

that old home of mine

by

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Abstract

My research centers an exploration of Métis identity and Michif ways of knowing through a practice-based method of inquiry into beadwork and beaded objects. This thesis document is written in the form of letters written to my daughter and is organized around the idea of building a Michif-self archive by stitching together narrative writing, letters, poems, family histories, and short stories. While reflecting on the many relationships that have held me with care and grounded me within my understanding of my own Michif identity. At its core this research is about love, cultural knowledge transfer, and the practice of remembering and re-remembering past, current, and future ancestors. This document centers my relationship with my daughter as I explore the role of motherhood in relation to Métis culture.

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Marsii to my primary advisor Peter Morin for patience and understanding as we journeyed together through immense periods of grief and joy. I am forever grateful for your shared knowledge and friendship. I am thankful for the space we created where Tahltan and Michif care intersects and is met with humor and the tough love that gets you across the finish line. Marsii

Marsii to my secondary advisor Cathy Mattes how lucky am I to have the language of our Ancestors spoken to me just so I can hear it. Knowing I have my kin, my family, guiding me with a deep understanding of our shared culture and ancestral lineage has been such a gift. I am so thankful Peter brought us together, our Ancestors are smiling. Marsii

Marsii to my peers Lacie Burning and Arielle Twist I would not have survived the first week without you, I am here because of you. Marsii

Marsii to my extended kinship networks, who know who they are, for carrying me through it all. Marsii

Marsii to all my ancestors, past, current, and future. Thank you for guiding me. To my ancestor Taran Kootenhayoo, Standing Sunrise, even from the spirit world your belief in me keeps me going. I hope I made you proud. I miss you everyday. Love you forever. Marsii

Marsii to my mother I don't know how you did it raising us all well growing new life inside you. All I can say is I am sorry, one pregnancy is hard enough I cannot not imagine going through seven. I am in awe of you. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a mother. Marsii

Marsii to that old home of mine, to my mom, dad, grandma and granddad, grandpa and grandma Boucher, auntie Angela and Uncle Chris, my cousins, and my beautiful siblings. I think about the days spent together with fondness, where our dreams started. I am so grateful for them, in the ways you have held me, in the ways you continue to hold me. I will never forget that old home of mine. Marsii

Marsii to my sisters, you are my whole soul. To know my daughter will grow up with aunties who will break themselves open for her heals every pain I've ever known. Marsii

Marsii, my new home, my best friend, the love of my life, Mangeshig. I could fill this thesis with my love for you. You are the best story I will ever tell, I still cannot believe I am lucky enough to know such a love in this lifetime. As I sit here writing these words I feel our daughter kick, what a beautiful thing we have done together, creating life from our love, our daughter will be so lucky to witness it, to know it. I cannot wait for our little family to come together, to grow and to experience a love more powerful than anything we could ever have imagined. I love you so much Marsii.

Dedication

To my daughter,

I met you before you were born

in a prairie field

visiting in a dream

my future ancestor

I didn't know you then

but I knew you were my world

I write these worlds for you

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Introduction

It is 2020 and I am standing in the collections of the Museum of Manitoba with a room full of bead workers and bead enthusiasts, gathered here for the beading symposium: Ziigimineshin.

¹Placed on the table in front of me there are rows of beaded objects resting on top of sheets of collections paper, the collections manager Dr. Maureen Matthews is handling the objects with white gloves on while explaining the technical aspects of each piece. I wasn't listening. I was dreaming, as I often do. I was reflecting on a question I had asked her during a q&a earlier "if you know whose family most of the beadwork in your collection belongs to, why don't you just return them" to which she had responded "while no ones asked for them back, and they're safer here anyway. But I was dreaming, dreaming of the lives that these pieces had had before they were labeled , wrapped in tissue, and stored in shelves to be acced and viewed by community only under supervision. In the meantime Dr Sherry Farewell Rcette had commandeered the viewing. She had taken off her archival gloves and was handling the pieces and encouraged us to do the same. She encouraged us to touch them, to study them, to know them. She reminded us that these objects held our stories, that they belonged to us, and that they belonged to our Ancestors. She reminded us that they are our Ancestors. In that moment my thinking around bead work and bead objects shifted, rather than a fascination with aesthetic, design, and history, I began to look at these works more expansively as transformative objects that held past, current, and future ancestors and served as portals to their re remembering. This experience is/was the first entryway into thinking about making and research processes.

¹ The Beadwork Symposia Ziigimineshin was held in Winnipeg Manitoba at the Manitoba Museum February 6th-9th.

My initial inquiries into my research and making were rooted in object creation and object theory². I began creating beaded objects within my studio practice as a way to navigate larger themes surrounding Michif identity and the Michif archive. In this archive I was imaging/shaping/dreaming. I was interested in object theory as a means of understanding objects and their abilities to communicate stories and worlds. I was thinking through familiar objects, objects of the everyday in my Métis world, transitional objects, and objects with connection to time and space. As an entry point into object theory and as a way to deepen my thinking around Object Theory, I explored Bill Brown's thing theory and the idea of thingness. *Other Things* by Bill Brown offers us the idea that we look through objects to see what they disclose but thingness is what the objects assert themselves as things. The idea of thingness suggests that "things" exceed their function and mere meterilization their thingness becomes a force or a metaphysical presence³. This theory became important to my creation practice as I asked the question how are everyday objects venerated and valued? How does the creation of these objects aid in cultural accessibility to Indigenous kin. Questioning the ways in which a pair of gloves, a sofa, a lawn chair, a jacket, a shelf, a painting, and jars in turn become objects of ceremony, of ritual, of remembering. Similarly in Shellys Turkle *Evocative Objects: Things we think with* she discusses the theory of evocative objects. She sees objects as in transition and in passage that they are not only in relation to each other but in relation to us so much so that we inscribe our lives into stories that relate to objects. "We think with the objects we love

² Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, page. 1–22. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344258>. Accessed 19 Jul. 2022.

³ Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, page. 1–22. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344258>. Accessed 19 Jul. 2022.

we love the objects we think with”⁴. There is no separation of thought and feeling in relation to things. When I began the process of making for my thesis research and exhibition, I felt this notion of objects we love was so closely related to Indigenous epistemologies surrounding making. I began asking how the works I was making become visual symbols of love and re-remembering? How I could encapsulate story and feeling ? I wanted to create a body of work that acted as a love story, one that centered my relationships with my family and community, and that through my own re telling open space and told the stories of past, current, and future ancestors.

To do this I began theorizing the concept of the Michif self archive. The Michif self archive became a way to document my specific personal experience as a Michif person rather than speaking to the experiences of the Métis nation as a whole. The exploration of the Michif self archive first grew out of my interest in autoethnography, a practice based in anthropological writing that utilizes self reflection and self narrative writing to connect to larger political, social, and cultural framework. This concept was first presented to me through Kathleen Stewart's *Mattering Theory*. Stewart suggests that mattering is situated within entanglements and the worlds of which we are a part of, the common place and the everyday⁵. In the end mattering theory didn't matter all too much to me but it was my first engagement with the common place and the everyday as a point of exploration which shifted my research and my making entirely as it was one of the moments that brought me to the Michif self archive. Secondly, this concept of the Michif self archive derived from my own archival research into our family beadwork. I became interested in the quiet stories of Michif women and how these stories did not occupy the same space within the Métis archive. Within my research I didn't have to look further than

⁴ Turkle, Sherry. *Evocative Objects: Things We Think with.* , 2007. Print. Page 16.

⁵ Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2007. Print. page 1-7

my great great grandmother Caroline Lesperance to realize the extent of this anonymity so often assigned to Michif women within the archives. It led to the questions: what will become of me? How will I be remembered? Who will tell my stories?

While creating the work for my exhibition *that old home of mine* I was exploring kinship structures within beadwork, beadworks in relationship to place, Indigenous ways of knowing, Ancestral Collaboration, and Cultural Knowledge Transfer as a way to move through the Michif self archive. Here I looked to making as methodology, storytelling as methodology, and visiting methodology while thinking along Indigenous theorist and makers, like Carmen Robertson, Sherry Farrell Racette, Cathy Mattes, Eve Tuck, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Dylan Miner, Shawn Wilson, Ursula Johnson, James Luna, Lisa Myers and Katherine Boyer. I attempted to represent making methodology, storytelling methodology and visiting methodology (*miner 2015*) through the information within beadwork and the reciprocal archive between makers, thinkers and ancestors rather than focusing on theory that did not serve my community.⁶ I was interested in intergenerational relations that emerged, for example the relationship between Katherine Boyers grandmother and my grandmothers. A connection that was learnt through the naming of our shared grandmothers Nowananikkwee and Marguerite in her piece titled *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary*.⁷

I was interested in the connection that resulted from viewing the art works for the exhibition, like when a friend said to me ‘*wow this couch reminds of my grandmother's home, I can picture her sitting right there*’. Through my work I hope to reveal how Michif ways of knowing in

⁶ Robertson, Carmen. Robertson, C. Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland. 2017. RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review, 42 (2), <https://doi.org/10.7202/1042943ar>. Page 14

⁷ Boyer, Katherine. Labour is the Body; Time is the Bridge. 2018. Page 11

relation to place and land reposition beaded language in the context of generational and archival narratives⁸. I explored this possibility within my own investigation into autobiographical beadwork, an emergence of experimental beadwork and new possibilities. Playing with stylistic elements I created a textile based inquiry into archived objects through the adaptation of my own style, reflective of traditional Michif floral designs but also rooted in a contemporary style. This way of making positioned me as not only the maker but the bridge or portal to the future ancestor, I created these works for them to be passed down, to be understood, to be gifts of love and care.

These pieces while connecting also highlight disconnect and diaspora. They embody my own grief, loss, and longing. Reclamation of traditional practices and ancestral knowledges are encoded through making and storytelling within these works. I look to artists such as Ursula Jonshons, and Lisa Myers, as examples of gestures of remembering. Each artist symbolically connects to their ancestors through the representation of family narratives, land, and survival. There is an urgency demonstrated within their processes that reflect my own. This urgency becomes a portal to our Ancestors. For me these concepts are best demonstrated through collaboration with non humans, Ancestors and spirits, in this way I see the artworks made for *that old home of mine* as existing outside of colonial time in a space that holds Michif stories, lineage, and dreams, a space between worlds, where I invite my Ancestors to meet me, to tell their stories through me, a vessel of remembrance, a ritual healing.

In this document poems are frequently used within the framework of storytelling and visiting methodology. The poems become a part of my Michif self archive as they transform into opportunities for visiting with my daughter. They offer insights to objects and stories that slowly reveal themselves, the words become gifts to her. The poems then function further as

⁸ Robertson, Carmen. Page 14

documents within this Michif self archive. The poems are my spoken voice speaking to my daughter.

When conceptualizing the Michif self archive it became important to ground my research and making with intention. This research functions as more than fulfilling an academic requirement for an MFA program. This making is more than a capitalist venture for a colonial art market. The work I am creating are gifts, offerings, language and objects for Future Ancestors. The term Future Ancestors is used throughout this document to reference that intention. Moving through the world while honoring and holding space for one's Ancestors is practiced by many cultures, but carries specific spiritual meaning within Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. Thinking through Grace Dillons concept of Indigenous futurism⁹ the Michif self archive gives space to connect with Ancestors and reimagine Métis futures rooted in Indigenous knowledges and survivance outside of colonial structures of time. The Michif self archive My Ancestors before me, past Ancestors, fought to secure a place for Michif peoples. My current Ancestors continue to do the work of the past while preparing for the future of Métis sovereignty, the future of the land, the future knowledge holders. I create this work to ease access, I create this work to mend Métis diaspora, I create this work to open space. In doing so this work becomes a transformative portal to my ancestors, a space in which we may find each other and share in our love for one another.

Making these works and creating this document became my first act of care and my first journey with my daughter, She is my future ancestor. She held me through it all, I felt her move as I beaded and she gave me the power to continue knowing that my making was healing..

⁹ Grace L. Dillon. *Walking the Clouds : an Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. Tucson :University of Arizona Press, 2012.

She was the piece that connected my work, my theories, my methodology, my making , my explorations, the long nights of anxiety and questioning why in the world I was still doing this, what is the point. My research is healing myself so that I can parent my daughter alongside her Ancestors and I can help her tell her stories, as the Future Ancestor for so many following generations. This research in the end becomes the foundation of my love for my daughter, and as we continue on together we collaborate and come to know each other this knowing is what is next.

So I will end with the start of our archive, daughter.

My little spirit bead

Daughter,

I made these works for you, my Future Ancestor. I created this document, these pieces, this Michif self-archive for you. So you wouldn't have to search my name, or dig too deep for my stories. You could speak with confidence to who I was and what I loved. I created this work so you would know my stitch, you would recognize me by the way I placed my beads. You would never feel alone amongst beaded objects because you would know they are family, and you are home. I imagined you adorned and protected as you carried the knowledge of our Ancestors in those same threads. I imagined you studying and learning from my designs and one day creating your own. Your fingers touching the surface of the fabric, memorizing the textures, the shapes, the tension of the threads. And as you learnt you remembered and taught the next generation how to look, how to remember too. I made these works so our ancestral ties would never break, past, current, and future ancestors could live in reciprocity together in the worlds we have created for one another. I made these works so you would know you belonged to me and I to you and through our shared lineage we would hold each other up in our remembering.

I imagined you as a great great granddaughter searching for my story, eased in knowing I loved you, as I reached out to you through our shared objects. In my wildest dreams I could not have imagined that you, my Future Ancestor, were already here with me.

Growing inside me, breathing with me, becoming all the while knowing that I created these works while I was also creating you. A trickster just like her mother hiding out of

reach until you were ready to announce yourself. And with you came my world. With you came a clear understanding of the world I am building, the world I have rebuilt for you, Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, *rebuild little one*. These works are my first gift to you, these words are my gift to you, my daughter. Marsii, Miigwetch, thank you for collaborating on these works with me as we moved, felt, dreamt, learnt and remembered together. My little spirit bead, my gift from creator.

I love you

gi-zaagin

Ki shaakiihitin

But what did she love



Figure 1. But what did she love. 2021. Detail.

Silk glove, seed beads

Daughter,

I feel your kicks against my ribs as a constant reminder you are here with me. My brain is in knots. I'm anxious as I struggle to think of ways to articulate thoughts that are true to our ancestors, thoughts that do not heave under the pressure of Academic expectations. You kick my ribs as if to say we are journeying together. The weight of you has become so much that when I bend over to pick up a fallen paper I begin to think I have become weightless. I begin to think that at any moment I could fall, and continue to fall until some force rescues me from my pitiful spiral. You have grown stronger, and somehow I too have become stronger. So, I retrieve my paper as you kick me and I continue on.

It is in this struggle, of lifting, of holding, of carrying, of perseverance that I think of your great great great grandmother Caroline Lesperance. I imagine her with the future generations within her as she left her homelands, the Red River, to settle in St Louis Saskatchewan¹⁰. She is commanding an ox as she controls the reins of the wagon. Her whole world packed into that cart, her whole world inside of her, she is making for past, current, and future ancestors.

Not much is written about Caroline. And often, when she is written of it is in relation to your great great grandfather Jean-Baptiste Boucher. He is immortalized in the archives as a war

¹⁰ The Boucher family settled in St.Louis at their homestead on river lot 12 after leaving the Red River district in 1882.

hero, as a leader in the rebellions¹¹. And all this may be true but I want to know more about her, our Caroline.

When you are young you often don't remember family stories that are spoken around dinner tables or campfires. You may find that you cannot recall the stories I tell you of the ones who came before us. I think of the stories that were told to me, and they are there in that distant time, but before them is a memory of my siblings and I, in some hall in Prince Albert, piling our plates with homemade peanut butter squares. And even now, I can't remember what was said about Caroline. I can't remember if it was ever said outloud, and everyone who knew her is gone now. And everyone who remains in this world with us probably have memories that are also clouded with peanut butter squares of their own.

On the 52 day journey from Red River to St Louis, Caroline who was 8 months pregnant at the time gave birth on the side of the road. She birthed a daughter, and by the next day they were back on the road.¹²

This is all that is documented of Carolines life in the archives. She birthed the future on the side of the road and she continued on, her own Future Ancestor in tow. I have always felt deeply connected to Caroline, much like I have always felt deeply connected to you. I do not know her, and in many ways I know her more than I know myself. Caroline is reflected in many Michif women, her words may never have been documented, her story deemed worthy of remembering within an anthropological framework. Yet she is the strength of our nation. She

¹¹ The North-West resistance was a result of growing concerns surrounding Michif land and economic sovereignty due to an influx of European settlers. Jean-Baptiste Boucher was a member of Louis Riel's council and an active participant in the Red River resistance of 1885 in which the Métis launched a resurgence against the Canadian government. He fled to the states to avoid persecution after being wounded in the battle of Batoche and returned after being granted amnesty in 1886.

¹² Gordon, Irene Ternier. *A people on the move: The métis of the western plains*. Heritage House. 2009. Page 82.

is every stitch tacking down a row of beads creating harmony, creating a foundation for the next generations so they too may tack their own beads.

Sometime ago I began a line of inquiry into our family beadwork and designs. I knew that historically the women of my family would have likely engaged in this type of labor.¹³ Yet, to my knowledge, I had yet to see any family beadwork or archival designs. The older generation of my family who would have held this knowledge had since journeyed to the spirit world. I asked my father if he could produce any of our family beadwork or stories surrounding them. I did a deep dive into the archives searching the names of my relatives and came to the realization that much of the beadwork resting in museum collections and archives the makers were unlisted.¹⁴ My father Albert Lionel Boucher sent me some of the pieces in my grandfathers-Raymond Bouchers-collection of beaded garments. He had left most of them to my Uncle when he passed, as he often wore these items for ceremony and hunting to pass them down through his male lineage. My father had sent a pair of embroidered gauntlets and a beaded vest. I asked him who had beaded these items for him, he did not know. He inquired with my grandmother, and she did not know either. Although the gloves and the vest were worn

¹³ “The work of integrating new goods into everyday life was largely the cultural work of women. While both men and women wear beads and their manufacture is often a male activity, working with beads is generally categorized as women’s knowledge.” Racette, Sherry Farrell. “My grandmothers loved to trade: the indigenization of European trade goods in historic and contemporary Canada. .” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 20, 2008. Page 77

¹⁴ Métis were often omitted from the archives or categorized as the wrong people. Exclusion of Michif women was common due to early gender relations and patriarchal social codes reenforced by western archivist and historians whose worldviews influenced documentation. Métis beadwork is often wrongly categorized to a specific region due to the nomadic nature of the Michif people and the stylistic influences of other nations. As well, material culture was incorrectly categorized as a result of the trade nature of the Michif people and survival culture. Beadwork often ended up in personal collections without proper information about the maker or region

and faded from years of use and passed down generationally, the maker remained anonymous.

In 2020 I attended the beading symposium Ziigimineshin¹⁵ in Winnipeg Manitoba, the Métis homelands. It was there where I was introduced to Katherine Boyers piece *Meeting Grans over Tea and Bangs: Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Rosalie, Emilie, Mary*. The work consisted of five tea towels hung across a white wall with traditional Michif floral designs beaded in tones of white embellished onto the red and checkered surface. I was at first drawn to the piece as it reminded me of family gatherings and the intimate Indigenous kinship and knowledge systems that we pass through the everyday in the domestic spaces, like over the sink doing dishes with grandma. The works were a representation of each of Katherine's grandmothers, a symbolic rebuilding and strengthening of their lineage through an everyday household object¹⁶ Like myself, Katherine was interested in the quiet stories of Michif women, the stories that did not occupy the same space within the Métis archive. In their writings *Labour is the Body; Time is the Bridge* Boyer creates a dialogue surrounding Michif women's resistance represented through the repetitive action of beadwork "an essential component in the process of remembering as it expresses time, intimacy and a relational connection to ancestors"¹⁷ I felt a connection to these works, something beyond aesthetic appeal and a fondness for beadwork, something I could not place. This inquiry into loss of space bridged through material investigations had impulsively transferred into my own studio explorations. Sometime after witnessing *Meeting Grans Over Tea and Bangs*, I began creating gloves for my grandmother

¹⁵ The Beadwork Symposia are intended to contribute to and build on the scholarship around contemporary Indigenous art with a focus on how beadwork builds community; through making and learning together, opportunities will be created for the exchange of knowledge and the building of community. <https://manitobamuseum.ca/event/beading-symposium-ziigimineshin-winnipeg-2020>

¹⁶ Boyer, Katherine Page 11

¹⁷ Boyer, Katherine. Page 14

using the design from my grandfather's gauntlet. The first iteration of the glove was a pair of yellow rubber gloves with a beaded fringe which I created to honour both my maternal and paternal grandmothers. *But What Did She Love* is a continuation of this project created to support my MFA thesis research. I made these gloves for my great -great grandmother Caroline Lesperance. The silk gloves become a visual symbol of my love for her, a re-remembering¹⁸ of her story, encapsulated through transformative beadwork. The beaded design adapted from my grandfather's gauntlets becomes an access point to Caroline's story assigning her narrative materiality within the family object archive. She is remembered and activated through the laborious act of beading, which becomes physically present throughout my body. Our stories become stitched together creating a bridge not only through our shared lineage but through an understanding of historical and personal narratives. Caroline and I become even further fused through physical objects in which both maker and object become a vessel for her remembrance.

¹⁸ The term re-memebering is from Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* Smith explains the term as "connecting bodies with place and experience" (147).

You'll know me by my stitch



Figure 2. You'll know me by my stitch. 2022. Detail.

fur coat, size 10 seed beads

One day while in conversation with Kathrine Boyer I mentioned to her my great great grandmother's name was Caroline Lesperance. We quickly discovered that she was in fact the sister of Katherine's great great grandmother Rosalie, making the Margurite that Katherine mentioned in her artwork was my great great great grandmother and Nowananikkwee my great great great great grandmother. Somehow I hadn't picked up on the names in the title

earlier on and I realized the deep connection to them, beyond aesthetic appeal, was ancestral. Our shared ancestors came together through a love of beadwork and textile exploration. In Carmen Robertson *Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatlands* she speaks to the kinship structures common amongst beadworker and makers in the prairies. "An intergenerational relationship emerges between them, one that reveals how epistemological understandings of place, and specifically the land, serve to facilitate interplays of generational, cultural, artistic, and colonial narratives that resituate the beaded expressions."¹⁹ She explains that information within beadworks creates a reciprocal archive between makers.²⁰ *You'll know me by my stitch* is an investigation into autobiographical beadwork and the emergence of experimental beadwork and new possibilities²¹. Playing with stylistic elements I create a garment based inquiry into archived objects. Creating my own style which is reflective of traditional michif floral designs but also rooted in a contemporary style. This style speaks to my own duality of both a person of Métis and British descent. I intentionally opt to leave the floral outline unfilled, playing with negative space to activate a painterly gesture with the beads. This style embraces the imperfect the mistakes that often accompany mastering a new technique, especially when reclaiming traditional practices. The style repeated has become recognizably my own. Much of my MFA research also employs the act of beading over, in which I embellish on top of a pre existing pattern or object as an act of intervention. This act of beading over in turn transforms the object from object of the everyday to an object of Indigenous resistance and resilience. Similarly, techniques such as loom beading are activated within my practice through a slow repetitive act of stringing and placing

¹⁹ Robertson, Carmen. Page 14

²⁰ Robertson, Carmen Page 13-16

²¹ Racette, Farrell Sherry. *Sewing Ourselves Together: Clothing, Decorative Arts and the Expression of Metis and Half breed identity*. University of Manitoba. 2004. Page 63-64

beads. This gesture becomes a repetitive act of patience. It is symbolic of those who have come before us and those who have yet to come. Each bead a physical representation of their care and love as they fuse together to create a visual map revealing untold stories. I imagine my pieces discovered by a great great granddaughter in an archive. She is aware of the ways I manipulate beads, in the designs I use, and my application of colours. She is able to identify my work simply by my stitch because she is home amongst the work.

These things I saved for you



Figure 3. These things I saved for you. 2022
wooden shelf, little princess locket, scrunchie, red rose bison, avon jar

Fragmented collections of various sundays

my grandma gifted me an old Avon jar
she was an avid collector of antiques
on sundays she'd sell them at the mall
sometimes if we were lucky we could sit with her
drinking coffee from the food court while counting coy fish on our tippy toes
collections of stamps and rusted military pins
old men with round glasses recalling stories of their youth
I kept that pink glass jar on the shelf beside my bed
everytime I opened the lid its smell carried me across time
and i know when I can no longer reach for you
that smell remains, a portal
a cup of red rose tea, a biscuits, a sunday morning

Daughter,

My interest in collecting, in keeping, in sharing comes from my grandmother Margaret Cabana, your great-grandma. In 1963, in her mid twenties, she traveled by boat to Turtle Island to start her life as a nurse. She didn't bring much with her, just a single steamer trunk. Initially she had intended to continue on a tour around the world with her nursing friends, but she met my granddad and was married a year later. Amongst the things she brought with her were her cards from her twenty-first birthday celebrations. She explained to me on my own twenty-first that in England this age is considered a milestone birthday as you are now legally an adult and given a key to the family home, the key to success as she put it²². That year my family threw me a half Christmas party, my birthday marking the halfway point June 25th, so in the middle of summer we feasted on turkey, set up the christmas tree and put up the decorations. My grandmother placed a foil key- which she kept tucked inside her birthday card from her twenty-first- on top of the christmas tree next to one she had made for me. I've moved many places since then and under my bed in a white box I still have every card I've received, traveling with me, a tradition I carried forward from my grandmother; Or perhaps, I'm just a hoarder even though I much rather prefer the sentimental.

²² At the time your twenty-first symbolized coming into adulthood as you were the age of consent and able to marry without permission from your parents. The family law reform act and the representation of the people act of 1969 reduced marriage and voting age from 21 to 18.

In 2012 I was attending the University Of Regina for my first attempt at my undergraduate Bachelors of Fine Art²³, spoiler alert, I did not complete it. I was taking a class called Art 100 with Métis scholar, and artist, David Garneau. I was freshly 19 and just outside of my highschool education. It was my first introduction into contemporary art. Up until then, I had only learnt about white male artist and I was much too lazy to do the research myself. David's class was a crash course into the larger expansive art world, and most notably it was an introduction into the cannon of contemporary Indigenous art. I learnt a lot in that class; money well spent if you ask me. Once, in an effort to explain signs and semiotics to us, Garneau commented that there were three things that made an artist. Now I can't remember all of them, but I do recall that he said something along the lines of *displaying your work in a gallery to be seen by the viewers, when your work no longer exists as you would want it to be understood, and meaning is established by the viewer, this makes you a true artist.*(2014)

That evening I attempted to relay this information to my family around the dinner table. It was a Thanksgiving long weekend, and I was met with roars of laughter and sarcasm. For years the statement *"well you're not actually a real artist yet Maria"* or *"Maria you'll never believe it, Callums kindergarten classes art is being displayed at the Mendel Art Gallery, he's a real professional artist now"* haunted me. When I showed my first work in an exhibition at The Fifth Parallel Gallery at the University of Regina²⁴, it was a sigh of relief.

But I digress, it wasn't only ruthless teasing about my failed art career from my siblings that I took away from that class, i was also introduced to James Luna's *Artifact piece (1987)* that had the biggest impact on my practice. James Luna was a Native American artist of Luiseño,

²³ I graduated from Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 2018

²⁴ This exhibition was called *Experimenting with Fire* and was exhibited September 9th-27th 2013 at the Fifth Parallel Gallery. The exhibition featured wood fired ceramics created from the newly built wood kiln that participants had constructed that summer at the University of Regina.

Puyukitchum, Ipai, and Mexican descent. His work often involved performance by utilizing his body as a critical reflection of institutional spaces and Indigenous representation while playing with stereotypes and satirical subversion. *Artifact piece* positions the viewer as the museum gaze, the colonial gaze, the archival gaze while also re-directing the power to Luna through refusal, limiting the viewer by what is not known²⁵. By displaying his own body, personal belongings, and artifacts throughout the duration of the exhibition, Luna engages with voyeuristic strategies reflecting in the ways in which Indigenous people are consumed and documented in these spaces

The exhibition, consisting of various vitrines displayed in the San Diego Museum of Man, happens in the section of the museum devoted to the Kumeyaay Indians. . Three museum vitrines are strategically placed near the artist's body. His body is in the center of one of the vitrines. Another one contains traditional artifacts and medicines, and another an assortment of Luna 's shoes, and his personal belongings: his driver's license, diploma, tapes and records, political buttons, comic books and writings by Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski, small sports figurines, paper toys, family pictures, a plastic Godzilla and a statuette of a Franciscan monk clutching a Native child. Luna lies in a bed of sand, almost naked and covered by a loincloth. All of the marks and scars on his body are detailed and labeled with information on how he obtained them, similarly to other objects within the other museums. Luna becomes an embodied archive, an embodied collection. Here I am reminded of Thomas Kings dichotomy between the dead indian and the living indian ²⁶ . The dead indian becomes a mechanism in an obvious criticism of salvage ethnography and the preservation of Indigenous

²⁵ Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. . R-words: Refusing research. *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. 2014. Page 225

²⁶ King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. 2013. Print. Page 74-98

culture vs the living Indian in all our autonomy as literal living breathing peoples. The living Indian who is participating in modernity, capable of determining our own remembering and re-remembering. Luna's Artifact Piece at once undermines the archive while also becoming an active participant in the archive as an "embodied archival form in which the past (not only Luna's past or that of his ancestors but the past of the museum itself) remains, is remembered, is repeated, and is passed through the flesh of the living body"²⁷.

It is in reflecting on this work that I think of my childhood room and the shelf that ran alongside my bed. A white shelf filled with various objects; a scrunchie, a locket, a glass jar, a bison figurine. I imagine these caredfor objects as a vessel for my own remembering, i imagine objects falling victim to the greedy hands of anthropologists, and i imagine objects that no longer serve their intended purposes and assigned a kind of meaning by white gloves, gathering dust in archive drawers, and living behind glass.

Grappling the anonymity so often assigned to Michif women within the archives, I question what will become of me? How will I be remembered? Who will tell my stories? *These things I saved for you* explores the Michif self archive in relation to objectivity. In this exhibition, a replica of my childhood shelf holds precious selected objects I have carried with me on my journeys, objects that hold my meaning, objects that hold my memories and, in turn, become objects of ceremony, of ritual, and of remembering.

These interventions into the consumption of Indigenous identities and how those identities are informed by Indigenous objects through the museum practices is an attempt to claim sovereignty over my own re-remembering and re-telling, this creates a generational

²⁷ Blocker, Jane. Ambivalent Entertainments: James Luna, Performance, and the Archive. Grey Room , Fall, 2009, No. 37.Fall.The MIT Press.2009. Page 52-77

strengthening of stories and in this way I open up space for you my daughter, my Future Ancestor.

Portals to a Wasauksing winter day

I see bright spots of sun on the snow where your boots have imprinted into earth

you reach out to touch the land, an ungloved hand, you have found a rock

you ask me if you can bring it home with you

I tell you only if you thank the earth

Marsii Miigwech thank you

you put it in your pocket and we continue on our way

I tuck it away for you, a portal to this day

many moons later you ask me the story of the rock

I tell you of a winters day in Wasauksing, of little hands, and sunbeams

you say I think I remember that

I smile because I remember every moment with you

the space between before you and forever

Its funny, isn't it how one little rock can hold all that you say

and i think of myself as a rock in the snow

but you picked me and took me home

and here I am to tell your story

It is funny isn't it

I imagine the objects within the Michif archive as portals, portals to past, current, and Future Ancestors. When I am speaking to collections I think of kinship between human and the non human, ones based in reciprocity, I care for these objects and they care for me. In this way I rejected the colonial archive, the over-documentation, the over collected . I see objects as non linear with the ability to convey stories that are not restricted to western notions of time. This rock tells my story, as it tells yours, daughter, as it tells Carolines, and all those before and after her. I see a commonality to Indigenous epistemology in relation to objects in Bill Brown's *thing theory*. Brown speaks to how objects are in relation with each other, in relation to us. He presents their thingness as the ability to transmit place and time and in this way an object can shed their encoded meaning and transcend their intended functions. Brown asks us to see through objects.²⁸ In the Michif archive I am asking the viewer to see through the physical quality of the object presented and rather the relationship to storytelling and narrative. I am interested in the commonality of shared remembering within everyday objects, within the familiar object, in the ways in which we elevate objects, and in the way we impart meaning onto objects. It is in this space of inquiry that a twenty-first birthday card becomes a symbolic rite of passage, that is carried across an ocean and into an archive of tradition.

²⁸ Brown, Bill. *Other Things*. The University of Chicago Press. 2015. Page 17-38

One day I'll have a blue room again

My mother used to collect blue and white china plates, she would line them along the frames of her window sills. My father would purchase her one every anniversary. I worried she would run out of places to put them. My grandmother loved antiques. She would line figurines above her stove. One day when I was maybe five years old she gifted me a tiny teapot and soon I was lining up my own collection on the shelves next to my bed.

I was playing in our front yard with my sisters when I noticed the neighbors across the street were having a garage sale. My mother was smoking on the front steps and drinking coffee with my grandmother. After some pleading they walked us over to look through the boxes. I noticed a table which seemed to house almost a hundred elephant themed objects, a collection. My neighbor explained each one of the elephants stories, where she got them, who gave them to her, and then she told me about one she found in her travels abroad and placed it in my hand. It was an elephant playing soccer. She said I could keep it, and when I tried to give her the quarter my grandmother had given me, she refused it. I didn't understand why she would give away her collection. It didn't make sense. When I asked my mother, she put her hand on my head and said *well it's like your teapots one day you just won't have room for them anymore or you'll lose interest*. These things happen when you grow up.

I was listening to some early 2010 scene-kid-anthems on my iPod when I heard something smash followed by some sort of laugh-scream. I pulled myself off my bunk bed emerging from

my teenage angst, and made my way to the doorway of my mothers room. It was blue with white paisley wallpaper. I watched my mother as she took down each china plate and smashed them on the floor of her room. She didn't know I was there.²⁹ My mother sometimes mentions her dream is to have a blue room again, but she never mentions the plates.

Can you get the sugar for me, it's under the cozy above the fridge. My grandmother had a bench built into her wall along her kitchen table, so all her grandkids could fit around it. This was a great plan when we were younger, but my knocking-on-thirty self struggles trying to squirm out of there. The easiest exit strategy was a smooth slide under the table followed by an awkward stumble out from under the table, which usually includes bumping one's head on the pointed corners. When I pulled myself up the last time, I noticed my grandmother had replaced her oven. *Gma when did you get this, what happened to your old one, where are your figurines?* The stove had kicked the bucket and with it came a new modern one with no room for tiny glass objects; in turn she had boxed them up and sold them at one of her antique markets.

I don't have my teapots anymore. I don't really know what happened to them. When I moved out of my childhood home I didn't have room for them and I always assumed my home would be there, even when it wasn't. Today, lined along a shelf in my current room is a shard of a china plate, a tiny glass figurine, and a ridiculous statue of an elephant playing soccer.

²⁹ Practicing Audra Simpsons ethnographic refusal I will not go into further detail about this experience. This experience is just for my mom and myself.
Simpson, Audra. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures-the Journal for Thematic Dialogue*. 2007. page 67-76

Save the cans for me



Figure 4. Save the cans for me. 2021-22.
lawn chair, cans, pasta sauce, box, labels, size 10 seed beads

Boucher tomato pasta sauce

My dad text me to say

this might be a good time to call your grandma and ask her about pasta sauce

she's just had a heart attack

And I don't feel much

sadness for a girl who ate spaghetti and felt love

loss for a girl negotiating culture

Making the food of her childhood

not knowing the recipes

I once told her, spaghetti was my favourite meal

Next time she came to the city

she brought mason jars stacked one on top of the other

With what had to be years of sauce

My mother made me eat spaghetti for every meal

We didn't have the storage

to this day

I've never tasted pasta sauce that

Is canned in such a way that I absorb

The care and the past of generations

And the sorrow of the lose

of a skill that ends with a heart attack

Dear daughter,

I have been practicing the recipes I will cook for our family. Cooking over our little gas stove. Your dad and I think this must be one of the first stoves ever made. This cooking is a way that I can intimately care for you before you are physically in this realm with us. Before your father, cooking a meal for myself was not an everyday occurrence. In my twenties I relied heavily on the generous scraps from the kitchen staff at the restaurant I worked at; the Elephant and Castle. I would keep packs of instant lipton noodle soup and kraft dinner in my cupboards, my Michif resourcefulness, but nothing of substance. On my way to the skytrain, I'd swing by the shell gas station beside my house and grab one of those horrid pre-made smoothies that I've heard are responsible for several cases of botulism. Your Auntie Emma often remarked that she was generally concerned about my eating habits and to this day swears I only got pregnant because I started eating right. When I found out I was pregnant with you I became vigilant in my consumption; Did I eat enough protein? Have I had any fruits and vegetables today? Coca Cola is not water Maria! My anxieties shifted the ways I related to food because my body no longer belonged fully to me. I began to reflect on the foods I was exposed to growing up and the time spent around dinner tables sharing meals with my loved ones. There is a longing there, a hope that you, daughter may experience the same joys of the mundane everyday moments of Culture Knowledge Transfer that take place over the kitchen table.



Figure 5. Save the cans for me. 2022.

cardboard box, glass jars, labels, tomato sauce, size 10 seed beads

Save the cans for me highlights the importance of cultural knowledge transfer of every day knowledge and the urgency that is often associated with obtaining these skills. Here I focus on My Grandma Boucher recipe for canned tomato sauce. My grandmother grew tomatoes in her back garden in Prince Albert Saskatchewan, she harvested them, processed them and canned them. She would deliver them to our family home on her visits to Saskatoon along with ice cream pails of homemade baking or fill our trunk with palettes of jarred goods on our visits. She would always remind us to save the cans for her when we were finished with them so she could repeat this act of making and nourishing her family. I once remarked that Spaghetti topped with her pasta sauce was my favorite meal. My mother would joke that our

grandmother would bring extra to make a point that I preferred her cooking over my mothers. Canning foods is a common practice amongst rural communities in Saskatchewan. This is especially common amongst Indigenous and Métis families as it is a way to ensure access to traditional foods throughout the year and in turn a form of food sovereignty.³⁰ This specific method of preservation becomes a representation of rituals of home and nostalgia connecting to the domestic sphere. Although familiar with the process, I have only ever enjoyed the labors associated with canning through personal consumption. I only like eating the food. Its become important to me to learn this skill set as a way to feel a closeness to my grandmother and my recent Ancestors who have practiced this method of canning. Anishinaabe artist and curator Lisa Meyers discusses the politics of food and significance of family food archives in *Best Before: Recipes and Food in Contemporary Aboriginal Art*. Stating “food engages the politics of place in relation to colonial history, which acknowledges the presence and absence of traditional food memory in their lived experience”³¹. Food is then reframed “as a material to symbolize personal stories, memories and experiences”.³² This is explored in Meyers' video series *Straining and Absorbing* (2014). Meyers strains berry pigments over wood and paper allowing it to absorb into the material in a process she calls “blueprints”³³. The berry stains transform into maps symbolically connecting her to her grandfather, encapsulated by storytelling and memory held within the juices. This gesture of mapping the blueberry pigment is representative of family narratives, food, and relationship to land and survivance.³⁴

Storytelling is incorporated as an archive through encoded meaning allowing for a

³⁰ <https://bcfoodhistory.ca/preserving-canning-food-history/>

³¹ Meyers, Lisa. *Best Before Recipes and Food in Contemporary Art*. 2011. Page 2.

³² Meyers, Lisa. Page 3

³³ <https://lisarosemeyers.com/artwork/3830492-straining-and-absorbing.html>

³⁴ Wilson-Sanchez, Maya. *On Mapping, storytelling, and cooking a discussion of Lisa Myers's Berry Works*. <https://www.otherplaces.mano-ramo.ca/maya-wilson-sanchez-on-mapping-storytelling-and-cooking-a-discussion-of-lisa-myerss-berry-works/> . 2022.

re-remembering of Myers' familial histories. In my piece *save the cans for me*, I am similarly creating a family archive represented through food and cultural practices. Through a series of comical and not so comical happenings I attempted to can tomatoes in an effort to preserve a family skill and recipe from my youth. My first step was to reach out to my father to coordinate an exchange of recipes from my grandma Boucher in Saskatchewan. However, my grandma fell ill and was unable to send the recipe in the time frame needed to exhibit the works. Not wanting to stress her out further, I decided I would attempt to replicate the process when I traveled to Prince Albert for her 90th birthday. I wanted to learn from her. . Next I was determined to plant tomatoes in my garden, as farming is surely embedded in my Michif genetic makeup. Incorrect. It turns out the winter months do not make for optimal conditions for growing tomatoes, something I surely would have known if I paid attention to my mother while assisting her with our family garden. Despite this I proceeded to purchase cans, I journeyed to Canadian Tire and picked up a dozen Bernardin mason jars and white labels with cherries printed on the corners, exactly like the cans my grandmother used. While waiting at the self-checkout the barcode would not scan, I called for assistance, and no employees would come to my aid. Finally in an act of Michif resistance, and annoyance, I scooped up the cans and exited the building without paying, your mom, a decolonial baddie³⁵.

It became clear to me that I may not be able to correctly make, and can, the sauce before the installation of my exhibition. It was important to me to represent the labor and care of this process even if I was unable to properly replicate it. I began edging the labels, a repetitive act of tacking down one bead and adding two more before tacking the last bead to the fabric and repeating this gesture. This became representative of the passage of time and entanglements of past, current, and Future Ancestors. In the end, I used four 1.8L of no name original pasta

³⁵ Your dad told me to write that

sauce from No Frills and transferred it into the glass jars before sealing them and placing a date stamped label on each can. The piece is an embodiment of Ancestral Knowledge, it highlights the disconnect so often present while reclaiming cultural traditions.



Figure 6. Save the cans for me. 2021. Detail

lawn chair, size 10 seed beads

Similarly Mi'kmaw artist Ursula Johnson explores Indigenous ways of knowing in her performance piece *processing* (2014-ongoing). Johnson prioritizes Mi'kmaw baskets by harvesting ash trees and processing them. In the performance the artist follows her grandfather's directions; she begins on her home territory by selecting an ash tree, she intentionally selects a tree that is out of season and cuts the tree early. The tree is shipped to the gallery where Johnson begins to process it in an ongoing performance in the space. The process is a struggle, she attempts to access knowledge from her instructors, she has just enough skill set to process the tree although at the beginning she does this awkwardly often missing steps or using clumsy methods. As she repeats the performance she performs her lack of knowledge while simultaneously building her skill set and performing her acquired knowledge and experience.³⁶ Johnson's performance highlights the decline in Ancestral Knowledge and the urgency to reclaim this knowledge even through incorrect processing. This urgency honours the relationship between her Ancestors, material culture and Traditional Knowledge, building bridges between knowledge, developing relationships to material culture, reaffirming community connections and identity.³⁷ In my piece *save the cans for me*, I create an installation space reflective of my grandparents shed and basement. Inside the space hangs a single light bulb over a beaded lawn chair and a box of canned tomato sauce. I am reimagining a memory of my grandparents, a memory in which my Grandpa Boucher is sitting on a lawn chair and my Grandma Boucher is entering the shed to collect canned foods for my family to bring home to Saskatoon. My Grandpa passed away from dementia when I was a

³⁶ Dickenson, Rachelle. Ursula Johnson and the art of doing it wrong. 2019. Page 123-129.

³⁷ Dickenson, Rachelle

teenager. He held extensive cultural knowledge that was lost with his passing. The lawn chair is stitched together with loomed strips of size ten seed beads, it is a bridging of what has been lost and what remains. I imagine myself, and you, my daughter, sitting, watching, and learning the stories and cultural techniques as he sits in his chair.. I think of these moments of loss of cultural knowledge transfer and I am overwhelmed with grief. I am all too familiar with the urgency to reprocess and reclaim knowledge that was taken from me. It is June 2022 now and there are four tiny tomato plants lining my window sills bathing in the sun. They are growing as you grow my daughter, by the time you arrive earth side, they will be ready to harvest and one day we will learn together.

Raspberry bush of broken dreams

When we first moved into our home, my Dad bought my Mom a bunch of raspberry bushes to plant in her garden for their anniversary. My mom liked the idea of harvesting fresh berries with her little ones, and the promise of excitement that would bring each spring. My dad liked the thought of making jams with his children and canning them like his mother used too. We, the kids, liked the thought of feeding ourselves, and the little bit of independence that brought. We also liked that the berries furthered the plots of our make-believe games. Very summer that raspberry bush produced a measly amount of berries, not even enough for our mother to feed us fresh berries every morning, not even enough for our father to teach us about harvesting, and only enough for us kids to sneak a few here and there without dwindling our parent's supplies. It was a raspberry bush of broken dreams. It started infesting my mother's garden and even though it wasn't growing anything the branches and roots would choke out her other plants and they'd die. One day I watched from the kitchen window as my mother took her garden shears to that plant and destroyed it. You see my father had given her that plant, and as my sister puts it "that raspberry bush took over the garden like he took over our lives". It was an act of rebellion. I watched from the window as she tore up roots she had so eagerly put down and I knew this was her way of communicating she wanted more for us.

423 7th street east

The way the stairs creaked under my feet

The jars of canned spaghetti sauce on the basement floor

Fur coats, gloves, boots

The sofa where we watched tv

The shelves lined with personal collections

A story about my great grandpa

Reunion song 2022

I think about those days with you
when we were all younger
a brief moment in time
life has changed us
but those memories of home
hold us together there

in that old house
along the bend of the river
long ago though it seems
I heard you once laugh
those were the start of our dreams
sitting there in the yard
where the sun always shined
on that old home of ours

now that our hair has turned to silver
we've all become just victims of time
we can never go back
to the life we once knew there
but I'll never forget
that old home of mine

Figure 7. Reunion song. 2022.

green text on vinyl

Daughter,

There is a picture of my dad and his cousins sitting around a fire, each of them proudly holding two forties of miscellaneous liquor with big grins on their faces. They are at the first official Boucher family reunion in Waka, Saskatchewan. I think it was taken sometime in 1984.

My dad has sent along this photo with a string of others, he's texting me the story of each photo so I can write it down for our Future Ancestors like you.

We stayed up all night drinking, me, Gordie, and an American cousin, from the part of the family that headed south after the rebellions.

Grandma Boucher is going through her old photos, and my dad is helping her organize them. He has scanned them and uploaded them onto a shared drive for my use in the creation of this MFA thesis, and so that eventually I can add them to our family archive for you to look at. Our family archive does not exist yet, and I'm not sure I am the one to shoulder the responsibility of its creation, I surely am not qualified even if my father has declared that I am to be the next family historian, the keeper of our family stories. There is an urgency now that most of my grandfather's generation have passed on and there is on-going fear that the old ways and their stories will be lost. So my phone is going off all the time now, *10 attachments today* and probably 10 attachments tomorrow

In one of the photos my dad has sent, he and his cousins are sitting on a green picnic table cloaked with a 70s floral tablecloth. The kind of table cloth that I wish someone would have thought to put in a box labeled for future Maria. You'll understand the feeling one day when you ask me to cough up an old shirt from the late '20s, and I tell you "*oh I donated that ions ago*". There's a yellow pot on the table, contents unknown, and a pair of thick rim glasses that look like my grandpa Bouchers. I imagine he was close by laughing at the unhinged 14 year old and his Métis cousins. I can hear his laugh while looking at the photograph and it is forever captured amongst scattered objects on a picnic table.

In 2001 the Bouchers hosted a family reunion on our Michif settlement in St Louis, Saskatchewan. The entire family set up in camper vans and tents in a field behind our

homestead. I was sitting in a circle, in a busted old lawn chair, listening in on hushed conversations riddled with family gossip. Later the cousins decided to go on an adventure and explore our homeland. This naturally led to a rendezvous at the family gravesite. *Maria, come here right now.* When I joined my cousins and siblings they were crowded in front of a headstone that read Marie Marguerite Boucher. My cousin whispered *Jesus Christ that's the French version of your name, Maria-Margaretta Boucher.* We all screamed and ran through the fields back to the homestead. We burst through the door frantically explaining our findings and were met by laughing aunties and uncles who comforted us by stating that *she even looks like Marie too.* At the end of the night my grandpa Ray led us in campfire songs and enacted a very animated retelling of his grandfather rebelling against the colonial government. As he did the northern lights came out to play and we all laid in a field enchanted, he reminded us to say hi to the Ancestors and to always thank the Creator. In the Gabriel Dumont Institute virtual museum there is a collection in their archives named after my dad's cousin, the John Boucher collection.³⁸ Somewhere there's a document titled Campfire Program, Boucher Reunion, July 21, 2001. It is a small dedication from the reunion committee led by my grandpa Boucher and a list of songs with a corresponding name of the Boucher who shared it. I was there. I know the songs. I know each song was carefully selected because of a memory associated with them. I was there, I sang those songs. I sang them off a pamphlet held by my dad and shared with my sister. The archive doesn't note lawn chair gossip, adventures with cousins, or shared Michif laughter in the kitchen.

³⁸ <https://www.metismuseum.ca/browse/index.php/13119>

Reunion Song 1984

I remember the days,
when we were all younger.
I never thought our summers would end.
But the years have gone by,
'cause nothing's forever.
These mem'ries of home is what happiness brings.
On that old farm,
on the banks of the river.
Long ago though it seems,
Was the start of our dreams.
As we are gathered on the banks of the river.
Where the sun always shines,
On that old home of mine.
Now that our hair,
has turned to silver.
We've all become, just victims of time.
We can never go back,
to the life we once knew there.
But I'll never forget,
that old home of mine

Reunion song was created and performed for the 1984 reunion, it quickly became a family staple in *le olde Métis song book*. I can picture my father and his cousins sneakily sipping their drinks, singing along with their parents, uncles, and aunties. Unaware at that moment that they too would become victims of time. Like my father, I attended the 2001 Boucher family reunion, where the song that was written for his childhood reunion was sung again for the our generation. There is nothing of grandma's raspberry compote delivered in an ice cream pale to our RV No mention of Northern Lights and star gazing, or adventures with cousins in the family gravesite that haunt me to this day. When I think of a physical archive as framed through the lense of Anthropological collections, I ask why such a footnote was left out. These are the stories I am interested in. I am interested in our family stories that offer connections to moments in time that are fused with family togetherness. Somewhere shoved away in a drawer at my mothers house is the physical song book that remains. Its probably hidden amongst old bills and loose photos.

And I think to myself, is my mothers credenza not an archive in itself ?

Reunion song 2022

I think about those days with you
when we were all younger
a brief moment in time
life has changed us
but those memories of home
hold us together there

In that old house
along the bend of the river
long ago though it seems
I heard you once laugh
those were the start of our dreams
sitting there in the yard
where the sun always shined
on that old home of ours

now that our hair has turned to silver
we've all become just victims of time
we can never go back
to the life we once knew there
but I'll never forget
that old home of mine

Reunion song 2022 is an Ancestral collaboration with all those who have witnessed and sang the original rendition of Reunion song 1884. I am interested in the ways in which I can collaborate with non-humans, Ancestors and spirits. I see this iteration of the reunion song as existing outside of colonial time in a space that holds Michif stories, lineage, and dreams. The original rendition of the song speaks to experiences of my grandfather and fathers generation growing up on the Boucher family homestead in St.Louis Saskatchewan. The song celebrates intimate kinship ties to our Métis homelands. But it is also anchored in a generational grief that accompanies displacement and Métis diaspora. It is reflective of hardships of a beaten people but at once reminiscent of hopeful times before the encroachment of settlers and discriminative land acts.³⁹ Katherine Boyer speaks to the scrip era⁴⁰ and mending of Métis diaspora; “When the notion of land and home meet, complex dualities of positive and negative experiences can exist. Both can be sites of familial cultural erasure, displacement as well as a space of comfort, safety and protection, inclusive of all the various degrees in between”.⁴¹ Reunion song is reflective of land and home, of my family's journey as we moved from the Red River, St. Francois Xavier, St. Boniface, St.Louis, and finally to Prince Albert we carried with us both a pain and a hope that has been passed down generationally. My rendition of Reunion Song seeks to mend diaspora experiences rooted in colonialism, through the opening of space, a joining of experiences, between past, current ,and future ancestors. In this iteration I represent the current ancestor. I am reflecting on my family home in Saskatoon Saskatchewan on 7th street east and the memories shared growing up with my six siblings. Our bond is deeply

³⁹ Campbell, Maria. Halfbreed. Halifax, N.S: Formac, 1983. Page 10-11

⁴⁰ In 1870, the Canadian government devised a system of Metis scrip that issued documents redeemable for land or money. Scrip was given to Métis people living in the West in exchange for their land rights.
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis-scrip-in-canada>

⁴¹ Boyer, Katherine 14

connected to place and as we have grown and found distance from each other we have the ability to travel back through a shared remembering and meet in the reimagining of our home. The physical space we shared may no longer exist in the ways it once did but we are held together through an unwavering love for the people we were and the people we are now. This song in turn becomes an opportunity of rebuilding and honoring our connections to lands that have been separated from our physical beings. A strengthening of community and our ties to place. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her book *as we have always done* (2017) speaks of everyday acts of resurgence as a mechanism that can be used to build a more united resurgence movement that strengthens nationhood and works outside of the colonial spatial constructs.⁴² Through my words I am reaching out to my Ancestors in a space between worlds. I am inviting them to meet me, to tell their stories through me, as a vessel for their remembering, and as a space for ritual and healing. As I hold out my arms to the generation before me I hold them out to you daughter so that we may become connected, joined, an unbreakable tether. You are the future, the next rendition of this song and I will borrow from the strength of our Ancestors to raise you as they have raised me so you will know all our homes, all our lands, all our relations.

⁴² Betasamosake Simpson, L. *As we have always done*. University of Minnesota Press. 2017. Page 198

Meeting my ancestor at the water

Okay well will you go on a walk with me first

And sit by the water

I want to knock down some inukshuks with you

The ones we saw white tourist building

And laugh at the white noise

I want to tell you about my love

And I want to hear it

And thank you for letting me go

I love you

I love you

We sat by the water and we talked for days

When we realized how much time had passed

We laughed and said we should get gawn

At the same time we said

Remember when we ate those weed gummies and stared at a wall

Michif lullabies

My girl my girl he used to say
singing french lullabies about drinking in taverns
and I want to tell him about the time I fell in love with the moon
because the moon always comes back for you
and I want to tell him I'll only love myself
because my hands may be soft but my fingers are calloused
and I don't like the smell of hide anymore because it reminds me of disappointment
but I like the smell of liquor
because it reminds me of michif songs and the naive ears of a child
sang by a soft voice I haven't cared to hear in years
and times when things were easy because the answers were always non non non oui oui oui
and the naive moments before I knew it was safer to fall in love with the moon

Red door in the middle of the block

I came to understand love through the spilling of coffee on white shirts in tiny book shops.

Of fatal falls from cliffs

Months passing represented through seasonal fruits on market stands

Burnt dvds in plastic sleeves labeled in permanent marker

The same line repeated over again

A crowded sofas sweaty thighs pressed together

An old television with a crack down the middle

Mother saying move you're in my spot

Move you're in my spot



Figure 8. Move you're in my spot. 2022. Exhibition view.

Dear daughter,

Some of my earliest memories are of my six siblings and I cramming onto a small sofa. This sofa changed over time. It was brown with orange stripes and embroidered florals, then green with paisley designs, then it was solid gray, then it became dark brown leather with rips on the cushions, then red with floral throw pillows, and is now olive green with wooden legs. I can hear my mothers voice saying *move you're in my spot* while promptly downgrading a sibling to floor seats. The tune of coronation street playing and echoing throughout the house, a warning to all to join in or keep quiet for the next hour and save all emergencies for the commercial break. As siblings we'd all sit around the table in the dining room eating our meals while our

mom and dad sat in the tv room laughing together watching Seinfeld. It was one of the only times I felt they were truly happy. My mothers favourite movie was *Notting Hill*, a British rom com starring Hugh Grant and Julie Roberts, which remains a family top five to this day. My father's favourite movie was the *last of the Mohicans*, which I've recently found out is based on a book. Set in 1757, this film explored the complex relationships between the settler and the settled during the colonial frontier. Both movies somehow symbolize a meshing of identities and are representative of our upbringing and the ways in which cultural knowledge was passed in everyday spaces within the domestic sphere. Although citing Last of the Mohicans as a mechanism of knowledge sharing might be a stretch, I am more concerned with the shared moments of sitting around the sofa and how this becomes representative of Visiting methodology. *Move you're in my spot* is an installation of tv and living room spaces that I frequented during my formative years. It features a sofa with beaded designs on the cushion utilizing opaque bugle and seed beads which follow the pattern work of the fabric, a visual imprint of those who have come and gone. The sofa is against a white textured wallpaper with a repeated embossed geometric pattern centered with a single flower, white molding runs along the trim of the wallpaper. The molding breaks the space between the whiteness of the gallery walls and the texture of the wallpaper. The wallpaper, a replica of the paper pasted on my family walls growing up. Over the years it was painted over and repainted based on my mom's favorite color of the moment, making the the layers of paint into an archive of time. Lastly, the piece *like one of your Michif flowers* hangs on the wall. Framed and loom beaded, the beaded still life is a recreation of a painting that belonged to my grandmother, a gift from my granddad. The assorted flowers in a vase is one of a series of paintings that rests on her living room wall. The transformation from painting to beaded painting is reflective of the many

moments spent visiting and sharing in that space. Each bead a memory that holds a meaning, each bead weaving together so many stories of those who passed through the space impacting my life's trajectory. These everyday spaces, instilled with lived experiences, become sites of cultural learning and knowledge transfer within the gallery space. Creating readily accessible sites of ancestral knowledge that allow for public spaces of Indigenous gathering and shared remembering. In *Land as pedagogy* Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks to theory within homespaces and family systems theory she says "is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community and generation of people". She notes that outside of academia and intellectual pursuits that theory "is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal, with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives."⁴³ These sites allow for the mediation of identity outside of settler colonialism, determining our own value systems and in turn connecting diasporic bodies back to Indigenous ways of knowing. *Move you're in my spot* is informed through visiting methodology and does the work of maintaining community while pushing against colonial notions of time and temporality.⁴⁴ I am sitting here with you daughter on the sofa in my living room. Your father is sitting at the desk illustrating his next children's book which features you as the main character. I am frantically attempting to finish this document before your arrival. I picture you here in my arms looking up at me. I am reminded of something my primary advisor Peter Morin asked me. *Who are you making this work for, who are you writing to?* This process of making, of being made, we did parts of this together, but I have made this

⁴³ Betasamosake Simpson, L. *Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation*. 2014. Page 7.

⁴⁴ Miner, Dylan AT. "Mawadisidiwag Miinawaa Wiidanokiindiwag // They Visit and Work Together." *Makers, Crafters, Educators*. 2018. 131–134. Web.

document for you. We visit here on these pages. We come to know each other through the hours spent in silence in collaboration as you and you alone gave me the strength to preserve.

You are always here, and you always will be. I cannot wait to meet you.

Ki shaakiihitin/ Gizaagi'in/ I love you

Lucky one, you are my home

your name reminds me of a memory
of little feet in brown water and ecstatic nets
of catching minnows as they swam between our fingers
hornets and black flies on wooden picnic tables
empty buckets of kfc
long drives home prairie sunset kissing eyelids
wet towels on car seats
keys in the door welcomed by an old friends bark
shredded up garbage and missed calls
sand in our sheets in the morning when we wake
I like your name because it reminds me of a memory
you remind me of a memory

An ode to the South Saskatchewan River

we use to play on concrete buffalos
run wild on lands named after our fallen
on the shores wild berries and sage at our fingertips
we'd run to the tops of fortresses
stare down at the land we couldn't yet comprehend what had happened there
maybe that's why we felt at home amongst the tall grass and the gravel paths
some sort of decolonial yearning
a call from our Ancestors who walked before
who had not yet walked and may never walk there
naive hands falling grasping for each other pulling carrying each of us together
braided hair bouncing against jean jackets
velcro shoes

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

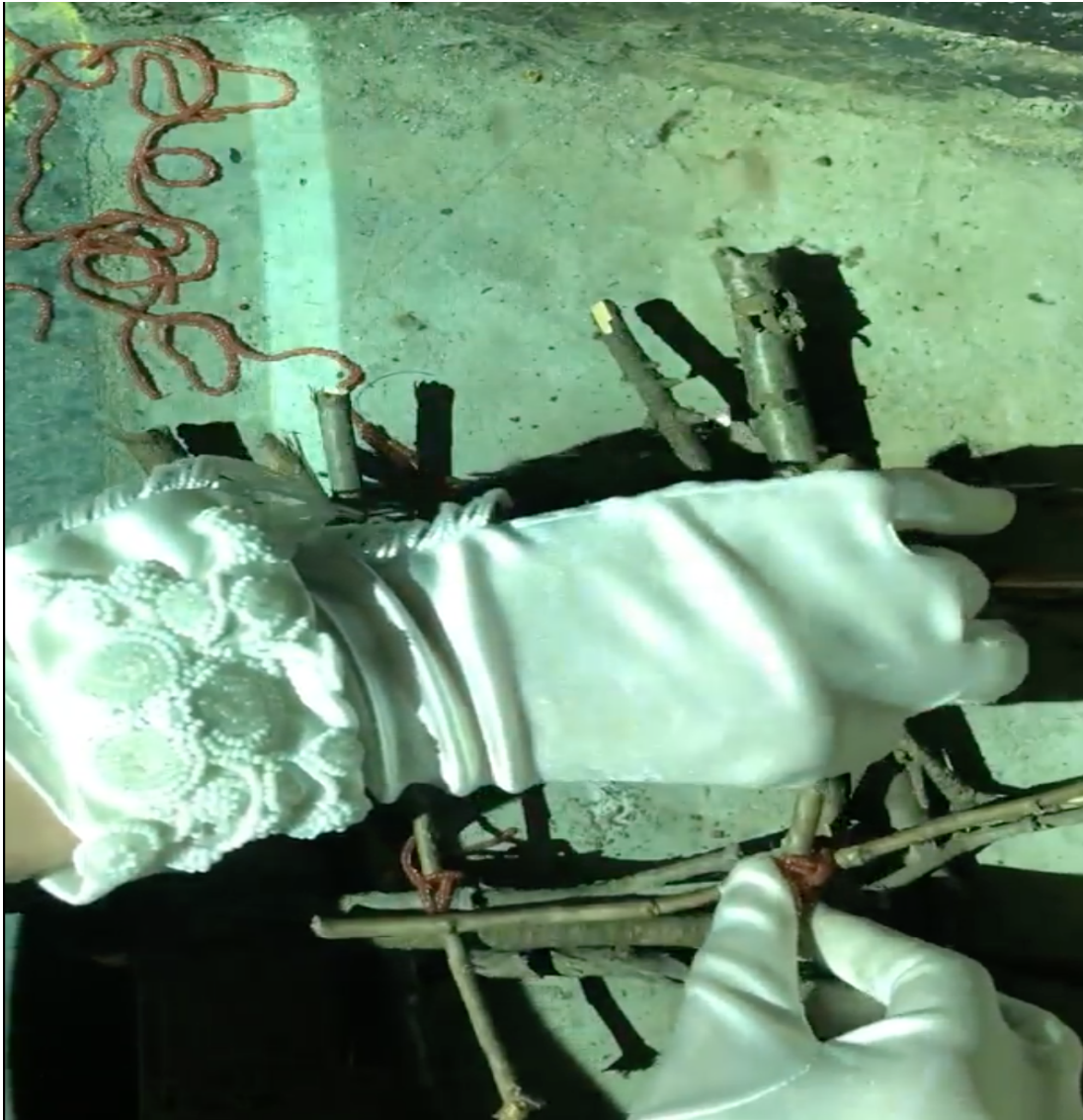


Figure 9. Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild. Still from video performance. 2022.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12NJniDlfMlaaMW21xE3ab6KLSRhHotGF/view?usp=sharing>

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

*Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild*⁴⁵

You will likely never see the home I write of, in the way I knew it.

You will feel the love that grew within those walls and hear of the stories but by the time you're old enough to speak them that home will be gone

structures disappear over time, they shift they are taken by greedy hands, they fall to the ground under the heaviness of their own weight

the ground engulfs them and they return to the earth they came from

So we run our fingers through the ashes trace our names out in the places they stood

Like our ancestors before us we fill our pockets with the remains and carry them to our next resting place

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

⁴⁵ This section is a description of my video *Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild*. The video was displayed in my thesis exhibition *that old home of mine* at Seymour Art Gallery March 8th- April 16th 2022.

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Your auntie and I became friends at a bus stop outside our school. She was moving nearby, close to my family home, we were twelve at the time. She had pale skin, dusted in freckles that looked like tiny stars, and hair as black as the sky that housed them. We became best friends quickly. Her mother used to say we were both a Chipewyan off the old block, sisters separated at birth. Our friendship was ancestral. Two Michif girls becoming together with a world that had a radius of five blocks.

Your auntie gathered the sticks that have become your home. She harvested them from the spaces we grew old together, our family homes, those five blocks.

She knew which sticks to pick, she knew what you would need because like me she spoke you into existence. Auntie transported that bundle of sticks across the waters for you and this became our bundle. This became Medicine to heal us both, medicine to help you grow, and medicine to build your home from our past.

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Sisters, I cannot heal what has been broken but I dug these beads up from the place that we fell

My fingernails bathed in dirt, for us.

we want there to be more for you

Sisters, I strung each bead a memory of you

I strung each bead with our laughter so she would always know the belly laugh of my three sisters

I strung each bead with our tears, so she will always know we wept so she did not have to

I strung each bead with the softness and the hardness of our love so her home would know a sisters fortified loyalty

my sisters, you are the foundation of my whole world, and now of her whole world.

Daughter, I built your home out of branches gathered from our homelands. I place two sticks on top of each other, I wrap them where they meet, I mend them together in a string of dust ruby rose beads. I pick two more and wrap them again at their intersections, strengthening their bond. I place all four together, together they make the foundation of our home, of your home. You, my three sisters, each of us, imagined in each stick, brought together to hold you up. I repeat this over and over again. Together we build worlds for her, together we remember, together we become her home.

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

My mother would always say *put some elbow grease into it*. I would watch her as she labored after us everyday doing the same mundane tasks, keeping us fed, and keeping the home together. I couldn't see the joy in it at the time. She told me she learnt it from watching her mother, and her mother from hers and one day I would learn as well. Intergenerational labors of love. She would laugh and say I hope you have a daughter just like you. Mothers, grandmothers, I made these gloves for you to honor your labor, your love. To show you I watched, I listened, I have witnessed what you have given to sustain us. I use these gloves to hold the sticks that build a home for you. In the quiet moments of the everyday you poured your hearts into giving us air to breathe.

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

Daughter, I built the roof of your home from twigs
I gathered them outside the world your father and I have made
a symbol of both of us, of our love for you

we take you to our ancestral lands to all lands as I carry you with us always

we dream every dream for you, we want better

for you we break and bend and open

in every world we meet each other to meet you

we mend ourselves together from fragments of what was taken

we become for you all they could not for us

my daughter we have built this home for you

we have made this world for you, we are ready

Kiihtwaam ooshtaahk, rebuild

We rebuild for you

We rebuild for you

Dear daughter,

Any day now you will make your journey earthside. I have prepared your little world for you as best I can. I have taken the moments leading up to your arrival to create this Michif self archive for you. To visit with you on these pages and in doing so solidify you within my archive and I within yours. The Michif self archive has become more than a document of my own remembering but a document of your beginnings, a place where we can meet and remember together. I have learnt that the self is much more than the archivist experience alone. I have learnt that within myself contains multitudes of ancestors and futures, I am never alone. I have felt myself split into two beings as I have created you within me, my journey becoming intertwined with every path you will ever take. I have learnt that the Michif self archive which was once so specific to my understanding of my identity has the potential to become a vessel for your own understanding of self. This work will grow, it will grow alongside you, alongside us as we come to know each other outside of these pages. Through this research, this making, this labor of love I have come to understand that you are the Michif self archive, you are the portal, you are the self. I have tacked the first bead down, you will tack the next, many hands will know this piece. *Nowananikkwee, Marguerite, Caroline, Delia, Emma-Love, Rain, Hannah-Rose-Ruby, Maria-Margaretta, Mino-Margaret.* We rebuild together.

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Appendix A: Exhibition documentation



Figure 10 Exhibition view



Figure 11 Exhibition view



Figure 12 Exhibition view



Figure 13 Exhibition view



Figure 14 Exhibition view



Figure 15 Exhibition view



Figure 16 Exhibition view



Figure 17 Exhibition view



Figure 18 That old home of mine:but what did she love. 2021. Silk gloves and size 10 seed beads. Detail.



Figure 19. That old home of mine: these things I saved for you. 2022. Wooden shelf, locket, scrunchie, bison figurine, avon jar.



Figure 20 That old home of mine: these things I saved for you. 2022. Detail.



Figure 21 That old home of mine: these things I saved for you. 2022. Detail.



Figure 22 That old home of mine: these things I saved for you. 2022. Detail.



Figure 23 That old home of mine: these things I saved for you. 2022. Detail.



Figure 24. That old home of mine: Move you're in my spot . 2022. Sofa, wallpaper, seed beads size 10.



Figure 25 That old home of mine: Move you're in my spot . 2022. Detail.



Figure 26 That old home of mine: Move you're in my spot . 2022. Detail.



Figure 27 That old home of mine: Move you're in my spot . 2022. Detail.



Figure 28 That old home of mine: you'll know me by my stitch. 2022. Detail.



Figure 29 That old home of mine: Move you're in my spot . 2022. Detail.



Figure 30 that old home of mine: save the cans for me. 2021.

lawn chair, size 10 seed beads.



Figure 31 that old home of mine: save the cans for me. 2022. Cardboard box, mason jar, pasta sauce, labels, size 10 seed beads.



Figure 32 that old home of mine: save the cans for me. 2021. Detail.



Figure 33 that old home of mine: like one of your michif flowers. 2022. Frame, loom, size 10 seed beads.



Figure 34 self portrait of the artist. that old home of mine Seymour Gallery opening. 2022.



Figure 35 Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley & Maria-Margaretta Cabana Boucher. Mom & Dad. that old home of mine Seymour Gallery Opening. 2022



Figure 36 community observing beadwork. that old home of mine Seymour Gallery opening.
2022.



Figure 37 Mother and Daughter. that old home of mine install day at Seymour Gallery. 2022.