

Educators' Guide

I continue to shape

Curated by cheyanne turions
University of Toronto Art Centre
September 5 – December 8, 2018



Nicholas Galanin, *Things Are Looking Native, Native's Looking Whiter*, 2012, giclée prints.
Courtesy of the artist.

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Exhibition Info

The Art Museum at the University of Toronto presents *I continue to shape*, curated by cheyanne turions and featuring work by Maria Thereza Alves, Cathy Busby, Justine Chambers, Nicholas Galanin, Lisa Myers, Mickalene Thomas, Joseph Tisiga, and Charlene Vickers.

History, like all stories, is told slant, subject to distortion by those with the power to represent it. *I continue to shape* looks at the practices of artists as means of working toward futures otherwise, shaping a world more tender, more just and more unsettled than the world we have now.

The first-person “I” in *I continue to shape* refers both to the agency of the artists working with history as a raw material, making sense of colonialism and what it can shape when Indigenous cultures collide with other cultures, and the audience who is being asked to reconfigure history and histories of other peoples. The works within the exhibition work towards the future to unsettle the processes of settler colonialism and its inherent power structures.

Curator’s Biography

cheyanne turions is an independent writer and curator concerned with art’s capacity to provoke otherwise possibilities. Recent and upcoming exhibitions include projects with the Audain Gallery (Vancouver), Gallery TPW (Toronto), Mercer Union (Toronto) and SBC galerie d’art contemporain (Montreal). She has published widely, including with *Afterall*, the Banff Centre, *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Hyperallergic* and the Vera List Center. In 2017, she participated in documenta 14. A recent graduate of the MVS Curatorial Studies Program at the University of Toronto (2016), she is currently the Director of Education and Public Programs at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and sits on the board of directors for 221A.

Key Points:

- Culture collision
- Indigenous culture
- Settler-colonialism
- History
- Tradition
- Storytelling and language
- Survival strategies
- Performance/activation

Discussion Topics

1. In your opinion, what is Indigenous art? What is at stake for Indigenous artists when making art?

2. Nicholas Galanin and Joseph Tisuga's work both incorporate other topics like popular culture and entertainment. In your opinion, what is the purpose of doing so? Does it change your notion of art-making in a modern context? How so?
3. Maria Thereza Alves' installation is interested in utopia. In your opinion, does utopia exist or not exist? Why or why not? How might the concepts of utopia and settler colonialism be tied together?
4. Cathy Busby's WE CALL project space extracts calls of action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and makes them into banners. What are your thoughts on the calls to action? What do you think would be your own responsibilities and calls to action as a student?
5. Several artworks within the exhibit invite visitors to participate through action and dialogue. In your opinion, is this type of work necessary in the context of the exhibition theme of "shaping" and "reshaping"? Why or why not?
6. The exhibition provides several mental tools for us to solve the problems of "culture collision". What might these tools or strategies be? How might we continue to address these questions after and outside the exhibition?

Selected Press

Brett, Guy. "Nowhere." *Nowhere: The Central Space*, London, 1993.
http://www.mariatherezaalves.org/assets/files/1993_guybrett_nowhere.pdf

Galanin, Nicholas. "Out of Line: Nicholas Galanin Rejects the Traditional/Contemporary Binary." *Walker Contemporary Art Primer*, March 26, 2018.
<https://walkerart.org/magazine/nicholas-galanin-indigenous-art-contemporary-traditional>

Mann, Mark. "Joseph Tisiga Unsettles Exoticism with Mythic Force at Parisian Laundry." *MOMUS*, November 14, 2017.
<http://momus.ca/joseph-tisiga-unsettles-exoticism-mythic-force-parisian-laundry/>

Wirk, Mandeep. "ACT NOW on Reconciliation." *Rungh Magazine*, May 20, 2018.
<http://rungh.org/act-now-on-reconciliation/>

Curatorial Statement

cheyanne turions

History, like all stories, is told slant, subject to distortion by those with the power to represent it. In the telling, certain characters are foregrounded and certain power dynamics are obscured, leaving certain other characters—their perspectives and experiences—cast out of this immortal glow. And yet, it seems that aesthetic practices bear a specific capacity to transform the sediment of history into something moving once again, to puncture what seems solid, to redirect the light.

The capacity for artworks to provoke this kind of shift is often tied to their ability to conjure visceral and intuitive responses that percolate through the viewer, from a change in mood or disposition, to an evolving understanding of the relation between actors, objects and society. Philosopher and artist David Garneau has coined the term “extra-rational aesthetic action” to describe the possibilities that reside in encounter with works of this sort. Drawing upon Garneau’s study, *I continue to shape* considers how the extra-rational capacities of art can support interruptions of history such that new kinds of stories become possible to tell.

Sometimes these interruptions are worn on the surface, such as when iconic images from art history and popular culture are radically reconfigured. When Nicholas Galanin juxtaposes a headshot of Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia with an Edward Curtis portrait of an unnamed Hopi-Tewa woman in the photo collage *Things Are Looking Native, Native's Looking Whiter* (2012), he displays how an ongoing colonial project in North America takes Indigenous cultures as raw material to appropriate. Joseph Tisiga’s *Props for Reconciliation* series (2017) sets characters from the *Archie* universe in dialogue with representational tropes from Indigenous cultures. If the comic-book characters appear too much at home, the Indigenous characters and cultural forms fade from the surface, displaying the destructive effects of what Archie and his friends, no doubt, imagine as only good-natured skill sharing and curiosity. Mickalene Thomas’s *Origin of the Universe I* (2012) reconfigures Gustav Courbet’s *L'Origine du monde* (1866) with the image of a Black woman and expands the scope of the image’s originary claim from the world to the universe. Adorned with rhinestones and produced as a self-portrait, the work detourns a classic example of female objectification into a powerful act of self-determination, claiming representational agency as the artist’s own. With these works, the extra-rational takes root in the quick recognition of disrupted forms; resisting colonial containment, they trade instead in a deep investment in the effects of cultures in collision.

Against the maxim that history repeats itself as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, it is possible to approach inheritance as a means of activating the present anew. Maria Thereza Alves’s *Nowhere* (1991) charts the force of European ideas of utopia, and their destructive effects on Indigenous life and lands across the globe. Photographic images depicting places of colonial plunder (such as Amazonas, Brazil) are disrupted by overpainting and two-by-fours, disturbing the idealizations of site that colonization depends upon. Within this interruption is contained an argument for engagement with the social and political contexts that actually already exist instead. In this place—Canada—there is an urgency for this kind of attention to the gruesome legacy of settler colonialism in general, and residential schooling in particular. Cathy Busby’s *WE CALL* (2017) functions as a mnemonic device. Editing and

reproducing calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report that address academic and cultural institutions, as well as their governing and funding bodies, this pair of wall-text panels loudly reminds us of our living duties to this ongoing history. Across Alves's and Busby's propositions for belonging, which counter narratives of nation building, there is critical investment in the extra-rational as a means of acknowledging "the perpetual struggle to make both Indigenous and settler people aware of the complexity of our shared colonial condition, and how this legacy informs every person and institution in these territories."

The survival tactics of those who are subject to systemic violence are varied. Charlene Vickers goes for armatures that lack subtlety: *Diviners* (2012) are a set of 10-foot long sharpened cedar spears, reminiscent of porcupine quills. By invoking a quill's power of deterrence, the *Diviners* function as medicine, extending the body through an outsized identification with our animal kin and their modes of protection, healing and sustenance. In a quieter way, Lisa Myers employs processes of straining and absorbing as metaphors for social interaction and personal endurance. What needs to be left behind, and what must be taken forward? In the creation of her blueprints—silkscreened images created with the anthocyanin pigment of blueberries—the pulp of a wild fruit is passed through a sieve to become an unstable ink, mapping its own forms of life. Continually changing colour, the pigment responds to the material composition of the paper and exposure to light, just as any being is transformed by the conditions of their environment.

If the extra-rational potential of artworks can change minds and behaviours, it is important to tend to the affective labour involved in this. Justine Chambers offers a place of rest through a malleable scenography that invites gallery visitors to reconfigure it as they see fit, and allow their bodies to unfurl. It recognizes flesh as a way of understanding being in relation with bodies past, present and future. Over the course of the exhibition, Chambers has invited artists Deanna Bowen, Ame Henderson and Jessica Karuhanga to activate her work, so as to relay the nature of the work as, in Garneau's words, a place of "sensual and intuitive study ... where people can find refuge from the ideas that otherwise rule them."

The title of the exhibition references Galanin's observation that contemporary Indigenous cultures, like all other cultures, exist on a continuum of change based on engagements with others and in dialogue with land. The "I" of *I continue to shape* is both the artist's subjectivity bearing upon the world, as much as it is the "I" of the viewer, coming to terms with how else to understand their role in upholding or dismantling the structures we have inherited, and to shape new personal and cultural relationships. By challenging colonial habits and tending to the labour that such re-orientation implies, *I continue to shape* looks to the breadth of that "I" for a shared agency in shaping a world more tender, more just and more unsettled than the world we have now.

Preparing for Your Visit

Food and Beverages

Food of any type is not permitted in the Art Museum. This is to help the Art Museum control insects and other pests which pose risks to the collections on display. Food services are available at Gallery Grill in Hart House.

Photography

Photography video recording is permitted in Art Museum galleries for personal use only, with hand-held equipment. No flash photography is permitted.

Bags, Backpacks and Personal Items

We encourage you to leave your valuables and other personal belongings at home. For the safety of our visitors and collections, large bags and backpacks are not permitted inside the Art Museum and must be checked at front desk.

Writing Materials

Ink pens are not permitted in the Art Museum spaces. We ask you to use only pencils to sketch, draw, or take notes while in the Art Museum.

Museum Conduct

- All persons entering the Art Museum are subject to video surveillance.
- Touching objects on display is not permitted. Even mild touching, over time, will cause damage to artwork. There are some exceptions to this rule, and those objects will be clearly marked as being touchable.
- Pets are not permitted in the Art Museum. Service animals, such as seeing eye dogs, are exempt.
- The Art Museum is a smoke free building.

Etiquette

- Visitors are asked to refrain from shouting, running and rowdy behaviour.
- Please turn your cell phone to the “silent” or “vibrate” setting, and be considerate of other visitors when using your phone.

Exhibition Location

University of Toronto Art Centre
15 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H7
416.978.1838

Gallery Hours

Tuesday to Saturday 12-5pm
Wednesday 12-8pm
Sunday and Monday closed
Admission is FREE to all exhibitions.

Wheelchair access to the University of Toronto Art Centre location is closed due to University College building revitalization construction.

Outreach and Tour Bookings: theresa.wang@utoronto.ca

artmuseum.utoronto.ca

@artmuseumuoft



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