

Spring 2017

Another Way To

Celebrate 150 Years

As the national public relations machinery gears up to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary there are a number of ways for the Canadian art lover to celebrate the nation's anniversary.

There are parties and parades of course, but here at Magazin'art we would like you to go out and buy some really good Canadian art, much of which is gathering an international following. Buy pieces of art that you truly like and want to live with. Purchase pieces that speak to you. That being said there are some First Nations' artists who are starting to make the obvious objections to a constant parade of unfettered self-congratulation. As a place Canada has existed for a lot longer than 150 years. To only celebrate the last 150 years is therefore excluding those peoples who have traditionally lived here. To their credit the cities of Vancouver and Victoria are taking a different stance.

Vancouver has called their celebrations Canada 150+ and will be celebrating First Nations' art, music and culture. Victoria has named its sesquicentennial celebrations, A Year of Reconciliation, and said that it will be focusing on reconciliation with the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. By now you must be thinking what does this have to do with art?

The answer to that is it has a lot to do with aboriginal artists, many of whom are dead set against celebrating what can justifiably be called a colonial power that continually ignores the problems and the cultural genocide that it has created. Kent Monkman, a well known artist of Cree descent who has had shows at the National Gallery, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Glenbow is subverting Canada's sesquicentennial through his new show, Shame and Prejudice: The Story of Resilience, which is premiering at the University of Toronto Art Museum through to March 4th and then touring the country, opening at the Glenbow in Calgary in early June.

Monkman has a long history of producing subversive art. He likes to take a picture from the past and then redo it from a revisio-nist point of view. The best examples of this tack may be The Death of a Virgin (After Caravaggio) or his The Daddies, modeled after Robert Harris' The Fathers of Confederation. In The Death of a Virgin, Monkman shows a family grieving over a dead woman lying in a hospital bed, presumably by suicide. In The Daddies, Monkman's alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle lies naked before The Fathers of Confederation.

Miss Chief Testickle serves as a constant witness to the colonialization of her people. Speaking of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle Monkman has described her as a very female spirit that counters the very male, patriarchal European colonized viewpoint. In The Scream, Monkman takes only the title from Edvard Munch. The picture shows nuns, priests and red serge uniformed Mounties tearing children from the arms of their families. The exhibition is in nine chapters and runs through time from the arrival of the French to the present.

The exhibition will be travelling across Canada until 2020. By this point you may be asking yourself what does all this mean to me and one concrete way to answer that may lie in the hoodie worn by a First Nations girl in Winnipeg several years ago. It said, "Got land? Thank an Indian." One way to thank the First Nations is to start by making sure that when you buy something which can range from mukluks to parkas to West Coast First Nations carvings and art to Inuit sculpture and graphics, that it is truly indigenous. That may be easier to do in British Columbia than it is in the rest of Canada. In BC, the Authentic Indigenous Arts Resurgence Campaign has been formed to provide buyers with an authentic provenance. ARC provides a three tier certification process that runs from being entirely created and sold by First Nations members to designs that have been approved and are used under licence.

One of the major complaints about cultural appropriation is that the symbolism in aboriginal designs is often misused when they are appropriated creating a debased and repugnant version for those who know what the original should mean. You could say that in most cases it adds insult to injury when you throw in the lost potential revenue. In the rest of Canada your best bet to make sure you are purchasing authentic indigenous artwork is to buy it from reputable dealers and to stay away from the gift shops and tourist centers.



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