BETWEEN ROCKS AND HARD PLACES: INDIGENOUS LANDS, SETTLER ART HISTORIES AND THE "BATTLE FOR THE WOODLANDS"

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The historical legacies of colonialism which continue to shape settler-Indigenous relationships in Canada are today being actively renegotiated in both political and cultural spheres. Commitments to enact change have been spurred by the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential Schools tabled in June 2015 and are reflected in the announced intentions of the new Trudeau government to act on all of its recommendations (see TRC Commission of Canada). This is, then, a good moment for an art historian to think about the ways in which the narratives of Canadian art we create might work in concert with these urgently needed changes: by helping to indigenize our images and understandings of the lands and places today shared by Indigenous peoples and settlers.

In the summer of 2015, just before the expected arrival of international visitors and participants for the Pan American Games in Toronto, I arrived at the city's downtown airport on my way to see "Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting in the Americas" which had just opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). As I walked from the gate I was greeted by a large mural-sized sign welcoming me to the city. An Aboriginal man in pow wow dress was shown riding up one of the airport escalators next to the message: "We're Here. You are Welcome in

Toronto. The Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation Host First Nation Welcome You to Toronto 2015." This offering of a first welcome by the traditional owners of the land acknowledges on a symbolic level the primary relationship of an Indigenous nation to a particular place by virtue of its members' descent from the totemic being or *dodem* (pl. *dodemaag*) identified with it. Although this protocol has been honoured for some years in western Canada, it is a recent phenomenon in southern Ontario. Indeed, the advent of such signage might puzzle residents of Toronto who are aware that in 1787 and 1805 the ancestors of the Mississaugas of the New Credit transferred to British colonial officials the fourteen by twenty-eight mile piece of land that is roughly contiguous with their modern-day city. In the Indigenous world, however, people remain irrevocably tied to places through the *dodem* system. As Lakota historian Vine Deloria has written, "American Indians hold their lands—place—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind" (qtd. in Green). Even though the Mississaugas' *dodem*, the eagle or thunderbird, can no longer be seen flying over Toronto, it still soars in graphic form on their welcome signage and the logo that represents their First Nation.

The 250,880 square acres of the Toronto purchase are now home to the 6,000,000 inhabitants of the Greater Toronto Area, the most densely populated region of Canada; the 1900 members of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation are today in possession of a reserve one-fortieth the size located near Niagara Falls, about a hundred kilometres away. The Mississaugas are an Anishinaabe nation, closely related to other speakers of Anishinabemowin—the Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin and Cree—who spread across the great geological formation known as the Canadian Shield.

Locating Rock Art in Indigenous and Western (Disciplinary) Space

In the Aboriginal world which has existed in this place for millennia, human beings share these lands with the powerful *manitous* or "other-than-human beings," who can assume animal, human and other forms. They roil the waters and electrify the skies, bringing wealth, fertility and healing powers as well as danger, destruction, and death.[1] Humans can thrive only by establishing and maintaining relationships of reciprocity with the *manitous* and acquiring from them knowledge of empowering medicines. For at least 2000 years, the Anishinaabeg have done this by seeking contact with these beings through dreams and visions and by making offerings at and marking with images places in the land where the presence of the other-than-human powers who are potential givers of medicine is most evident.

The figurative and abstract images painted on these sites are termed pictographs in the scholarly literature. They also occur as the mnemonic signs incised on birchbark panels and scrolls to record songs and the order of rituals of the shamanistic Midewiwin society, most of which are now regarded as sacred, culturally sensitive, and not suitable for public display. They are also closely related to images painted or, in earlier times, tattooed on the body and painted, woven, embroidered and carved on medicine bags, drums, rattles, and war clubs. These small portable articles have been collected and preserved by Europeans since the early years of contact and form the canonical corpus out of which histories of Indigenous arts in the Great Lakes are constructed. In contrast, rock paintings and petroglyphs have remained the concern of archaeologists and barely figure in narratives of the history of art in North America, whether

[1] According to archaeological evidence, the first human habitation of the region dates back approximately 11,000 years; the origins of the life-style followed by Indigenous peoples in southern Ontario at the time of contact originated in the Woodland period which began about 1000 B.C. (see "The First Nations").

settler or Indigenous. Yet this body of imagery, inscribed directly onto the land, is the form of visual culture that speaks to us most compellingly about Indigenous conceptualizations of place and space. Its omission is therefore evidence of the processes by which Indigenous concepts and representations of land have been overwritten with those introduced by European settlers in the course of four centuries of colonial rule.

It was not until the mid-twentieth-century that Selwyn Dewdney, a professionally trained artist and amateur ethnographer, made the first systematic effort to map, record and interpret the rock art of the Canadian Shield. Commissioned by Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, he spent many summers canoeing the shorelines of lakes and rivers and interviewing local people, both Native and non-Native, in order to locate and, where possible, interpret, the painted images. He drew, photographed, and made full-sized tracings of the anthropomorphic, animal and abstract images he found at 290 sites in the province of Ontario.[2] Dewdney's work has been carried forward by archaeologists Thor Conway and Grace Rajnovich who have advanced the project of interpretation through further intensive work with Aboriginal elders. Because the practice of rock painting ceased around the turn of the twentieth century, these elders are the last generation to have had both direct contact with shaman-artists who painted on rock surfaces and training in oral history and ritual knowledge. The decisions they made to share knowledge with researchers are especially precious.

The vast inventory of images preserved on the sheer rock surfaces of the Canadian Shield constitutes, I would argue, the essential ground line for an inclusive art history in central Canada, both literally and metaphorically, and the relative silence that surrounds it therefore invites

[2] Dewdney gave the number as 162 in the 1967 revised edition of his book; the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources plaque at the site gives 260, but new sites continue to be discovered.

interrogation. This silence suggests three different kinds of problems. The first is the uneasy fit of rock paintings with Western constructs of 'art.' The term 'pictograph' is preferred by archaeologists because they study these images primarily as a form of picture writing. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars like Garrick Mallory undertook broad comparative studies of world pictographic systems as representing an early phase of human literacy; it is difficult today to divorce the term from the cultural evolutionist framework of that anthropological literature—now, of course, thoroughly discredited.

For the art historian, however, a difficulty in categorizing this vast body of imagery as 'art' arises from their highly variable aesthetic quality. While some, such as the great Agawa image of Mishipeshoo, display a formal power that fully realizes the conceptual power of the subject, a great many others are crudely rendered. Because they are painted on vertical cliff faces descending directly into the water, many must have been made quickly and in a summary fashion by someone standing in a canoe or balancing on a ladder on a narrow rock ledge many metres above water level. Over the centuries, weathering has further compromised our ability to recapture the aesthetic power individual examples may once have had. Yet at the same time, the aesthetic quality of the rendering would not have altered a rock painting's ritual and communicative functioning, just as a poorly designed and printed book can be read just as easily as one designed with skill and style. And where images and texts can be distinguished when we speak European languages, in Anishinaabemowin the morpheme "mazi" or "mazena" is the root of the words for both "image" and "book."[3] Classifying all these images as 'art' either finesses

[3] "The word we use here on Manitoulin for picture/ painting/ photograph is *mzinaazgan* which could be *mazina'aazigan* in other dialects" (Corbiere).

these issues or—if aesthetic appreciation of their radical simplifications is intended—interposes a modernist and primitivist lens on our viewing of them.

The problem of 'art' is paralleled by a problem of 'history.' Rock paintings are notoriously difficult to date because the animal fats and fish glue binders that were mixed with powdered red ochre to make the paint have been washed away over the years. Without such organic substances, radiocarbon dating cannot be used. Other kinds of tests have produced results indicating a greater antiquity for these paintings than was first assumed, but no hard dates. Using other archaeological evidence found at rock painting sites, Rajnovich has made a convincing case that rock painting goes back 2000 years, to the beginning of the Woodland period, when peoples ancestral to the Anishinaabeg inhabited the same regions. Despite such finds, it may be that the failure of art historians to integrate rock art into their chronological narratives is due to the disciplinary divide between archaeological and art historical methods and disciplinary conventions.

A final problem has to do not with discursive but with physical erasures. As Dewdney's years of exploration of rock art sites showed, most of the known sites are in thinly populated northern regions and only reachable by canoe or motorboat. Rock art specialists speculate that many sites that must have existed in the southern parts of the Canadian Shield have been physically obliterated or submerged under water in the course of two centuries of urban-industrial development; rivers and lakes have been dammed to facilitate logging and mining and streams have been paved over to build railways, roads and cities. These transformations of the land have most affected the southern areas of the Canadian Shield, and because these are also the most densely populated regions of Canada, the impact of the erasure of Indigenous markings on settler historical consciousness is magnified. The biggest losses, however, are those of memory

and knowledge that have resulted from the forced Indigenous displacements from land which ruptured the bonds between people and topography and from the cultural violence of assimilationist policies. Designed to obliterate Aboriginal languages, they have walled off the Indigenous discourses and ritual practices integral to the meaning of the visual imagery.

Despite this history of erasure, important projects of recovery have, however, also, been underway during the past fifty years, carried out not only by archaeologists, but also by Anishinaabe artists. The pioneer was the painter Norval Morrisseau. Selwyn Dewdney sought him out in 1960 as an informant on Anishinaabe shamanism and oral traditions and, in return, sent the young artist copies of his drawings of rock art and his 1962 book, *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*. In much the same way as Picasso's discovery of ancient Iberian sculpture catalyzed his breakthrough into cubism, Morrisseau's access to the bold outlines and flat pictorial space of Anishinaabe rock paintings proved the key to his reinvention of Anishinaabe tradition as a modernist art form. His dramatic and successful entry into the Canadian art market soon after was a turning point in the history of Canadian Indigenous art, inspiring a whole generation of younger Anishinaabe artists to explore Western fine art genres as a site for the revival of traditional knowledge.

In the contemporary moment, rock is being explored as a site of inscription and identification by Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine. In contrast to Morrisseau, whose art affirmed Indigenous traditions of mysticism, shamanism and spirituality in a modern idiom, Devine's work engages with a contemporary politics of land and the environment. Where Morrisseau's concerns made it relatively easy for his early patrons and promoters to frame his work within the comfortable tenets of modernist primitivism, Devine's work speaks both to contemporary

contestations over land ownership and to a world now facing the ultimate disaster of environmental implosion.

I now want to look at the issues of Indigenous and settler concepts of art and place in terms of an interlocking set of contemporary issues arising from Indigenous decolonization and land claims on the one hand, and the parallel process of a decolonized world art history on the other. I want to argue that, in Canada and elsewhere, these issues are currently converging in a shared consciousness of the growing environmental crisis. I will also urge that an art history that deals more authentically with place and space by attending to Indigenous histories in the land can serve as a unifying force. I will attempt this admittedly ambitious task by examining in more detail the chronological spectrum of Anishinaabe visual art: the rock painting tradition that reaches back many centuries before the arrival of Europeans, the traumatic negotiations of new systems of land, spirituality and visuality imposed by settlers during the nineteenth century, and contemporary art as represented by one of Bonnie Devine's recent projects. This exploration also has a personal dimension, for Anishinaabe visual culture and arts belong to the place which I, too, call home, and therefore necessitate a reflection on the narrow space between the bedrock of the Western art historical tradition and the hard place of accepting different Indigenous epistemologies with which many art historians in settler societies are now grappling.

Canadian Shield Rock Art

Scholars who study rock paintings closely speak eloquently of the relationship between the paintings and their sites on the margins of land and water. In their book on the Agawa site Thor and Julie Conway write:

> Forget the pictographs for a moment and let your senses take over. Lake Superior has moods, feelings, and subtle influences on those who can stand still and let emotional forces take over. The pictograph site location can energize or calm us. The setting certainly leads us away from the 20th century into a more natural world. In some ways, a poet can get closer to the site than a scientist. (11)

They further explain that "great vertical cliffs were believed to be 'cut rock'—powerful places where the earth's energies were exposed" (11). Rajnovich observes, along the same lines, that rock painting sites are "places where sky, earth, water, underground and underwater meet . . . They allowed the manitous and medicine people to pass into each other's worlds" (159).

We also need to attend to Ansihinaabe understandings of the materialities of rock art, for both stone and red ochre carry connotations of power. For millennia, Indigenous people across North America have regarded red ochre as a sacred material emblematic of blood and life force, and have valued its protective and healing powers. They have painted their bodies and their clothing with red ochre and placed it in burials to protect the dead (Rajnovich 13). On some rock faces washes of red ochre occur rather than paintings. Anishinaabe researcher Grace Seymour has explained that "the 'wash' denotes the special spirituality of the site" (qtd. in Rajnovich 66).

Stone, in English and other Western languages, carries connotations of impenetrability, inanimacy, and obduracy—qualities diametrically opposed to animacy and personhood. Talking to an unresponsive person is like 'speaking to a stone.' To be lacking in empathy is to have a 'heart of stone,' to try something impossible is like trying to squeeze 'water from a rock.' In the traditional Anishinaabe world, in contrast, stone can be permeable and resonant of power. A. Irving Hallowell, one of the most perceptive students of Anishinaabe world view, conducted fieldwork in Northern Ontario during the 1930s. In his classic essay on Ojibwe ontology, he

reported an exchange he had with an elder who had pointed out a stone animated by thunderbird power: "I once asked an old man: Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, 'No! But *some* are'" (361). As Hallowell commented, "The Ojibwa do not perceive stones, in general, as animate, any more than we do. The crucial test is experience. Is there any personal testimony available?" (363).

Such experience—knowledge of the presence of power and spirit in particular places—is acquired through observations of the special features of land and then detailed in dreams. Shamans—people with exceptional powers to dream in this way—are able to establish particularly effective communication with the other-than-human beings and gain from them knowledge of medicines. As Rajnovich explains:

> 'Medicine' had a great depth of meaning in traditional Indian usage. It meant something like 'mystery' and 'power' and included not only the activities of curing with tonics from plants and minerals, but also the receipt of powers from the *manitous* for healing, hunting, and battle. The most important step in the practice of medicine was communication between the practitioners and the *manitous*. (10-11)

Power also expresses itself as the ability to transform one's human or animal appearance—the quintessential power possessed by the *manitous*. Paintings on rocks are, then, representations of the experiences to which Hallowell refers, and they testify to the presence of other-than-human beings in those particular places.

The individual nature of the experiences that lead to the making of paintings on rock explain the highly varied repertoire of the rock art lexicon. We can sample this repertoire by looking in more detail at the famous paintings at Agawa Bay on the northern shore of Lake

Superior. Nineteen panels of images have been identified at Agawa, some of them now very indistinct. They include some of the most visually compelling and best documented paintings in the Canadian Shield. Travellers in the Great Lakes from the mid-seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries mention seeing or hearing about rock paintings. However, the most detailed account was given in the 1840s to Henry Schoolcraft, the Indian agent at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, by the prominent Anishinaabe chief Shingwauk (Shingwaukonce), whose community was located near Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, 130 kilometers east of Agawa Bay. Schoolcraft, who was married to Jane Johnston, the daughter of an Anishinaabe chief, was a keen amateur ethnographer and compiled an early and important multi-volume publication of information about Great Lakes peoples which includes Shingwauk's account (see Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information*). He described both the images which had been painted on the rock by an Anishinaabe shaman and warrior named Myeengun (the Wolf) and the more recent paintings he himself had made. Shingwauk, in Schoolcraft's rendering, described Myeengun as a man "of much skill and secret power," a shaman who, by virtue of his high rank in the shamanistic Midewiwin Society,

> acquired influence, and crossed Lake Superior in canoes. the expedition was not barren in other respects of success, but this exploit was considered as a direct evidence of the influence of his gods, and it gave him so much credit, that he determined to perpetuate the memory of it by a Muz-sin-a-bik-on. He made two inscriptions, one on the south, and the other on the north shores of the lake. Both were on the precipitous faces of rocks. (qtd. in Conway and Conway 58; see also Schoolcraft 406)

Although Shingwauk gave drawings of these 'inscriptions,' to Schoolcraft, the American writer never saw the original rock paintings and they remained unknown to outsiders until Selwyn Dewdney located the Agawa site in 1958.

Through ethnohistorical research and his discussions with Shingwauk's grandson, Fred Pine, and other elders, Conway was able to date and establish the historical references and purpose of Myeengun's paintings. He argues convincingly that "from the evidence . . . Myeengun was an Amikwa leader from northeastern Lake Huron, who was displaced to the Lake Superior area during the Iroquois wars of the 17th century. At that time, he battled the Iroquois on eastern Lake Superior, and made a commemorative pictograph panel during a ritual after the event" (Conway and Conway 61). Myeengun's rock paintings thus comprise a kind of history painting which commemorates a great victory in war accomplished through a shaman's ability to enlist the aid of the powerful underwater beings at the place where they reside.

The paintings Shingwauk made at Agawa illustrate a third cultural-ritual context which could stimulate the making of a rock painting. The panel consists of a horse and rider and a small insect above a row of four circles and two broad arcs. These motifs record not an historical event, but the great powers possessed by Shingwauk himself. Fred Pine told Conway that the horse and rider are dream images from a vision quest, and the archaeologist has been able to relate the row of circles and the cross to Shingwauk's high rank and powers within the Midewiwin society. The insect, a louse, represents Shingwauk's magical shape-changing abilities. As Fred Pine recounted, "He could transform himself into any animal. One way he travelled and hid from his enemies was by becoming a louse. When he changed into a louse, nobody could recognize him" (qtd. in Conway and Conway 32).

Few rock painting panels can be dated so accurately or attributed to particular artists. This is not surprising, for in their own time they were not intended to be read in such specific and literal ways by casual viewers. The details of encounters with other-than-human beings were kept private in order to retain their power; rock art images are thus profoundly narrative while at the same time withholding the details of the stories to which they refer. They proclaim the painter's access to power while retaining the mystery of that power, and they affirm a degree of human control and achievement in a universe controlled by beings whose powers are far greater. Fred Pine summarized the interactive nature of rock painting, which links humans to places and places to powers, when he told Thor Conway: "When I see one of these marks, I know what it is right away. But there's more meaning to it. It's like shorthand. You have to dream about it. It's an effort on your soul by the spirits" (Conway and Conway 43). In the past, members of Anishinaabe communities would have understood many of the general references of this shorthand. Many no longer do, and such understandings are even rarer in settler society. The restoration of the field of common reference is a classic Panofskian project, and a contribution that art historians can make which will be valued if undertaken with respect for areas of Indigenous knowledge today regarded as private, proprietary or sacred.

Mississauga Topographies and Transformations

The different styles in which rock art thunderbirds, eagle *dodemaag*, and contemporary First Nations graphic symbols have been drawn are the visual indicators of centuries of rupture and cultural trauma—and also of the extraordinary efforts of will which have kept the fundamental concepts alive. I have long found haunting a passage in Donald Smith's biography of Peter Jones, one of the most prominent Mississauga men of that period, because it suggests

how people experienced dislocation from the lands which conferred on them their fundamental identities. Jones was born in 1802 to the daughter of Wabenose, one of the Mississauga chiefs who would sign the Toronto purchase, and Augustus Jones, a Welsh surveyor engaged in the colonial project of translating land into property. Peter Jones's Anishinaabe name, Kakewaquonaby, or Sacred Feathers, directly referenced the Mississauga eagle *dodem*, and he was given both a traditional Anishinaabe upbringing and an English education. He reached adolescence at a time when young Anishinaabe men first sought the protection of a *manitou,* during the War of 1812. The Mississauga lands at Burlington Bay were at the heart of the conflict, and the Burlington Heights—the cliff-rimmed isthmus which lies between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie—became the site of a military encampment and a major battle. The Mississauga believed that the caves and hollows of Burlington Heights were, as Jones later wrote, "the homes of many manitous" (qtd. in Rajnovich 74). They would have been favoured places for the pursuit of the vision quest and the making of rock paintings. "During these troubled times," Smith writes, "Sacred Feathers went on his first vision quests":

> The arrival of white settlers, then this incredible war, had rendered the Mississaugas' universe unrecognizable. Although the spirit world was real to him, Sacred Feathers never experienced a vision. The Indians believed that after the arrival of the white settlers many of the spirits had left. The water creature living on the Credit river had taken his leave in a tremendous flood, retreating into Lake Ontario when the white people began taking salmon from the river. Similarly, the supernatural beings in the caves at the Head of the Lake, who made noises like the volley of gunfire, had left for the interior when the alien presence approached. (35)

Throughout southern Ontario, and, in due course, other areas, similar failures of belief and practice occurred when the relationships to space and place to which they were integral failed. Within a few years, Kakewaquonaby converted to Methodism and devoted his life both to converting his fellow Mississaugas to Christianity and to securing their remaining land rights. Yet despite the new faith he and others adopted, and its prohibition of traditional rituals and spirituality, the images of these powerful beings survived in oral traditions and a new range of innovative art forms.

Bonnie Devine's "Battle for the Woodlands"

Contemporary Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine has evoked these images in a series of recent projects. Dodem and manitou return, for example, greatly enlarged, in "The Battle for the Woodlands," an installation curator Andrew Hunter commissioned Devine to create in 2014 for the Art Gallery of Ontario's Canadian Wing. Devine chose an alcove which had been designed for a previous exhibition of nineteenth-century art entitled "Constructing Canada" and retained its mural sized enlargement of a nineteenth-century map of Ontario taken from *Bartlett's Canadian Scenery,* one of the most popular publications of the era. In overpainting the five Great Lakes with the figures of Bison, Otter, Turtle, Mishipishu and the great trickster Nanabush, she reclaims the land from its European cartographic rendering as an Anishinaabe place. Yet these images do not seem firmly fixed in the space of the map; rather, they appear to fall, hang, and slide off it, and to be constrained by the beaded bands which run across its surface, representing the treaty belts that have divided First Nations from settler territories. On the wall to the 'east' of the map, Devine painted ships bringing soldiers and settlers. In the first phase of the installation, Devine paired her wall paintings with a sculptural floor piece entitled "Treaty Robe for

Tecumseh." Wrapped in the Union Jack of which the robe is made, the great Shawnee leader who rallied the First Nations to hold the line against further white encroachment during the War of 1812 would drag behind him the heavy train of treaty belts that had already been exchanged.

In 2015, Devine completed the second iteration of her installation. She painted in a new group of spirit animals who represent the Anishinaabe who moved west under pressure from eastern settlers, and she replaced "Treaty Robe for Tecumseh" with two further additions. The new floor piece, entitled "Anishinaabitude," consists of three figures woven with traditional basketry techniques out of commercial fibres and twigs collected from her own Serpent River First Nation, the Walpole Island First Nation (said to be the burial place of Tecumseh), and the Don River, which flows through traditional Mississauga lands in the heart of Toronto. These figures introduce a living presence to the gallery while also suggesting a quality of timelessness. The second addition, "Objects to Clothe the Warriors" are garments made in honour of three great Indigenous leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—Tecumseh, the Odawa chief Pontiac, and the Oglala/Lakota warrior Crazy Horse. As Devine has explained, "They have been positioned to be easily at hand should these warriors return to continue their resistance, their spirits newly clothed to join the ongoing battle for the Woodlands."[4]

Devine's development of "The Battle for the Woodlands," traces a movement from histories which highlight the active resistance to land loss of past generations to a future which she makes present only as a potentiality. The battle for the Woodlands is not in the past, she tells us, but "ongoing;" the great leaders may yet return. Her point of departure, which has unified the work throughout its incremental development and continues to be fundamental to its meaning, is

[4] The final text as installed read: "They are hung to be easily accessible should these warriors return to join in the ongoing battle for the Woodlands" (Devine).

the juxtaposition, glued to and painted on the wall, of Indigenous and Western concepts of land. Her wall paintings, she says, are a "symbolic gesture of acknowledgement . . . I wanted to talk about the land . . . as a being with whom we are in a reciprocal relationship . . . and also . . . to allude to the pictorial tradition, the pictographs on the cliff." She also articulates the essential difference that keeps separate the underlying and overpainted images: We've made marks not on canvas but on the rocks themselves, as marks of presences not of ownership" (Devine, interview). In insisting that there is an alternative to 'ownership' and the uncontrolled and destructive exploitation of land, Devine's work—like Peter Jones's coat—instantiates the quality Anishinaabe literary scholar Gerald Vizenor has called 'survivance,' a quality of resistance and active presence which Indigenous peoples have maintained for four centuries against the heaviest of odds (15).

Settler-Colonial Art History

When art historians come together today in settler societies we inevitably engage with the new iteration of our discipline which is beginning to respond to Indigenous 'survivance.' New Zealand art historian Damian Skinner has termed this approach "settler-colonial art history," and defined it in ethical and epistemological terms "as an explanation and primary dynamic shaping art, but also as a possible method for breaking down the unholy alliance of art history and the nation state" (132). Settler-colonial art history, he argues, is a subset of postcolonial studies which is distinctive in a number of important ways. Unlike external colonies which expelled their former colonizers and are now self-governing—such as India, Indonesia or Senegal—settler societies must confront the failure of centuries-old policies designed to absorb, assimilate or destroy their internally colonized Indigenous minorities. In Canada, New Zealand, and

elsewhere, there is a growing consciousness that the places settlers call home were taken from their original inhabitants by theft, deception, and violence. As they exited the "Picturing the Americas" exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for example, visitors encountered an enlarged reproduction of the Toronto purchase of 1805 and video interviews in which Indigenous historians and artists discuss identity, land, and relationships to place.

Theorists of indigeneity have demonstrated the dialectical relationship between the constructs of indigene and settler—one, obviously, cannot exist without the other. But both Indigenous and settler identities are also the products of deep processes of cultural exchange and intermixture comprised of appropriations, adoptions, resistances, and mimicries—all informed by radical imbalances of power. In the course of their different but intertwined anti-colonial struggles, settler artists have often sought to indigenize themselves through appropriations of Aboriginal art forms, while Indigenous artists have accepted the universalist promises of artistic modernism and deployed Western art practices as powerful weapons of decolonization and reclamation. "Making settler colonialism visible," writes Skinner, "necessitates an awareness of the conflicting tendencies that fracture the settler collective: the desire for indigenization and national autonomy sits uneasily with the desire to replicate a European, civilized lifestyle" (140).

The reverse action of 'to colonize' is 'to decolonize,' a term often heard these days in Indigenous North American political and art worlds. Bonnie Devine's artist's statements express the tension entailed in decolonization which arises from the need to use Western disciplines, epistemologies and techniques of historical and art-historical research in order to recover Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, and traditions of visualization. "As a First Nations woman," she has written, "I am interested in the oppositions inherent in the terms history and memory, science and mythology, art and artifact, and these oppositions and their cultural

antecedents form the basis of much of my work" (Devine, *Writing Home*).[5] She also makes clear that erasing the erasures of the colonial past is at the heart of her decolonizing project: "My work attempts to trace the absence of the Anishnaabek in these territories using the colonial mapping and claiming techniques that have strategically served to erase their history and the Indigenous methods of mark-making and mapping that reassert it" (Devine, "Artist Statement"). Her strategies use the familiar in order to defamiliarise—re-forming the written pages of her thesis research into a canoe in her 2004 exhibition "Stories from the Shield," re-rendering written letters as lines of stitches in her 2008 show "Writing Home: The Art of Bonnie Devine." Such acts are both cancellations and retrievals, they explore processes of visualization which turn words into images and images into words.

The eminent Anishinaabe writer Louise Erdrich has also meditated on the bicultural conundrum in a small and lovely memoir entitled *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country: Travelling in the Lands of my Ancestors*. She recounts a summer canoe trip among the 14,000 islands of the Lake of the Woods. "Some of them are painted islands," she writes, "the rocks bearing signs ranging from a few hundred to more than a thousand years old. So these islands, which I'm longing to read, are books in themselves" (3). Erdrich sees offerings left on rock ledges beneath the paintings, and thinks about the beliefs in spirit presences that inspired them in relation to her own Western cultural and academic formation. She writes:

> There was a time when I wondered-- do I really believe all of this? I'm half-German. Rational! Does this make any sense? After a while such questions stopped mattering. Believing or not believing, it was all the same. I found myself

[5] *Writing Home* was curated by Faye Heavyshield and shown at Gallery Connexion in Fredericton, New Brunswick from February 2 to March 21, 2008, and at Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art in Winnipeg, Manitoba from February 12 to March 27, 2010.

> compelled to behave toward the world as if it contained sentient spiritual beings. The question whether or not they *actually* existed became irrelevant. After I'd stopped thinking about it for a while, the ritual of offering tobacco became comforting and then necessary. Whenever I offered tobacco I was for that moment fully here, fully thinking, willing to address the mystery. (16)

Erdrich's response to the dilemma of the rock and the hard place—the challenge of reconciling Western and Indigenous epistemologies—is, then, a kind of suspension of disbelief achieved by opening herself to the possibility of a radically other worldview. She seeks knowledge of Anishinaabemowin in order to gain access to this world view:

> The word for stone, *asin*, is animate. After all, the preexistence of the world according to Ojibwe religion consisted of a conversation between stones. People speak to and thank the stones in the seat lodge, where the *asiniig* are superheated and used for healing. They are addressed as grandmothers and grandfathers. Once I began to think of stones as animate, I started to wonder whether I was picking up a stone or it was putting itself into my hand. Stones are no longer the same as they were to me in English. (86)

She wills a dual Western and Indigenous consciousness and claims it by virtue of her Anishinaabe heritage.

The settler's claims, however, are differently grounded, for the silences of colonial history mystify the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the settler's tenure. Is a similar dual consciousness possible or desirable for the settler? The kinds of myths perpetrated by art historical narratives may seem relatively benign in comparison with those of the history books, but their acts of silencing, as I have argued, have been no less violent. A fundamental task is to

become conscious of the ways in which art historical discourses have supported colonial dispossession and violence in critically important ways—how, through colonialism, Western visualizations of space and place have replaced those of Indigenous people through acts of silencing, decontextualization, and marginalization. As Skinner writes,

> It was not enough to assert legal processes that transferred ownership from Indigenous peoples to settler populations, or to create and manage social processes of dispossession. The land itself also had to be re-imagined and remade, and in this process the ideologies of race and the organization of space became intertwined, based on the remarkable commonality that both are conceived of as natural, given, and elemental. (136)

We have come to understand how the Western genre of landscape served as a primary site for this reimagining and remaking of land by rendering it objectifiable, and therefore divisible, commodifiable and possessable. Deconstruction, however, cannot be an end in itself. It is, rather, a stage in the development of a new construct that better fits current needs. I pointed to the problematic nature of the characterization of rock painting as 'art' at the beginning of this paper, and similar problems have emerged in relation to Western constructs of 'history' and 'land,' as well as to standard Western genres of the portrait, the still life, and the history painting. If we cannot expect Indigenous thought-worlds to be conformable to and containable within Western understandings of these genres and terms—if we cannot produce inclusivity merely by extending

the mantle of western genres over things that seem to resemble them from other parts of the world—what kind of common conceptual vocabulary can serve the needs of a world art history?[6]

The further challenge that confronts us involves not merely the reconstruction of art histories that have been unwritten or marginalized, but, rather, the taking on of their epistemological and ontological differences, their radically different understandings of space, place, and the ways human beings are positioned in relation to them. This task cannot be accomplished by well-intentioned settler art historians on their own. If the Indigenous and the settler-colonial summon each other dialectically, then a settler-colonial art history requires the complement of an Indigenous art history. A rising generation of Indigenous art historians trained in Western conventions but committed to survivance and the reclamation of Indigenous world views has begun to enter the academy. And although their work is necessarily complicated by the dual traditions to which they are heir, a distinct Indigenous art historical discourse is nascent. Fluid and difficult to characterize at present, it will take shape as part of a larger political and cultural project of decolonization. Settlers and Indigenous peoples are not only divided but also united—profoundly, indivisibly, fatally, hopefully—by their shared sense of space and place. In Canada, the renewed threat of global environmental disaster is proving to be a meeting ground, engendering the new kinds of alliances that are embodied in the *Idle No More* movement. As these alliances grow, they have often focused on places in the land long identified by Indigenous people a places of power and spiritual presence.

[6] I discuss the imposition of Western landscape and portrait genres in "Indigenous Lands/Settler Landscapes" and "From Harmony to Antiphony."

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