

*(re)mapping, grounding, remembering: A Curatorial Study of Way-finding and Relationships to  
Place in Contemporary Indigenous Art Practice*

by

Courtney Miller

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### Abstract

*(re)mapping, grounding, remembering* explores how the concept of (re)mapping is communicated in Indigenous contemporary artwork to demonstrate place-making methods and maintain Indigenous presence on land/landscape. (Re)mapping indicates Indigenous perceptions of and connections to ancestral land/landscape through themes of responsibility, reciprocity, place-based language, and intergenerational knowledges. This thesis project involves an exhibition featuring the artworks of Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine, Blackfoot/Cree artist Richelle Bear Hat, and Métis artist Katherine Boyer. Through literal, symbolic, and discursive gestures of mapping, the artists contribute to a conversation of re-writing histories, shared memories, complex and enduring relationships pertaining to homeland.

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I express my continual appreciation to the artists in my thesis exhibition: Bonnie Devine, Richelle Bear Hat, and Katherine Boyer.

I dedicate this thesis to Métis family members who have encouraged me along this path: my auntie Niccol, my late father Jason, and my late Great Grandmother Irene.

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## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

My curatorial research and complementary exhibition focuses on how the practices of three Indigenous artists communicate their relationships to homeland. An autoethnographic research approach<sup>1</sup> for this thesis — which takes personal experience and self-location as the starting point for cultural investigation — provides the methodological framework to turn a similar inquiry towards myself. In line with autoethnographic methodology's overall agenda of disrupting power relations, my reflection on personal and familial experiences resists the inferred authority of objective research and the falsehood of a neutral perspective. Self-location becomes an important strategy in this regard. More specifically, it is a socially responsible practice that involves stating one's relationship to land or within a colonial system.

I was raised both in a colonial settler context with my mother's and stepfather's family, and separately with my Métis father's family. In situating myself as having mixed identity, and in the process of coming to know more about my own Métis cultural context, I understand how I and my ancestors have both benefitted and were hindered by the Canadian colonial project. During my research, I located what are called "money scrip" documents in online archives signed by my Métis ancestors in Fort Vermillion, Alberta. Scrip were grants to land or money, created by the Dominion of Canada under the Manitoba Act in 1870 to extinguish Indigenous title to land with the purpose of furthering colonial settlement.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous title as inherent right

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research/ Historische Sozialforschung*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2011): 273.

<sup>2</sup> "Aboriginal Title," University of British Columbia, accessed October 30, 2019 [https://indigenousfoundation-s.arts.ubc.ca/aboriginal\\_title/](https://indigenousfoundation-s.arts.ubc.ca/aboriginal_title/).

to land was a relationship recognized by the British Crown in the 1763 Royal Proclamation, yet colonial powers quickly sought ways to disrupt Métis relationships with homeland.<sup>3</sup> The scrip process was often convoluted, presenting Métis populations with a difficult decision between providing for one's family and maintaining their way of life. I do not have the knowledge of the specific contexts behind why my ancestors accepted scrip, but my Nana's adamancy for her family to embrace a connection to Métis culture guides this autoethnographic research process. Following the direct encouragement through remembered conversations with multiple generations of my Métis family prior to this research, I am now uncovering the complexities of how my family is culturally connected and their perceptions of homeland.

## WHAT IS (RE)MAPPING?

Beginning with the definition of (re)mapping in *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* by Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman, the concept encompasses the forming of individual and collective understanding of land/landscape as methods for unsettling imperial and colonial geographies.<sup>4</sup> The prefix “(re)” preceding mapping indicates that the work of Indigenous writers who the author responds to represent stories of renewal, drawing from both tradition and contemporary contexts.<sup>5</sup> I argue that (re)mapping as a gesture of cultural continuation is also

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<sup>3</sup> “Aboriginal Title.”

<sup>4</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 3.

expressed in the art practices of Bonnie Devine, Richelle Bear Hat, and Katherine Boyer. My thesis project draws on how methods of (re)mapping are expressed in various art mediums, and how each artists' approach to mapping contributes to a wider conversation of Indigenous place-making and presence in relation to ancestral territories.

In the artworks by Devine, Bear Hat, and Boyer, literal and symbolic gestures of mapping arise from re-writing and spatializing Indigenous perspectives and connections to homeland.<sup>6</sup>

They assert Indigenous rights to land, based on treaties and their cultural connection, despite colonial strategies of removal through mapping, geography and cartography. Colonial histories and systems are often obscured or forgotten<sup>7</sup> in mainstream narratives of Canada, as

Métis/Syrian/German scholar, curator, and artist Julie Nagam insists, "Canada's collective memory is built on the colonial myths and disembodied maps of the area we call home."<sup>8</sup>

(Re)mapping unearths colonial attempts to make tidy the messy and often violent realities of land control.

What kind of a formulation does (re)mapping find in the works of the three artists, mentioned above? Challenging the idea of normative mapping, Devine counters monetary value-based depictions of land (as implied in the surveyor's map) with life-giving properties of the

Earth; Boyer's beadwork uses a floral vocabulary in dialogue with Métis histories of land

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<sup>6</sup> The artists in this exhibition are three female Indigenous artists, and I link my own analysis of their art practices in relation to (re)mapping with Goeman's analysis of female Indigenous writers. I wish to avoid an essentialized reading of Indigenous femininity to give space to realities of gender beyond a binary of male and female. Goeman indicates that the identity intersection of Indigeneity and femininity can be thought of similar to intersections of spatial histories represented as meeting points in (re)mapping (6). A deeper investigation of gender and mapping lies outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Stacy A. Ernst, "Indigenous Sovereignty and Settler Amnesia," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/ Canadian Art Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017): 108.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Nagam, "(Re)mapping the Colonized Body: The Creative Interventions of Rebecca Belmore in the Cityscape," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35:4 (2011): 148.

division applied to the grid pattern of tea towels; and while Bear Hat's work indirectly stages a confrontation with Western mapping techniques, she employs the medium of storytelling to (re)map Blackfoot territory with the memory of matrilineal family members and place-based language.

Whether (re)mapping is a concept or action expressed in a broader range of Indigenous art is a question that lies outside the scope of this thesis. The discussion around maps has been a part of ongoing and lively conversations, such as the projects by the art collective Ogimaa Mikana, organized by Anishinaabe artist Susan Blight and Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King. They seek to (re)map city centres of Toronto and Thunder Bay by re-inscribing Indigenous place names to their locations. Through site-specific intervention, English language street names were restored in Anishinaabemowin to reaffirm Anishinaabe presence in these regions.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Anishinaabe artist Olivia Whetung's series *tibewh* (2017), contends with new cartographical technologies of Google Maps in order to confront how land is represented, in particular the lock system along the Trent-Severn Waterway. This body of water runs through her territory, irreversibly altered by its development as former military route, and now used for pleasure boating. She (re)maps the 42 locks in gun-metal beadwork, to draw attention to the historical militarization of this waterway. The title *tibewh*, meaning "a body of water, or a shoreline you are in or on,"<sup>10</sup> asks the viewer to consider their relationship to this waterway, and the history the land and water holds.

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Blight, "Big Ideas in Art and Culture: Susan Blight," *Big Ideas in Art and Culture*, CAFKA, June 28, 2018, video, 12:31, <https://www.cafka.org/lecture/susan-blight>.

<sup>10</sup> Shannon Webb-Campbell, "Reclaiming Indigenous Territories, Bead by Bead," *Canadian Art*, June 27, 2017, <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/olivia-whetung-tibewh/>.

Likewise, Métis artist Amy Malbeuf focuses on relationship to her own ancestral territories, re-enacting reciprocal gestures to land and the more-than-human world. Her series, *iamthecaribou/thecaribouisme* (2014), interrupts colonial depictions of Alberta by (re)mapping the migratory routes of the caribou in loops of colourful beadwork that extend off the caribou skin ‘canvas’. The series honours the cultural significance the animal holds in relation to Malbeuf’s Métis identity,<sup>11</sup> and draws attention to non-human seasonal movement as a form of internal mapping in the caribou’s sense of direction.

## METHODS OF MAPPING

European and Indigenous knowledges each bear their own methods of mapping, and fundamental differences of value are represented in the incongruent ways land is viewed by each. European mapping techniques flatten the undulating reality of the Earth in order to more easily quantify the land for monetary value. Imposing grids in hard and hypothetical boundaries, the view comes from an overhead ‘godlike’ perspective, preaching a singular truth.<sup>12</sup> The overhead viewpoint depicted in surveyor’s maps indicates a colonial surveillance of Indigenous land, as discussed by Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson of her experience being watched by settler cottagers on her territory.<sup>13</sup> The currently unfolding conflict of Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs defending their territory against encroachment from Coastal GasLink pipeline

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<sup>11</sup> Amy Malbeuf, “apihkêw (s/he braids, s//he weaves, s/he knits),” (Masters Thesis, University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2016), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 40.

construction demonstrates how colonial and industry mapping both surveys Indigenous territory and simultaneously attempts to erase Indigenous presence for the purpose of capital gains.<sup>14</sup> Historically, liberal perception of Turtle Island as unoccupied territory justified the colonial pursuit for land, as Nagam explains, “colonial maps describe the space as void or *terra nullius* by the lack of bodies and their focus on ‘empty’ landscape.”<sup>15</sup> The perception of an uninhabited landscape was considered to be ripe for the claiming, as Lockean theory declared these lands as common property that could be improved by cultivation and industrialization.<sup>16</sup> European-determined ‘correct’ uses of land included settled agriculture and private ownership by Christian Europeans, demonstrating that maps created with the purpose of determining available or seized property are “document(s) of colonial ideologies.”<sup>17</sup>

European cartography and maps continue to be considered the preeminent forms of charting land, and justified as inherently objective, scientific, and universal,<sup>18</sup> while Indigenous mappings of land are conversely assumed to be inferior and inaccurate. Ironically, European

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<sup>14</sup> The case of Wet’suwet’en land protection is a current example of what is at stake with actions of (re)mapping. As the news is developing daily on this issue, a deeper analysis is not possible in the timeframe of this project. I mention this conflict to tie (re)mapping with relevant political acts.

<sup>15</sup> Nagam, “(Re)mapping the Colonized Body,” 149.

<sup>16</sup> Duncan Ivison, “Locke, liberalism, and empire,” in *Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter R. Ansley (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2003), 91.

<sup>17</sup> Candice Hopkins, “The Map is Not the Territory,” in *\$5 Handshake*, ed. Melanie O’Brien, (Burnaby, BC: SFU Galleries, 2018), 104.

<sup>18</sup> Kelli Lyon Johnson, “Writing Deeper Maps,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter 2007): 104.

explorers often relied on Indigenous mapping knowledge for way-finding, and subsequently the land was drawn by European cartographers who had never seen these areas themselves.<sup>19</sup> Although Western mapping is currently asserted as the global standard for measuring and understanding land, it fails to account for the constant fluctuations of a living, breathing entity, which is the “landscape”.

Land and landscape represent different viewpoints of location. Western mapping typically perceives land as a measured surface, and landscape as alterable for cultivation. British anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests other perceptions between land and landscape in the way that they are valued: land is an inherent presence that is sensed and not seen, and measured in terms of quantity, while landscape is an intrinsically interconnected system understood through quality.<sup>20</sup> In other words, land is the plane from which life springs forth, and landscape is the visible environmental network that connects life forms with one another. Ingold claims that there is no separation between people and the landscape around them, an argument that begins to break down the detachment that western mapping creates between humans and landscape. Anishinaabe and Mohawk scholar Vanessa Watts furthers the notion of inseparability in her definition of Indigenous Place-Thought, wherein the connection between interior and exterior embodiment is tethered to the Earth, and humans and non-humans interact with the land as a fellow thinking being.<sup>21</sup> Watts, like Ingold, sees the land as living, with the landscape as an extension.

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<sup>19</sup> Deborah Doxtator, “Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro-Based Concepts of Time, History, and Change,” in *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*, ed. Carolyn Podruchny and Germaine Warkentin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>20</sup> Tim Ingold, *Perceptions of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 191.

<sup>21</sup> Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!),” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2013): 21.



(Re)mapping, in this thesis, refers to both land and landscape, as the artists speak to the intertwined unseen and visible ancestral locations.

Mapping can also be created through the body, multiple mediums, and epistemologies. The experience of travelling on the land can form maps in the mind, where landmarks and changes in terrain indicate bodily responses to way-finding.<sup>22</sup> Dane-zaa artist Brian Jungen attributes his reclaiming of his ancestral culture both from British anthropologist Hugh Brody's book *Maps and Dreams*, as well as lived learning experiences from family members in his community. Brody's text was a reference point for the exhibition *\$5 Handshake: Art on Treaty 8 Territory* in 2017, curated by Melanie O'Brien and Brian Jungen, where an excerpt from the original text was featured in the exhibition text. Brody recounts the explanation of dream hunting, in which Dane-zaa ancestors possessed the ability to access mental maps in their dreams prior to hunting to locate an animal in their mind, and later in waking hours follow a trail with certainty.<sup>23</sup> Expanding beyond surface-level cartography, Indigenous mapping represents fluid and three dimensional properties reflecting a perspective from collaborating with local landscapes.

## LAND-BASED KNOWLEDGES

The variance of Indigenous land-based knowledges is reflected in the local, the places of origination, and where land/landscape is positioned as central to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. While it is to be understood that each Indigenous group and individual holds unique knowledges specific to place, understanding these knowledges from an outside perspective may

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<sup>22</sup> Anna J. Willow, "Doing Sovereignty in Native North America: Anishinaabe Counter-Mapping and the Struggle for Land-Based Self-Determination," *Human Ecology*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (December 2013): 874.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981), 44.

not be achieved. Common themes that run across Indigenous land-based knowledges can include memory, family, language, responsibility, community, protection, and reciprocity. This is exemplified through the following keywords spoken or authored by Indigenous scholars.

The Nêhiyaw or Plains Cree word “wahkootowin,” means an interrelatedness between all beings. Métis curator Cathy Mattes describes this worldview as valuing family, kinship, and the connection between humans and more-than-humans, as integral to understanding Indigenous experiences on the land.<sup>24</sup> Wahkootowin exemplifies the capacity of (re)mapping to reflect an understanding that all beings are part of a greater interrelated network.

The Anishinaabemowin word “biiskabiyang,” as used in Simpson’s writing to indicate “a returning, reengagement, reemergence of resurgence processes,”<sup>25</sup> is in response to Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor’s idea of “survivance”. Vizenor’s term indicates continual Indigenous realities, where stories of survivance refuse narratives of “dominance, tragedy, and victimry.”<sup>26</sup> Linking these theories, Simpson’s definition of biiskabiyang calls forth the prefix ‘re-’ that is used in (re)mapping to indicate a repeated action of survivance.

Furthermore, Dene scholar Glen Coulthard’s concept of “grounded normativity”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cathy Mattes, “Curatorial Essay,” *Amy Malbeuf: Inheritance*, Kelowna Art Gallery, 2017. <http://kelownaart-gallery.com/inheritance/curatorial-essay/>

<sup>25</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.

<sup>27</sup> Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 13.

theorizes land as central to Indigeneity, a relationship based on duty to community and the more-than-human world. (Re)mapping speaks to grounded normativity in the process of establishing individual and collective understandings of place.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999)

It is imperative to acknowledge that land-based knowledges are not a simply understood or automatic aspect of Indigeneity, but rather indicate an intrinsic socio-political context. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith resists what she describes as a romanticized Indigenous relationship to land, where she is “cautious about the mystical, misty-eyed discourse that is sometimes employed by indigenous people to describe our relationships to land and the universe.”<sup>28</sup> Relationships to land are dependent on both individual and collective experiences, and sometimes inaccessible; my understanding from her statement is a reticence to speak of these relationships without addressing the political nature of the discourse. The colonial system does not define Indigenous experience, although colonialism has and continues to cause significant changes to land/landscape and breaches to the human rights of Indigenous groups. While I do not discount Indigenous experiences of activated inherent knowledge in relation with land/landscape, I understand that for some Indigenous people the desire to reconnect to these epistemologies can represent frustrating barriers, rather than a nostalgic homecoming. Smith provides specific examples of colonial incursions of Indigenous land within the realm of colonial mapping, in

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Introduction.

particular the re-naming of Indigenous lands as a strategy of claiming.<sup>29</sup>

Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (2013)

Goeman's definition of (re)mapping is instrumental to the formulation of the title for my thesis exhibition, and in understanding the nuances of (re)mapping as a reclaiming of Indigenous territories. Focusing on the labour of Indigenous women in relation with mapping, the author's examples of Indigenous women's writing links to (re)mapping in Indigenous art practice. The author insists that (re)mapping does not simply layer meanings over existing maps, or attempt to return to a pre-contact perspective, but instead reflects on current relationships to land to make way for Indigenous futures.<sup>30</sup> The prefix (re) indicates a repeated action to continually re-assess spatial contexts of Indigeneity. As repeated actions infer forthcoming contexts, (re)mapping is a process of endless renewal.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (2017)

The concept of biiskabiyang as resurgence grounds Simpson's reflections of a research project with Elders from Long Lake #58 Anishinaabe territory, where she came to understand the conjunction of practice and theory of Nishnaabewin ways of being and knowing. The author understood the Elders' worldview as "cycles of creative energies, continual processes that bring forth more life and more creation and more thinking,"<sup>31</sup> as guidance for finding herself as part of this regenerative and reciprocal network with the land, landscape, and community. The research

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Chapter 4.

<sup>30</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 24.

project entailed visiting with the community to gather data on the ways their nation used the land in an effort to avoid further extraction and interruption. Cartographical information included both topography and stories; Indigenous land-based knowledge was (re)mapped by the Elders noting landmarks, hunting grounds, ceremonial sites, locations where events occurred, thereby creating maps of immeasurable depth.<sup>32</sup>

Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2010)

Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach's writing addresses the differences between Western and Indigenous thought. She communicates that these branches are not strictly a binary, but rather distinct bodies of knowledges that can coexist, but with evident and significant cultural differences.<sup>33</sup> Kovach's comparison of responsible Western research such as autoethnographic, feminist, and qualitative methods with her own Nêhiyaw methodology guides thinking through developing my own curatorial research approach that reflects my positionality as an in-between space, not a conflicting binary between settler and Métis. Developing the curatorial premise for my thesis exhibition involved an autoethnographic research process of recalling conversations with my family members and accessing archival documents to understand my ancestor's connection to land, alongside learning about the way Devine, Bear Hat and Boyer communicate connections to homeland and strategies of mapping in their art practices.

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<sup>32</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 29.

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

*Nations in Urban Landscapes*, 1997

Curated by Marcia Crosby (Tsimshian-Haida) at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, *Nations in Urban Landscapes* (1997) investigates the strategies in which Indigenous people situate themselves and relate to their environment in urban landscapes. Questioning notions of authenticity, land rights, and official and non-official spaces of Indigeneity, the exhibition discusses complexities of nationhood. Featuring artists Faye HeavyShield (Kainai-Blood), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), and Eric Robertson (Métis/Gitksan), the premise “is not an exhibit that constructs aboriginal peoples and their cultures as models for stewards of the land or keepers of culture and spirituality.”<sup>34</sup> In this declaration I comprehend the risk of essentializing Indigenous peoples by ascribing them as inherently in relationship to the land, as similarly discussed by Smith. Rather, the exhibition highlights that Indigeneity is present not just on reserves/traditional territories, but also in cities and urban environments. Romanticizing Indigenous connections to land flattens the intricacies of individual experiences, and as Crosby argues, builds unfair expectations for Indigenous people to hold traditional or ancestral knowledge.

*Reservation X*, 1998

Curated by Gerald McMaster (Nêhiyaw-Siksika), *Reservation X* (1998) is an exhibition in which the reserve/reservation is a place by which many Indigenous identities are ascribed, calling into question the current state of Indigeneity and the complications of displacement,

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<sup>34</sup> Marcia Crosby quoted by Paul Chaat Smith, “From Lake Geneva to the Finland Station,” in *Nations in Urban Landscapes: Faye HeavyShield, Shelley Niro, Eric Robertson*, ed. Marcia Crosby, Paul Chaat Smith, and Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver, Canada: Contemporary Art Gallery, 1997), 7.

disconnection, home, belonging, and perception. Featuring the work of artists Mary Longman (Saulteaux), Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo), Marianne Nicholson (Kwakwaka'wakw), Shelley Niro (Mohawk), Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), Mateo Romero (Cochiti Pueblo), and C. Maxx Stevens (Seminole/Muscogee), the exhibition took place in the First Peoples' Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. In the exhibition catalogue, the artists speak to varied relationships with their homeland as leaving, living in, staying, and returning to ancestral territories. Understanding as a continually shifting rather than a static place, McMaster argues that returning to the reserve “does not mean a return to the margins; rather it is a return to a centre of activity.”<sup>35</sup> In my own process of re-connecting with my Métis homelands, the previous statement explains how returning to ancestral territories represents potential for expanding knowledge and strengthening family and kinship ties.

*BUSH Gallery, 2015- ongoing*

BUSH Gallery is an ongoing curatorial project from 2015 organized by Secwepemc artist and curator Tania Willard, questioning Western notions of where art takes place and how art is defined, by moving outside the white cube and to the bush/land/reserve. Land/landscape becomes the host of art, and art is loosened in definition to include actions of sharing, making, experimenting, and lived experiences with the land.<sup>36</sup> At the Summer Indigenous Art Intensive at University of British Columbia Okanagan in 2019, Willard organized another iteration of BUSH Gallery, which I attended. Food was shared, and video and image-based artwork was exhibited by projecting onto a sheet held up by tree branches. BUSH Gallery is an art making environment

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<sup>35</sup> Gerald McMaster, “Living on Reservation X,” in *Reservation X*, ed. Gerald McMaster and Canadian Museum of Civilization (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 1998) 22.

<sup>36</sup> Tania Willard, “THE BUSH MANIFESTO,” *C Magazine*, Issue 136 (Winter 2018): 6.

grounded in shared skills and non-hierarchical learning, deconstructing knowledge barriers that are often present in normative exhibition spaces.



## SECTION 2 - Curatorial Essay

*(re)mapping, grounding, remembering* reveals how the concept of (re)mapping is articulated in contemporary Indigenous art to communicate methods of place-making and Indigenous presence on land/landscape. The artists whose work is featured in this thesis exhibition include Bonnie Devine, Richelle Bear Hat, and Katherine Boyer. The concept of (re)mapping as defined by Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman 1) demonstrates individual and collective understandings of land from Indigenous perspectives, and 2) troubles or problematizes colonial geography as a way to think towards Indigenous futures.<sup>37</sup> (Re)mapping extends beyond overlaying Indigenous contexts to cover or erase existing Western cartography, instead this concept presents strategies of place-making or conceptual frameworks that go deeper than the page or the written word. Through the mediums of painting, video, and beadwork, these artists embody their relationships to ancestral territories through memory, language, and family. Refusing Western definitions of land established through colonial cartography, geography, and ‘proper’ land use, they contribute to a legacy of Indigenous mapping that is non-linear, multi-medial, and constantly shifting.

The grid, the line, and the border in Western cartography represent tools of demarcation imposed on Indigenous land and its peoples, as means to measure, quantify or ascribe value. *(re)mapping, grounding, remembering* focuses on the work of three Indigenous artists whose practices involve mapping strategies that go beyond the threshold of surface level perception. In some of the works, (re)mapping is enacted to contest colonial histories and the ways that “capitalism and colonialism have produced new ways of experiencing time and space.”<sup>38</sup> Conversely,

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<sup>37</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 28.

(re)mapping can operate separately from challenges to colonial mapping, by comprehending land/landscape through personal narratives. While Western cartography is positioned as the most comprehensive and scientific form of recording land, this exhibition asks the viewer to recognize additional forms of mapping that question normative assumptions for more expansive representations. (Re)mapping re-inserts living experience and memory back into cartography, drawing attention to the ways Western mapping tends to erase bodies, particularly Indigenous bodies, from the Earth. When bodies are removed from sight through a *terra nullius* strategy, the perception of Turtle Island as unoccupied, allows capitalism a smooth passageway for sectioning and dividing land “awaiting [its] arrival.”<sup>39</sup> The necessity of (re)mapping is demonstrated with current Wet’suwet’en resistance against resource extraction encroachment. The Canadian State’s priority of economic development over Indigenous Nations’ land rights repeats a *terra nullius* perspective in a current context of colonial mapping.

Each of the works position the ground as central, but not from a detached, overhead view: Devine, Bear Hat and Boyer’s works all ground their knowledge by situating themselves within the landscape itself. The focus within and on the ground in the three artist’s works forms a meeting point for Indigenous land-based knowledges. The selection of the word *grounding* in the exhibition title references this literal focus on the ground, as well as Glen Coulthard’s concept of grounded normativity. He explains this theory as the land forming the basis for Indigeneity, reciprocal relationships with human and more-than-human beings, and “place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought.”<sup>40</sup> A reciprocal relationship with land/landscape and an intercon-

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<sup>39</sup> Jodi Byrd, “Introduction,” In *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, ed. Jodi Byrd (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) xxi.

<sup>40</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13.

nectedness with all beings is also realized through the meaning of the Nêhiyaw or Plains Cree word “wahkootowin.”<sup>41</sup> Western forms of mapping instead produce a removed view of landscape as an endless resource, rather than a living being with agency.<sup>42</sup>

Indigenous nations continue grounding (re)mapping strategies of their surroundings to ensure their own futures. These realities are not dictated by colonial definition but rather an endurance despite colonialism. The prefix (*re*) in the exhibition title references Goeman’s text, but also indicates (re)mapping as a repeated and persistent action of the artists re-asserting their new definitions and relations to land/landscape, indicated in the Anishinaabemowin word, “biisk-abiyang.”<sup>43</sup> The repetition of place-making methods as explained through biiskabiyang ensures that this knowledge both references teachings and is carried forward to incorporate new contexts. (Re)mapping challenges current colonial systems to re-write narratives for Indigenous futures.

Bonnie Devine’s art practice confronts issues of land rights, environment, treaty, and maps to directly challenge conflicting viewpoints of land between the colonial state and Indigenous knowledges. Her work draws from Anishinaabe pictorial tradition such as birch bark scrolls and Agawa Rock pictographs,<sup>44</sup> as well as knowledge she learned from her grandparents, who were trappers on the Canadian Shield. Devine’s works in this exhibition, *Impassable* (2018), and *Settlement* (2018), are diptychs of a surveyor’s map of Ontario regions on the left panels, and on the right side is a painted response where gridlines and boundaries are dissolved to honour living

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<sup>41</sup> Mattes, “Curatorial Essay.”

<sup>42</sup> Ingold, *Perceptions of the Environment*, 191.

<sup>43</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Bonnie Devine, “Bonnie Devine’s Woodlands,” Art Gallery of Ontario, December 11, 2015, 2:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbNbRh04fuQ>.

entities. Although these diptychs present two radically different perspectives, this format does not necessarily represent a binary, but rather potential for conversations connected at a seam. Mapping has consistently held a place in Devine's art practice, in which she stated: "a map is an abstraction, and the rim of the horizon in which it contains us, is not straight."<sup>45</sup> She (re)maps her understanding of the Toronto area by contesting that a surveyor's map of the region only depicts a disembodied, capitalist view of the land.

The medium of painting allows for extending beyond the views of colonial cartography, as the fluid quality of paint responds to Devine's hand in the transfer of knowledge onto canvas. Painting, in relation to Anishinaabe pictorial tradition, is a method of (re)mapping history by collapsing past and present understandings of Anishinaabe territory. In the left panel of *Impassable*, the grey, flattened ground is rendered with hard black borders, and swathes of land are cut into rectangles to subdivide for sale. The reconnaissance sketch depicts the area of Toronto nestled between the Humber River and Etobicoke River to the West and East, and Dundas Street and the Lake Ontario shoreline to the North and South. The surveyor's map is from the vantage point of an impossible disembodied 'god's eye' overhead view, recalling the French derivative of the word survey, which is "to look over,"<sup>46</sup> and surveillance as in the colonial gaze.<sup>47</sup> In response, the other half of the diptych is a painting of a cutaway ground view of maple seeds taking root in the soil. Vast networks of roots fan underground, crossing over one another, represents the interconnectedness of beings.

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<sup>45</sup> Bonnie Devine, Guest lecturer, *Expansive Approaches to Indigenous Art Histories*, Fall 2018, OCAD University.

<sup>46</sup> Robert S. Nelson, "The Map of Art History, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (March 1997): 36.

<sup>47</sup> Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 40.

Similarly, in *Settlement*, a colonial map of the Great Lakes communicates the militarization of the region in anticipation of battle. Devine's painted response depicts the depths of the lakes as metaphor to question the depths of ownership and colonial attempts to claim land. The painting of the ground from a cutaway partly below and partly above, draws from the artist's perception of humans as laterally in relationship with plants, animals, and land, rather than a Western hierarchy where humans are placed at the top of the food chain. This gesture presents Western surveillance as solely mapping the land for future private ownership, and symbolically lifts the veil to reveal the vibrant depths of life.

(Re)inserting life back into mapping and linking the memory of her teachings as an intrinsic connection between mind, body, and land, Devine situates her traditional knowledge in reference to the landscape of the Serpent River First Nation. Devine recognized maps embedded in the rocks near where her grandparent's home once stood. Spending time and looking closer with the rocks, she recognized the ways in which they were visually communicating across geologic time.<sup>48</sup> While her territory is still accessible for learning, colonial encroachment attempted to cease this relationship. She recalled how surveyors entered her Nation to stake the ground and disrupted her grandparent's trapline to make way for uranium mining.<sup>49</sup> By challenging colonial mapping and extraction in Indigenous territories, Devine's artwork provides an opportunity to reconsider land/landscape from a relational standpoint. The maps arising from the rocks in Devine's homeland form a grounding basis for her work with colonial maps as a point of contention.

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<sup>48</sup> Suzanne Morrisette, "Stories of Place, Location, and Knowledge," (Masters Thesis, OCAD University, 2011): 27.

<sup>49</sup> Devine, *Expansive Approaches*, 2018.

Richelle Bear Hat maps her surroundings through the gifts she has received from family: lessons of navigating homeland, shared memories, and gestures of love. Her work explores memory, family relationships, and Indigenous language, and how stories and knowledge are passed through generations. Using video as a method for storytelling, *In Her Care* (2017), depicts landscape from standing firmly on the ground, looking out towards the swaying prairie grasses. Bear Hat (re)maps her understanding of land/landscape as one rooted in memories of family members, and through the process of learning Blackfoot language. Being physically present on her ancestral grounds, she engages her senses.

Video becomes a contemporary vessel for (re)mapping family stories by folding together the visuals of land and the sound of voice. A tool for recording knowledge, video as medium in Indigenous women's artwork can create opportunity for "projects of language revitalization and cultural continuity,"<sup>50</sup> as well as decisions over what the viewer sees and what will not be shown. Re-claiming Blackfoot language as a means of speaking to land and memory, Blackfoot spoken in the video remains intentionally untranslated for the viewer, where the speech is intended only for those who know how to hear the words. As the narrator, she shifts between Blackfoot and English, recalling stories of her mother, aunties, and grandmother. Working through memories of those who have passed on, she recounts imparted knowledge such as making bannock, learning language, and how one shows care and love through their gestures. In recounting these moments of love, her emotions of grief do not signify an ending, but rather how the spirit of her ancestors live on through her own body. She (re)maps and remembers her mother as part of the land.

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<sup>50</sup> Joanne Hearne, "Native to the Device: Thoughts on Digital Indigenous Studies," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2017): 8.

Memory becomes part of the landscape topography when the artist narrates: “she is part of the grass that grows here.”

Bear Hat received encouragement from her family to cultivate an understanding of the Blackfoot language, which was reinforced by learning jokes to make her aunts laugh. This language reclamation demonstrates her dedication to (re)learn what it means to be on the land and what the land can teach.<sup>51</sup> In other words, she speaks to the land and the land speaks to her. To further communicate remembered actions of matrilineal love, *In Her Care* shows manicured hands gently braiding long, flowing swathes of sweetgrass, sage, and rose hips, as a gesture familiar to the tenderness of braiding a loved one’s hair. Grooming strands of prairie grasses and plants, Bear Hat holds them in her hands, passing them through her fingers, connecting herself through tactile action. In her narration, she recognizes that words may not fully communicate love; these tactile memories activate another language. Speaking to the land/landscape is a method of locating herself in relation to her territory, beyond the boundaries of normative way-finding.<sup>52</sup> Relating to land through touch, speech, and memory, the artist grounds both her own body and the presence of her ancestors on the land.

This work demonstrates the conceptual approach to (re)mapping, in which understandings of the land are expressed through physical and mental action: speaking, grooming, loving, and looking at the landscape by being on the land. The vantage points of looking at the landscape remain close to the ground: crouching in the grasses, laying down and looking upwards, or stand-

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<sup>51</sup> Brian Jungen, “Curators of Maps and Dreams in Conversation,” in *\$5 Handshake*, ed. Melanie O’Brien (Burnaby, BC: SFU Galleries, 2018): 49.

<sup>52</sup> Sara Nicole England, “Lines, Waves, Contours: (Re)Mapping and Recording Space in Indigenous Sound Art,” *Public Art Dialogue*, 9:1 (2019): 22.

ing in place and gazing to the horizon between land and sky. (Re)mapping and grounding is enacted with storytelling, remembering, and speaking Blackfoot. The video culminates with the artist laying down in tall grasses, the land embracing her as she disappears from sight. In this action, she directly places her body on the ground, and the land reciprocates by enveloping her.

Finally, Katherine Boyer navigates the archive to track the repeated displacement of her Métis family from their homelands. Working with records of family history, Boyer forms her own understandings of identity and connection to place by responding through intricate and methodical beadwork. Bridging time with body to her Métis matrilineal family, Boyer beads on gridded tea towels to speak of hidden female labour and land divisions in *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary* (2017). Establishing relationships with her ancestors through the domestic space of the kitchen, Boyer (re)maps her understandings of family memories and Indigenous land title across time with the labour-intensive act of beading. She explains that her body becomes a channel by which she speaks with her ancestors, demonstrating a responsibility to learning their stories and “repairing lost homelands.”<sup>53</sup> Through her dedicated archival research, Boyer’s multi-media approach remembers her family’s journey across the landscape. In particular, her recent works focused on her family’s Souris Valley farm, where she confronts the Canadian government’s decision to flood this valley with water.<sup>54</sup>

The body-land connection enacted in these artist’s works demonstrates how (re)mapping has the capacity to re-establish the presence of Indigenous bodies on the land. Despite erasure

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<sup>53</sup> Katherine Boyer, “Labour is the Body; Time is the Bridge,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Manitoba, 2018): 4.

<sup>54</sup> Katherine Boyer, Artist Talk, University of Winnipeg, April 1, 2019, 8:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH3ISR8tRs8>.



strategies by colonial systems, Boyer's practice (re)maps unearthed histories by engaging with the archive as a basis of creation within contemporary contexts. She communicates this learning process through material culture, as the act of beading allows for deep contemplation. While the artist lamented missing family beading motifs, she received advice from one Métis Elder who instructed her how to build her own vocabulary:<sup>55</sup> beadwork became her visual language for reflecting on family history to ensure dynamic continuation of these stories into the future.

Using white beads for *Meeting Grans Over Tea and Bangs*, the floral motifs both blend into the background of the cloth and are revealed when traversing the red gridded borders. In a metaphor of the visible and the obscured, the often hidden domestic labour of women, the beads break the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces, representative of the struggle of land rights across generations of Boyer's family. The grid pattern on the tea towels is a reference to both the Métis river lot system in Manitoba, and Métis scrip land. The series also calls attention to successful continuations of passed-down information: the Boyer family recipe for 'bangs.' The recipe represents a lineage of working hands kneading dough, well-worn tea towels bearing tactile memory, and bodies remembering repetitive motions and the taste of the fried bread upon the tongue. *Meeting Grans Over Tea and Bangs* is a map of years of familial research that upholds matriarchal presence in her own history and on the land.

Boyer's archival discoveries indicated that documentation of women as compared to men was under-represented. Considering the legacy of the Boyer family matriarch, Mary LaRocque, this series of beaded towels seeks to make visible the contributions of female family members

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<sup>55</sup> Katherine Boyer, "Métis Beading and Ancestral Knowledge: A Conversation with Katherine Boyer," interview by Lauren Fournier, *Canadian Art*, November 22, 2018, <https://canadianart.ca/interviews/metis-beading-and-ancestral-knowledge-a-conversation-with-katherine-boyer/>.

with each stitch. Connecting to consistent themes of cultural context and location in her art practice, the artist's work is described by Lakota/Scottish scholar Carmen Robertson as "visual maps that reference stories connected to identity and place."<sup>56</sup> Each bead, intentionally placed, (re)maps her Métis family's presence on the Prairies, thus grounding her created visual language through the continuing the legacy of Métis beadwork as a cultural expression. With familial and cultural guidance, the artist finds a way to speak to her ancestors.

## CONCLUSION

Bonnie Devine, Richelle Bear Hat, and Katherine Boyer visually articulate the concept of (re)mapping through numerous gestures, specific to each of their perspectives. Their cultural context and individual understandings of land are based on story, experience, and communicating geographies that are not easily measured. Demonstrating a range of map making mediums, *(re)mapping, grounding, remembering* intends to problematize the normative notions of what a map is expected to look like, and how deeper meanings can be cultivated. Painting, beading, and video represent the range of mediums through which (re)mapping can be expressed. Devine references the Anishinaabe pictorial tradition and passed-down familial knowledge in her approach to painting a direct confrontation to colonial maps.<sup>57</sup> Activating memory through visual, aural, and tactile senses, storytelling activates Bear Hat's fond memories and a platform to practice Blackfoot language. Beadwork allows space for Boyer's deep contemplation of archival docu-

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<sup>56</sup> Carmen Robertson, "Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/ Canadian Art Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017): 13.

<sup>57</sup> Devine, *Expansive Approaches*, 2018.

ments, where each stitch transfers knowledge to cloth. While the creation of maps literal and symbolic intentions is the thread through which the works relate, the difference in mediums exemplify artist's individual and community contexts.

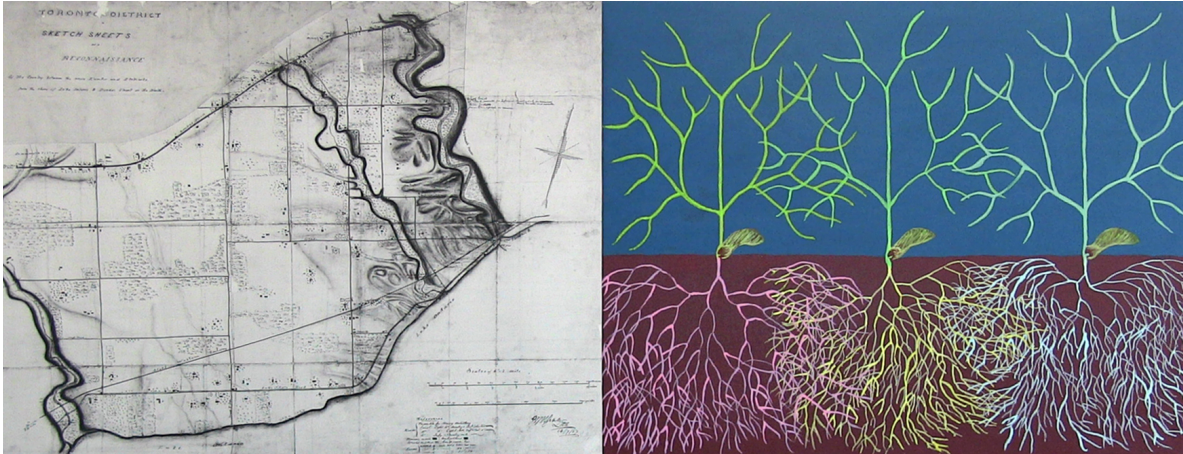
Western cartographic lines and borders indicate limitations, but Indigenous (re)mapping opens opportunities for expansion as social geographer Katherine McKittrick explains, "these (cartographic) rules are alterable and there exists a terrain through which different geographic stories can be and are told."<sup>58</sup> Colonial methods of mapping are both directly challenged and ignored completely across the three artist's works, forming a spectrum of actions from confrontation to refusal. Devine opposes the surveyor's map with a more vibrant (re)mapping of soil and water, Bear Hat brings the viewer to her homeland to share a rich and complex map of memories, and Boyer transcends boundary lines of allotted scrip land and interior/exterior space. In this sense, mapping is language that represents a range of perspectives: in this thesis, I have tried to argue that each person and also each community bears their own map.

While Western mapping line drawings or computer renderings have declared themselves as an objective method for way-finding or locating, this perspective is better understood as one of many lenses by which to understand place. Normative knowledge disguises the realities of control and containment. Instead, each artist reinserts their body and their ancestor's bodies back onto the land/landscape through the strategy of (re)mapping, thereby defying *terra nullis* narratives. (Re)mapping argues against Western mapping as representative of a singular authority, and further suggests that these documents are a distortion of land as opposed to a unified reality. By confronting the drawing of hard and arbitrary lines on a map, plus the subsequent histories of

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<sup>58</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): x.

displacement, (re)mapping reveals the political rather than neutral nature of cartography. This thesis is an attempt to show that (re)mapping created by Devine, Bear Hat, and Boyer positions their knowledges as coming from land/landscape, memory, story, and language as tools for charting their views.



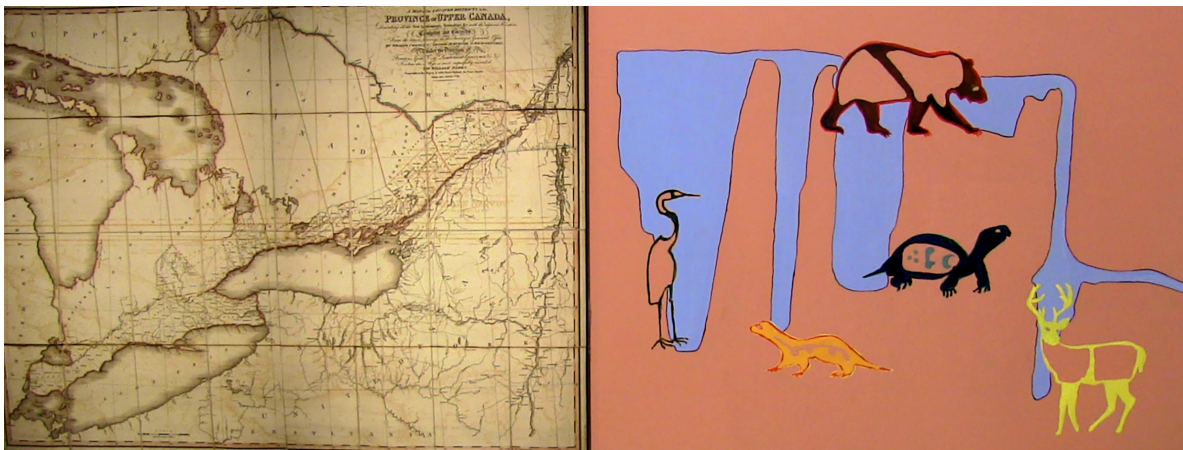
© Bonnie Devine

*Impassable*

122 x 45.7cm painting diptych

2018

Photo courtesy of Bonnie Devine



© Bonnie Devine

*Settlement*

122 x 45.7cm painting diptych

2018

Photo courtesy of Bonnie Devine



© Richelle Bear Hat

*In Her Care*

10 minute video

2017





© Katherine Boyer

*Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee,  
Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary*

One of five beaded tea towels (detail)

2017



Exhibition installation, entrance to OCAD Graduate Gallery.



Exhibition installation, right side of OCAD Graduate Gallery.





Exhibition installation, left side of OCAD Graduate Gallery.

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### Appendix A: Exhibition Design

Designing the layout of an exhibition requires methods of mapping. Curators often obtain the exact measurements of an exhibition space and of each artwork prior to installation, creating a map to plan what the exhibition might look like after installation. My experience with installing exhibitions has demonstrated that the presence of the artworks transforms the exhibition design map to a guideline rather than blueprint. Curators must give space for artists to communicate how their artworks should be installed, and simultaneously let the artworks determine where and how they should be displayed. Fluidity in designing an exhibition provides room for artworks, artists, and curators to collaborate, and to attempt to relinquish historical institution power imbalance between artwork/artist and curator.

Bonnie Devine's diptych paintings *Impassable* and *Settlement* stage a direct confrontation between two worldviews, communicating metaphorical depth of land and water to the viewer, hung on opposite sides of the gallery space to re-stage a visual confrontation. Richelle Bear Hat's *In Her Care* is visually enclosed by the framing of the projector, yet the sound of the artist's voice cannot be contained — it reaches every corner of the gallery space and spills out of the entrance. Katherine Boyer's installation of *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary* is coded spatially. The height of each hanging tea towel corresponds to her familiarity with each Métis ancestor, with lowest denoting closeness and furthest indicating distance.

### Appendix B: Artist Biographies

**Bonnie Devine** is an installation artist, sculptor, painter, video maker, curator, and writer. A descendant of the Anishinaabek of Genaabaajing, (Serpent River First Nation) on the north shore of Lake Huron, Devine's work emerges from the storytelling and image-making traditions that are central to the culture of the Anishinaabek. Using cross disciplinary approaches and iterations of written, visual, and performative practice Devine explores issues of land, environment, treaty, history, and narrative. Though formally educated in sculpture and installation art at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD U) and York University, Devine's most enduring learning came from her grandparents, who were trappers on the Canadian Shield in northern Ontario.

**Richelle Bear Hat** is a Calgary-based Indigenous artist with both Blackfoot and Cree heritage. Bear Hat's recent exhibitions include *Horse Camp* (2017), Ociciwan, Edmonton; *Maps and Dreams* (2017), Audain Gallery, Vancouver; *Camp* (2017), Arts Commons, Calgary; and *Little Cree Women: Sisters Secrets and Stories* (2016), Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton. Richelle has also been a regional award winner of the BMO 1st Art Prize (2011).

**Katherine Boyer** is a multidisciplinary artist, whose work is focused on methods bound to textile arts and the handmade, including fabric manipulation, papermaking, woodworking and beadwork. Boyer's art and research is entrenched in Métis history, material culture and personal family narratives. Through the experience of long, slow, and considerate laborious processes, Boyer contemplates the use of her own Métis body as a conduit for building upon ancestor relations and exploring notions of a mixed cultural identity. Boyer has received a BFA from the Uni-

versity of Regina and an MFA at the University of Manitoba. She currently holds a position as an Assistant Professor at the U of M, School of Art.