

## Educators' Guide

### In Dialogue

Conversations in Contemporary Indigeneity

Curated by John G. Hampton

Co-presented by the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, and the Carleton University Art Gallery

On View September 6 – October 7, 2017

### Featured Artists

Raymond Boisjoly

David Garneau

Carola Grahn

Native Art Department International

(Maria Hupfield and Jason Lujan)

Nicole Kelly Westman

Duane Linklater

Tanya Lukin-Linklater

Amy Malbeuf

Nadia Myre

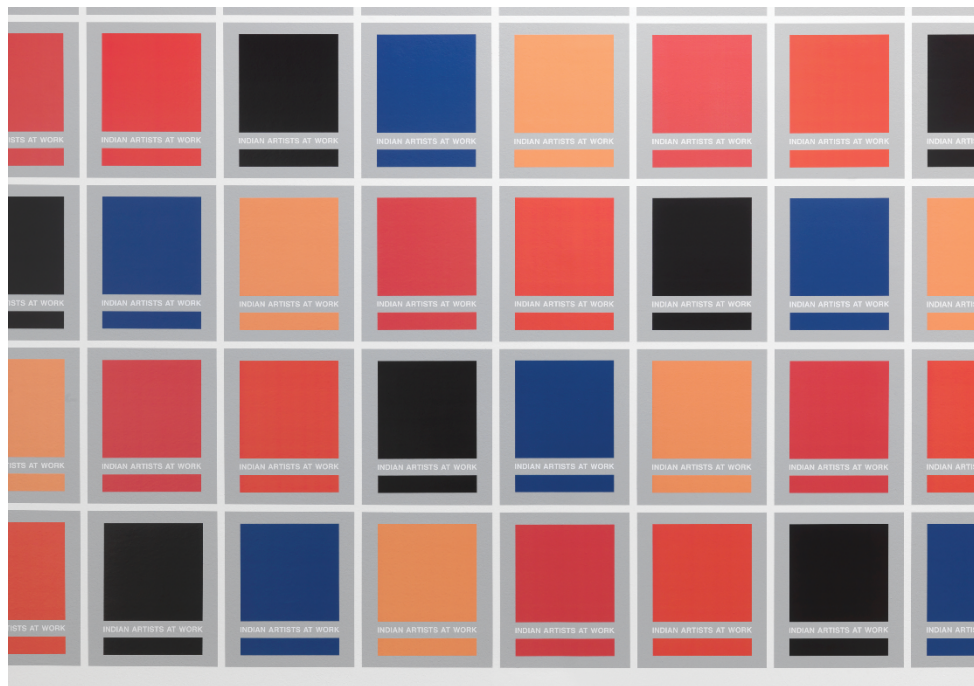
Peter Morin

Krista Belle Stewart



## About the Exhibition

*In Dialogue* is an exhibition structured as a conversation. It invites viewers into intimate discussions that work through new ways of understanding and being Indigenous in contemporary contexts. Moving from spaces of contemplation and reception to moments of excitement and animation, the artists blur borders drawn with invented notions of authenticity and guide us through negotiations between the specificity of personhood and its abstraction into larger groups of belonging. The gathering of work embraces the wildly individualistic tumble of connections and contradictions that constitute contemporary Indigenous identities, opening a dialogue between artists, audiences, and the interconnected mesh-works woven between all our relations.



### Key Themes

Public and private discourse

Contemporary Indigeneity

Identity

Heritage

Colonialism

Contradiction and affirmation

Interconnectivity

Individualism and collectivity

## Curatorial Essay

Over the past two years I have been carrying out conversations with the artists of *In Dialogue*, trying to address the complexities of contemporary Indigenous identity. These discussions were really just a continuation of the ones that we were all already having, which have built up through a lifetime of being. These private exchanges became the fundamental driving force of this exhibition, guiding each element and decision through reciprocal exchange and development.

In our early meetings, the artists and I talked about the difficulty of navigating contemporary Indigeneity against the backdrop of social, legal, and unspoken rules about what constitutes nativeness. We discussed anxieties about self-identification, blood quantum, mixed cultures, migration and diaspora, whiteness, assimilation, internalized and externalized colonialism, legacies of self-erasure, enrolment, disenfranchisement, false spokespeople, blood myths, and the diverse and ambiguous spectrums of Indigenous authenticity. There was an understanding that eventually these conversations would spawn an exhibition, book, or some other material output, but the artworks that ultimately emerged were primarily the artists' organic responses to our discussions. Some works directly incorporate verbal communication, some abstract it to activate its potentiality, and others look at discourse more broadly; such as how history, citation, and authority work together, dialogically, in the construction of community.

Each of the resulting works is rooted in a specific position, which is influenced by multiple intersecting factors of identity (of which the artist's Indigeneity represents only a small component). My own involvement inevitably guided some of the conversations according to my personal position—one of relative comfort as a white academic NDN male divorced from my traditional territory—as well as my struggle to come to terms with a discomfort felt at my privilege and the amount of opportunities I am given to speak on behalf of others. While organizing an exhibition on identity (or even while one is simply living life), there can be a value to discomfort. I *should* feel uncomfortable with my disproportionate privilege, when being asked to speak about/for those with different experiences than my own. Rather than being justified away, such discomfort should be nurtured. This discomfort is what reminds us when to listen instead of speaking, to honour the specificity of others, and to learn from and allow others to learn from them. Tribes, nations, and cultures emerge when individuals gather to speak and something larger begins to form. This process is not always tidy and it is never complete; it

involves varying degrees of self-articulation, imposition, allowance, enforcement, disenfranchisement, agreement, and policing.

Through discussions about this interplay between the individual and its abstraction into larger cultural masses, an exhibition began to emerge as its own abstract mass. Made up of a myriad of contradictions and kinship amongst its individual participants, unfolding in rhythmic movement between concealment and revelation, abstraction and specificity. In navigating this tumble of contradictions, new understandings of contemporary Indigeneities can emerge, specific to the space created between the somewhat interconnected histories of viewers, artists, organizers, and environment.

Honest and open dialogue about contemporary Indigenous identity and experience can hopefully function as an antidote to a new age of romanticization while avoiding playing the role of the native informant in a colonial script. Throughout the space of this exhibition, one will hear—sometimes loudly and sometimes in a whisper—about skin and blood, intergenerational citation, institutional violence and kinship, encircling histories, the simultaneous decentering and recentering of body, corrupted traditionalism, politics of refusal, and strategies for communication.

Identity is not decolonized by re-inscribing the settler/Indigenous dichotomy, but by restructuring the concept of identity formation to centre one's Self and Relations rather than one's different from an Other. This exhibition grew out of intimate discussions between Indigenous artists, but in its presentation, it becomes an invitation for the viewer to enter the conversation as well. The viewer, whoever they may be, is encouraged to embrace their own specific position—their class, gender, sexuality, nation, culture, skin, and everything else we cobble together to make our selves—as they partake in this discussion of who we are individually and who we are when we come together as a people.

John G. Hampton



## Sample Discussion Questions

1. What constitutes “nativeness”, and who gets to decide?
2. John G. Hampton states in his curatorial essay, “I *should* feel uncomfortable with my disproportionate privilege, when being asked to speak about/for those with different experiences than my own. Rather than being justified away, such discomfort should be nurtured.” What does this tell us about the gradient of indigenous experience and passing privilege?
3. How does art function as a discursive tool among marginalized communities?
4. How do art and craft differentiate? Is art more political? Use Amy Malbeuf’s piece, “Jimmie Durham 1974” as a discussion point.
5. This exhibition can be interpreted as a representation of the multi-faceted nature of Indigeneity. How is Indigeneity presented through various cultural, political, and personal lenses of experience?
- 6.

