

► **Rosary Beaver, 2016**

The relationship between First Nations people and Europeans began with the fur trade. Here, Monkman dangles a crucified beaver from a string of prayer beads. “Before there was a currency, there were beaver pelts. The beaver died for our sins,” he says.



SCRAPBOOK

Westworld

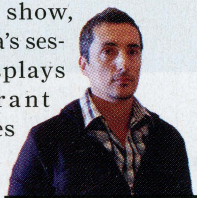
Kent Monkman reimagines Canada’s colonial history with sex and drag queens

BY SIMON LEWSEN

Lush flora, muscled warriors, painted ladies: art depicting the Old West generally exudes a certain rugged sexuality. In his cheeky landscapes, Kent Monkman makes that lewd subtext explicit. Monkman, who’s part Swampy Cree and part Irish, mimics 19th-century artists like George Catlin and Cornelius Krieghoff but adds his own racy twists. Amid the majestic peaks and billowing clouds of the Canadian prairies, he paints scenes of burlesque, fetish play and all kinds of sexual shenanigans between settlers and Indigenous people. Sometimes, Monkman’s drag queen alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, shows up in Louboutin stilettos, carrying a Versace bag.

His latest exhibit blends his raunchy humour with depictions of grief, violence and survival. The show,

which marks Canada’s sesquicentennial, displays Monkman’s vibrant sketches, sculptures and paintings, along



with a collection of artifacts that document the history of Canada through a First Nations lens. Here, Monkman talks about the stories behind some of the dazzling works featured.

ART
SHAME AND
PREJUDICE: A STORY OF
RESILIENCE
BY KENT MONKMAN

THE ART MUSEUM AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

JAN. 26 TO MARCH 4



▼ **Massacre of the Innocents, 2015**

Monkman tweaks the Rubens painting, recasting a scene from the “Gospel of Matthew,” as a bloody beaver hunt in pre-Confederation Canada.

► **Death of the Virgin, 2016**

Monkman’s riff on Caravaggio’s classic swaps out the Virgin Mary for a young First Nations woman in the hospital. “I wanted to speak about the violence against Indigenous women,” says Monkman. In the image, the visitors perform a smudging ceremony, a ritual associated with renewal and cleansing.





◀ **Iron Horse, 2015**

Monkman draws on paintings that depict the westward expansion of the railroad. He also lifts an image from Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's classic oil painting of the Trojan Horse. "The railroad was offered as a gift, as a symbol of progress, but it destroyed the people who received it," he says. "It decimated the bison and the Plains Indians' way of life."

▼ **Seeing Red, 2014**

This is a confrontation between Picasso's bull, an iconic symbol of virility and aggression, and Monkman's alter ego, Miss Chief, depicted as a matador in spiked heels. "The way the bull is painted is so clunky and violent, and Miss Chief is so beautiful," says Monkman.



◀ **Miss Chief's Praying Hands, 2016**

Monkman plays off Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands* with a silicone butt plug. "Christianity has fucked Indigenous people over for centuries," he says wryly.

▲ **Bad Medicine, 2014**

This piece, set in Winnipeg's north end, features Christian angels facing off against bear spirits. "I wanted to show Indigenous spirits moving through urban environments," says Monkman.

