

Post Cards:

Performing Turtle Island

by Anne Smith

1 October 2015

[PSi#21 Fluid States – Canada: Performing Turtle Island](#)

The Performing Turtle Island Conference was held September 17, 18, 19, 2015, conjointly at the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada, on adjoining campuses in Regina, Canada, located on Treaty Four land, of the Starblanket First Nation. The name, “Turtle Island”, referring to North America, comes from the Iroquois Creation Story; Sky Woman falls to the ocean and the animals work together to make a place for her on the back of Turtle. This story is shared by many Aboriginal peoples from the east coast woodlands of North America. It is now a commonly used term by Aboriginal peoples across North America.

The conference has brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists and researchers who are exploring how indigeneity has been performed over the past four or so decades, how indigenous artists are expressing themselves now, at the beginning of the 21st Century, and how indigeneity will be performed in the coming decades.

Where does Indigenous identity and community fit in to the construction of the country's identity? Indeed, what do we mean by Indigenous identity, and, given the proliferation of newcomers, what do we mean by Canadian identity? In the face of growing international mobility and a radically changing Canadian demographic, it is important to take another look at how identity is constructed on Turtle Island within the ideational borders that designate Canada.

While we are concerned with traditional performance, we aim our focus more on contemporary forms that express Indigenous identities across diverse cultural and social contexts. In this way, we hope to engage Indigenous theatre and performing arts through a multidisciplinary



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perspective that helps promote Indigenous cultures as valuable sources of knowledge and identity inclusiveness. Performing Turtle Island Website

The art forms brought to the conference focus on theatre and written arts, visual and performance art, music, dance, film and video. Indigenous performance is very often interdisciplinary and mixes traditional forms with contemporary forms. Video footage of the many live presentations and links to the films and videos will be made available to the Fluid States website.

Earlier this year, two theatre artists who have had a great influence in the Aboriginal community in Saskatchewan and Alberta, were tragically killed in a car accident. The conference was dedicated to Michelle Sereda and Lacy Morin-Desjarlais. Throughout the conference, many references to these women were made by local artists and the university community.

The collaborative nature of the conference, in its conception and realization, made for a rich tapestry of provocation from and for the artists and researchers who presented. There is an awareness of the history of indigenous art and performance in Canada and that its progress has been a long struggle both for support in the Aboriginal community from its political leadership and within the larger arts community in terms of funding, access, and visibility. The practice of all art forms may be seen as “medicine” in bringing forth the creative spirit and healing from the legacy of the residential schools. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families and incarceration in institutions – schools and TB hospitals - sometimes over four generations has had enormous impact on individuals, families and communities. There is also a tension between the colonial practice of elevating art and the Aboriginal practice of rooting art in community. The strength of Aboriginal artists comes from their connection to the land and to their peoples.

As local correspondent, I am sending postcards of the events of the conference, with photos and short video excerpts.

Annie Smith
Theatre Artist and Researcher

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Postcard: A Windigo Tale, feature film by Armand Ruffo



Video capture by Annie Smith. Actors: Elliot Simon and Gary Farmer
Fifth Parallel Gallery: Film Screening, Curated by Dianne Ouellette, September 17, 2015

A Windigo Tale is a dark story of the legacy of residential school and the secrets held within a family. A young woman unwillingly returns to her reserve from the big city to help her mother banish the windigo spirit of her father. The film is graphic and unsettling though the ending is hopeful as the community comes together to discuss how they move forward from the past. The story is interspersed with scenes between a grandfather and his grandson as they journey home; the grandfather explaining what has happened to help his grandson understand his place in his community.

The dark energy of the scene of sexual abuse was so unsettling. I was glad to get outdoors into the beautiful sunshine and walk to the PowWow at First Nations University. I was able to work off the pall of distress by dancing.

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Post Card: Land of Oil and Water, Documentary Film by Warren Cariou



Warren Cariou. Photo by Annie Smith
Fifth Parallel Gallery: Film Screening, Curated by Dianne Ouellette, September 17,
2015

Cariou's documentary film begins in his home community of Meadow Lake,
Saskatchewan, where the people of Buffalo Narrows have signed an agreement to

allow oil and gas exploration on their land. Cariou visits residents in Fort McKay, Fort Chipewyan, Meadow Lake, Buffalo Narrows, and Lac La Roche to get a picture of what this may mean for the community at Buffalo Narrows. The vision is conflicted between the chilling shots of the land devastated around Fort McMurray and the hope of the young people to have livelihoods that will give them a competitive future in the larger economy of Canada. For me, the saddest impacts of the tar sands are the eradication of a way of life that depended on harvesting from the land; the forest is empty of game and the fish are toxic. The scariest impacts are the rise in cancer and the over use and toxification of fragile water resources. The film has been screened at film festivals and is distributed through the Winnipeg Film Group: www.landofoil.com.

Postcard: Grand Entry at the 2nd Annual Tony Cote Welcome Back Pow Wow



Photo by Annie Smith

The **Welcome Back Pow Wow** is hosted by First Nations University to welcome their students and to honor Tony Cote, a Canadian Veteran who has been a pivotal supporter of the University and of the students for many years. The Grande Entry was made to the music of Charging Bear, a Regina Drum group. Pow Wow announcer, Mike Pinot, kept everyone entertained while waiting for the Grande Entry folks to line up. The line up included dignitaries from First Nations University, Canadian Veterans, the RCMP, Student Council Officers and Royalty, and participants of the Performing Turtle Island Conference.

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**Postcard: Welcome
Address by First Nations
University of Canada
Princess, Wynona Pratt**

Wynona Pratt, as a representative of the student body, gave many acknowledgements to the people who made the Pow Wow possible. She followed the protocols of acknowledgements and is an example of the leadership of the youth at First Nations University.

Photo by Annie Smith

Postcard: Beaded Rope Artifact



Kahente Horn-Miller shows students how to bead the rope in the Student Lounge at First Nations University. Video by Annie Smith.

This beaded rope was added to over the course of the gathering. Beading is a traditional Aboriginal art in Canada. The wild rose is emblematic of the Metis people and is often beaded onto moccasins, vests, jewelry, and jackets. I wish there had been a chance to do this myself as I have wanted to learn to bead, but there just wasn't time. Having a physical link between conferences as well as the virtual is an important legacy. The rope will travel from Regina to the conference in New Zealand with Dione Joseph, our foreign correspondent for Performing Turtle Island.

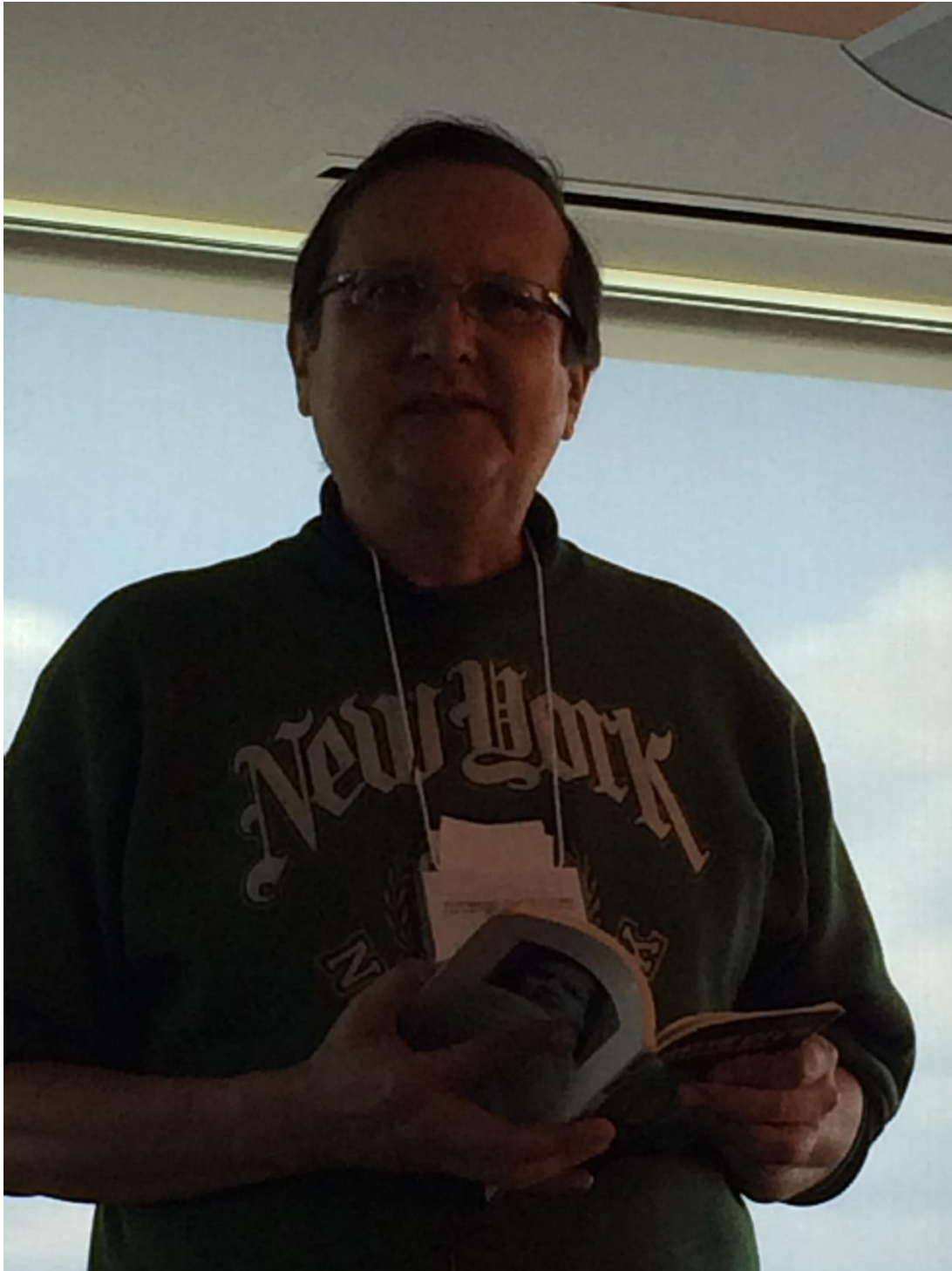
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Close up of Kahente Horn-Miller beading the rope. Photo: Annie Smith.

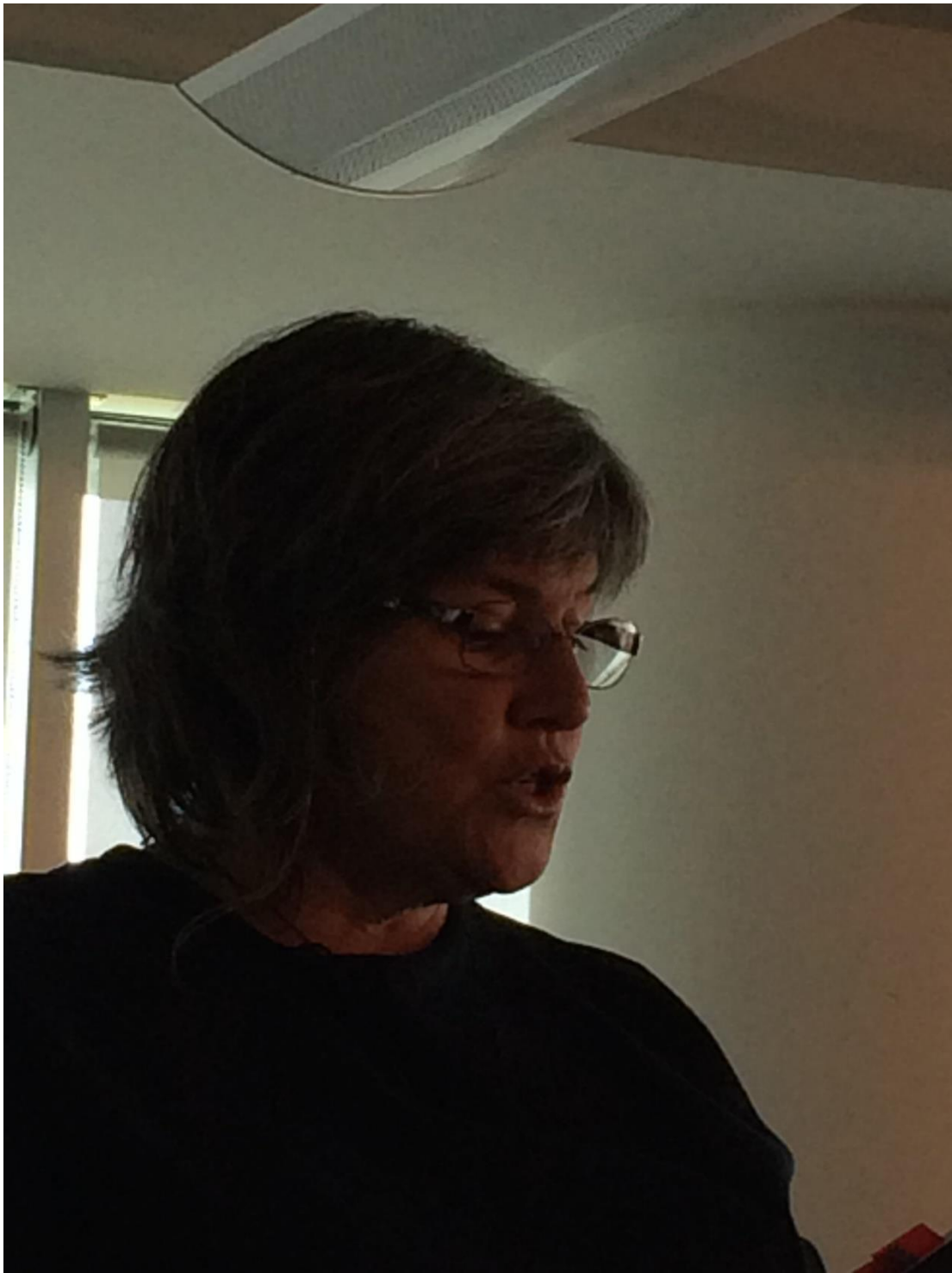
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Postcard: Playwrights Panel with Daniel David Moses and Yvette Nolan.
Moderated by Mary Blackstone, University of Regina.



Daniel David Moses. Photo: Annie Smith.

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Yvette Nolan. Photo: Annie Smith.

Daniel Moses read two excerpts, the first from his first play, **Coyote City**. Johnny, who doesn't know he is dead, begins his opening monologue with the line: "Give me a drink." He is an engaging character for all his maundering and Daniel's reading had us all laughing and groaning. Johnny is the quintessential drunk. The second reading is from the play he is working on now, "Crazy Dave". This story, set between the World Wars, is taken from a book by the late Basil Johnson. The main characters are Dave, a man with Downs Syndrome, and his Grandmother. The scene Daniel read is the story of the Star Man, discovered by two young boys at the summer gathering place. Hearing Daniel read from his work opened my understanding of how much a playwright needs to love his characters. They came to life in his mouth.

Yvette Nolan read from her book, **Medicine Shows**. Yvette has taken her title from two of Daniel's early plays. She read from the introduction and from the last chapter, "The Eight Fire", which is her extension of the prophecy of the Seven Fires, or the Seven Generations that Aboriginal people will suffer at the hands of European colonizers. The Eight Generation is now, when Indigenous and Settler peoples need to work together to bring peace to the planet. The core of the book comes from Joseph Boyden: "all acts are medicine." Nolan understands that theatre is ceremony and that her book, describing thirty years of Aboriginal Theatre in Canada, is offered as a Medicine Bundle.

In the Q & A after the presentation, Mary Blackstone raised the question of who has the right to speak and act for whom, referring to the controversy around the Toronto production of Nolan's play, **The Unplugging**, where an Aboriginal character was played by a non-Aboriginal actor. Both Daniel and Yvette expressed frustration that this question of 'cultural appropriation' is still dogging Aboriginal playwrights. A question of what has changed in thirty years lead to Daniel's assertion that the best theatre work in Canada is being done by Aboriginal playwrights, moving beyond the Bourgeois models that dominate English theatre. Nolan pointed out that there are more Aboriginal artists and companies than when she and Daniel started writing.

Post Card: Memorial Dedication – *TransActions* - Tribute to Michelle Sereda

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Photo by Annie Smith

Joey Tremblay introduced the Collective Performance Storytelling Ensemble that had been working with Michelle Sereda at the time of her death. The piece they performed told the story of a blanket of thorns, involved a movement piece (video), and ended with a haunting choral piece that surrounded the audience in the First Nations University atrium. The impact of Michelle's life and creative work lives on in the ensemble and in us who witnessed the performance.

Performers: Janine Windolph, Jesse Archibald-Barber, Errol Kinistino, Sophie Bouffard, Dominic Gregario, Ayesha Mohsi, Mohammad Saadoun, and the Vocal Choir.

Post Card: Discussion with Brett Graham and James Daschuk

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Sculpture, *Pioneer*, by Brett Graham, New Zealand artist. Photo by Annie Smith

When I wandered into the First Nations University after leaving the Pow Wow this strange vehicle confronted me. I was wondering why a covered wagon would be given a place of prominence in the teepee shaped, four story atrium. Brett Graham spoke about some of the influences that the vehicle suggests: a cross for the Roman Catholic Church, wagon wheels for the 'prairie schooners', horizontal slits for guns to shoot the Indians, a coffin shape to remember the loss of life to diseases that swept the plains. And it's white – well, because white looked interesting.

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James Daschuk and Brett Graham. Photo by Annie Smith.

James Daschuk spoke about his book, *Clearing the Plains*, and how Brett's sculpture/installation points to what he has written about, covering the history of the suffering of Aboriginal peoples, first to the European diseases that they had no immunity to and then to the Canadian Government policy of starvation at the beginning of the reservation system and the building of the CPR railroad. I just finished reading the book and the piling of evidence upon evidence is overwhelming, like the piling of the bones of the dead from a holocaust. There is poetic irony that this event/installation was in Regina – the place of the bones.

Post Card: Amy Malbeuf @ Plain Red Art Gallery – *A Woman And This Bannock That She Made For You*



Amy Malbeuf buried in sugar. Photo by Annie Smith.

I walked into the Plain Red Art Gallery well ahead of the crowd and took my place against the wall across from the doorway. A young woman appeared to be sleeping, buried in a mound of white sugar. I had heard rumours of it being 800 pounds – that is a lot of weight! The atmosphere was very quiet. As people entered the room they became silent, maybe trying to figure out the meaning of the mound of sugar in front of them.

Before the room was full – people were bringing in their refreshments with them – Malbeuf eased herself to sitting and then began her movement around the mound, scooping sugar into a large apron pocket. At first I didn't know why she was doing this, but she uncovered a rectangular block wrapped in white cloth and carried it to the table at the side of the room. She did this six times.

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Malbeuf beginning her excavation of bannock. Photo by Annie Smith.

As more and more people entered to stand around the sides of the room the silence became almost eerie, as they became mesmerized by the soft susurrations of sugar being scooped and sliding into the cloth apron, accented by the clicking of camera shutters. Even children were awed into quiet. Gradually, even the cameras stopped.

Questions floated in my mind about the symbolism of the acts of digging, scooping, finding, uncovering, carrying. Burial mounds and treasures. The symbolism of refined sugar?

As Malbeuf's apron filled with more and more sugar it was harder for her to get up to carry the bannock to the table. The weight of uncovering the treasure, artifacts, food, was palpable.

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Amy Malbeuf and a silent audience watching. Photo by Annie Smith.



The Bannock Feast. Photo by Annie Smith

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The feast of bannock, made by Malbeuf, was shared with the audience. Many of us went back for seconds. It was delicious with an extra spice of secrecy, having been buried in sugar.

Post Card: Keynote by Margo Kane



Photo by Annie Smith.

Margo Kane was introduced by Randy Lundy as a woman who has built up and influenced Aboriginal performance in Canada. Margo spoke about her journey as an artist, first in dance. At age 11 she formed her own dance company and was teaching dance at 13. Finding work as a female Aboriginal artist in the mainstream theatre has always been a struggle. In 1992 she formed Full Circle Native Performance in Vancouver. The company explores physically-based work. In 2000, she began the annual Talking Stick Cabaret to showcase Aboriginal artists in all

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performance disciplines. This festival is thriving, growing and changing as art forms change and develop. When asked about the challenge of leadership Margot challenged us as artists to model the behavior we want to see.

Post Card: Strands of Knowledge – performance by Julianne Beaudin-Herney.



Braiding the cloth. Video by Annie Smith.

The concept of the braid of three vibrant sheets of cloth, spread across the grass was intriguing. It took quite some time to set up the installation, to fasten the cloth to boulders and lay it out. Handling the bundles of cloth was challenging. Once the braid was finished, Beaudin-Henry took an ulu and cut through the braid, ripping the cloth. This was reminiscent for me, of the children in residential schools having their braids cut off to “clean them up” and make them suitable for assimilation. Hair is symbolic of strength and cutting the hair takes strength away. After the braid was cut, she pulled it into a circle, making a personal bower of protection where she could rest, reclaiming the cut hair.

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Cutting the braid with the ulu. Video by Annie Smith.



Creating the bower. Photo by Annie Smith.

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Once the bower was shaped, Beaudin-Herney scattered tobacco and laid out sage on the braid. Then she rested. Because she was pregnant the space was also symbolic for me as a birthing place and the cutting of the braid could be understood also as the cutting of the umbilical cord. I was also reminded of mother animals pulling hair or feathers from their bellies to make soft, warm nests for their young.



Resting after her labours. Photo by Annie Smith.

Audience members were invited to take a branch of sage away with them.

Post Card: *The Birds, The Bees, The Berries* by Adrian Stimson and Lori Blondeau.

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Adrian Stimson as “bird man” pours berries into a birch bark basket held by Lori Blondeau. Photo by Annie Smith.

When people came into the Atrium at First Nations University of Canada after watching the performance piece, *Strands of Knowledge*, we found it transformed into a domestic space with furs on the floor, stones, bowls of blueberries and reed frames in front of which sat Stimson and Blondeau facing each other across the expanse of mosaic tiled floor. They sat still as statues until the audience was seated. Then each performer began their own tasks and rituals. Stimson put on a wing contraption reminiscent of Daedalus that he could manipulate with straps on

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Bird Man Explores the World. Video by Annie Smith.

his chest. He proceeded to explore the space while manipulating the wings. When he began to move a soundtrack of chirping birds filled the space.

While Stimson, as bird man, was investigating the world they had created, Blondeau set up her space by emptying the birch bark basket filled with medicines and prepared to receive the berries that Stimson brought to her. Once the basket was filled with berries, Blondeau began to grind the berries between two rocks.

Blondeau grinds blueberries. Photo by Annie Smith

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As Blondeau ground the berries the sound track changed to bees droning. Stimson took a position before the audience and embodied the work of the drones by shivering his fingers, hands and arms. Once the basket of berries was ground between the two rocks Stimson went to a basket behind Blondeau that was filled with small lidded plastic cups of honey. He spread them out on a hide and then both he and Blondeau passed out the cups of honey to everyone in the audience. Once all the honey had been distributed, the sound of droning ended and the piece was finished.

The performance was curious in its detail, rituals and detachment. The focus was on the tasks performed not the performers. In accepting the honey, the audience became participants in the ritual.

Post Card: Indigenous Hip Hop Discussion

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Lindsay Knight, aka *EEKWOLL*, Chris Merk, aka *Merky Waters*, Brad Bellegard, aka *InfoRed*. Photo by Annie Smith

I was excited to hear this panel as I am a big fan of Indigenous Hip Hop. I had heard Eekwoll back in May in Saskatoon and am really inspired by her work. I was not the only person eager to hear the panel as the room was packed with people of all ages. Each performer had their own perspectives but agreed that hip hop provides a voice for every culture; there are no divisions in hip hop – which is the other side to how popular media represents rappers. Lindsay pointed out that hip hop is maturing as artists mature. Hip hop has given her a way to work out her identity. This was echoed by Chris and Brad. Chris pointed to the spiritual elements in his work and Lindsay spoke about how her work is grounded in the land she comes from. Brad spoke about how rapping has given him an avenue to deal with stereotypes, to reach across cultures as he has done work in Chile, Palestine and Brasil; people can rap in their own languages. Brad and Chris also spoke about the beat; the drum is the connection for them to their aboriginal cultures.

Charity Marsh, the moderator, fielded questions from the audience. A response from Lindsay really struck home for me: being a woman in hip hop is a dilemma – not to be a stereotype, not to be sexualized in a male dominated art form. She has set her boundaries firmly to resist the temptations of the industry and speak her truth.



Chris Merk, aka *Merky Waters*, Brad Bellegard, aka *InfoRed*. Photo by Annie Smith

Post Card: *A Musta Be: Maskihkiy Maskwa Iskwew*, a play by Jane Heather and Old Earth Productions

Old Earth Productions, an Aboriginal theatre collective, was formed in 2005. In 2007, the collective, with Jane Heather, began to develop the play, ***A Musta Be***, which focuses on institutionalized women and the intergenerational impacts on daughters. The play was completed in 2009. The first production was at the Timms Centre for the Arts in Edmonton, directed by Jane Heather. The play has toured Alberta in 2014 and 2015.

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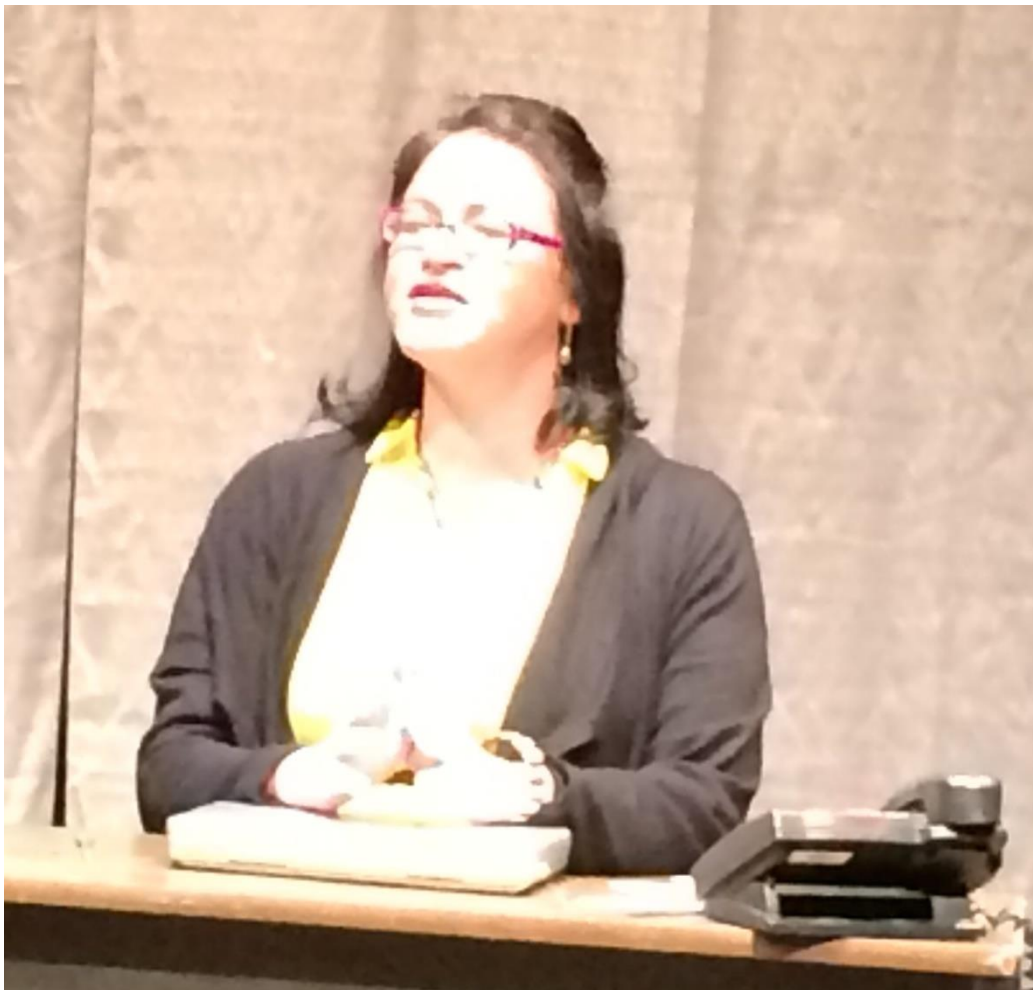


Darlene Auger as Auntie Soos and Gloria Okeynan as Mary. Photo by Annie Smith

The play is about three Aboriginal women, one who has been released from prison, (played by Gloria Okeynan), who is estranged from her daughter, (played by Melanie Rose), and a young woman on the streets (played by Teneil Whiskeyjack). There is a fourth actor, (Darlene Auger), who plays multiple roles and helps to propel the action of the play forward. From the beginning of the play I was trying to figure out the relationships of the characters. This is slowly revealed through the play as the women reach out to each other tentatively. The play does not have any 'magic'

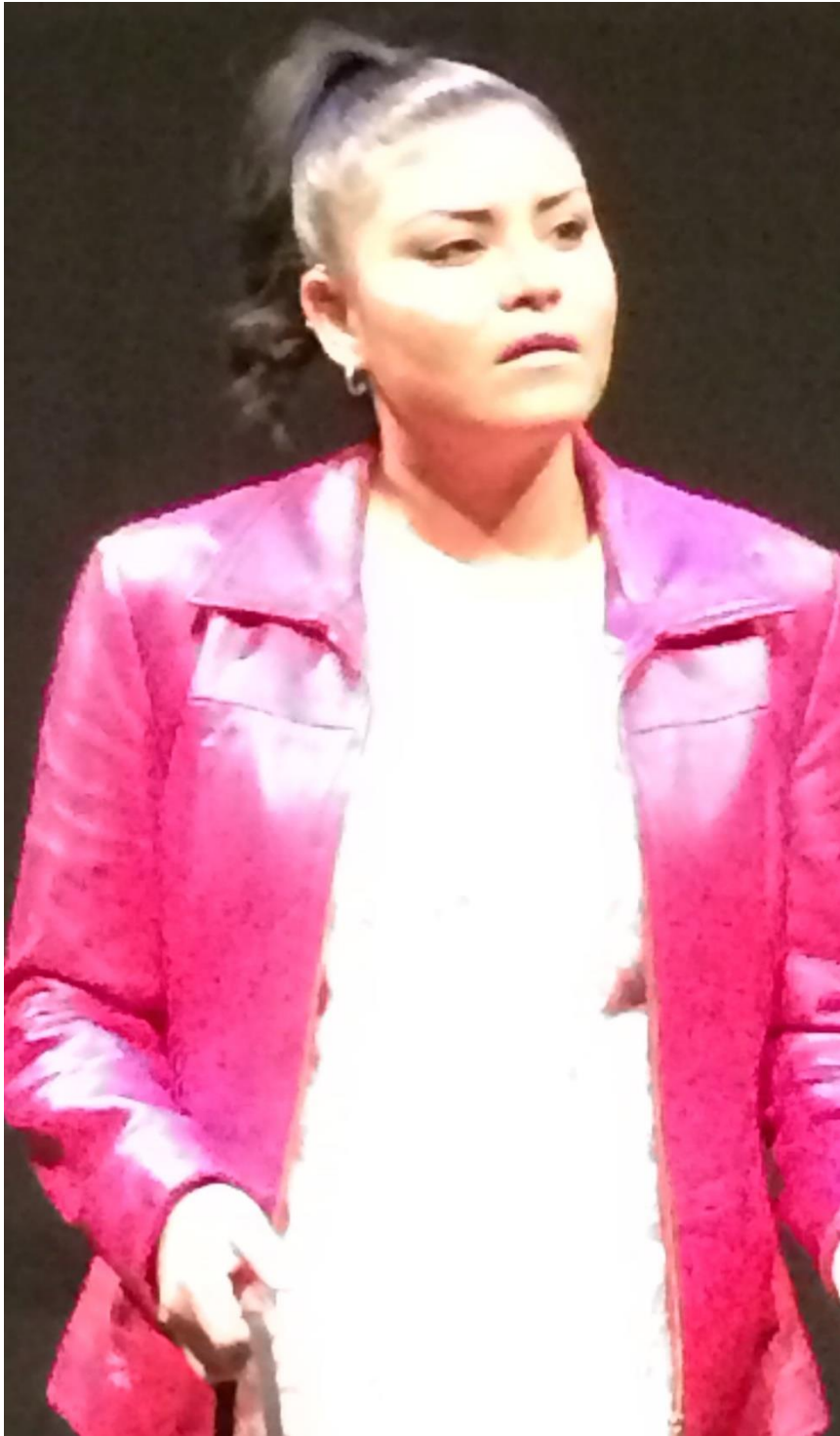
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solutions to the isolation each woman experiences but there is a sense of possibility if they are able to build on the tentative overtures they have made. While the stories of the characters are particular, I often saw myself or my family members or friends in them. The fact that the two young women have the same last name is not only a joke but a reminder that we are all related.



Melanie Rose as Alice. Photo by Annie Smith

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Teneil Whiskeyjack as Nicole. Photo by Annie Smith

Post 6, October 22, 2015

Post Card: Attawapiskat Is No Exception



Kelitta Bear, Emilie Monnet, and Nicole Akan. Photo by _____

This staged reading of Floyd Favel's new play was entertaining despite its serious theme. Part of the fun of it was watching the actors constantly changing roles and positions. A workshop production of the play was directed by Ursula Neuerberg-Denzer at Concordia University. At this reading, many gathering delegates were pressed into service as readers.

The play has two locales - the reserve and the city. On the reserve there are three families in their respective homes and the Chief's office. The residents of the reserve are forced to leave their homes because the water is contaminated. They relocate to hotel rooms in the city, with no settlement in sight. In the city we have three hotel rooms, the DIA office, and the streets. The human stories that unfold in the play include rivalry between the Chief and one of his counselors who is seduced by the DIA officer's

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offer of prestige and kick backs, a husband cheating on his wife, youth who are having access to the city's opportunities for the first time, and an elderly street couple who have gone through the dislocation process decades before. The tensions of a dislocated community are seen through the struggles of its families and individuals.



Philip Adams, Brad Bellegarde, (Carol Greyeyes), Nicole Akan, Yvette Nolan, Candy Fox, Ursula Neuerburg-Denzer, Michael Santiago, Simon Moccasin, and Curtis Peeteetuce (Mandy Goforth and Kelitta Bear) Photo by _____.

Post Card: Keynote Address by Michael Greyeyes – Performing Indigeneity: Training Paradigms from Saints and Strangers.

Not only is Michael Greyeyes the MFA Program Director at York University, he is an accomplished screen actor and carries some of that movie star glamour in his stance and manner. His presentation, however, and his presence at PTI, was warm and encouraging. I felt quite in awe of his accomplishments and his total dedication to his craft as an actor and as a mentor.

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Greyeyes spoke of his experience playing the character “Canonicus”, a power hungry and fearful sachem of the Narragansett people: “he is tall and muscular”. This character description propelled him into a rigorous program of physical training for the part. Greyeyes’ physical training draws on Anne Bogart, Tadashi Suzuki, and Viewpoints Movement Practice.



Michael Greyeyes. Photo by Annie Smith

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Greyeyes stressed the amount of research that has gone into the production of *Saints and Strangers*, from the passenger manifest of the Mayflower to learning of the 17th Century Abenaki language, of which there are only 12 speakers left. There is a tension in portraying the “noble savage” of the period and the opportunity as an Aboriginal actor to play an Aboriginal character. Greyeyes drew our attention to the importance and power of language, citing *Dances With Wolves* as the first Hollywood film to use the Lakota language and not the typical grunts and “sign language” of earlier films where Aboriginal characters were played by white actors in grease paint. He led us through a language exercise with one of the Abenaki words that was crucial to understanding the heart and culture of the community: :“jiligiliji” (jeeleegeeleegee), the act of taking care of the wounded after you have wounded them.



Image captured from Greyeyes' powerpoint.

Greyeyes closed his speech with a reflection on the loss of Aboriginal languages in Turtle Island as a manifestation of ethnic cleansing. He challenged us to find the Indigenous knowledge where we live, to keep it alive.

Post 7, October 23, 2015

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Post Card: Performance Storytelling and Community Engagement Panel

Chaired by Carol Greyeyes. Respondents, Bruce Sinclair and Shauneen Pete.



L to R: Panellists Emilie Monnet, Marjorie Beaucage, Dione Joseph, Moderator Carol Greyeyes, Panellist Kahente Horn-Miller. Photo by Annie Smith.

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Kahente Horn-Miller telling the Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman. She is wearing the traditional symbols of the sky dome and the tree of peace. Photo by Annie Smith.

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Dione Joseph – a song greeting from Aotearoa (New Zealand). Photo by Annie Smith.



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The four panelists presented excerpts and issues from their work as Indigenous women artists. Common to all four were the connection between community and women's role as story tellers. Kahente chose to tell Sky Woman's story in her voice, incorporating the lived experiences of women in her community of Kahnawake. As she told her story, her feet never left the ground as she incorporated the shuffle dance into her telling. This action provided a tension in connecting sky and earth through Sky Woman's journey. A line from her that telling that I wrote down is, "wings of loons and herons broke her fall and held her up".

Marjorie spoke of her work in an Inuit community where people had forgotten their creation story. She plugged in a camera for the community TV so that community members could come to the Band Office and tell the pieces of the story they knew. In this way they pieced together their story. Women artists help women remember who we are. This is making medicine for the people. The Indigenous university is the land. Institutions take over partnerships – ie, the Banff Centre Indigenous Film Program.

Dione spoke of her own traditions coming from the grandmothers, from the marae (meeting house) and how as a visitor and travelling scholar, she goes to the traditional peoples of the land where she is a guest to learn. Her observation of being in Canada is the different "piercings" of colonization that are particular to here because this land is different from other lands.

Emilie, an Ondinnock artist from Montreal, spoke of artistic collaboration as a way to build community. There are four Aboriginal companies in Montreal but there is no collaboration between their companies and the mainstream theatre. There is also the challenge of bridging between Anglophone and Francophone Indigenous companies. There is no funding available for Indigenous people who are not from a recognized Quebec nation. She gave us a heads up about a new Indigenous interdisciplinary collaborative project premiering at the Phenomena Festival in the Spring of 2016. She also showed video footage of a Rwandan women's drum group, Atikametu, meaning Songs of Mourning; Songs of Healing – a way of healing from the genocide.

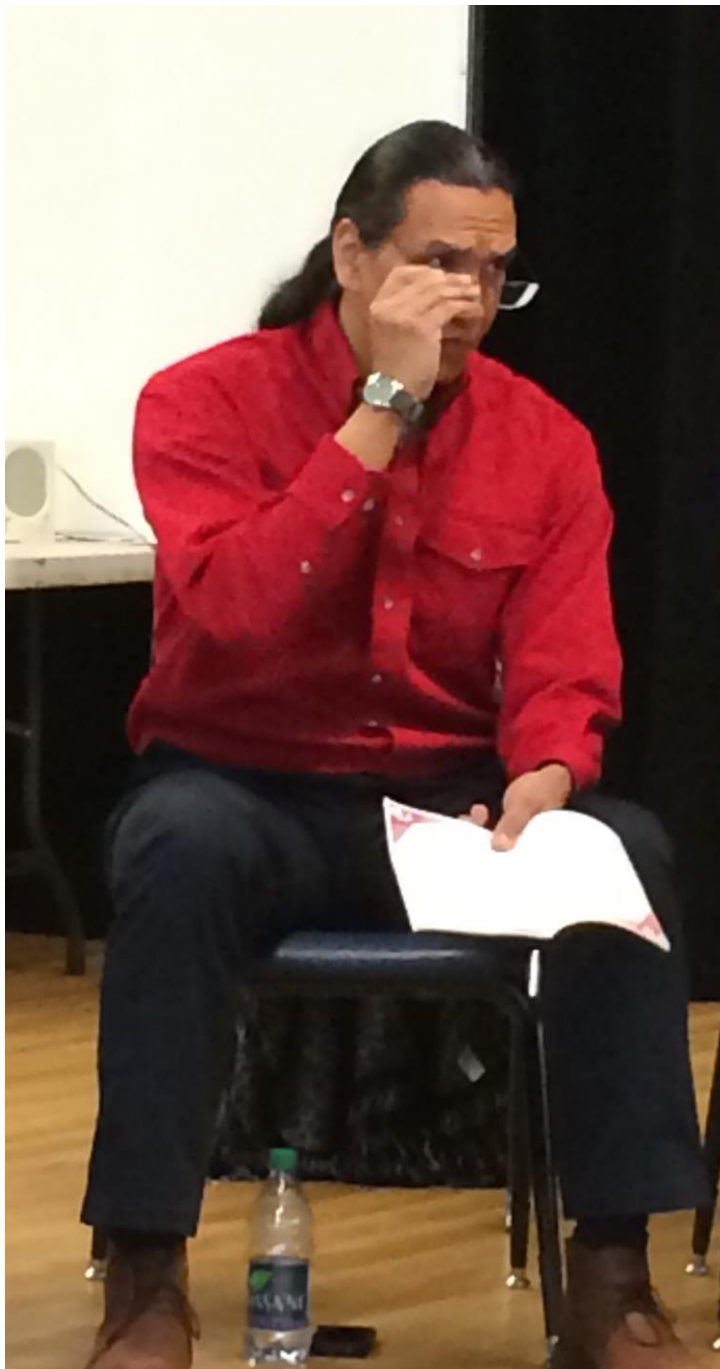
Points that came up through the respondents' questions:

- "purpose" is the most important word in framing the why of the work we do as artists - Carol
- oral story telling is a tool for decolonizing the academy – Kahente
- dreaming a turtle space ship; the prophecy that the turtle will fly away at the end of the world – Emilie
- the wound of residential schools is the war between women and men – Marjorie
- history is covered by the maps of the colonizer - Bruce

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Post 8, October 23, 2015

Post Card: Indigenous Film Production Panel



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Michael Greyeyes, Moderator. Photo by Annie Smith



Armand Ruffo. Photo by Annie Smith.

Armand Ruffo began this panel with an humorous retelling of his process of making *A Windigo Tale*, which we saw screened on Thursday morning (see *Post Card: A Windigo Tale*). In fact, for many of the film-makers, their accounts were a litany of 'one disaster after another'. It is a testament to their naivety, persistence, faith, and the creative energy of the universe that their films were completed. The genesis of the *Windigo Tale* film project was when Ruffo's play was selected by the National Healing Foundation in 2001 for a film adaptation. Ruffo's first task was to rewrite the script as a screen play. The CBC was able to film 3 scenes with the budget provided and then everything

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stopped. Ruffo's solution was to rewrite the script to work with the scenes already shot. With this beneficial constraint, the film has won multiple awards but there is no distribution for Indigenous films. There is a manifest need for Aboriginal film producers.



Warren Cariou. Photo by Annie Smith.

Next up was Warren Cariou's account of the making of *The Land of Oil and Water*, also screened on Thursday morning (see *Post Card: The Land of Oil and Water*). Cariou is from Meadow Lake, SK, and he wanted to find a way to show the magnitude of what would happen if tar sands production took over his community. He put forward his desire to make a film about the issue and a friend said, "let's do it". So with a budget of \$10,000 and no script, they just went ahead. Visiting was the primary methodology.

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They discovered that it was good that they didn't have a plan because communities self-organized and serendipity came into play. The occasion of filming can bring out stories in a different way. Thankfully, the ImagiNative Film Festival got the film out into the communities.



Trudy Stewart. Photo by Annie Smith

Trudy, a student in the URegina Film Program, spoke about her project, "Rise from RIIS", about the Regina Indian Industrial School. The research for this project was daunting because so much of the history was lost. The school was closed in 1910 and as there



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were no living survivors, all she could find were faint echoes dispersed through descendents – both Aboriginal and settler, as well as some archival records. Trudy found that the camera was intrusive and allowed people to share what they knew without questions.

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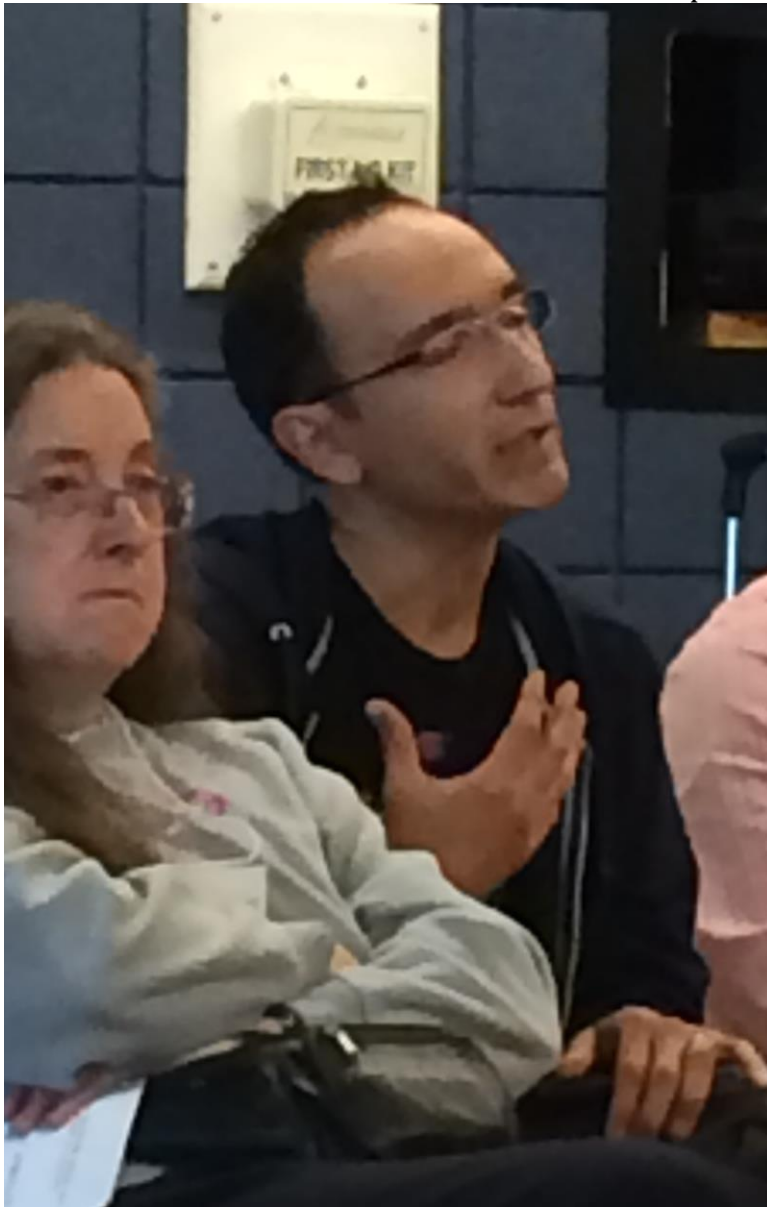


Janine Windolf. Photo by Annie Smith

Jeanine spoke about her MA thesis project which became an NFB film on losing a child. For her, this two year project was about using film for healing as family stories were opened up. Each person had a different story and opening the memories brought the family together. Film is a medium that allows many ways to tell stories; each person

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needs to find their own way. It is also important to view the work in the community it is from. *Berries and Bannock* was screened after the panel.



(Moira Day) and Peter Brass. Photo by Annie Smith.

Peter Brass produced *Dad*, also screened on Thursday morning. This independent film focuses on parenting from the perspective of a second generation residential school survivor. There is affection, the sharing of household tasks, a positive depiction of Indigenous masculinity as a counter narrative to the warrior gang machismo. The film techniques are artful, the images seen through the filter of memory. Brass's approach to film is as a lover of movies. He did not grow up on reserve and doesn't want to get stuck

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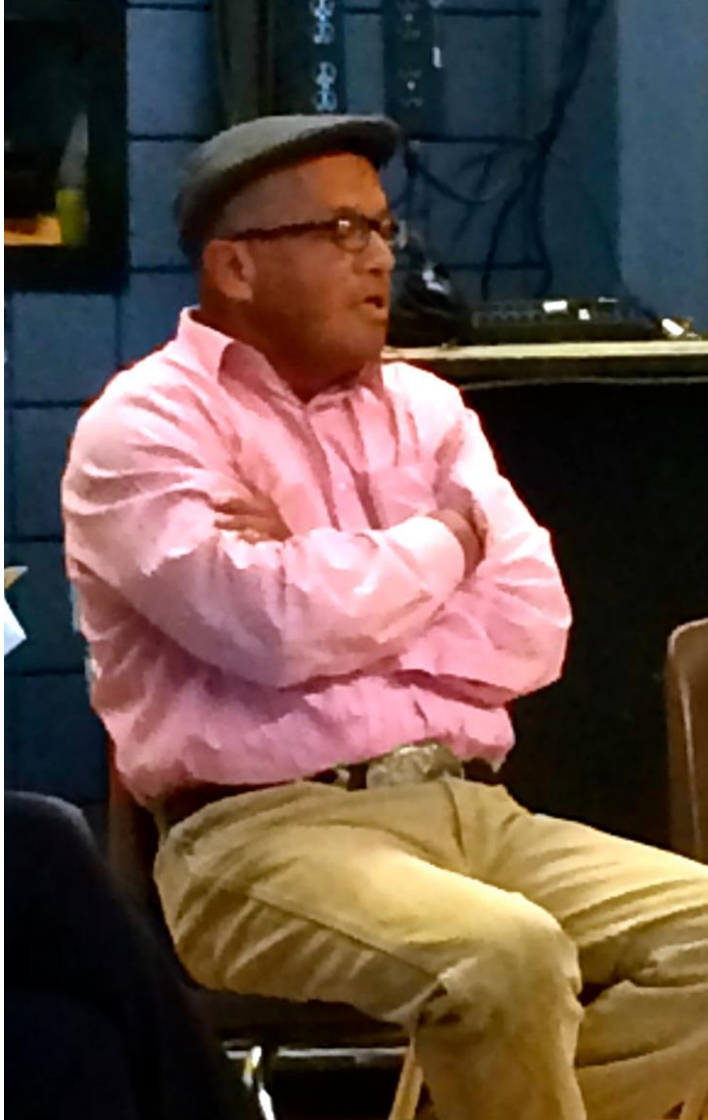
in film festival circuits. His stories are based on cultural stories but there is more to show than the 'victimized Indian'.



Candy Fox. Photo by Annie Smith

Candy is also a student in the URegina Film Program. Her entry into film was as an actor. Her first film, *Being Two-Spirited*, won an award and that kept her going. Her next film, *Backroads*, was more difficult subject matter – bringing sexual abuse out from behind closed doors. She spoke of the irony of recognition. ImagiNative accepted her film only after it was chosen as one of the top ten films at TIFF. Candy is exploring different ways of doing documentary using dreams and images as methods of creating narrative.

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Floyd Favel. Photo by Annie Smith

Floyd's experience with film-making echoed Armand Ruffo's in terms of running out of funds. He chose to use video when making *Antigone*, based on the play by Deanne Kasokeo.

This video was screened on Thursday afternoon. I was intrigued to see how the video turned out as I was teaching the play at the same time they were filming. There was controversy about the subject matter (based on Sophocles' *Antigone*) and the chief and council at the Poundmaker Reserve pulled the funding for the project and banned it from the reserve – ironically the main issue of the play is banishment. Favel and the company set up in a hall off reserve, a friend gave \$15,000, and everyone in the project got \$3000.00. The film script changed considerably from the stage script and became more focused on Creon (played by Favel) than on Antigone.

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Louise Big Eagle. Photo by Annie Smith

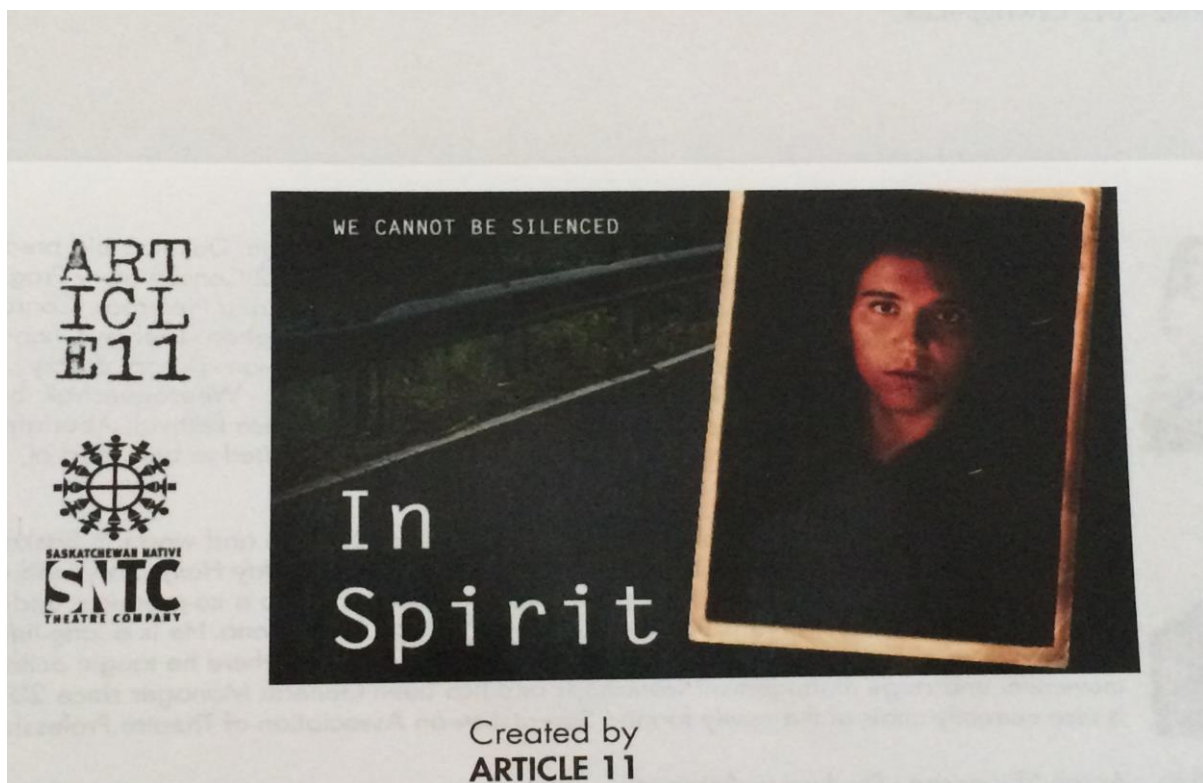
Louise is also a film studies student at URegina. She worked with Trudy and Janine on their film projects. Her own project was to find out the story behind Thomas Moore Keesick, the boy in the iconic 'before and after' residential school photographs. Again, her biggest challenge was research. *I Am a Boy: Thomas Moore Keesick*, was screened after the panel.

Final comments: Michelle Sereda was the students' mentor for the films screened after the panel, including *I remember*, by Brad Bellegarde. Both Janine and Louise paid tribute to Michelle in their presentations. All the film students expressed their frustration with archival research into the residential schools. "Indians" were not

identified in photos or in burial records. The absence of information is a story that needs to be told.

Post 9, November 4, 2015

Post Card: *In Spirit*, written and directed by Tara Beagan. Sponsored by Curtain Razors. Co-produced by Article 11 and Saskatchewan Native Theatre.



When I look back at my notes to write this postcard, I have one – Tara Beagan’s response to my question, “Is this play based on a story that you know personally?” Her answer: “Yes. The play is based on the true story of a distant relative. Her family gave permission for me to write about the girl who was abducted and murdered, but I changed details, such as the place and names.”

The reason I have no notes is that I was so caught up in the performance I didn’t want to take my eyes off the playing space. I don’t even have the name of the girl written down! The set is a backdrop of what could be the back of a run down building with an open space in front. There is fence on either side of the backdrop. Pieces of a bicycle are strewn around the space in front of the backdrop. There are enough details to anchor the girl’s story but not to provide a fixed location. But I had a location in my mind’s eye -

in the Chilcotin – a reserve I spent a couple of days at with Tricksters’ Theatre doing school performances and workshops.

The girl comes into the playing space disoriented. She keeps saying her name (you’d think I’d remember this), shouting for someone to find her. We know she is dead, but she does not. The play is her journey through the events that lead her to finally realize that her life was taken from her by a stranger, a man she offered to help find his way off the reserve. She was riding her new bicycle that she got for her 11th birthday. As she finds pieces of her bicycle to fit together she remembers the pieces of what happened to her.

What stuck me most about this theatre is that the girl becomes so real. Her story could be any girl’s story: her confusions, her desires, her denials, her hopes, her fears. She confides in us in her attempts to hold on to her reality. But her reality has changed and she has trouble accepting this.

At the end of the play I was profoundly grateful that her story had been told. I remembered being her age and all the changes that puberty brought in terms of relationships and the questions that plagued me. Looking back, I can see how vulnerable I was at that age and how what happened to her could have happened to me or any of my friends. Tara Beagan has written a tender play and Dakota Herbert’s acting was superb – simple, honest, unaffected.

“**Article 11** is helmed by Andy Moro (Omushkego Cree/Mixed European) and Tara Beagan (Ntlaka-pamux & Irish “Canadian”). We have come together as Article 11 to channel our mutual desire to pursue the creation of live performance works with a holistic approach and a rigorous attack. Inspired by the traditional leadership values system in many First Nations communities, there are project leaders who serve the team as a whole by maintaining a directional focus, yet there is no imposed hierarchy. All collaborators work to celebrate Article 11 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through practice:

Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. (13/09/2007)”

Saskatchewan Native Theatre

Mission

To produce and present innovative cultural experiences that engage and empower First Nations, Metis and Inuit youth, artists and the greater Saskatchewan community.

Vision

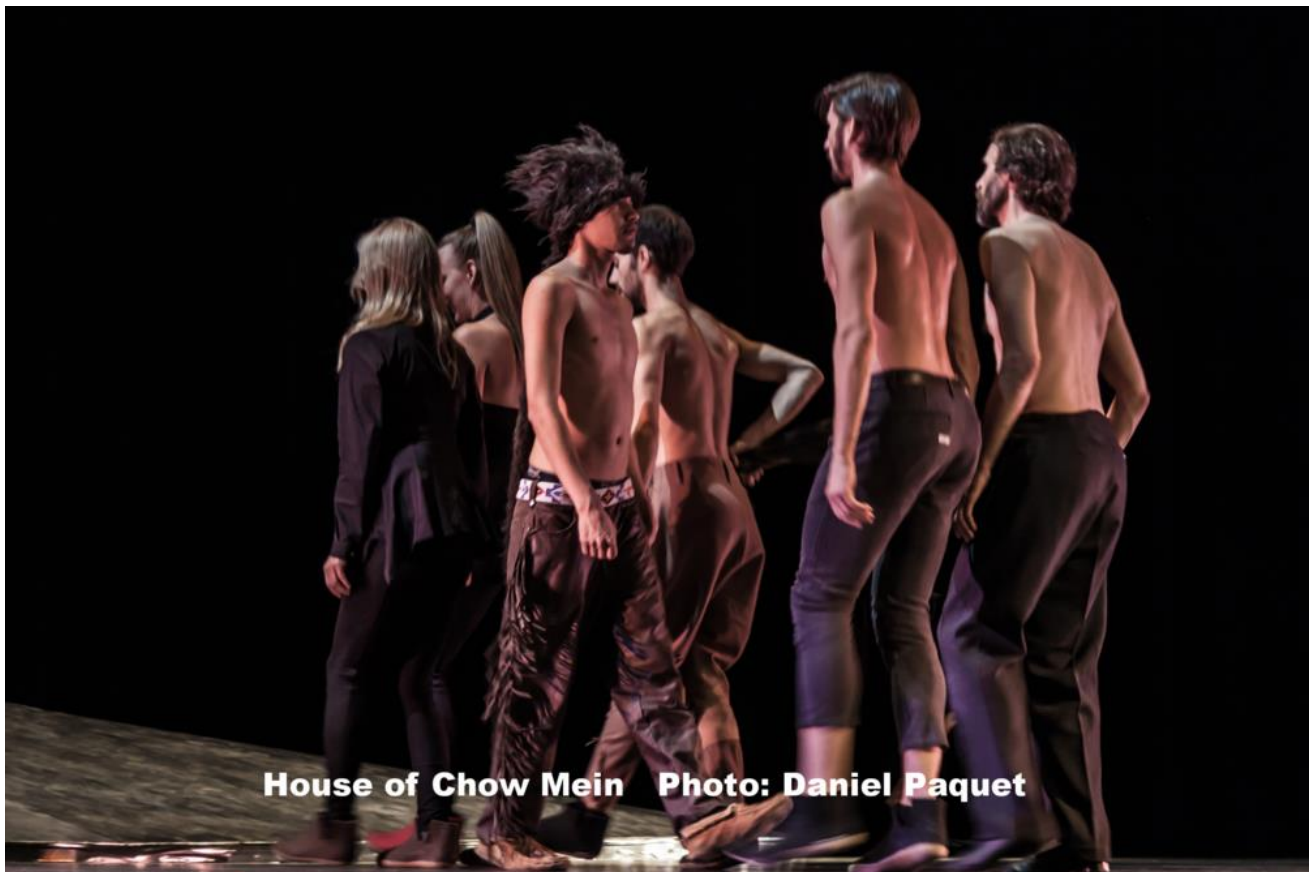
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To create a world where people are transformed through Indigenous performance.

Program notes.

Post 10, November 5, 2015

Post Card: *House of Chow Mein, A Dance in Three Acts.* The life of Henry Jackson and his brief time with Louis Riel. Conceived and Directed with Edward Poitras. Co-presented by New Dance Horizons with the Performing Turtle Island Symposium in partnership with the University of Regina.



House of Chow Mein Photo: Daniel Paquet

A line from the original text, by Tim Lilburn: “... the hills of Val Marie under an inflamed sky....” This image, spoken at the beginning of Act One, resonated throughout the three acts in the counterpoint of the dancers’ steps to the sparse musical score performed by Jeff Bird. A chorus of dancers sweep the stage, drumming the floor with their jiggling. The physical drumming of their steps grounds the ephemeral and poetic text and the sometimes contorted movements of the dancers portraying Louis Riel and Honoré Jaxon.

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Choreographed by Robin Poitras. Sound Design by Charlie Fox.

Performers: Ray Ambrosi, Yvonne Chartrand, Bill Coleman, Eloi Homier, Graham Kotowich, Tim Lilburn, Yawen Luo, Marcus Merasty, Robin Poitras and Krista Solhiem.

Once upon a time in the West, a right hand and a wolf's head etched in history did echo and were heard through the ages, beyond notions of race and time, beyond the veil of words, a song of eternal life in death. Above the hubris of those who would make war. A western with no end, chasing its tale towards the setting in in twilight's last trace before the night and the light of a new day.

From the archives of Honoré Jaxon ...a journey through time and space from Batoche 1885 to New York City in 1951. – Edward Poitras (Program Notes)



Act One of House of Chow Mein is an embodiment of Riels vision of “a nation based upon the union between humans and the natural world”. Henry Jackson is swept up by the vision and changing his name to Honoré Jaxon, becomes a disciple of Riel. The chorus enacts the utopian vision with props and costume pieces representing human endeavor and the animal world.

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Act Two is the journey of Riel and Jaxon, as prisoners, from Batoche to Regina. Separated physically, they commune telepathically on their philosophical vision and their physical condition.



In Act Three, Jaxon, now derelict, sits on a New York street surrounded by his belongings,

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including the archives of the Provisional Government at Batoche and Riel's visionary writings.

The affective impact of the dance is held in the tension of Riel and Jaxon's utopian visions and the complexities of the natural and human worlds. What is the meaning of sacrifice? How is this carried in the body? Relationship is continually severed, tenuous at best. The intersections of sound, movement, image, coalesce and separate, sometimes over-riding each other. Riel's vision is made visceral and then disappears into "twilight's last trace".



Notes from the Q/A afterwards:

The performance is a first draft based on a one week residency at URegina. Poitras' next piece will be based on Louis Riel. He works to embody the understanding and beliefs of the people at that time.

The title is transposed from Riel's prophecy that only the House of Charlemagne will stand. Spoken in "Chinese" ---> "the House of Chow Mein". There may also be a link to New Utopia, a Chinese restaurant owned by Roger Ing. Does the title of the piece

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distract or tantalize? I was distracted and a bit irritated. The explanation given after the show seemed (f)artsy to me. But, maybe you have to have been there and all that...
Post 11, November 8, 2015

Interview with Yvette Nolan, September 19, 2015



<https://www.playwrightsguild.ca/playwright/yvette-nolan>

Yvette Nolan's career in theatre in Canada has been rich and varied. She is a playwright, director and dramaturge currently working as a freelance artist in Saskatoon. she is an associate with Signal Theatre in Toronto, where she is working on a Dance Opera project examining the inter-generational legacy of Canada's Indian Residential School system.

Nolan's plays include *BLADE*, *Job's Wife*, *Video*, *Annie Mae's Movement*, *Scattering Jake*, *from thine eyes*, *The Unplugging*, *The Birds* (a modern adaptation of Aristophanes' comedy). She has directed *Justice* by Leonard Linklater, *Café Daughter* by Kenneth T

Williams ([Gwaandak Theatre](#)), Marie Clements' *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian*, *Salt Baby* by Falen Johnson, *A Very Polite Genocide* by Melanie J Murray, *Death of a Chief*, Darrell Dennis' *Tales of An Urban Indian*, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* by Marie Clements, *Annie Mae's Movement* ([Native Earth](#)), *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* ([Western Canada Theatre/National Arts Centre](#)), *The Only Good Indian...*, *The Triple Truth* (Turtle Gals).

In 2007, she received the Maggie Bassett Award for service to the theatre community. She has been the president of the [Playwrights Union of Canada](#) (1998-2001), of [Playwrights Canada Press](#) (2003-2005), and of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance (2007-2008). In 2007-2008 she was the National Arts Centre's Playwright-In-Residence. The Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts from 2003-2011, she was awarded the City of Toronto's Aboriginal Affairs Award. On June 7, 2011, she was honoured with the George Luscombe Award for mentorship in professional theatre. From 2003-2011, she served as Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, Canada's oldest professional Aboriginal theatre. (<http://ipaa.ca/members/membership-directory/saskatchewan/yvette-nolan/>) She was recently awarded the Mallory Gilbert Leadership Award for leadership in the Canadian theatre community. (Performing Turtle Island program.)

Yvette was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to an Algonquin mother and an Irish immigrant father and was raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has lived in various parts of Canada, including in the Yukon and Nova Scotia.

(<http://www.playwrightscanada.com/index.php/yvette-nolan.html>)

Our conversation, over lunch at Campion College, hosted by the Saskatchewan Arts Board, focused on her new book, *Medicine Shows*, published in May 2015 by Playwrights Canada Press.

Annie: What was your impetus for writing *Medicine Shows*?

Yvette: When I was leaving Native Earth, I realized that I had a lot of information in my head that was not documented, plays that had had only one production, productions that were created by the company that would likely not be remounted. There is still so little critical work on Indigenous theatre, still so few Indigenous theatre scholars, I felt I needed to download what was in my head onto the page.

Annie: What is your starting point for *Medicine Shows*?

Yvette: Well, the book is not a chronological survey. I don't start at some arbitrary "beginning" of Indigenous theatre and move linearly towards some other moment in time. It's a very personal book, because of Indigenous worldview, which insists that everything is relational. In the introduction, I talk about the process being something

like dropping stones in a pond and following the ripples outwards, my work with Turtle Gals rippling outward to Marie Clements' work, works that incorporate or manifest ceremony carrying me outward to other works that manifest ceremony, like Margo Kane's *Moonlodge*, Waawaate Fobister's *Medicine Boy*, and so on. If I had to articulate an arbitrary starting place, it would be the almost simultaneous events of the founding of Native Earth in Toronto, and the creation of *Jessica* by Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths in Saskatoon.

Annie: Why did you choose to start with *Jessica*? While the play was a collaboration with Maria Campbell, the theatrical elements were largely controlled by playwright Linda Griffiths and director Paul Thompson.

Yvette: Maria Campbell's book *Half-breed* was hugely important to me as a child. I was a Half-breed, and she reclaimed the word for me. Her journey in the book spoke of all the challenges of being mixed blood in this world, and pointed the way to growth and healing. And *Half-breed* was the theatrical source material for *Jessica*, but the real gift for me is *The Book of Jessica*, which documents the creation of the play and all the pitfalls and frustrations of trying to use theatre to create understanding. Of course the theatrical elements were largely controlled by Paul and Linda – they had the resources, the skills, the power. But Maria had the vision of using theatre to heal us all, which ultimately is what *Medicine Shows* is about.

Annie: The title of your book references Daniel David Moses's play cycle: *The Indian Medicine Shows*. This play cycle is very dark – it is bitter medicine that I can still taste on my tongue when I think of the plays.

Yvette: Daniel's play cycle does not have a direct influence on *Medicine Shows*, but it is important to note that medicine is sometimes bitter, as in Daniel's plays. Tomson Highway, in his introduction to *Dry Lips Ought To Move To Kapuskasing* (1989), quotes Lyle Longclaws: "... before the healing can take place, the poison must be exposed ...".

Annie: This image makes me think of a snake bite (maybe reminiscent of the image of the "snake oil" of the medicine shows), of cutting open the vein or artery to let the blood spurt out to remove the venom injected from the bite. What is the poison that you see needs to be exposed?

Yvette: The poison is all the effects of colonialism that have impacted Aboriginal people and communities, and the country – the institutional programs of genocide and deprivation with the reservation system, the residential schools, inadequate health care, prisons. And all these things have been largely hidden or unacknowledged by the Canadian population, because of the textbooks, the curricula, the shame, the values of

capitalism and colonization. We need to look at where we've come from to be able to move forward, all of us together, in a good way.

Annie: How do you see Aboriginal Performance as medicine?

Yvette: If we understand medicine to mean reconnecting, rather than curing, then the work Indigenous artists do onstage are all acts of reconnection, reconnecting us to our stories, to our values, to our understanding of the world. The things that have been broken – family lines, language, our relationships to the natural world – we are addressing all those things in the work onstage, making the reconnections for ourselves and for our audiences. That's medicine.

Annie: Is this why you practice theatre?

Yvette: I practice theatre because theatre is about voice. Theatre gives voice to people, to communities. What is hidden can be exposed, what is forgotten can be remembered, and then we can see what we knew, what we know, and how we might go forward from here. *Medicine Shows* is a meditation like the winter cycle of story telling. These things happened, these people did these things, they existed, and now here they are in this bundle. The bundle is open – it is an invitation to learn and add new work to the bundle.

Annie: Thank you for writing this book.

Post 12, November 17, 2015

Afterword: Reflecting on Medicine

The idea of art as medicine beats through the different performances, panels, speakers, I have been witness to. In my introduction I offered the idea that the “practice of all art forms may be seen as “medicine” in bringing forth the creative spirit and healing from the legacy of the residential schools”. In my 11th post, Yvette Nolan explained her understanding of Aboriginal performance as medicine:

If we understand medicine to mean reconnecting, rather than curing, then the work Indigenous artists do onstage are all acts of reconnection, reconnecting us to our stories, to our values, to our understanding of the world. The things that have been broken – family lines, language, our relationships to the natural

world – we are addressing all those things in the work onstage, making the reconnections for ourselves and for our audiences. That’s medicine.

My experience of the Performing Turtle Island Symposium was one of reconnection – to the stories that bring meaning to my existence, to the creative flame that burns strongly in all the artists present, to the generosity of the land that cradled us, to the people who came as witnesses to the work.

I am sad that there were sessions I don’t have notes for so that I couldn’t share them as local correspondent. I am thankful for the rich feast of beauty, of searing challenges, of the space that was held open for sharing and learning. The scope of this symposium was immense. When I look at the program, I am in awe of the vision of Kathleen Irwin and Jesse Archibald-Barber and how all the presenters and performers were woven together to make a vivid tapestry of living art, a blanket to warm and inspire us.

These brief postcards are evidence of good medicine that can reconnect us and give us courage to keep on making art and performing for the people, the land, and all our relations.

Meegwich and Kleco, Kleco.

Annie Smith
Local Correspondent

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