







FOREWORD BY

Kent Monkman



In June of 2011, during my first, and only, visit to the Prado, I was unexpectedly transported by a Spanish history painting, *Execution of Torrijos and his Companions on the Beach at Málaga* (1887-1888), by Antonio Gisbert. Over many years of looking at and studying great paintings, many have impressed me with their virtuosic technical achievements, but never had a painting reached across a century to pull me into the emotional core of a lived experience with such intensity. It felt as though Gisbert had sent a message into the future, a passionate defense of freedom and a critique of authoritarianism. I was humbled by the effect this deeply political work of art had on me, and felt a new urgency to undertake a serious subject with similar gravitas.

I could not think of any history paintings that conveyed or authorized Indigenous experience into the canon of art history. Where were the paintings from the nineteenth century that recounted, with passion and empathy, the dispossession, starvation, incarceration and genocide of Indigenous people here on Turtle Island? Could my own paintings reach forward a hundred and fifty years to tell our history of the colonization of our people?



## FOREWORD

Over the past fifteen years, with Miss Chief's cunning use of runny mascara, and my deep love of art history, I have developed a personal language of painting and art making in a variety of disciplines. Using humour, parody, and camp, I've confronted the devastation of colonialism while celebrating the plural sexualities present in pre-contact Indigenous North America. A gender-bending time-traveller, Miss Chief lives in the past, present and future. She embodies the flawed and playful trickster spirit, teasing out the truths behind false histories and cruel experiences.

My mission is to authorize Indigenous experience in the canon of art history that has heretofore erased us from view. From Albert Bierstadt to Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff, museums across the continent hold in their collections countless paintings that depict and celebrate the European settlers' expansion and "discovery" of the North American landscape, but very few, if any, historical representations show the dispossession and removal of the First Peoples from their lands. This version of history excised Indigenous people from art history, effectively white-washing the truth from Canada's foundational myths and school curriculums.

When Barbara Fischer invited me in 2014 to create a "Canada 150" project for the Art Museum at the University of Toronto, I leapt at the opportunity to represent a critical perspective on the last hundred and fifty years of history of Turtle Island. As Canadians celebrate the big birthday of confederation in 2017, we cannot forget that the last hundred and fifty years have been the most devastating for Indigenous people in this country: deliberate starvation, the reserve system, the legacy of incarceration, the removal of children to residential schools and the sixties scoop, sickness and disease, persistent third world housing conditions on reserves, contemporary urban disenfranchisement,



violence and poverty. The fact that Indigenous people continue to survive all of this is a testament to our resiliency and strength.

In my extensive research for this project in museum collections across the country I found inspiration for my own works, and located historical objects and artworks to present in conjunction with my own paintings, drawings, and sculptures. I wanted to activate a dialogue about the impact of the last hundred and fifty years of European settler cultures on Indigenous peoples, and about Indigenous resilience in the face of genocide.

Up until the final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, published in 2015, most Canadians were ignorant of the severity and trauma of residential schools: thousands upon thousands of children were abused, with estimates as high as 30,000 dead or missing. It is almost impossible to imagine the damage to children forcibly removed from loving families, and the agony felt by the parents. Surviving sexual and physical abuse, many were starved, and sometimes even used as guinea pigs for medical experiments. They were forced into free labour, made to feel shame about who they were, and in the process lost their languages and ties to their cultures. The last federally funded residential school finally closed in the 1990s, and the intergenerational trauma of these experiences continues to reverberate in our families and communities in varying degrees of psychological and social dysfunction. Through the witness of many thousands of residential school survivors in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Canadians have now been confronted with the dark past that haunts this nation.

My paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Monkman (born Elizabeth Everett, 1914-1983), was a survivor of the



## FOREWORD

Brandon residential school in Manitoba. I grew up not knowing much about her experiences, and wasn't encouraged to ask. Only on her deathbed was she able to speak openly about her own suffering and the abuse she endured in the schools. She was one of thirteen children born to Caroline Everett, only three of whom survived to adulthood.

As I began to assemble this exhibition, I reflected on the impacts of the residential school system in my own family: the removal of children, the cyclical violence and abuse handed down from one generation to the next, the loss of our language and cultural knowledge, the impact of the Church, the destruction of addiction, and incarceration. If all of this was present in my own family, the impact of colonization on Indigenous families and communities across the continent is statistically so staggering it's nearly impossible to comprehend. Joseph Stalin said "one death is a tragedy; one million is a statistic." Can this country begin to heal, reconcile, and offer restitution for the hundreds of thousands of shattered lives and damaged families, and for each individual life?

When I grew up in the 1970's in Winnipeg, residential schools were not talked about in mainstream public conversations, and there was certainly no mention of them in the public school curriculum. First Nations mostly made headlines with the depressing faces of colonization like violence, incarceration, alcoholism and poverty; but the root causes of these systemic problems were never discussed in the public realm. They didn't fit with the glossy brochure version of Canada: squeaky-clean, chiseled Leyendecker Mounties and cartoon beavers, a new country of pink-faced hard working immigrants. Modern Canadians didn't want to acknowledge or remember to whom the occupied lands rightfully belonged. This was



a "new" country ripe for the plucking. What happened in the past was no longer relevant, a cumbersome affront to the optimism of the newcomers. Modernity's rejection of tradition and embrace of capitalism were liberating and useful to the endless sea of industrious immigrants who fled political and social oppression in Europe to begin anew in North America. However, when the doctrines of Modernity were thrust upon Indigenous people, it had devastating effects.

The last hundred and fifty years of Canada are concurrent with the rise of European Modernism and of the emergence of Modern Art. The Canadian treaty signings of 1873 occurred ten years after Manet's innovative painting, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), transformed conventions of pictorial space and set Modernism on its path. The painter's flattening of pictorial space echoes the shrinking of space for Indigenous people who were forced onto reserves that are tiny fractions of their original territory, now comprising only 0.2 % of Canada. The Cubists' appropriations of tribal artifacts known as Primitivism were upending European art-making traditions whilst Indigenous traditions and languages were being beaten out of Indigenous children in residential schools. Picasso's phallic bulls and his butchering of the female nude were contemporaneous with the European aggression against the female spirit (homophobia, violence against women) in North American Indigenous societies, many of them matrilineal.

The nine chapters in the exhibition encompass a wide range of themes -- from the period of New France to the contemporary Urban Res. Included are works relating to New France, the period a hundred and fifty years before Confederation, as this was a time when Indigenous peoples were still major players in the economy that shaped North America, the fur



## FOREWORD

trade. Not yet incarcerated on reserves, Indigenous people were still able to move freely in search of game, pursuing the seasonal livelihood that they had since time immemorial. The Roccoco installation, *Scent of a Beaver* (2016) based on Fragonard's painting, *The Swing*, (1767), positions Miss Chief balancing the power struggle between French and English for dominion over the fur trade. In two of my newest paintings, *The Death of the Virgin (after Caravaggio)* (2016) and *The Scream* (2017), I seek to do justice to the unimaginable pain of losing children with a sense of sincerity and defiant bluntness.

Several other themes are shaped by my research in museum collections: food and drink, and the animals that provide physical and spiritual nourishment for Indigenous people. The theme of a personal journal or memoir, as exemplified by the exquisite miniature gouaches from the fantastic imagination of Nicholas Point, a Jesuit priest, also reverberates in the didactic panels that are narrated in Miss Chief's passionate and heartfelt treatise for her family and community. Framing the exhibition with a narrative inspired in part by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Miss Chief's social climbing and liaisons with the powerful colonizers, despite her trickster flaws, are negotiated with the well-being of her family and community in mind.

Food and drink (and the deprivation of food) as invoked by the earthenware and CP silver laid out on an opulent dining table, takes us from the baroque opulence of New France to the starvation policies of John A. Macdonald's government, the development of the railroad, and the decimation of the bison populations. The bear as a spiritual force appears often in my work, and the beaver is both a symbol of Canada and the currency of the fur trade. It is found



KENT MONKMAN

in numerous museum objects: trade silver pendants, Indigenous clothing, and earthenware.

The main theme of this exhibition, however, is resilience. My goal is to counter the one-sided version of art history that exalts European “discovery” of this continent and to celebrate and commemorate the indomitable spirit of Indigenous people. The greatest evidence of resilience lies in the creativity of Indigenous artists across this continent who are overcoming the intergenerational impact of genocide and transforming their troubled experiences into many forms of transcendent art and expression. I hope my paintings will function as a critique of colonization, authorize Indigenous experience in art history, and excite people with the enduring power and possibility of history painting, perhaps even reaching across the next hundred and fifty years.

I dedicate this exhibition to my grandmother, Elizabeth Monkman who, like many of her generation, was shamed into silence in the face of extreme prejudice.

*Kent Monkman, January, 2017*

## A COUNTRY WIFE



Kent Monkman, 2016, 60" x 36", Acrylic on Canvas





Shame  
AND  
Prejudice  
*A Story of Resilience*



Excerpts from the  
Memoirs of

Miss Chief  
Eagle Testickle



## CHAPTER I

### NEW FRANCE, REIGN OF THE BEAVER

---

*"And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds." — Royal Proclamation, 1763*

I had them both wrapped around my elegant pinkies in those days, Montcalm and Wolfe. They fell over themselves to curry my favour. They couldn't get enough of those luxurious pelts, taking the fashion worlds of London and Paris by storm, to say nothing of all that castoreum, distilled into Europe's most opulent perfumes. Our poor beavers, almost decimated by overuse (something I'll never say about my own). The power was in our camp back then, when



we, the Cree, Iroquois, Assiniboiné, and the other Red Nations, controlled these territories. No one got rich or powerful without us on their side. We always embraced new technologies, the guns worked well, and we prided ourselves on new ways of thinking. Why not humour those handsome Jesuit priests? There were far too few to cause much confusion....

## CHAPTER II

### FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION

---

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in need of a wife."*

— *Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 1813*

*"Why this response from grizzlies as the party (Lewis and Clark) moved across the land? Did the bears see vulnerability in the white men they could not detect in the Indians? The Indians of all tribes had a long-standing and complex relationship with bears. For many tribes the bear was a prophet, and having a dream about bears would almost certainly endow someone with the power to find lost objects. Other tribes saw the bear as a medicine animal, after watching him dig for roots that were as useful to humans as they were to the bears." — Vine Deloria Jr., excerpt from Frenchmen, Bears, and Sandbars, 2007*

When the stakes are high and our enemies mighty, it behooves us to do what we can in order to tip the scales in our favour. My people needed an ally in power, and I had my ways of getting a seat at the table. Men are so simple, blinded by greed, they see only that from which they think they can profit. I give them what they want, they believe that they take it from me; it amuses me to play them like pawns. Naked, I am at my strongest. I did not get where I am today by being a wallflower. My people

need me. My muskwas (bears) enjoy converting those Christians back to their authentic natures; how many times now have I seen their true selves blossom forth.

## CHAPTER III

### WARDS OF THE STATE / THE INDIAN PROBLEM

---

*"I want to get rid of the Indian problem.....Our objective is to continue until there is not an Indian that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department..." — Duncan Campbell Scott, Minister of Indian Affairs, 1920*



h, how I cried when they took Pihtokahanapiwiyn away in chains. You would know him as Poundmaker, but to me, he was my leader, my brother, my hero, my dear friend. He was our defender, our peacemaker. He stood firm against the lies others believed, and led us with calm steadiness as he negotiated the treaty for peace. Our dear friend Mistahimaskwa, Big Bear, was the strongest of our warriors, both in wisdom, and in medicine. His gifts allowed him to see that the reserves would keep us poor and beholden to the settlers. He kept his people free for as long as he could, until to keep them from starving, he was finally forced to capitulate. Our leaders thought we were going to share the land. Macdonald and Laurier's ideas of purchasing land as one would a trinket was as foreign to Mistahimaskwa and Pihtokahanapiwiyn as buying air, for we shared all. The sight of our proud leaders, later taken in chains to Stony Mountain prison under false charges, was meant to break our spirits. But even though they weakened under illnesses contracted in that stone fortress, Mistahimaskwa and Pihtokahanapiwiyn's spirits stayed strong; they knew we would persevere.



## CHAPTER IV

### STARVATION

---

*"Those Reserve Indians are in a deplorable state of destitution, they receive from the Indian Department just enough food to keep soul and body together, they are all but naked, many of them barefooted. Should sickness break out among them in their present weakly state the fatality would be dreadful."* — **Lawrence Clarke, 1880**

*"A long time ago, my father told me what his father told him, that there was once a Lakota holy man, called Drinks Water, who dreamed what was to be...that the four-leggeds were going back into the earth and that a strange race had woven a spider's web all around the Lakotas. And he said: "When this happens, you shall live in square gray houses, in a barren land, and beside those square gray houses you shall starve." — **Ĥeháka Sápa (Black Elk), holy man, medicine man, and sacred clown of Oglala Lakota Sioux, 1932.***

**B**efore the settlers came, all of us across Turtle Island were rich, in buffalo robes, in food, in our ability to go out on the land or water and bring back whatever we needed for our people. We didn't beg for scraps at anyone's table. They told us how important the Iron Horse was, and the riches it would bring to all. Blinded by their promises, I led the way. It was only later that I realized they did not consider us part of the "all." When the settlers started shooting the buffalo from their trains, we were sickened by the waste, the carcasses left there rotting in the sun. But slowly we realized that it wasn't only for sport, the soldiers knew we couldn't live without the buffalo, and they were right. Once so numerous, it took several days for a herd to pass, they were now almost entirely gone and our people were starving. It was one more way they tried to make us disappear, but the buffalo came back, and we never left.

## CHAPTER V

### FORCIBLE TRANSFER OF CHILDREN

---

*"When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men."* — **Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, 1879**

*"It can start with a knock on the door one morning. It is the local Indian agent, or the parish priest, or, perhaps, a Mounted Police officer. The bus for the residential school leaves that morning. It is a day the parents have long been dreading. Even if the children have been warned in advance, the morning's events are still a shock. The officials have arrived and the children must go.*

*For tens of thousands of Aboriginal children for over a century, this was the beginning of their residential schooling. They were torn from their parents, who often surrendered them only under threat of prosecution. Then, they were hurled into a strange and frightening place, one in which their parents and culture would be demeaned and oppressed."* — **Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015**

*T*his is the one I cannot talk about. The pain is too deep. We were never the same.

## CHAPTER VI

### INCARCERATION

---

*In the period between March 2010 and January 2013, the Prairies Region of the Correctional Service of Canada (primarily the*



provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta) accounted for 39.1% of all new federal inmate growth. Most of this growth was led by Aboriginal offenders, who now comprise 46.4% of the Prairie Region inmate population. At Stony Mountain Institution in Manitoba, 389 out of 596 inmates – 65.3% of the population – were Aboriginal; at Saskatchewan Penitentiary, 63.9% of the population was Aboriginal; at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon, 55.7% of the count was Aboriginal; and at Edmonton Institution for Women, 56.0% of the population was Aboriginal. — **Aboriginal Offenders - A Critical Situation, Office of the Correctional Investigator, Government of Canada, 2013**

They wanted to take the Indian out of us; they couldn't do that, but they did beat down our spirits. Generation after generation of us spent our childhoods in the residential schools, being told over and over again that we were inferior, until we believed it ourselves. One hundred and fifty thousand of us were told that our loving parents were bad, that our devoted grandparents practiced devil worship, that we were dirty, inside and out. Then, in the sixties and seventies, social services came to our homes, scooped twenty thousand of our beloved babies, and gave them to other families, far from us, our languages, and our land. So many of our people grew up broken – is it any wonder that they fill the prisons, crowd the wards, and line the sidewalks, lost in the cycle of self-loathing, trauma and addiction? I shine brightly for these souls through the darkness, slaying savage masculine force with the dazzling power of my beauty and allure. I am the light, the two-spirited gentle man and fierce woman. Walk towards me, my children, fall into step and let the drum guide you. You will be reborn, free to rise again with the buffalo.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE RES HOUSE

---

*"And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." — Luke 2:12*

Not so long ago (well, my sense of time may be different from yours), my family crowded into the same drafty substandard housing familiar to so many of our people, for the most sacred of occasions — a birth. And this was not just any birth. This was *my* birth, into this period of history, anyway. The skies opened up and all manner of angels and supernatural beings awaited my arrival. There was no room at the hospital. Actually, there was no hospital at all. In our makeshift res shack, a cold draft blew, chilling my mother as she laboured. My father hauled water for my dear mother, but it caused her sickness when she drank, and it blistered my newborn skin, for the water was poisoned. I was born in humble circumstances, yes, but to my beloved parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, I was a treasure, for there is nothing more important to us than our children.



## CHAPTER VIII

### SICKNESS AND HEALING

---

*"It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habitating so closely in these schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is being geared towards the final solution of our Indian Problem."*

— *Duncan Campbell Scott, 1910*

I remember the first catastrophes – the dark days of the epidemics; we had no resistance to the European plagues of smallpox, influenza and measles that ravaged our communities. Our numbers were reduced by three quarters; so many perished that those few who remained could not even bury our dead. Now the sicknesses of the body that stalk us have different names: tuberculosis, diabetes, HIV, AIDS, FAS. The sicknesses of the soul are many: far too many of our young people, growing up broken in the long shadow of residential school, are so bereft of hope that they take their own lives at horrifying rates. My heart aches for our missing and murdered Indigenous women – each one a sister, mother, daughter, friend. We remember their names, all one thousand five hundred, and we hold their spirits tight. We mourn for those of our men we have lost to violence, trauma, mental disturbance and despair. Entangled in the darkness of their afflictions, trapped in the chaos of addictions, they suffer alone in institutions. I visit my people to bring them the solace of our spirituality, that they may rise up out of this cycle of destruction, learn the language of their souls and be free once more.

## CHAPTER IX

### URBAN REZ

---

*"We're surrounded by violence here, self-inflicted violence, or violence by Indians to other Indians, or violence by whites to Indians. That's Regina, and that's Saskatoon for us, because we grew up like that. We try to be good, you know? But there's sickness all around. You witness it. You participate in it in some way. But as an artist, I guess that informs your work, it becomes part of your work. And what comes out is life and death. Dashed hopes and beauty."*

— *Floyd Favel, The Tunguska Project, 2005*

*H*ere in the cities, my people struggle. We have no space, we cannot see the horizon or feel the wind. Crowded into ghettos in these prairie and northern towns, broken and bleeding from the wounds of our parents and grandparents, we may as well be surrounded by the same concrete walls of the prisons. Too many of my sisters are stripped of their honour and grace by men who are afraid of the power of the feminine. I try to bring hope, some laughter, a respite from the crushing weight of poverty and violence that keeps my people from seeing the sacred within themselves. I show them who they truly are, my beauty reflecting theirs, but only some have eyes to see. The others cannot see our magic, they try to tell us it is not there, but they do not understand the power of Miss Chief and they sorely underestimate the resilience of our people.





## THE SUBJUGATION OF TRUTH



Kent Monkman, 2016, 72" x 51", Acrylic on Canvas

# *Acknowledgements*

---

*Miss Chief's Memoirs written in  
collaboration with Gisèle Gordon*

*The artist would like to thank:*

***Barbara Fischer***

***Bernard Doucet and the  
Donald R. Sobeys Family Foundation***

***The Studio***



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.



Canada Council    Conseil des arts  
for the Arts      du Canada







