge and research methodology to remedy the lack of Indigenous discursive frameworks in the Canadian art world, and raise mainstream awareness about contemporary Indigenous artists. They describe their work as as an act of decolonization: "decolonization produces a critical understanding of the epistemologies, motivations and values that underlie Western research projects" (2011, 6). These four Indigenous

texts present Indigenous worldviews as alternatives to the mainstream art world, and reveal that in fact the mainstream is a fabricated product of Euro-Western discourse.

Black scholar Rinaldo Walcott adds to this philosophical discussion by considering the ontological impact of racially exclusionary practices in Canadian art institutions. Walcott describes a “culture of whiteness” and dismissal of Black Canadian life as a national State-building strategy. In his keynote address entitled “Conditions Critical’: Anti-Blackness, the Canadian Artworld and Future Collectivities.” at the “The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation” conference, Walcott exposed two layers of anti-Black forces: coalitions of racialized artists that do not ultimately support Black artists in the long-run, and Canadian cultural institutions that reject Black Canadian art history and lineage. Combined, Walcott argues, these forces have serious reverberations in undermining Black personhood and denying its place in the constitution of the Canadian state – and even humanity (Walcott, 2014). Walcott’s polemic joins the philosophical analysis of Indigenous museum scholars by articulating the crushing impact of Euro-Western ideologies. My paper will pick up from this departure point by scrutinizing the basis of these ideologies.

Christianity and White Supremacy

The writings of W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon form the bedrock of Black civil rights movements, and amongst many other issues, investigates the origins of white supremacy in Christianity. In DuBois’ seminal 1903 book “The Souls of Black Folk,” he focuses on the paradox of being both Black and American when white Americans violently brutalize and segregate Black communities. DuBois describes the simultaneous rejection and pressure to be a

Black Christian or a Black American, coining the term “double consciousness,” meaning the impossibility for Black Christian Americans to feel unified within their identity (1903, 5). He writes about the impossibility for a Black person to measure their Christian soul, because Christianity is the very measuring tape that makes Blackness into “a problem.” He asks, “why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” (1903, 5), and questions whether God Himself is anti-Black.

In his 1961 book “The Wretched of the Earth” Fanon elaborates on the agony of anti-Black religion. He begins the following passage in the voice of Christianity, and like a ventriloquist, shames native populations for behaving like depraved parasites,

The customs of the colonized, their traditions, their myths, especially their myths, are the very mark of indigence and innate depravity. This is why we should place DDT, which destroys parasites, carriers of disease, on the same level as Christianity, which roots out heresy, natural impulses and evil... I speak of the Christian religion, and no one need be astonished. The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen (Fanon: 1961, 7)

Through Christian eyes, native traditions and myths are the mark of evil. Colonial Christianity acts like DDT, a poisonous toxin bent on destroying Native life. Fanon makes an important observation about the contradictory behaviour of Christianity, although he does not probe further into its theological rationale.

During the settlement of Canada and colonial expansion, Christianity treated Indigenous Canadians with this same brutality. This is exposed in detail in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the research conducted by Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin in their 1990 book, “An iron hand upon the people: the law against the Potlatch on the Northwest

Coast.” Christian morality, sin and conversion imperatives played a central role in two draconian government acts that persecuted Indigenous communities.

The first was Prime Minister John A Macdonald’s enforcement of the Potlatch Law. In 1884 this clause was added to the Indian Act to ban Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest from practicing potlatches – a central, communal ritual, a traditional form of economy, and a platform for cultural expression. This clause was explicitly added to appease Protestant and Catholic clerics, who labelled the tradition “depraved” and “savage.” When these ministers were unable to stop the practice on their own, they demanded government support, and Prime Minister John A Macdonald obliged. He quoted the Christian ministers, calling the Potlatches “unhealthy”, inappropriate and “debauchery of the worst kind” (Cole and Chaiken, 1990:15). Although the clause first targeted West Coast communities, it eventually extended to Native communities across the country and was severely enforced by local bureaucrats known as “Indian agents,” who would arrest, humiliate and prosecute anyone practicing Indigenous rituals, resulting in the near eradication of many traditional practices (Cole and Chaiken, 1990:17). This cultural genocide was enforced on behalf of Christian morality, through practices of shaming and punishment – two Christian pedagogical methods that will be more explicit in the next example.

In the same decade as the Potlatch Ban, the government inaugurated the residential school system. Indigenous children were forced from their homes and sent to Christian schools where they were brutally disciplined and sometimes died in a process intended to break their connection to their traditions and assimilate them into Canadian values. These schools were generally run by one of two Catholic Orders, Jesuit monks or Oblates of Mary Immaculate nuns, who labeled Indigenous culture as sinful,

In their missionary work, the Oblates made successful use of a teaching tool that came to be known as “Father Lacombe’s Ladder.” Based on earlier illustrated timelines that set out humanity’s pathway to heaven, Lacombe’s version was novel in that it included a separate pathway to hell. As a sign that their cultural and spiritual ways were sinful, most of the Aboriginal people in the illustration were travelling this road (TRC, *The History*, Part 1: 2015, 91).

Once Indigenous traditions were established as sins, this justified violent corporal punishment.

This violence operated in a feedback loop – condemning all human beings, Christians included, as sinful and deserving of punishment. In the “*The History*, Part 1,” the TRC explains,

The churches and religious orders that operated the schools had strong and interrelated conceptions of order, discipline, obedience, and sin. They believed that human beings were fallen, sinful creatures who had to earn salvation through mastery of their nature by obedience to God. The approach to discipline in schools was based in scripture: corporal punishment was a biblically authorized way of keeping order and of bringing children to the righteous path (TRC, *The History*, Part 1: 2015, 649).

Because of a racist colonial agenda, Indigenous children were the most brutalized targets of a Christian worldview that humans are born flawed, and must undergo a violent educational path to righteousness. Students were punished and demeaned for their language and cultural expression, and exposed to documented physical and sexual abuse. As a result they associated their traditions with inferiority, pain and shame, a process that nearly destroyed these traditions (TRC, *The History*, Part 1: 2015, 7).

Christian missionaries were committed to damaging the psychology of the colonized in order to undermine their relationships to Native language, spirituality and cultural customs (TRC, *What We Have Learned*: 2015, 19-20). This act of genocide also provided a secondary purpose, as a lesson to others. Residential schools teach current and aspiring Canadians about the

nation's uncompromising monotheistic expectations of citizenship. I will argue that this coercive education also manifests in the gallery.

Church historians (Williams, 1996; Friedman, 1981) provide invaluable insight into the Church's ancient notions of race, although their medieval histories adopt an outdated modernist framework. Although their research reveals that racial categories are social constructs, they do not pursue the implications of these findings, or investigate the genocidal fallout of these taxonomies. However this field is still a key link to understanding modern racism, as well as disablism and transphobia⁶.

Although the 1996 book "Deformed Discourse" focuses on the Christian conception of disability, medieval historian David Williams divulges that non-European races were categorized as disabilities. In 620 A.D. Spain, Isidore, the Archbishop of Seville, created a taxonomy of non-human creatures to explain the existence of non-Christians in the world. The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve only produced one chosen race, and so Isidore created the "etymological encyclopedia" to answer this problem with a list of twelve non-human categories. The last category was the "monstrous races," which were the product of Adam and Eve's evil son Cain and his sinful bestial exploits. The first eleven were borrowed from pre-Christian Greco-Roman beliefs about imaginary races as well as attitudes towards disabled and intersex babies. Isidore labelled those, for example, as "atrophy," "excrescence" and "hermaphrodites." (Williams 107).

⁶ My curiosity about the Christian roots of racism was sparked by the book "Racism," in which critical race historian Robert Miles attributes white supremacy to the Christian binaries of sin and virtue (Miles: 2003, 16), but also disablism and transphobia, a lesson that has profoundly expanded my sense of solidarity with these identities. This led me to three texts that do not cite Christianity, but clarify the connections between racism, transphobia and disablism: Alison Kafer's 2013 book "*Feminist, queer, crip*," A.J. Withers' 2013 book *Disability Politics and Theory*, and the 2015 Disability Justice Statement by author Patty Berne and the Sins Invalid collective.

Isidore's list began the process by which the notion of the virtuous Christian became contingent on the notion of the sinful Other.

According to literary scholar and theological historian John Friedman, Isidore's list held such sway on the Christian imagination that even five centuries later it was still the basis of medieval ecclesiastical university textbooks,

On a commentary on the tenth-century *Ecloga* of Theodulus, a very popular school text in the Middle Ages, the innocuous word "Ethyopum" is interpreted allegorically: "Ethiopians, that is sinners. Indeed, sinners can rightly be compared to Ethiopians, who are black men presenting a terrifying appearance to those beholding them." Fugentius of Ruspe spoke of baptizing an Ethiopian whom he saw as "one not yet whitened by the grace of Christ shining on him." And the theme appears in romances telling the story of the king of Tars, where a Saracen sultan marries a Christian princess who eventually converts him. Upon baptism he changes color from black to white (Friedman: 1981, 65).

Taken from Friedman's book, "The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought," this passage describes the inherent sinful terror of the dark skin of Ethiopians and "Saracen" which referred to Arab people. Medieval Christians came to believe that dark skin meant a lack of grace and would turn white through Christian baptism. According to Friedman, the monstrous races also included dog-headed humans and headless men; and together all of these races were illustrated and codified in the medieval Psalter Map (Appendix A). This map assigns foreign populations, particularly those along the coast of Africa, to "monstrous zones," and eventually played a major ideological role in the later period of European expansion (Miles: 2003, 16).

In the fourteen centuries since Isidore's time, the sinful, monstrous idea of the non-white races has been strategically, repeatedly exploited to justify political agendas and profit driven enterprise. The Crusades may be the first large-scale deployment of Christian binaries of virtue

and sin in order to wage war. In 1095 Pope Urban II declared that the foreign Muslim Turks were inherently monstrous in his speech in Claremont, France. He combined a fatal mix of xenophobia and salvation rhetoric so persuasively, that according to one legend, an independent band of warriors left for Jerusalem the next day on their own, ahead of the army. His speech was transcribed after the fact by four different clergymen and reassembled by medieval scholars,

Let the holy sepulchre of the Lord our Saviour, which is possessed by unclean nations, especially incite you, and the holy places which are now treated with ignominy and irreverently polluted with their filthiness. Oh, most valiant soldiers and descendants of invincible ancestors, be not degenerate, but recall the valor of your progenitors. (Sweetenham: 2006, 14)

Pope Urban's condemnation of the Turks is followed by a moralizing reminder to "be not degenerate." In other words this speech is not only a war cry, it is also a form of ministry: discrimination was also one of the most urgent offices provided by the Catholic Church.

Writing about the hermeneutics of the modern self, post-structuralist theorist Michel Foucault explains that one of the two principle roles of Christian authority is to help the faithful discriminate – in order to renounce sin, temptation, the unclean and the corrupt, without and within. Quoting the teaching of the influential medieval theologian John Cassian, Foucault states,

Thoughts are like grains, and consciousness is the mill store. It is our role as the miller to sort out amongst the grains those which are bad and those which can be admitted to the mill store to give the good flour and good bread of our salvation. Second....We must act like officers who divide soldiers into two files, the good and the bad. Third... We must verify the quality of the thought: This effigy of God, is it real? What is its degree of purity? Is it mixed with desire or concupiscence? (Foucault: 1988, 47).

Foucault explains that there is a "truth obligation" shared by all Christian denominations.

In other words, Christianity demands that the faithful recognize and obey a "degree of

purity” enforcing binary valorizing labels of virtue and sin onto all things and bodies. This binary, and the paranoia and insecurity that it breeds, has then been repeatedly reinforced in pedagogy and storytelling frameworks, within modern Euro-Western political and cultural institutions including art galleries.

Sin, Shame and Racial Hierarchies

Literary scholar Northrop Frye argues that the Bible’s story arc is the most enduring template for modern Euro-Western storytelling (Frye and Lee, 2006). It contains three standard parts: a fall from grace; a journey of contemplation; and a happy reunion with all that was lost. This fall from grace is known as “sin.” According to the 2005 New English Translation of the Bible, sin is an act that separates Christians from approval, acceptance and love. “But your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers” (Isaiah 59:2). In order to establish his argument Frye breaks down the notion of Christian sin and contrasts it with Judaism (Frye and Lee, 2006, 103). A Jewish person’s sins are punished by a wrathful God, and so Jewish scholars debate the interpretation of holy laws. On the other hand, a Christian must search their own conscience and agonize over their own failure to confess, renounce their transgressions, or redeem themselves. For this reason, the New Testament designates the Self as the most important site for the struggle of our soul (Frye and Lee, 2006, 103). As a principal protagonist of the Acts of the Apostles, St Paul determined and broadcast Christian doctrine, and in an instructive letter to the Romans he most emphatically articulates the torturous notion of self-examination, “Wretched man that I

am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. “ (Romans 7:18-7:23, New English Translation) According to Christian teachings the most fearful pernicious struggle is within; the law of sin manifests within my own flesh, my own body, in me. In other words, sin is a source of shame, and Christians are shamed by the knowledge that they must constantly overcome what they are. Frye explains that the U-shaped story – a fall into sin followed by a rise to salvation – is the most pervasive of Euro-Western narratives (Frye and Lee, 2006, 108).

What does it mean when racialized bodies are designated symbols of sin? According to St Paul’s words, all of us contain original sin. In other words, while the monstrous races on the fringes of the Psalter Map are sinful, they are also reminders of inherent European sinfulness. When the Eclogus claims that “sinners can rightly be compared to Ethiopians” waiting to be whitened by the grace of Jesus, it implies that Ethiopians represent Europeans at their worst. In other words, “sin” and “virtue” are mutually constituent categories. Christian xenophobia is a didactic cautionary tale about every Christian’s own shame.

Modern colonial capitalism preserves elements of Christian beliefs, like this sense of shame, because it is a useful manipulative tool. Other core Christian lessons about “loving thy neighbour” have not survived in commercial and political messages, but the notion of original sin is still a powerful tool for garnering power and profit. Feminist and critical race scholars reveal how consumer advertising and political campaigns thrive on insecurity and fear through sexist, ableist, racist messages (Beneke, 1997; Lakoff, 2000; Gilroy, 1987, López: 2014). These messages not only degrade the marginalized populations they target, they also provoke a general

sense of insecurity by establishing uncompromising rules, parameters and cautionary tales to enforce the norm. Cultural institutions like art galleries reinforce this insecurity. When Rinaldo Walcott (2014) describes the marginalization of Black artists in Canadian art galleries, he argues that it is a crisis for all human beings.

because the structures are fundamentally launched against Black people, our forms of life, Black forms of life, continue to shape what it means to be human, in deeply profound ways. By this we mean that reckoning with the multiple violences of anti-Blackness, Black peoples continually revise what being human means for all of us (Walcott, keynote address, 2014)

The disproportionate violence committed against Black people increases the possibilities for violence against all.

Curators and museum scholars have demonstrated that artists of colour are under-represented in art galleries due to Eurocentric Canadian nationalism which erases and devalues racialized cultural production. However this erasure does not only devalue racialized cultural production. It is rooted in the philosophy of sin, or inherent flaw, which disproportionately attacks racialized populations, but devalues all cultural production generally. In the museum, residual Christian ontology establishes aesthetic norms through rules, cautionary tales, and punishments for non-conformity. As I will argue based on the following museum texts and curator interviews, this creates a cycle of anxiety, insecurity and inertia that perpetuates inequality, but also adversely affects all actors in the gallery through a coercive, dehumanizing worldview.

Christian Values and the Contemporary Museum

In 1995 Tony Bennett applied post-structural critical museology to a genealogy of museum display practices from an interdisciplinary background. In his article “The Exhibitionary Complex,” argues that the design of The World Fairs taught values, behaviour and compliance to its nation’s citizens through a “set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry” (1994, 4). The World Fairs are the precursors to contemporary exhibitionary practices and Bennett’s genealogy – detailing their taxonomy, spatial design and racial hierarchy – provide valuable insights into underlying museum ideologies.

Bennett explains that Museums were founded to exert a new form of optically benign state power. During the rise of the modern European and American nation states in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, governing bodies ceased to exercise violent control over populations, such as feudal practices of public torture or execution. Instead, modern governments demonstrated the kind of power that could extend life, through bureaucratic institutions like housing, public health care, education and other cultural institutions, a phenomenon that Foucault calls “biopower” (Foucault: 2007, 16). Museums joined this project alongside other cultural institutions that, while appearing to be benevolent, in fact impart the strict expectations of the well-behaved citizen. As part of this process of the making of respectable citizens, art collections that had previously been private wunderkammers of the wealthy were opened up to the public and made into exhibits that magnified the command of the state by showcasing its colonial acquisitions. At the same time the museum acquired a shrewd spatial design that exposed visitors to each other in an increasingly self-conscious way, and reduced them to well-disciplined, orderly, obedient citizens (Bennett: 1994, 7).

Presentation practices at World Fairs also ranked people and objects. The 1889 Paris Exposition arranged Asian and African people in simulated 'native' villages on a spectrum of human evolution from “barbaric to the nearly civilized” (96). Although Bennett aligns these practices with the rise of new colonial disciplines such as archaeology, geology, biology, and anthropology (88), I argue that they descend from centuries of Christian belief.

Bennett describes how the 1901 Pan-American Exposition broadcast staunch Christian values through its handbook, including a Christian sermon called a 'Short Sermon to Sightseers,' which instructed visitors about how to behave (Bennett, 81). The Oxford History of Anglicanism cites London’s 1851 “Great Exhibition” as proof of the glory of the Church of England,

The frontispiece for the Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition displays a range of figures of all ages and many attributes... In the topmost corners of the image, an inscription reads “the Earth is the Lord’s and all that therein is / The compass of the world and they that dwell therein.” These provocative words from Psalm 24 are situated at the heart of the grand production of the Great Exhibition, consecrating it and declaring that everything within it and all who contribute to it are enmeshed in a Christian worldview sustained and supported by the British monarchy and the exhibition’s commissioners (Strong: 2017, 407).

The Great Exhibition and “everything within it and all who contribute to it are enmeshed in a Christian worldview.” Christianity was an epistemic locus of the Exhibition.

The 1893 Chicago World Fair was dedicated to Christian values. The Fair featured the first of many “Parliament of Religions,” an institution that became a common feature of subsequent World's Fairs. The Parliament of Religions was a showcase of diverse religious spokespersons gathered “to underline the central place of religion in the fair’s agenda” (Joiner, 2013: 76). However, although the spokespeople representing various religions included Jainism, Theravada Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Japanese Pure Land, Hinduism, Islam, Baha’i,

Spiritualism and Christian Science – the Parliament had one primary mandate – to “verify the supremacy of Christianity and demonstrate the superiority of Western culture” (Joiner, 2013: 76). The Chicago World Fair was in fact intended to proselytize Christianity. In her book “Sin in the city: Chicago and revivalism,” historian Thekla Joiner writes,

Evangelicals saw the fair as a mini-missionary opportunity to convert international visitor and then return them to their home countries as emissaries of the Gospel. Their Gospel message, however, was equally and emphatically directed at the many “heathens” who resided in Chicago. The majority of the domestic heathens were men who, as in the 1880s, were perceived as threats to Chicago’s moral and social order (Joiner: 2013, 83).

The insinuation that “heathens” posed “threats to Chicago’s moral and social order” alludes to the Fair’s white supremacist undertones. The Chicago World Fair hosted two conferences: the Social Purists, a movement to eradicate sex work, and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Both of these staunch Christian groups demanded that the Fair abide by Jim Crow laws and forbid the participation of African-Americans. Chicago civil rights activists Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells lobbied organizers until they grudgingly permitted one Black speaker at Fair events (Joiner: 2013, 74). Fannie Barrier Williams was chosen, a prominent local member of the Chicago Women’s Club, and she courageously criticized the Social Purists, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the Parliament of Religions, saying that white people “had no corner on morality, and to assume otherwise was to falsely construct a moral justification for racism” (Joiner: 2013, 75). However Williams was the only Black participant allowed at the Fair, which highlights the theme of this paper: a central purpose of early exhibition practices was to model Christian ideology, and this religion was a vehicle for white supremacy.

Thus, because of the Christian overtones of the early Fairs, degrading ranking systems of racialized bodies were familiar to visitors. In fact, organizers struggled to differentiate themselves from carnival freak shows, which had dealt in the same degrading displays since the previous century. The nineteenth century was the heyday of the Freak Show – the most famous of which featured Saartje Baartman, a Khoikhoi captive from South Africa at London's Piccadilly Circus:

Exhibitions of living foreign peoples were accessible and highly profitable forms of entertainment throughout the nineteenth century. Baartman's display was the first of the new century and the forerunner of numerous displays of foreign peoples including Sami ("Laplanders", 1822), South Americans (1822), Esquimaux (c. 1820s), Native Americans (1840s), San ("Bushmen", 1847), "Aztecs" (1853), African "Earthmen" (1853), and Zulus (1853) (Qureshi, 238).

The freak shows echo Isidore's list of disabled and foreign bodies. They may have inherited willing audiences from the previous century's morality plays, which were popular forms of entertainment in which good Christians were tempted and taunted by dark, sinister characters who personified sin and vice (Bevington, 792).

Because Christians believed that foreign bodies were sinful, I disagree with Bennett's supposition that Christian audiences felt flattered by captive Indigenous people at the World Fairs. He writes that white citizens enjoyed a feeling of complicity in this show of dominance,

This power thus subjugated by flattery, placing itself on the side of the people by affording them a place within its workings; a power which placed the people behind it, inveigled into complicity with it rather than cowed into submission before it. And this power marked out the distinction between the subjects and the objects of power not within the national body but, as organized by the many rhetorics of imperialism, between that body and other, 'non-civilized' peoples upon whose bodies the effects of power were unleashed with as much force and theatricality as had been manifest on the scaffold. This

was, in other words, a power which aimed at a rhetorical effect through its representation of otherness rather than at any disciplinary effects (Bennett, 4).

Bennett depicts visitors who felt “inveigled into complicity” with state power. However if Christian principles represented Otherness as depraved sinners, visitors would not feel flattered, but instead triggered into a prudish shame and repulsion – although it can be argued that this is just as effective a disciplinary tool as flattery. For example, upon seeing these “non-civilized” people at the World Columbian Exposition in 1901, the Reverend Beverley Eggleston left the tent in a rush. “The strange music of a foreign tambourine, and the hideous yelling (music, so-called) of non-American girls... to those possessing the sense of propriety, these bodily contortions were unrefined and even repulsive” (Eggleston: 1901, 25-26). For Eggleston, foreign cultures were “repulsive” and reinforced his moralizing standards of local “American girls.”

Artist, critic and writer Brian O’Doherty contemplates the effects of the white cube. His 1976 book “Inside the White Cube” became a seminal text that challenged the role of the gallery, not simply as an art repository, but a contested space that artists must navigate with savvy and caution. In the opening chapter “Notes on the Gallery Space,” O’Doherty offers an affective reading of the white cube space, and records a sense of being an unwelcome intrusion. He attributes that feeling partly to a sense of Christian sanctity:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art.” The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics. So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that, once outside it, art can lapse into secular status (O’Doherty: 1976, 14).

This initial passage deploys some unexamined cultural interpretations – for example, which populations or bodies relate to “the sanctity of the church”? O’Doherty essentializes and homogenizes the reader and assumes that we share his normative cultural location as a white upper middle class Catholic man in New York in the 1970s. However his writing may reveal that the alienating experience of the white cube gallery affects visitors regardless of race, social location or privilege.

O’Doherty specifically articulates his sense of alienation in a passage which portrays the gallery as a site of personal anxiety – where “your own body” is made to feel like an “odd piece of furniture.” He writes,

Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study, Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of “period” (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. Indeed the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion, The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not – or are tolerated only as kinesthetic mannequins for further study. This Cartesian paradox is reinforced by one of the icons of our visual culture: the installation shot, *sans* figures. Here at last the spectator, oneself, is eliminated. You are there without being there – one of the major services provided for art by its old antagonist, photography (O’Doherty: 1976, 15).

Inside the white cube, one’s body becomes a piece of furniture that is not just odd, but also implicitly grubby, in contrast to the art’s “ungrubby” surfaces “untouched by time and its vicissitudes.” The word “vicissitudes” is a graphic cue to mortality and our inevitable trajectory through Isidore’s checklist from “excrement” body parts to gradual “atrophy,” a list that also inspired whiteness as a virtue and darkness as shame. The white cube preserves this story, surrounding the visitors, not even in the pink hue of European flesh, but an extreme white,

“unshadowed, white, clean, artificial” making all bodies intolerable. O’Doherty recalls St Paul’s anxiety of the flesh when he invokes the Cartesian ego, “while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not” (O’Doherty: 1976, 15).

White cube galleries emerged at the same time as white cube churches during the German Liturgical Movement, which expressly rejected every mortal body, even God’s. The rationale was that a white cube would remove the distracting drama of Christ’s graphic bloodied body on the crucifix, and replace it with the disembodied presence of God, represented by pure whiteness (Schloeder, 71). A key example is the Corpus Christi Church by architect Rudolf Schwarz (see Appendix B). “In front of the altar were simple benches. Behind the altar was a great white void of a back wall, signifying the region of the invisible Father” (Schwarz: 2001, 1958: 14).⁷ This Church rejects even Christ’s body, and so when O’Doherty states that “one has to have died already to be there,” the Liturgical white cube tradition would deny even that. In other words, what O’Doherty describes as the gallery’s “closed system of values” may be traceable to a tradition of rejecting all bodies, resulting in the extreme of the white cube.

Art historian Carol Duncan is widely cited in curatorial studies for her exposition of the museum’s Christian rituals (2005). She points out that the gallery contains scripts and paths in the vein of Christian traditions. She writes,

The museum’s sequenced spaces and arrangements of objects, its lighting and architectural details provide both the stage set and the script... The situation resembles in some respects certain medieval cathedrals where pilgrims followed a structured narrative route through the interior, stopping at prescribed points for prayer or contemplation” (Duncan: 2005, 12).

⁷ Other notable white cube church architects include Le Corbusier and Fritz Metzger.

She goes on to caution that visitors who fail to recognize this structure will fail to enact the museum's ritual. The only visitors who succeed are those who are "perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically and culturally,"

The museum setting is not only itself a structure; it also constructs its *dramatis personae*. These are, ideally, individuals who are perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically, and culturally to enact the museum ritual. Of course, no real visitor ever perfectly corresponds to these ideas. In reality, people continually "misread" or scramble or resist the museum's cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs according to all the historical and psychological accidents of who they are (Duncan: 2005, 13).

Duncan imputes gallery architecture with the power to provoke our insecurities – demanding "a *dramatis personae*," or the ideal visitor, which is unobtainable. Some visitors will resist the museum's cues; some will scramble to read them, but all will feel a heightened self-awareness, and some, failure. "The beneficial outcome that museum rituals are supposed to produce can sound very like claims made for traditional, religious rituals. According to their advocates, museum visitors come away with a sense of enlightenment, or a feeling of having been spiritually nourished or restored (2005, 13)." Duncan's appraisal of the gallery imbues it with the biblical U-shaped narrative of imperfection, contemplation and hope for salvation.

Although Duncan's analysis aims to reveal the power structures of the gallery, she does not discuss power and race. In the introduction to her book, she writes

My book is, in the immediate sense, concerned not with the representations of foreign or non-western cultures, but with what art museums say to and about our own culture. Nevertheless, the two questions are ultimately not separate; western representations of western culture hold implications for the way non-western cultures are seen (Duncan:2005, 4).

This statement makes three simultaneous erasures; of Indigenous "western" cultures, of the Black, Indigenous and racialized populations that inextricably constitute western culture, and of

non-white readers of the book. She confirms this erasure two pages later, “I look at some of the most prestigious spaces in my own – and what I assume will be my readers’ – culture” (6). It may be due to this myopia that her analysis comes into conflict with sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s 1960s seminal analysis of the museum,

Without rejecting [Bourdieu’s] valuable sociological insights, I treat museums... [as] content that is not always or not entirely subject to sociological or political description... It is, in my view, precisely the complexity of the art museum – its existence as a profoundly symbolic cultural object as well as a social, political and ideological instrument – that makes the notion of the museum as ritual so attractive (Duncan:2005, 5).

This statement suggests a mutual exclusion between “symbolic cultural objects” and “a social, political and ideological instrument.” It also undermines the power differentials she sets out to examine. This lack of intersectional analysis, combined with O’Doherty’s lack of structural critique, indicate the pace of museum studies that even in Duncan’s 2005 book, lag behind critical race theory, thus reinforcing the need for race analysis in art galleries. This is provided by the work of the Canadian curators and scholars discussed at the beginning of this literature review, which fleshes out, amongst other things, the connections that Duncan misses between ideologies, symbols and cultural objects. However in some ways both Duncan and O’Doherty’s Eurocentric perspective helps reveal the impact of Christian affect on both white and non-white visitors to the gallery. I will now turn to Bourdieu’s study, which makes some of the connections between museum cues and political ideologies that Duncan misses.

Duncan’s “*dramatis personae*” borrows from Bourdieu’s landmark 1960s study of museum visitors. His research asks the question: if museums offer enlightenment, nourishment and refined tastes, why do only a privileged few visit? (Bourdieu et al.: 1991, 120) His study led

to three conclusions. First, due to the class stratification of education, working class communities may not aspire or feel entitled to approach the museum. Second, once inside the gallery, a visitor may not be, as Duncan states, “predisposed” to follow the gallery’s cues, because without a privileged education those cues are illegible. Third, the privilege of museum literacy is ultimately converted into material assets. For example societal recognition and perceived intellectual disposition, which are passed down through generations, seal privilege within the family. Bourdieu coins the term “cultural capital” to explain that museum literacy, and all privileged cultural literacy, is a form of power. Duncan disagrees with Bourdieu because she argues that the symbolic cultural aspect of the museum ritual is not necessarily political. This indicates how, fifteen years after Bourdieu published his findings, writers may still deny the accountability of the art institution as an arbiter of power (Bourdieu et al.: 1991, 148-152).

Bourdieu’s research demonstrates that the space, architecture and aesthetic design that O’Doherty and Duncan observe is not just a foil for art and enlightenment; it is also a trial to test one’s cultural “virtues.” Visitors who are poor or marginalized do not have access to an elite education, and so fail this test. Bourdieu opens his book, “The Love of Art,” by explaining cultural capital in explicitly Christian terms,

The religion of art also has its fundamentalists and its modernists, yet these factions unite in raising the question of cultural salvation in the language of grace... The mystical representation of the aesthetic experience can lead some aristocratically to reserve this gift of artistic vision they call “the eye” for the selected few and can lead others to grant it liberally to the “poor in spirit”... It is as if those who speak of culture, for themselves and for others, in other words cultivated people, could not think of cultural salvation in terms other than of the logic of predestination, as if their virtues would be devalued if they had been acquired, and as if all their representation of culture was aimed at authorizing them to convince themselves that, in the words of one highly cultivated elderly person, “education is innate” (Bourdieu et al.: 1991, 1-4)

Bourdieu conducted his research in the sixties and published and presented his conclusions in several languages starting in the seventies, yet decades later some art writers including O'Doherty and Duncan retain the “mystical representation of the aesthetic experience.” They do not acknowledge, as Bourdieu observes, the discriminatory process of the gallery, in which subjects are examined for “innate” cultivation, and only a “selected few” pass. His observation bears an echo of Fanon’s description of Christianity: “[the Church] does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen” (Fanon: 1961, 7). The mystical representation of the aesthetic experience in contemporary art upholds the same deterministic sense that some classes, races and abilities are inherently flawed.

All four authors provide ways that the museums manipulate the pedagogical tools that were first crafted by the Church. Bennett reviews the birth of the museum during the World Fairs, and documents the rise of its strict disciplinary technologies. Art historians Strong and Joiner couch the World Fairs in Christian morality. O'Doherty describes the museum’s sense of inhibition, Duncan acknowledges the museum’s demanding cultural cues and Bourdieu reveals its test of innate virtue and cultural salvation. All of these incorporate the anxiety of Christian ontology to produce an elite cultural product that alienates marginalized visitors, but teaches firm rules to all visitors.

Toronto survey exhibits

In this section I will discuss a 2013 survey exhibition, *One and Two and More than Two*, that typifies the absence of racialized artists in Toronto exhibitions that purport to survey contemporary art and artists.

Exasperated art critics lambasted Toronto's contemporary art galleries for overlooking Toronto artists of colour or siloing them in metonymic ethnic group exhibits in which the title, theme and selection of artists pressure a small group to stand in for a whole race (Cooley et al. 2015). Meanwhile, despite the fact that Toronto has been recognized as the most racially diverse city in the world⁸, exhibitions that aim to sample Toronto's contemporary art feature as many as 95% white artists⁹. The first survey exhibits of the broader Toronto art community incorporate substantial racial diversity only opened in 2016¹⁰. In fact since prominent local galleries began hosting survey exhibits of Toronto contemporary art in the eighties, they have almost exclusively featured white artists. Some examples include The Power Plant's 1987 *Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire)* 2007 *We Can Do This Now* and 2014 *More Than Two*; MOCCA's 2007 *Love/Hate: New Crowned Glory in the G.T.A.*; and the University of Toronto Art Centre's 2010's *Traffic* and 2015 *Showroom*. Despite Toronto's demographic population that is 50% non-white, these exhibits rarely included as much as 15 % non-white artists.

I worked for three years as a docent at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, which describes itself on its website as the "leading Canadian public gallery devoted exclusively to contemporary visual art." In 2013 the gallery mounted the exhibit *More than Two*, in which an

⁸ according to the BBC Radio, 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03v1r1p>

⁹ For example the Power Plant exhibit *More Than Two*, an exhibit that I will discuss shortly in more detail.

¹⁰ The University of Toronto Art Centre featured a racially diverse Toronto survey, *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto*, curated by Luis Jacob, September - December 2016, as did the Art Gallery of Ontario with the exhibit *Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989*, curated by Wanda Nanibush, September 2016 to May 2017.

established artist Micah Lexier curated 101 Toronto artists. Although he did not intend for this to be a comprehensive survey of Toronto artists, the gallery and the press treated it that way. The Power Plant's website has since incorporated the exhibit into its "History" section as an achievement in diversity, calling it a "wide-ranging, multi-generational portrait of a robust Toronto art community" ("About us" 2017). Art critics agreed, calling it "a mirror of Toronto's art scene" and a "beacon for the vitality of art making in this city" (Ritchie 2013, Whyte 2013). And after all, the exhibit was instigated by established Toronto art critic Sarah Milroy, who donated her own writing award cheque as the seed fund expressly to establish "definition in the city's art scene" (Ritchie, 2013).

Out of the 101 Toronto artists in the survey, ninety-four were white. This is despite the fact that diversity was one of the curatorial mandates: the artists were 50% women and deliberately sampled a variety of sexualities and career ranks. The exhibit garnered favourable reviews from every critical national platform including "Canadian Art," "Border Crossings," "The Believer," "Globe and Mail" and "Toronto Star," and in all of these reviews the exceedingly white representation of the exhibit went unmentioned. It was another two years before "Canadian Art" protested against racial homogeneity in a survey exhibit of Toronto contemporary art; The University of Toronto Art Centre's 2015 *Showroom* exhibit displayed an overwhelming bias for white artists, but Gabrielle Moser critiqued its curator Sarah Robayo Sheridan's choices, writing, "There are condo ads on the subway that demonstrate greater diversity than this exhibition" (Moser, 2016).

When I worked as a gallery attendant during the *More Than Two* exhibit I was amazed that visitors did not comment on the overt underrepresentation of artists of colour. On the rare

occasion that I was able to engage visitors in a discussion about racial representation in the exhibit, they frequently justified the decision, suggesting that this high level of art might be difficult or unlikely for people of colour to attain. Their reasons for this included low educational attainment, career choices, poverty, lack of discipline or work ethic. Their responses not only reinforced negative racial stereotypes, it also echoed Bourdieu's theory about how cultural capital is stratified along race and class lines (Bourdieu, 1991).

The under-representation of indigenous and racialized artists in the gallery flourishes and is maintained through moral binaries that pre-date colonialism. These binaries draw on a well of race-based taxonomies first deployed by the Christian Church and since appropriated by colonial capitalism for expansion and profit, and in the case of the gallery, to exert discipline and maintain the cultural capital of dominant classes (Bennett, 1994; Bourdieu, 1991). The vast under-representation of racialized artists in Toronto survey exhibits seems to demonstrate and underwrite this long-standing power and authority. Neither critics nor visitors examine it, and when they do, they trust the innate virtue of white artists to be "a beacon for the vitality of art making in this city" (Whyte, 2013).

Chapter 3: Disobedient Curators

The following chapter analyzes the interviews conducted with Michelle Jacques, Geneviève Wallen and Wanda Nanibush – three curators dedicated to equitable racial representation. The interviews were coded and parsed into the following themes: the personal and professional toll of museum labour, acts of epistemic disobedience, ontological resistance, and supportive conditions for equitable curatorial practice.

Personal Toll of the Gallery

Based on interview feedback, curators in major art institutions feel a sense of hurt and even trauma due to identity hierarchies around race, class and gender. Wanda Nanibush is the Assistant Curator, Canadian and Indigenous Art and the AGO, and she explains that for some, institutional work culture can result in exhaustion:

The culture of a place can push you out. I don't give a shit but some people do, they take things very personally and things hurt a lot. Those people can't stay in institutions like this. Either they adapt and their desire for change becomes smaller and smaller, or they get exhausted and have to leave. Or they have a breakdown (Nanibush interview, 2017).

According to Nanibush, major art institutions like the Art Gallery of Ontario reproduce a work culture that can even cause breakdowns. Nanibush emphasizes that it is most painful for staff who are racialized or Indigenous,

There's an emotional energy required when you're a person of colour or an Indigenous person working in an institution like this that's never factored into the actual job. We should get damage pay, or trauma pay, or something, because it's a lot more work for us. The culture of the place doesn't fit us, so we're constantly working out of conflict (Nanibush interview, 2017).

She jokes that curators of colour are so traumatized that they should be compensated, but the implications are serious. The work culture of major art institutions forces racialized curators to work “out of conflict” and makes employees want to spend as little time as possible in the institution. She comments that “the culture of the place doesn’t fit us,” implying that it is tailored towards people of European descent, although as O’Doherty’s piece signals, a binary system of valorization demands an impossible level of perfection that alienates every single body.

Nanibush alludes to that next, by pointing out that “institutions are going to do things all the time that piss you off,”

I just get in and get out. That takes work. I care about people but you can’t take things personally. Institutions are going to do things all the time that piss you off and that are going to seem really frustrating. Instead of feeling that constantly, you just have to see it as – these are the places I can go and the things I can do – and then do them, and focus on that. And then the institution changes in a very different way from that because there’s reverberations off of things that you do, and you can often be surprised (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Change is not impossible; Nanibush sees the results of her activism in unexpected reverberations.

Part of her activism is to intentionally refuse to personally internalize the gallery’s valorizing system. She notices that it flourishes through shame, in the same manner as Bourdieu’s study, which subjects actors to upper class tests. This shame emanates as Bennett expects, not through overt authoritarian punishments, but covert institutional discourse – “the way the institution is run” and “how it operates,”

The art gallery institution comes out of the upper class, you know when people talk about being cultured it’s a class value. So the way the institution is run, how they operate and what culture is attached to them, they automatically shame people [from other class backgrounds.] So if you can, as an employee, not adapt to that class background – like I maintain my poverty and working class roots – then you kind of naturally push the boundaries of how it operates and what it is, and it becomes more visible too. Because if you’re not conforming and you don’t

experience shame around the conformity, then they're forced to look at themselves as an unnatural thing (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush sees Christian ontology at work through shame and conformity, and she resists it by being shameless. To cite disability scholar Loree Erickson, Nanibush turns a site of shame into a site of resistance (Erickson, 2007). Instead of capitulating to the upper class test, Nanibush decides to “maintain my poverty and working class roots,” and transform sin into its own virtue. She forces this residual Christian worldview into focus, and exposes its unnatural toxin like Fanon’s DDT (2007). In the process, she also gives her colleagues the chance to see its artifice and possibly follow her example.

Professional Toll of the Gallery

Michelle Jacques implies that the AGO tends not to show racially diverse artists out of a sense of insecurity. In her experience AGO staff worried that if they took risks and introduced new artists, they would lose attendance. She explains,

So it's kind of easy to show diverse artists [at the AGGV] compared to [the AGO], and I think that all relates a lot to the AGO's assumptions about what excellence is, or who deserves to be in that building... If you're going to have a Black artist it has to be Stan Douglas, or better yet an American, which is what the AGO always falls into, because they really feel like they have to have name recognition to get people through the door (Jacques interview, 2016).

The AGO's assumption of “excellence” recalls the anxious religiosity of Bourdieu's aesthetic experience: “cultivated people could not think of cultural salvation in terms other than of the logic of predestination, as if their virtues would be devalued if they had been acquired” (1996, 4). Bourdieu reveals how the class ranking system demands the same supremacy of Isidore's list, which promised Europeans that they were God's only chosen race. The Other must be inherently

flawed in order for the Norm to be inherently virtuous. To transpose this Christian belief, Jacques' colleagues discriminate against racialized artists not just with the excuse of "excellence" – but in order to define "excellence." This fulfills Walcott's prophecy that "reckoning with the multiple violences of anti-Blackness, Black peoples continually revise what being human means for all of us" (Walcott, keynote address, 2014). Christianity does not just shame and punish the Other, it uses this as a lesson to obey the norm.

In fact "norm" is a misleading word when according to Christian ontology, all are flawed and require salvation. Perhaps the word "excellence" is an appropriate way to define the uncompromising demands of residual Christian valorization. At the AGO, Jacques' colleagues avoided reprisal altogether and instead sought the approval of popularity and "name recognition." In other words the deprivation of Black Canadian art history that Walcott points out may be a casualty of banal insecurity.

Jacques currently works as Chief Curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV) where she notices this same insecurity amongst the docents. The volunteer docents are the gallery's longest-standing relationship – some have served for as long as twenty years. They have been asked to adopt a new visitor-centered learning technique, which replaces traditional Eurocentric art history tours with casual, relatable, meaningful conversations that foster a visitor's personal relationship to art¹¹. However, some of the docents revolted, preferring to preserve the gallery's traditional role of dogmatically, didactically imparting knowledge. Jacques notes,

¹¹ this progressive pedagogy deserves its own analysis as an antidote to the museum's residual Christian pedagogies. One of its proponents, Philip Yenawine, draws on the anti-oppression frameworks of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000) and treats students as teachers, or perhaps it can be said in Christian terms, as virtuous instead of flawed (Yenawine, 2013).

We are at a moment where people who have been connected to the institution for a long time, and have a sense of ownership over it, are feeling like they're losing their grip. So things can be pretty tense sometimes... We started re-training the docents and really the goal was to have a group who knew how to engage people in a conversation without spending years memorizing details about Emily Carr, the Group of Seven, or whatever. So [although] we now have some people who are willing to just go into it with visitors, with very little background training, there's been a revolt from the more established docents (Jacques interview, 2016).

To Jacques' dismay, the more established docents vehemently protested a new visitor-centred pedagogy. They preferred to didactically impart knowledge and strict Eurocentric art history lessons in the vein of Foucault's Christian "truth obligation," which demands that the faithful defer to authority to "verify the quality of the thought: This effigy of God, is it real? What is its degree of purity? Is it mixed with desire or concupiscence?" (Foucault: 1988, 47). For the docents, personal interpretations of the art disobeys authority and corrupts the "degree of purity" of knowledge. Diverging from this narrative raises enormous insecurity, and the docents fear that they would "make fools of themselves." According to Jacques,

But when asked to do it with the public they're still resistant because they feel they're going to make fools of themselves, or that it's not what people want – people are coming for knowledge and information... And it's not just that they themselves don't want to engage in that way – but that they don't want anybody to engage the public in that way (Jacques interview, 2016).

The docents were not only upset on principle, but they also crusade to prevent newer docents from engaging the public "in that way." This also guards the inherent virtue of their Eurocentric art history educations – and upper class cultural capital (Bourdieu et al., 1991). Jacques notices that their knowledge is attached to their class; because docent training days are Mondays it only tends to attract members of the upper class. She observes,

Maybe it has something to do with the feeling that their status is connected to their expertise and what they know and their right to be connected to places

like art galleries, and then when we say well you know the kind of expertise you're talking about is irrelevant, and you have no more right than anybody – they feel threatened (Jacques interview, 2016).

Jacques articulates Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1991) – docents feel it is “their right to be connected to places like art galleries.” In order to protect their source of cultural virtue, they have a personal stake in upholding gallery authority.

It is also worth noting the role of gender dynamics in relation to power and decision-making in the museum. Both Nanibush and Jacques report to male gallery directors and senior staff, while more junior ranks like curators, assistants and volunteers are managed by women, another indicator of valorizing binaries, this time along gender identity.

Epistemic Disobedience

Nanibush, Jacques, and Wallen transform gallery practices by introducing their personal marginalized worldviews through small but far-reaching actions. This is a risk when alternate worldviews are subtly shamed, punished and treated as the outer limits of “excellence” (Jacques curator interview 2017). In other words, these curators disobey the museum's valorizing system. Critical race theorist Walter Mignolo (2009) coined the phrase “epistemic disobedience” as a productive way to challenge power, by asserting alternative epistemologies that refuse to allow institutions to determine inherent value. When marginalized actors use their own knowledge and methods, they disobey hegemonic control and take back “the web of imperial knowledge (theo- and ego-politically grounded) from disciplinary management” (Mignolo: 2009, 20). Moreover, when the Christian lexicon treats difference as a punishable offence, “disobedience” is an

appropriate way to define resistance. The three curators practice epistemic disobedience by re-routing art history, thinking lovingly, and undermining authority.

Michelle Jacques writes curatorial statements for exhibition catalogues and reviews, and she commits acts of epistemic disobedience by grounding all of the artist's biographies within a Black art canon. She cites two examples: artists Suzy Lake and Howie Tsui,

Something that I've just realized I've been doing is, often when I'm writing about non-Black artists, I'll connect their work to a Black experience or a Black artist or tradition or whatever. I wrote an essay about Suzy Lake's early years in Detroit, for the catalogue for the show – and that was an obvious one because she was involved in civil rights activism. But one of the things that I really believe is that her interest in gender being a preformed thing may have come out of her 60s exposure to Motown. And that moment where Black performers were being trained to perform a different kind of gender than they were used to performing so that they could have crossover success. So Motown hired Maxine Powell, who was kind of – she had trained young women to be models I think in Chicago – it was her who trained Diana Ross and the Supremes to act in a certain way. So anyway that's a long explanation of the Suzy Lake connection. But then I just wrote an essay about an artist named Howie Tsui who lives in Vancouver, although he was originally from Thunder Bay, or originally from Hong Kong. And much of his work is premised in the history of martial arts narratives from Hong Kong both in literature and in film, and for my essay I wrote about how popular those martial arts films had been in African-American communities in the 70s. I don't even remember now how the Hong Kong producers realised that they had this ready audience there, but they were opening theaters devoted to martial arts movies in the States, and their audience was primarily African American. They loved Bruce Lee (Jacques interview, 2016).

Jacques' approach is subversive because it intervenes into an abidingly Eurocentric art history.

To this day University syllabi¹² persistently teach a linear Eurocentric journey that ignores the African, Asian and Indigenous American constitution of European cultural production, and exclusively emphasizes the primacy of Europe and the Euro-West as the sole source of intellect –

¹² For example OCAD University's mandatory first year Visual Cultural History textbook "Art: A Brief History" by Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Watt Cohen and published in 2007 by Pearson Prentice Hall.

adopting the white supremacy of medieval Christian beliefs that Europe is the sole source of spiritual virtue. When Jacques traces Lake's inspiration back to an African Diasporic lineage, she is not only vesting Black Motown with art historical legitimacy, she is breaking the monotheism of art history and expanding sites of virtue to Blackness. This also fulfills Walcott's call during his 2014 keynote speech to remedy the damage of Canadian cultural institutions who erase and reject Black Canadian art history and lineage. Jacques' publication takes another step. She does not simply insert racialized artists into a European canon; she expands the art history canon to expose its Black roots.

Secondly, Jacques re-routes art history through a strategy of curatorial storytelling. In 2015 Jacques co-curated a photography exhibit "In Another Place And Here" which was named after 1996 Canadian novel "In Another Place, Not Here" by Dionne Brand, about the romance, political history and critical observations of a Caribbean woman who immigrated to Canada. She recalls,

A couple of years ago we did this exhibition where it was a group show of contemporary photographers and six out of eight were Indigenous or artists of colour, and the docents didn't really notice... Victoria is also a town where people are so interested in history that you can really kind of hook them with different stories and histories, and they're more interested in that as the kernel of the program, than of having an interest in important artworks. Like there's the photography show that we did, and it had the title "In Another Place And Here," and it looked at the issue of the relationship between the individual and the landscape and histories of colonialism. And using Victoria as the touchstone, so the idea was that a lot of the issues that are relevant to Indigenous communities and other parts of Canada, to communities in the Caribbean etc, are relevant to here. And that title is actually a play on a Dionne Brand book, "In Another Place Not Here." And those same docents who I'm conveying as really conservative and afraid of change, became completely obsessed with Dionne Brand and were reading all of her books (Jacques interview, 2016).

This story describes two coups. First, by tying the exhibit to Brand's book, Jacques' exhibit acquires the first person narrator of *Elizete*, the book's Trinidadian protagonist, and centres the voice of a traditionally marginalized Black lesbian. Second, six out of eight of the photographers in the exhibition were Indigenous or people of colour, but rather than being evaluated through a European canon, they were read alongside *Elizete's* life story. Both Brand and the photographers also drew on themes of landscape and colonialism, themes that local residents of Victoria could deeply connect to. Through an absorbing, locally relevant story, Jacques' co-curated exhibit imagines universal cultural capital, an oxymoron that disobeys hegemonic binaries.

As the programming coordinator at the artist-run-centre Xspace, Geneviève Wallen sees her role as a knowledge gatherer and disseminator, "gathering knowledge about how diasporic communities speak about themselves, what kind of art they're doing, how that is linked to a broader narrative in terms of geo political systems" (Wallen interview, 2016). Wallen is devoted to gathering and promoting the epistemologies of artists of colour:

My strategy as a curator is to have subject matter that's at once very specific to a group but is also inviting to other groups. Basically my strategy is, our histories are all interdependent; in other words to never section off an event from something else (Wallen interview, 2016).

Like Jacques, she displaces racial binaries by exploring interconnected histories. In 2016, Wallen was commissioned by the Nia Centre for the Arts to curate their Annual "Exposed" Visual Arts exhibition. She entitled the exhibition *Solace*, and it ran from March 14 to April 10. The Nia Centre for the Arts is an organization mandated to support emerging artists of African and Caribbean descent, but although she was excited about this opportunity, it also felt potentially dangerous to Wallen. She feared that a group exhibit of Black artists would be subject to

essentialist generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes about “what Black art is” (Wallen interview, 2016). She went on to state:

It would be a show with a Black curator featuring Black artists for a Black association, which for me in many ways is amazing but dangerous. Because visitors from outside the community come to your show with an idea of what Black art is, which is what many of them have seen during Black History Month, and they feel that they have to see the same show with narratives they are familiar with. But I’m not going to give you that (Wallen interview, 2016).

Black History Month is an annual month that celebrates Black history, which Wallen feels is a segregating and tokenizing phenomenon. She also sees it as a form of censorship, since Black History Month events must apply to funding bodies who reward a narrative of distant historic Black struggle, slavery and ongoing victimhood. She explains,

I also have a hard time with what I call “first degree political art” which is very literal, kind of “in your face” scenarios, versus scenarios that allow Black people to be outside the spectrum of victim and resistor – just people hanging out and figuring shit out. Black History Month tires me. To some extent I hate Black History Month. I have a lot of mixed feelings about it. At the same time, it’s also a source of joy and I do enjoy supporting my peers during that month, but the way it’s constructed, I don’t like it. It’s also bad PR for us. It’s like “here’s your month, don’t complain about it and don’t ask for more.” If you complain about Black History Month, you appear ungrateful. It’s the only time of the year that the histories of the Black diaspora are of interest and have value across the board. It’s a small moment in which we are allowed to be heroic or excellent at all. It’s a very insidious way of silencing us and regulating our funding, entrapping the experience to “there was slavery and now there’s no more, but you’re still suffering because of slavery.” It doesn’t go forward. It is important to tell the complex web of histories informing our present, but it is just as crucial to create spaces that bring us outside of the spectrum of pain. For example images of Black people engaging in healing practices, like Yoga, are rare. So many Black people do yoga, but the mainstream media doesn’t portray that. If I had to curate during Black History Month I would work in that sense, and heck, why not host a show strictly dedicated to Black people doing yoga (Wallen interview, 2016).

The spectrum of victim and resistor recalls Christian epistemology in which the Other is either a sinner, or needs conversion. Wallen wants to demonstrate the inter-connected experiences of all of her audience members instead of the segregation of roles like “victims and resisters,” which recall the figures of African countries crouched on the fringes of the Psalter Map in need of salvation. Wallen wishes to dissolve the binaries of insider and outsider by drawing attention to shared experiences. She expands,

Solace was about self-care. We all need that. Everyone needs self-care – activists, teachers, even people in the healthcare system. So first it was for the Black diaspora, because there was a lot of things happening that year and the previous year, and it was a time of tremendous shift, and people were starting to talk about self-care, but more in activists circles and queer community, so I thought, how do you bring that discussion into the arts? And how can you have this as a conversation with the broader public? Because there’s a bit for everyone. So the question I was asking the artists was to think about what self-care means to them, yes as a Black person – but just what does it mean to you in every intersecting aspect of your identity. So I had a wide range of pieces which was amazing. And also that destabilized what Black art is supposed to be (Wallen interview, 2016).

The theme of *Solace*, was especially meaningful in light of the events that she refers to as “a time of tremendous shift.” (Wallen interview, 2016) Her exhibit took place in 2015, soon after the Black Lives Matter Toronto Chapter made national news by camping out on the front steps of Toronto Police Headquarters for two weeks. They had assembled to protest anti-Black police racial profiling after the fourth shooting of a Black man in two years in the Greater Toronto Area. I would argue that racial profiling thrives on the residual Christian notion of sin that designates racialized bodies as disproportionately flawed. The Black Lives Matter encampment was tense, adversarial and sometimes life-threatening due to freezing rain and -14C weather.

Within the context of the Black Lives matter Toronto protest, Wallen's choice of theme was a tender contrast that invoked fragility, vulnerability and a need for the healing of all. The artists in the exhibit created, for example, a mobile garden, a participatory dance video and a massive denim quilt, replacing essentialist, isolating portraiture of Blackness with interdependent, collective healing. Gift bags were available at the opening, inviting the audience to continue the conversation outside of the gallery walls. Items such as seeds from the Toronto Seed library were distributed so the audience could start their own garden. Wallen's exhibit united both the artist and visitor's need for self-care – her open invitation also extended care for the psychic harm inflicted on all Canadians, Black and non-Black, when citizenship is upheld by racism, brutality and corporal punishment.

Wallen is also interested in revealing the arbitrary biases of curatorial decisions by inviting children to curate an exhibit. She explains,

I'm curious about curating with kids. What if I bring a group of kids together and say "what do you want to talk about in the show?"... I would make them the jurors and say, "here's all the applications we had." When the audience would come and I'd say, "this was curated by four year olds and they just like this artist and this artist, that's what they like" (Wallen interview, 2016).

Although her idea to curate with kids may seem comical, Wallen is serious. She is driven to curate horizontally instead of laterally, even to the point of undermining her own authority by distributing it amongst children, in an act that would reveal the "mystical representation of the aesthetic experience" (Bourdieu et al.: 1991, 1-4)

Nanibush curates with a sense of love. She refuses to put the art first, and instead offers the art object in service of the human audience. She says, "one of the descriptions of curators is that we're protectors of objects. But I'm not that at all. For me it's about releasing, caring for the

world, for people, for emotions, for experiences, but not for objects.” This is a radical departure from the museum that Bennett describes that is designed to discipline and control the audience with the morality of the Christian sermons of the day. Nanibush rejects this imposing sense of iniquity and replaces it with a “love relationship.” She explains,

My goal is always to figure out how to create a mood and an atmosphere that opens people up to feeling comfortable with not knowing what’s going on. That’s your first step, because if the person is open, because it’s vulnerable to walk into a space and not know a piece. It’s like in a love relationship – if you can be open to being vulnerable and not knowing or understanding what’s going on, then that’s a way that they can receive an experience. And they’ll go away and they’ll do whatever they want with that but it’s my job is to create that openness in the person (Nanibush interview, 2017).

As a curator Nanibush recognizes that “it’s vulnerable to walk into a space and not know a piece.” She describes an example of how she created a sense of welcome, in a performance featuring artist Tanya Lukin-Linklater. As part of the Ode-Min Giizis festival in Peterborough in June 2010, Nanibush included Lukin-Linklater in the exhibit “Mapping Resistance,” and carefully planned the audience’s route in order to make them feel prepared, open and more prepared to be vulnerable. She describes the event,

She was going to perform on this grassy area by the water. She starts in a tree, where you couldn’t really see her. Then she moves into the grass and does some movements, and then she moves into the water, where she is talking about a massacre that happened. She has all kinds of red cloth in the water, and then she goes into the woods area and does this honey dripping thing. It’s all very abstract. I wanted people to be able to receive her work and be open to it, and not just feel like “I have no idea what’s going on.” I wanted to put them in a really quiet space, and also put them in nature, before we get to where she is. I also wanted them to be surprised when they found her. I bussed everyone there, and we got out of the bus, and I made sure it was on the other side of the river. We walked over the bridge, and we were looking at the river, and then they walked through a little pathway on the grass. And then they came around – and as they’re coming around the pond she’s there in the tree. And they just sort of notice, and you can see their faces, and then they’re also super open, and totally

with her at that point. They're on her side. So then she does all that stuff and it becomes much more of a transformative experience for them (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush anticipated the sense of confusion and discomfort that people might feel when confronted with abstract performance art, and wanted to honour and mitigate this reaction by providing the audience with extra time, silence and curiosity to discover Lukin-Linklater at their own pace. Rather than capitalize on her curatorial authority, Nanibush cares for her audience through a relationship that is based in love.

Nanibush attributes this alternative approach to her Indigenous worldview. Below she describes an Indigenous concept of beauty that is derived from her Indigenous worldview,

You'll find that Indigenous artists do not rebel against beauty. And I don't either as a curator; my shows are really, really beautiful. I mean that in a really broad sense, not necessarily a western sense. It is a facilitator. It's part of what opens people. There's many different kinds of beauty in the world. It can be about how things are placed together. Most collections are more concerned with telling an art history and not concerned with the pieces and how they look together, so when you make a room where everything works, you can actually focus on everything better. Our bodies have a relationship to space that is intuitive, and so when you walk into a room you can feel the difference of when you want to stay and when you don't. I curate with my body, I just go with my body and then hopefully other people's bodies have a similar kind of relationship to a space (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Therein lies the difference between Nanibush's Indigenous pedagogy and Euro-western pedagogy. Nanibush curates with her body in the hopes that "other people's bodies have a similar kind of relationship to space." In other words, she honours her body and its intuition in the hopes of creating a welcoming space for everyone. This is not to say that Nanibush resists the idea of the white cube. She does not – in fact she defends the white cube, arguing that it is "loving for certain kinds of things." She looks forward to installing the abstract paintings of

Indigenous artist Rita Letendre in a white cube, so the viewer can enjoy a sense of engulfment. But she tempers this potentially alienating engulfment with a respect for the visitor's freedom, choice and bodily intuition. Her approach is inspired by her Anishinaabe world view, which Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson describes in her essay "Land as Pedagogy."

To me, this is what coming into wisdom within a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabe epistemology looks like – it takes place in the context of family, community and relations. It lacks overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner-led and profoundly spiritual in nature. Coming to know is the pursuit of whole body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, inter-dependent and self-regulating community minded individuals. (Simpson: 2014, 7).

Simpson critiques Euro-western pedagogy which has normalized "coercion and authority," echoing the tyranny of the righteous path of which residential schools were only an extreme example. Anishinaabe epistemology on the other hand, is based on "whole body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom." This is the atmosphere that Nanibush offers to her audience, who walk freely through the forest to gradually discover Lukin-Linklater.

Nanibush finds ways to transform AGO policies through the act of naming. She states:

I asked [Andrew Hunter, Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art, at the Art Gallery of Ontario] to put "Indigenous" in my title. It's a small thing but it became a huge thing. The institution then has to think to itself, oh we just made a public commitment to Indigenous, now what do we do, so you keep going from there. So now we are going to have this big Indigenous gallery, and I have started getting them to think about, oh we should announce this information, we should make a big deal out of it. Because in my mind I'm working towards a plan. I collected a bunch of work already since July. So it's slowly building this thing that they don't even know is coming – and you do all these things and make them seem small; just get an agreement to it, and then once you get them all lined up then you have an entire argument for a department, or a bigger commitment by the institution, or a strategy by the institution, and you just keep going from there.

I start with the final vision in my mind, but I go at it piece by piece and fairly quickly (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush recognizes the contractual power of naming. When she mentions “it became a huge thing,” she is referring to articles in city and national news outlets like Metro, the Toronto Star and the Canadian Broadcasting Company that ran stories about her title, including the Metro headline, “Meet the AGO’s First Curator of Indigenous Art” (Warren, 2016). A single word in her title became, as she strategically predicted, “a public commitment to art.” Naming is part of a long-term plan.

Her community-based worldview also informs her long-term plan for transforming the AGO. When she found out that the AGO was making plans to reinstall major sections of the gallery, she listened in on a meeting about the Canadian Gallery, recognized the opportunity to expand Indigenous space, and made a point to attend all future meetings to push that agenda:

I said this is an opportunity for us to have a much larger space for Indigenous and to move us out of that hallway we’re in right now, and so that was done. And so now we’re redesigning the walls, and we’re going to have a huge gallery space actually, in the centre of Canadian, not in the hall at all – but then the hall gallery is still going to be devoted to Indigenous, but prints and drawings, so we gained another space, and then each room is going to be centred around an Indigenous work. So even though it’s all Canadian there will be a touchstone contemporary Indigenous artwork in every room (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush’s strategy interrupts what Bennett observes in the museum’s rhetoric of imperialism (Bennett, 1994). Now no room in the Canadian gallery can project an exclusive European-Canadian national identity. Instead, every room will be grounded in Indigenous identity, which monotheistic nationalism and profit tried to eradicate. Nanibush insists though, that there are no conspiracies in the gallery. Her colleagues do not push for the same things as her, but that is

because, “they don’t have the same commitment to Indigenous as an Indigenous person would” (Nanibush interview 2017). However Jacques points out that AGO staff may prevent racial diversity because of insecurity about public opinion and gallery attendance. Inertia works similarly, prolonging “the logic of predestination” of European Canadian identity, simply through inaction (Bourdieu et al.: 1991, 4). Nanibush interrupted this inertia by intentionally planting Indigeneity in every Canadian gallery.

Ontological Resistance

The radical, risky acts of resistance that these three racialized curators employ to attempt to transform Eurocentric gallery practices demand a rigorous commitment to an alternative epistemology. For Nanibush, that epistemology comes out of her Anishinaabe upbringing. Wallen and Jacques are motivated by their lived experiences as Black activists. All three curators’ actions are driven by a set of values that are anchored in their identities and identifications. If, as Fanon writes, the European Christian colonial worldview offers the Black man “no ontological resistance,” then these curators seek it elsewhere. Nanibush’s personal values are so strident that she does not care about her career:

As soon as you care about your career then they have leverage over you. So if they have no leverage, then you can push as hard as you need to because you’re not afraid of getting fired. And as long as you believe in what you’re doing then the pushing should feel justified. It’s not personal, it’s not coming from a place of anger or any of those things. It’s like you have a vision and you’re trying to get other people to see that vision (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Christian values in a capitalist context create a sense of shame and anxiety around financial security and productivity. Nanibush, however, makes herself immune to that shame by not caring

about her career. She sees her principal career as being a conduit of social change. She continues, “I wish curators would see themselves as a conduit of social change as opposed to just treating curating as a job. It will lead you in so many places, maybe curating in a different way” (Nanibush interview, 2017). Her epistemology is not Euro-Western, it is Anishinaabe. She explains,

I describe myself as a “wandering trickster,” because that’s my name – and as a member of the Wolf Clan. Wolves are about strategy. They’re about protecting the community and the family, and the ones who lead in a moment of crisis, which is why there’s not very many of us left. In general I’m coming from the place of thinking about what furthers community, whatever that means. It means different things, including what furthers children's lives. Children are walking through this world – what am I doing to make their lives better? So, when I’m sitting in a room [with gallery administration] I don’t really care about what anyone thinks, because I have something else in mind (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush is conscious of being part of her own community and family, and her actions are led by her role within that clan. She is a protector, a leader and a provider within a unit, rather than an atomized individual motivated solely by furthering her career. I asked her about how she maintains and preserves this awareness when she is under pressure, but she didn’t see this as a challenge. She observes,

I think the more you do it, the more you realize nothing bad comes, really, fundamentally nothing bad comes. Better things come in other ways. It depends on how you mark succeeding and not – you can’t use your career as a marker of success, because that’s where you get into different value systems. So you have to look at what you’re accomplishing and where, and you have to have your own measurements, so you can feel like you’re accomplishing something meaningful in the world, otherwise you’ll get depressed (Nanibush interview, 2017).

Nanibush focuses on the criteria of her own value system, and this clears her conscience to abandon and disobey Christian European epistemology. As she mentioned, when she refuses to

be ashamed of her working class roots, she rejects personal ranking systems until they become absurd. Nanibush puts her Indigenous epistemology first, and allows it to marshal her sense of working class pride, her Indigenous priorities and her love for people.

Wallen rebels against dominant narratives because she says she feels she has no other choice.

I always think about politics because when you decide to be aware of different systems of oppression and your positionality, you have no choice. When you decide to become aware of the structures pitted against you, it just doesn't leave you alone. I look at other people who prefer to keep their head in the sand and in some ways it definitely seems more comfortable. And that's not just white people, a lot of people of colour are not allies in the path of political consciousness and equity for all – because of internalized anti-blackness, for example (Wallen interview, 2016).

Her quote reveals however, that she does have a choice. Wallen made the choice to be aware by choosing art history classes in University that were geared towards revealing systems of oppression. It became impossible for her to ignore the facts of oppression and how they impact her as a Black French Canadian woman, which compelled her to activism,

Curating is my own activism... [at Concordia University] I took all classes that would cater to my interests in terms of gathering knowledge about how diasporic communities speak about themselves... delving into that history of colonization, and where I am in that history. What are all of those feelings that I have about myself as a Black woman? Where am I in that narrative especially as a French Canadian?... I thought, I want to work in museums and tell that story too (Wallen interview, 2016).

Her activism is based on a sense of obligation to her own community and to Indigenous communities. University classes about the history of Canadian colonization raised questions about her role as a settler on Indigenous land, and courses about diasporic communities inspired

her to think about the interconnected experiences of colonization, race, gender and language groups in her own life.

Jacques worldview is informed by her racial identity, social justice activism, and an indefatigable curatorial integrity. She has been personally accused of “driving wedges between people,”¹³ yet she remains committed to critiquing Eurocentric conventions and rejects the shaming pressure of “excellence” that was imposed by colleagues at the AGO. This integrity informs her activist style. Jacques addresses racial tensions – and potential future racial tensions – out of a sense of the duty and social obligation to foster conversation. She observes,

Thinking back to my presentation at the state of blackness – one of the struggles for me was, why would I even worry about black artists or issues in Victoria? The black population is miniscule. But I also think that Victoria for various reasons is a place where you could really get a range of people meaningfully involved in conversations we need to be having now. And it’s not so much that I worry about what impact whitelash might have on my art gallery, it’s more that I think we want to be emanating conversations that help in whatever small way that prevent it happening on a larger level in our communities (Jacques interview, 2016).

Jacques cites “conversations we need to be having right now” in response to “whitelash,” or the rise of new nationalism in the Euro-Western world. This connects the threads of her practice: how she re-routes art history, why she pushes for visitor-centered pedagogy, and her will to stand by unpopular curatorial decisions. Like all of the three curators I spoke with, she sees curating as activism. She seeks to create entry points and bring different worldviews together in order to fight racial stratification.

Nanibush, Jacques, and Wallen all make meaningful curatorial interventions to foster equitable racial representation in the gallery, but individual acts are only part of structural

¹³ During the 2015 exhibit *Paλsiγaλma (The Fire is Just Starting)*, Jacques decided to have the artists’ fish house installed inside the 19th Century mansion belonging to the AGGV. The docents protested vehemently including this quote; one even quit.

change. This next section will look at institutional conditions that can support marginalized curators to enact different worldviews.

Supportive conditions

Certain conditions help alternative epistemologies gain traction. The first is to prevent donors from influencing programming; the second is to hire a greater number of staff who are committed to marginalized voices, and who bring lived experience of marginalization.

At the AGO, Jacques struggled with conflict of interest when the gallery exhibits the personal collections of their gallery's donors or board members (Jacques interview, 2016).

AGGV curators do not deal with that pressure, however, because the gallery is run and sponsored by a board and donors who are not art collectors. As she points out,

At those institutions where... you've also got a more conservative board and donors, then we can see how that starts to become a real obstacle. Whereas here, our board is really not a board of collectors or a board that has any vested interest in who we show or what kind of programming we're doing. So they're pretty arms length. And then from this evidence of the fundraising I gather that our donors are not at all put off by the direction of the program (Jacques interview, 2016).

Eliminating the conflict of interest between boards, donors and gallery programming would help break the circuit of elite interests, and give curators of colour the freedom to introduce their own alternative worldviews.

Cultural shift requires critical mass. Jacques recalls floundering at the AGO due to a lack of support networks, unlike Nanibush, who is grateful for the support of her colleagues. Jacques expressed her struggle during her tenure:

I also think a lot about why it was so challenging for me to do things that were not unlike what Wanda is doing. You know it makes me realize that you can't be an island in the institution. You really have to have a network of support.... I was just constantly coming across people who were obstacles (Jacques interview, 2016).

Here Jacques refers to her efforts to bring artists of colour into an AGO Toronto survey exhibit and the gallery's permanent collection. Her attempt to broaden the representation of racialized artists was met with resistance. In other words, in order for a gallery to advance its attitudes around race, it requires more than one person's commitment. This made all the difference at the AGGV. Jacques continues,

Here I work with a lot of people and superiors who had an idea of what the institutions could or should be, but didn't really know how to put that into action. But they are completely dedicated to making space and supporting those of us who are trying to put different ideas into action. It kind of breaks my heart every day to think about how easy it is out here in Victoria to be more diverse. We actually have to look at the list of upcoming artists and see if there's a way to include any white artists (Jacques interview, 2016).

Jacques' is supported in her determination to challenge traditional Eurocentric art gallery practices by like-minded colleagues and superiors, and as a result, she has the freedom to imagine new futures for what institutions "could and should be."

Finally, in order to promote not only racial equity, but human connection, a museum must be willing to be disobedient – to disobey Eurocentric art history for example, and refuse to promote the cultural capital of upper class donors. My interviews reinforce Mignolo's (2009) observations that the most marginalized actors have the greatest stake in epistemic disobedience. In other words, museums that hire marginalized staff into positions of power are more likely to de-link themselves from alienating practices. Ideally, these marginalized staff are also personally committed to equity, supported by like-minded staff, and under no obligation to exhibit the

personal collections of donors or board members. In these conditions, first-hand alternative epistemologies can flourish, and disrupt thoughtless, dehumanizing acts of Christian valorization.

Chapter 4: In Conclusion, Love Thy Neighbour

Following in the footsteps of Indigenous museum scholars and Black critical race scholars I have investigated racial inequity in the museum, not only as a matter of representation, but as a philosophical, epistemic problem (Hill, 2007; Igloliorte, 2011; McMaster, 2004). I consider white supremacy in the gallery as a Christian epistemological framework (Walcott, 2016; Fanon, 2008).

Medieval scholars document the rise of Christian racism based on virtuous insiders and inherently flawed outsiders (Friedman 2000, Williams 1996), and I argue that this echo is still audible in the overrepresentation of white artists in Toronto survey exhibits and the strict Eurocentric art canon taught in schools. Furthermore, although museum attendance is a voluntary form of entertainment, museums preserve a Christian practice of renunciation, discrimination and discipline, overt in 19th century Christian sermons (Bennett, 1994; Joiner, 2013) and still ongoing through architectural cues and cultural literacy tests that foster self-surveillance, or altogether discourage visitors who cannot afford an elite education (Bourdieu et al., 1991; Duncan, 2005).

My personal contribution to this research is a close reading of Christian ontology, which reveals that there is no clean division between virtuous insiders and flawed outsiders. Combining St Paul (New English Bible, 1972) and Foucault (2013), I argue that the norm and the margins are mutually constitutive; the flaws in the Other mirror the flaws in the norm. Between the exacting test of museum cues (Duncan, 2005; Bourdieu et al., 1991) and the fictional bar of “excellence” (Jacques interview 2017), the gallery mimics a white cube Church where even

Jesus' body is not pure enough to hang (Schwarz 1995). My interviewees who work in major institutions attest to a work environment that breeds pain, burnout and anxiety, which especially affects marginalized staff, but also manifests in conservative curating and inertia amongst all staff, and breeds inequitable racial representation, but also widespread insecurity.

During interviews with these curators one theme emerges to fight the feedback loop of insecurity and anxiety – service. The notion of service seems to be counter-intuitive and even degrading, because colonial capitalist neo-Christianity idolizes individual potential, individual wealth, and as Foucault describes, the “emergence of the Self.” In these terms, service is counterproductive, degrading and even risky for marginalized actors, like women of colour, whose labour is already undervalued. Yet it is a staunch, recurring theme in all three curator interviews.

Nanibush explicitly disavows her own financial gain and career ambitions, and dedicates her practice to her Wolf clan, her broader Indigenous community and the world's children. Jacques left her position at one of the country's most prestigious and lucrative galleries in Canada to take a position in a gallery that aligns with her sense of integrity, and what “could and should be done” (Jacques interview, 2017). Even here at the AGGV her decisions face doцент protests and personal attacks, but she withstands these in service of what she believes is the greater good. Wallen refuses to take the “more comfortable” path and instead dedicates her career to equity-building for all (Wallen interview, 2016).

I was raised by a staunch Catholic Irish family on my mother's side, and a staunch Catholic Teochew Chinese family on my father's side, and both taught me altruism, sacrifice, community, accountability and service. These are not apparent in modern capitalism, where

Christian binaries are used to segregate and exploit differences in order to foster shame and insecurity. Jacques, Nanibush and Wallen disobey this worldview through service and stewardship that blossoms out of love and integrity. Curators from marginalized backgrounds have the greatest stake in leading this change, and so institutions that support them in leadership positions – with like-minded staff, and minimal financial conflicts of interest – have a better chance at approaching racial equity, but more importantly, humanity.

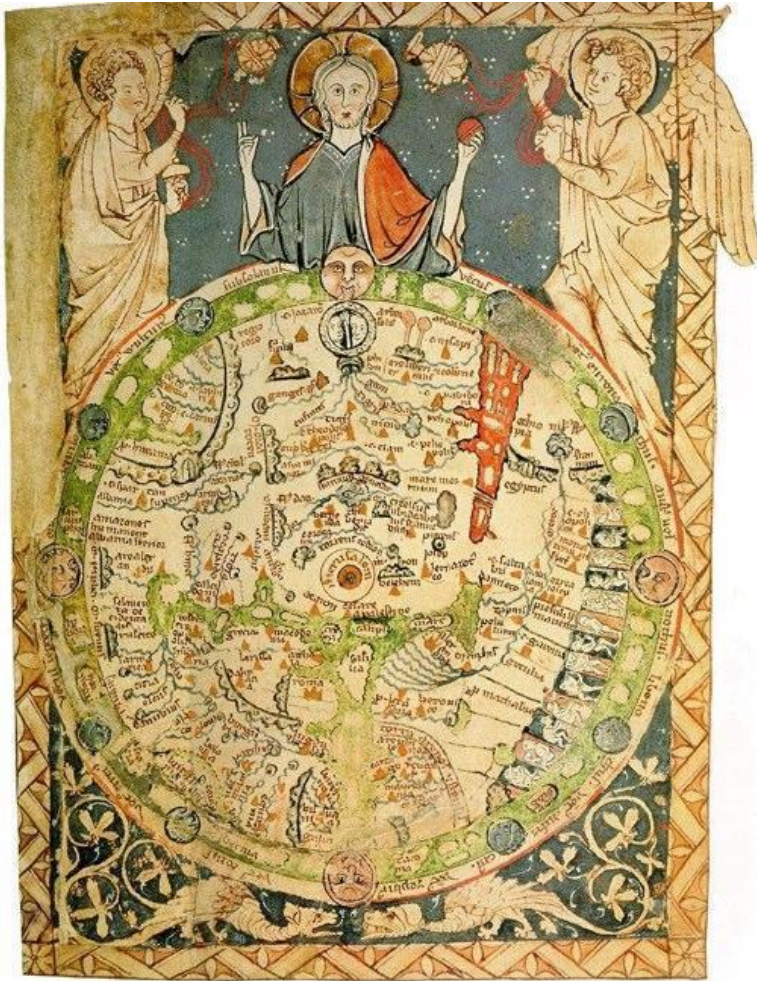
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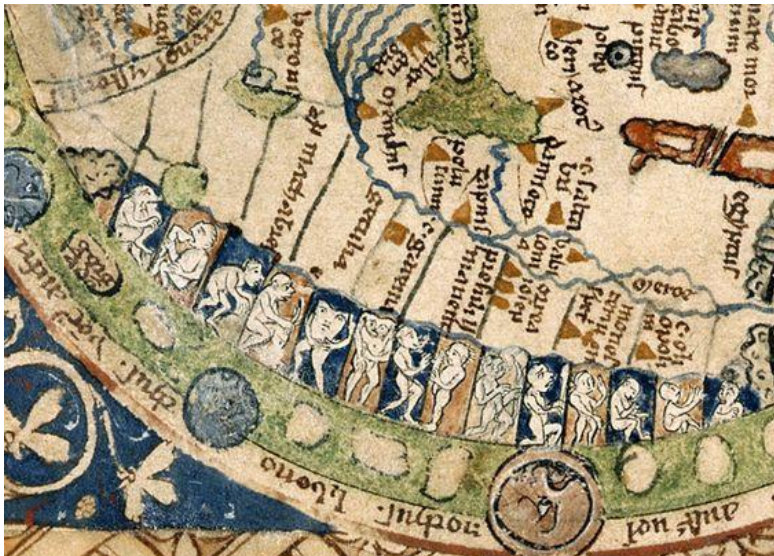
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Appendix A

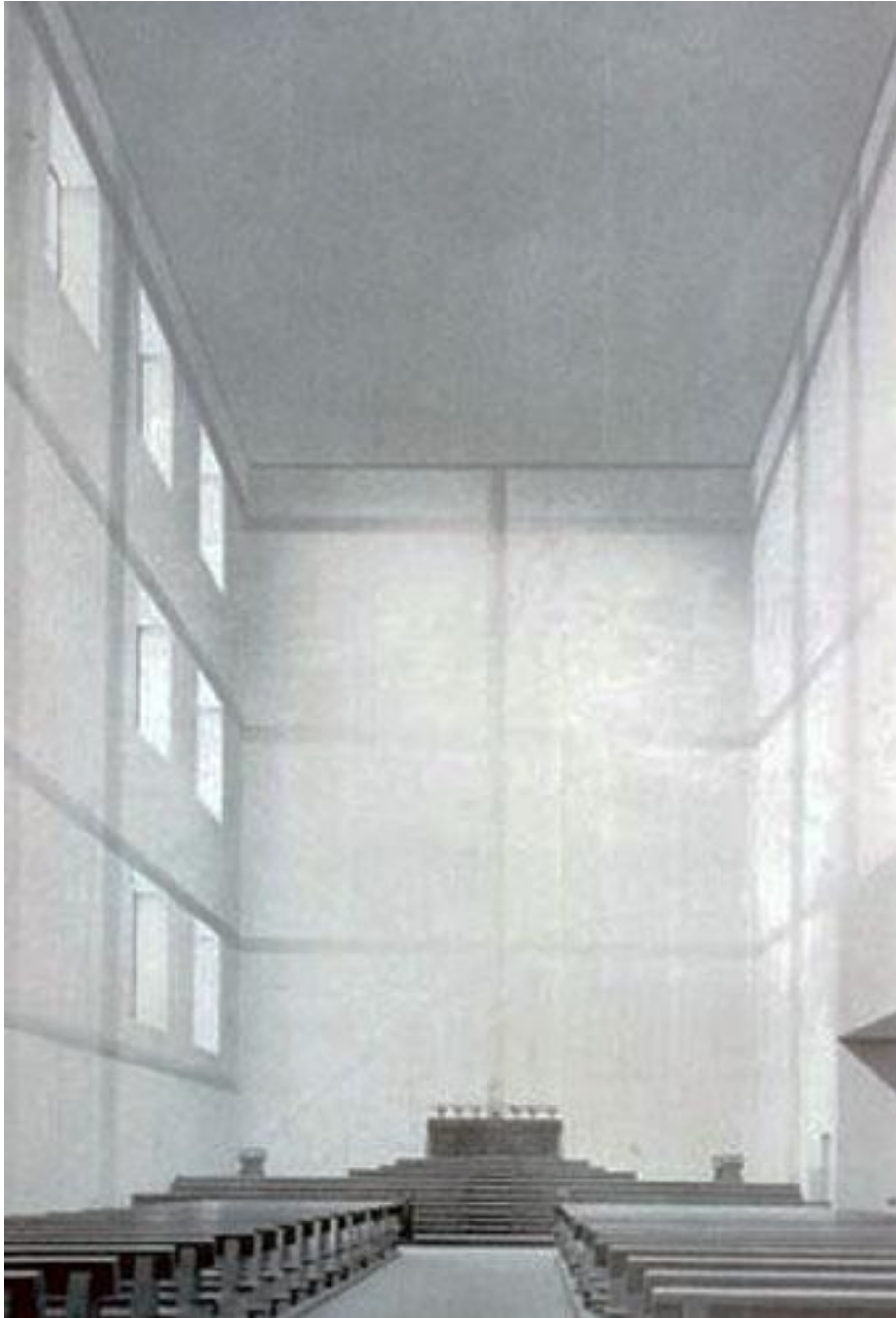


Psalter Map
ca. 1260



Detail of monstrous races

Appendix B



Corpus Christi Church
Rudolf Schwartz
Aachen, Germany
1928 - 1930

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How do you like to describe yourself?
2. What drew you to curating?
3. Tell me about your curation education, formal or informal.
4. Where did you learn what *not* to do?
5. How do you see your relationship to the audience?
6. What do you think are a curator's responsibilities to the audience?
7. Early ethnographic galleries promoted hierarchies around race, class, gender, ability and contributed to marginalizing identities. Do you still feel that legacy in your institution?
8. How do you promote greater racial representation in the gallery?
9. Is racial representation enough?
10. What are your strategies?
11. Do you have any thoughts to add?