to know dibaajimowin

a narrative of knowing: art, art education and cultural identity in the life experiences of four contemporary Indigenous women artists

Lori Beavis

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By: **Lori Beavis**

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_____External to Program
Dr. W. Linds

_____ Examiner
Dr. L. Blair

_____ Examiner
Dr. K. Vaughan

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. L. Szabad-Smyth

Approved by _____
Dr. K. Vaughan, Graduate Program Director

February 17, 2016

_____
Dr. R. Duclos, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

Abstract

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a narrative of knowing: art, art education and cultural identity in the life experiences of four contemporary Indigenous women artists

Lori Beavis, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2016

Beginning with research on the intersection of cultural identity, family history and education, this dissertation investigates how life experiences relevant to art contribute to identity and cultural identity formation. In exploring the lives of four Indigenous women, specifically contemporary women artists, this study makes a link between life experiences, events, art and art education. The research examines how those influences contributed to identity formation and how the selected artists incorporate identity within their artwork. In this research the notion of education as a transformative experience was also investigated.

An Indigenous paradigm frames the qualitative research method of life history research, narrative and story telling. The data, as proposed by Kovach (2010) was gathered through an Indigenous 'conversational method'. These methods allowed for a focus on the interconnection of experiences related to family and social relationships, schooling and professional practice. The rich stories revealed by the four artists were examined individually and through a cross-case analysis.

The findings indicate that both external and internal factors impact on the development of cultural identity. Identity development, as has been found with artistic identity development, is an accumulative process and education is an important factor. Family, self- awareness and a broadened knowledge of the external world along with a sustained interrogation of their inner world are also essential.

The knowledge developed in this thesis will help art educators recognize the value of meaningful cultural exchanges in the classroom, see the need to examine identity in a profound manner and discourage the practice of characterizing abilities and inclinations as cultural traits. Ultimately the particularized case studies will indicate a new direction that inserts itself into a larger narrative regarding Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

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This dissertation has been a long time in the making. It has been a great adventure and in this adventure I have grown personally and professionally

Without the interest and cooperation of the four amazing women – Shelley, Lisa, Jori and Nadia this research project would never have happened. Thank you for the time and the stories and the laughter. Thank you for your memories and for your contributions and for the ongoing help that you have given me. Thank you for the trust you placed in me to tell your stories well.

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I want to thank my parents for their love and support. I apologize for the length of time and the fact my dad missed the completion of this adventure. Al and Lois always supported me and continue to do so. I am grateful.

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For my husband Dominic Hardy, thank you for your love, support and your trust that I would finish this project. Thank you to Cat and Iris, my beautiful girls! I am always thankful for the love and patience you have shown me.

I dedicate this work to my grandmother, Laura Hannah Cowie Jones (1907-1987) – a proud Mississauga woman who valued education, her history, family and her grandchildren.

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Terminology

In this dissertation, the terms Indigenous, Native, and to a lesser extent First Nation and Aboriginal are used interchangeably to refer to the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America in this dissertation. These are not, as such, the "right" terms or the only terms that could have been used. They reflect my preferences.

Terms such as “Indian,” or “Aboriginal,” have emerged from European sources and may be regarded as an external classification or the imposition by a dominant authority. Because of its association with punitive laws and state control, the term “Indian” is now often regarded as having negative connotations. “Indian,” therefore, is not a term that should be used for people who would not use it to refer to themselves. However it should be noted, that at least for people in older generations, “Indian” is still a term that people use to refer to each other or themselves within community contexts, and that it can be used in these contexts with some level of affection.

Aboriginal for the last few decades is the most inclusive term in general usage in Canada. This term became more prevalent with its use in the repatriated Canadian Constitution of 1982. In the Constitution, “Aboriginal” is used to include three groups previously defined by earlier categories: “Indian,” “Inuit,” and “Métis.” Each of these three terms had existing functions in Canadian law. “Indian,” for instance, is the generic term used in the Indian Act, a centerpiece of state identity regulation, since 1876. The Indian Act and its later amendments define who has Indian (or Native) “Status” under the Act. This status is confirmed by registration and a government-issued status card, and confers certain rights and privileges, though its primary purpose throughout most of Canadian history has been to regulate and restrict those it has defined and to deny them the rights accorded to citizens, since “Indians” could not simultaneously be citizens.

In recent decades in Canada, the term “First Nations” has gained considerable currency. This identification emerged as a more respectful successor to “Indian” (as “Native American” did in the US). More recently, "First Nations" has been more often based on identification with legally recognized reserve communities. In this restricted sense, “First Nations” refers to status Indians who are members of a First Nation. In this usage, it excludes non-status Indians, Inuit, Métis, and those who have Aboriginal ancestry, but less clear identification with a particular community.

"Indigenous," has gained prominence as a term to describe Aboriginal peoples in an international context through the increasing visibility of international Indigenous rights movements. "Indigenous" may be considered by some to be the most inclusive term of all, since it identifies peoples in similar circumstances without respect to national boundaries or local conventions, but it is, for some, a contentious term, since it defines groups primarily in relation to their colonizers.

It is worth noting, however, that "Indigenous," like "Aboriginal" or even "Indian," is not itself an "Indigenous" term in the sense of deriving from an Indigenous traditional practice or language, though it is very much a term that Indigenous people have worked hard to define. In United Nations (UN) documents and in common usage, it tends to refer to people with long traditional occupation of a territory.

Chapter 1
Introduction

I begin this dissertation by invoking the sound of the metal cones on the jingle dress as the dancer approaches.[1] The dress is ornamented with multiple rows of metal cones that create a jingling sound as the dancer moves. The dance is attributed to the Ojibway and its origin dates to 1900 when a midewinini dreamt of the dance, the songs and the construction of the dress.

It is a metaphor that I will return to throughout the dissertation. I see a relationship between the dress, its construction and ornamentation and the dance and memory. There is the simple fact that the number of silver cones is accumulative; as the girl dancer grows year by year, another row of jingle cones are added to the dress. And as the experiences of a life are accumulative, there is a relationship between the jingle dance and memory. First, there is the physical memory of the dance as something that is learned from others, held and remembered in the body. Secondly, a spiritual sensibility is present in learning and performing the dance. As the dancer dances, she remembers and connects with all the others, past and present (Shea Murphy, 2000).

Locating Myself

The first step is to locate myself. I do this purposefully because the work I am doing is relational. It is important as a part of the Anishinaabe protocol for the speaker or writer to situate herself across physical, cultural and social landscapes as a way to establish connections personally, academically and professionally. This is also a way to remain conscious of the importance of cultural location and cultural knowledge (Absolon, 2011; Absolon & Willet, 2005; Graveline, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Lather, 1991; Sinclair, 2003; Weber- Pillwax, 2001; Wilson 2001, 2008).

I am Lori Beavis, the daughter of Lois and Al, and the granddaughter of Laura and Bert, Ken and Lorena. My identity is structured on the facts that I am a Canadian woman, born in

1 Lisa Stephenson, (1993) *The Powwow: questions and answers.* Bismarck: United Tribes Technical College. The Jingle dress is the regalia for an Anishinaabe women's powwow dance. Stephenson describes the dance as Ojibwe. There are many stories of where it originated but this author describes it as beginning in Mille Lacs, Minnesota when a holy man had a dream of four women wearing the dress. From the dream people learned the songs and how the dance was performed. From this point the dance spread through Ojibwe territories.

Ontario, now living in Montreal, Quebec. My maternal family is Mississauga from Hiawatha First Nation and of Welsh origin. My paternal family is Irish and English, they are settlers who arrived in Canada in the nineteenth century. The people I come from worked hard, fed and guided people, were caregivers, factory workers, educators, artistic crafters and tellers of stories. It is through my grandmother and my mother that I have Native Status through Bill C-3 (2011 Indian Act Amendments - Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act). [2]

Personal Connection to the Research

Aboriginal identity and art education will be the focus of this dissertation. My grandmother, Laura Hannah Cowie (1907-1987) and her education at a small on-reserve school in Ontario along with a collection of archival records,[3] interviews and memories have led me to consider cultural identity in the context of family, community and the educational environment. While this dissertation will not take my personal family history as its main focus, I will maintain the genesis of this research project was the experience of finding material on the little school by the lake in the archive and the later family-based interviews. Both the archival documents and the personal recollections added to my understanding of my grandmother's experience of the on-reserve school in addition to adding to my understanding of her later experiences and her negotiation of cultural identity.

Lawler (2008) states that identities are revealed through memories and narratives. In her estimation identity is produced through the assemblages of memories, experiences, and other episodes. These components make up the narrative or stories of how we came to be.

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2 This Bill is a result of an amendment to the Indian Act, which allowed individuals who met three stated conditions, to submit an application for Native Status, these were: 1) my grandmother had lost her entitlement to registration as a Status Indian as a result of marrying a non-Indian, 2) my mother was entitled to be registered and 3) I was born after 1951.

3 The archival documents at Trent University revealed a history of the school at Hiawatha. The record did not tell me anything about the role the school played in keeping the children on the Hiawatha Reserve rather than being sent to Residential schools. However further research into the Indian Act reveals that schools were maintained on reserves when the Band wanted and paid to maintain them.

In reference to Education Canada's Indian Act states, Section 114 (2) (Minister may Establish and Operate Schools) "The Minister may, in accordance with this Act, establish, operate and maintain schools for Indian children." Note: While the wording of this section is permissive, there is an obligation pursuant to Treaties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 "to maintain schools" in those reserves where the Bands desire them. In Treaty 7, the obligation is to provide and pay for teachers to instruct Indian children once they are settled on reserves. In Treaty 8, the obligation is to provide and pay for teachers as Her Majesty's Government of Canada considers "advisable". In Treaty 9, the obligation is to pay for teachers and provide school buildings and educational equipment as government "as may seem advisable" to government. In Treaty 10, provision will be made as "deemed advisable" by government "for the education of Indian children.

As a child I thought the Mohawk poet Pauline Johnson and my grandmother were childhood friends. My notion of this friendship came about as I listened to the stories my grandmother told about her schooling and her childhood at the Hiawatha First Nation on Rice Lake, Ontario. It was years later that I realized this relationship was a complete fabrication on my part. Or was it? Laura really did talk about Pauline Johnson as though she knew her. Why was this the case?

Biographies of Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) show that she constantly played with the question of identity. Throughout her career Johnson negotiated European and Native traditions in early twentieth century Canada as she tried to resolve both her Native and European heritages. While there appears to be no extent documentation of Johnson's interactions with Indigenous women during her lifetime, in biographies and critical reviews of her work written in the past two decades Native and non-Native writers have discussed her impact during her lifetime and in the time since her death. In their study of Johnson's life story and career, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)*, Strong-Boag and Gerson (2000) point out that "as a part-Native woman developing an independent career in a socio-political world dominated by powerful White men" (p. 112), Johnson situated herself in a sometimes contradictory position as she tried to, "encompass the Native storyteller and the European artist, the middle-class lady and the bohemian spirit" (p. 180).

These various facets of her identity were especially evident when we consider Johnson's stage persona. For the first half of her performance, Johnson wore her buckskin dress and presented from her Aboriginal repertoire, whereas in the second half, she reappeared in a Victorian-style evening gown and recited patriotic poems. In her choice of outfits she was playing with Euro-Canadians' expectations of her as the "Mohawk poetess" (a moniker she adopted in 1892) and with her own hybrid heritage in order to create a unique stage persona. Johnson's appearance was, in particular, challenging popular depictions and audiences' expectations of Aboriginal women as subservient, lovelorn, and downtrodden.[4]

4 In her theatrical productions Johnson presented such work as her *A Cry from an Indian Wife* (1885) – a lament of a woman whose husband is going off to fight with the Métis during the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. Similarly *The Cattle Thief* (1895) in which a young Cree woman rebukes the settlers who kill her father for stealing cattle to feed his family and community. The young woman in the poem castigates the killers who have stolen the land and the resources that sustained the First Nation prior to contact. The poetry reflects Johnson's knowledge of the events taking place in Western Canada in her lifetime and her recognition of women's strength and role in Indigenous culture. She also presented the Indigenous woman's point of view in her published work. For example *A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction,* published

The Mohawk writer Beth Brant (1994) wrote of Johnson as "a spiritual grandmother to … women writers of the First Nations" (p. 7). "Pauline Johnson began a movement that has proved unstoppable in its momentum — the movement of First Nations women to write down our stories of history, of revolution, of sorrow, of love" (p. 5). Johnson holds the distinction of being the Aboriginal author who gained the highest level of notoriety in the literary world and sold the most books in Canada in her lifetime (Young-Ing, 2001).[5]

In both her literature and on-stage presentations, Johnson examined the extent to which women have a voice. She accomplished this through her boundary-blurring actions, her challenge to European norms of what constitutes "good" or "real" literature, and her choice of both theatrical venues and print medium as avenues to cultural and political agency. Young-Ing (1991) has suggested that Johnson represented both her own internal identity confusion and reflected the tenuous situation of Indigenous people at the turn of the last century.

As an adult reviewing Johnson's career and taking a new look at the poetry, I see how the poet and these poems may have shaped my grandmother's conception of who she was and what she could be. I think my grandmother's experiences compares to those of many Indigenous women who lived during her generation. She felt the tremendous pressures to acculturate and incorporate the Euro-western world of the early twentieth century into her experiences and value systems as a young woman living on a Native reserve. I believe in her on-going negotiation of personal and cultural identity, Laura Cowie recognized Johnson as a successful embodiment of the Native woman she wanted to be. Laura was a woman with a great sense of fun and adventure but she understood there were both societal and educational limitations for her as a Native woman. And when she married a non-Native man she forfeited her status and had to negotiate a place for herself in both the Native community and Euro-Canadian society for the rest of her life.

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in *The Toronto Globe* in 1892, Johnson alluded to other contemporary Canadian writers who presented stereotyped misrepresentation of Aboriginal women. See Beth Brant (1994). *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Toronto: Women's Press. p. 5-24.)

5 The 'Pauline Johnson phenomenon' was not to be a catalyst that would open up the Canadian publishing industry to Aboriginal literature. In hindsight, her success must be viewed as an aberration. After Pauline Johnson's untimely death in 1913, almost six decades were to pass before another Aboriginal author would be published in Canada (Young-Ing, 2001, p. 182).

Laura Hannah Cowie was born in 1907. She was a Mississauga Ojibway and a member of the Rice Lake Reserve later renamed the Hiawatha First Nation, near Peterborough, Ontario. [6] My great-grandfather, Henry 'Hank' Cowie was a fisherman and guide. He served as chief of the Reserve at different times between 1910 and 1925 and he was a signatory of the Williams Treaty.[7] He also ran a successful hotel business. My great-grandparents, my grandmother and her three sisters worked hard at the business that catered mostly to American fishing enthusiasts – many of whom came each summer for decades. The enterprise probably set them apart from other families on the reserve to a certain extent and it enabled them to live comfortably. According to my mother, it is entirely possible that they had the wherewithal to go to Peterborough to see Johnson when she performed at the Peterborough Opera House however it is more likely that Laura learned of Johnson as she read and memorized the poems as a schoolchild. As Francis (1992) has written, "It is possible that more Canadian children have memorized *The Song My Paddle Sings* than any other piece of verse" (p. 116). Johnson's poem, *The Song My Paddle Sings* and the Longfellow poems, particularly poems *The Song of Hiawatha* and *Evangeline* all contributed to my childhood understanding of who my grandmother was. [8] Laura owned old hardbound copies of the poems and I remember looking at the embossed covers and the illustrations as a child.

It is through my knowledge of my grandmother's life experiences, education, stories and the recollections of my family history that I am questioning how we construct the themes of our identity. The research in this dissertation is therefore based on the realization that one's individual self-worth can be established through the connections to tradition and kin.

It is important to understand the construction of identity and therefore the self as this construct has an impact on the way people view themselves and other people. Identity is both

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6 Rice Lake Reserve was established in 1828 consisting of 1120 acres of land. The grant (title deed) was dated April 19, 1834. The original survey was in 1855. Rice Lake Village was given the name Hiawatha when the Prince of Wales visited the village in 1860 and stated on his arrival that he thought it the embodiment of Longfellow's poem, *Hiawatha*.

7 Williams Treaty signed on November 16, 1923 at Rice Lake Reserve, Ontario. https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028996/1100100028998 (accessed November 14, 2015)

8 Johnson's poem *The Song My Paddle Sings* was published in 1895 *The White Wampum.* London: John Lane, 1895. However she had written this poem just prior to her second appearance in Toronto in February, 1892 (See: Charlotte Gray (2002). *Flint and Feather: The life and times of E. Pauline Johnson, Tekehionwake* Toronto: Harper, p. 151-153). *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847) was Longfellow's first long piece of narrative poetry. It is an epic poem of loss and love. Longfellow's intention with *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) was to introduce Indigenous mythology to his Euro-American audience. The poem traces the life of the warrior Hiawatha. (See: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1975) *The Poetical Works of Longfellow, Cambridge Edition.* New introduction by George Monteiro. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

personal and social because it impacts the sense of wellbeing and one's interactions with the world. Identity theories assume that people care about themselves, want to know who they are, and use the combined information to make sense of the world (Lawler, 2008; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2011).

This research is about identity and about stories – life histories and narratives of life and art. Thomas King (2003) writes, "The truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 2). Much has been written on the subject of identity, which can be categorized into four broad areas. These are: rationalist - a fixed, individual identity with an unproblematic relationship to community and culture (Phinney & Rotherham, 1987), post-modern - constantly changing in response to social and technological cues (Giddens, 1991), political – which as a result of post-colonial studies emphasizes marginalized groups (Hall, 1991) and storied identities – recognizes the centrality of self-narrative in identity formation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Rich, 2014). It could be argued that our lives only achieve meaning as stories when they are constructed through life histories, personal narratives and autobiographies (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Fagundes & Blayer, 2007; Watson & Smith, 2010). Following Vygotsky (1978), this approach also draws attention to the distinction between social identity and personal identity. I have drawn on the theories of identity formation of the social psychologists, as I feel that this approach describes the social nature of identity, yet accepts that an individual has an active role in the construction of their own identity. This approach also underscores the affect of cultural memory and dominant discourses. However most importantly, the link between the life story and identity formation is crucial.

I grew up in Peterborough, Ontario, a city halfway between two Anishinaabeg reserves - Hiawatha First Nation on Rice Lake and the Curve Lake First Nation at Chemong Lake. My childhood memories are of summer visits to the Peterborough Petroglyphs, Burleigh Falls, Serpent Mounds, and to the two First Nations to visit relatives and friends. I always knew that these places were special and a significant part of my grandmother's life. The facts were instilled in me. My grandmother's family were Mississauga, members of the Anishinaabe. We are the Deer or hoof clan and known as the helpers. My grandmother ran her own trap-line as a young woman. From her I learned the names and history of the people on the Hiawatha Reserve – Paudash, Coppaway, Howard, Muskrat, Anderson. Laura was proud of her Indigenous heritage and her cultural identity as a Mississauga woman. While she never wrote any stories down she

did share stories of her childhood and her life on the Hiawatha Nation. I do however, wish I had asked more questions or listened more intently to her stories.

As hooks wrote in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) "memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things to be as they once were; it can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past" (p. 40) as it "serves to illuminate and transform the present" (p. 147). In her writing and teaching, hooks has used her family history and her memory of those people to reclaim the past and to make a new foundation on which she is able to stand and negotiate the present. Aboriginal women have long been perceived as silent, secondary and in the background. They have been stereotyped as "hard to find, hard to hear" (Kelm & Townsend, 2006, p. 3). This has often been the case because there was little interest in women's experience beyond the boundaries of birthing, childcare and food preparation (Klein &Ackerman, 1995; Mitchell & Franklin 1984; Ruffo, 1998 as cited in Kelm & Townsend, (2006)). As Kelm and Townsend report this was not because Native women were not speaking.

Developing the Research Question

The catalyst of this current research project is a meshed folio of memory, archive, and research projects. I entered the Art Education programme with the intention of continuing research on the history of women's art education in Canada. My experiences in the graduate programme were productive and diverse. However as I worked on my original subject it grew too large and I was advised to work from 'what I knew.' At the same time other coursework required research in the Peterborough Museum and Archives. There I discovered documents hand-written by a young student about the on- Reserve school at Hiawatha. This discovery led me to ask about and then interview my mother and her older brother about the school and their experiences. I was intrigued by their memories of art making at school. I also inquired into their memories of their own and my grandmother's experiences at the school. Following on, I then delved into the history of Hiawatha First Nation and found many rich details about the origin and makeup of the school (Maclean, 1978, 2002). Much of this material stirred my own earlier memories of what my grandmother had told me of her school life. I also remembered other incidents. A particularly strong memory is our discussions and perusal of her news clippings of the cases brought before the Supreme Court in the 1970s and 1980s by women who had lost their

status and the right to live on reserve as a result of marrying out.[9] I was a young woman identifying as a feminist and this material spoke to me in many ways, the least of which was my recognition that an unjust history had taken her Native status but had not taken away her cultural identity.

In early 2008, I brought a number of elements (history, family, feminism, education, art and Indigeniety) together when I developed a round table that focussed on "grandmothers."[10] The premise of the *Creative Histories* panel was the quote, "We each carry within us our own history in art" (Korzenik & Brown, 1993, p. 115). In reference to this I wrote, *It is Korzenik's contention that we know our parental and grandparents' history through the things that they have told and shown us and from them we can extrapolate to an even earlier time. As a result much of what we believe, know about ourselves and value is powerfully imbedded in our experiences and in the images we carry around with us.*

Each of the panelists spoke of art educators or others who had been exemplary in the work they then carried out in the field of art education. My objective was to have the student audience recognize the importance of the past and if possible, find their place in the history of art education through a particular person.

This current research project is a culmination of the abovementioned and other life experiences. Most especially these are: I am a teacher. I have worked in many settings. I have taught art making to children and adult learners. I have worked in university, colleges, galleries, artist run spaces and community centres. I have learned much about teaching different communities and populations. I identity myself as a feminist and I work from a feminist methodology which ensures that no perspective is neglected, pushed aside, belittled or ignored. The social and political currents of feminism in the late 1970s had an impact on me and have continued to influence the way I see and describe the world. As a feminist, my objective as a researcher has been to investigate the actions, practices and voices of women in the arts and give meaning to their experiences.

All of the experiences mentioned above brought politics, philosophy and experience together; the added challenge to make the research personally valuable was another step in the

9 http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/bp410-e.htm (accessed November 22, 2015)

10 The panel was composed of Leah Sherman, Suzanne Lemerise, Adriana de Oliveres, Paul Langdon and myself. Dr Farrell Racette was scheduled to speak on the Metis beadworker Melanie Blondeau but was unable to attend.

process. As I moved forward in my thinking and in my research into identity, I realized I wanted to focus on the art and life experiences of women artists. I have been aware of feminist writings and research into the lives and practice of women artists throughout my academic life. A prime instigation for me as an undergraduate student was the discovery of Nochlin's (1972) provocative article, *Why have there been no great women artists?* From that point I set out to tell the story of women artists. My present research project will contribute, I hope in some small way, to the discussion of women artists, and the intersection of women's art practice and cultural identity.

A survey of the texts devoted to women's art practice indicates that in the history of writing on women and art there are few mentions of women artists of colour. A quick overview of the literature over a forty-year period reveals the efforts of British, American and Canadian art historians to write women into the history of art. Texts such as Nochlin (1979), Parker and Pollock (1981), Broude and Garrard (1982), Chadwick (1990, 2002 (3rd ed.), 2007 (4th ed.), Cherry (1993), Swinth (2001), and Huneault and Anderson (2012) have concentrated on the contributions of European and American women and their experience of the art world. This important work placed many women into the history but rarely crossed the colour line. The picture is much the same in Canadian art history literature devoted to women's practice. The multiple biographies of Emily Carr (for example the monographs of Carr written over time by Tippet (1979), Blanchard (1987), Shadbolt (1994) and Newlands (1996) intertwine Carr's art making and travels into Haida territory and document her exhibitions with West Coast artisans though Native West Coast artists are rarely if ever mentioned by name.

Nor is there mention of Native women's participation in the, admittedly few, modern histories of individual (non-Native) Canadian women's artists. McDougall's (1977) story of Montreal painter, Ann Savage or, Butlin's (2009) study of early twentieth century Ontario-based painter Florence Carlyle or Lind's (2009) history of the socially and politically active Toronto painter, Paraskeva Clark who worked through the nineteen thirties and into the fifties, are examples.

However the story begins to broaden in Canadian art history, when in *By a Lady* (1992), Tippet made the history of women's art more encompassing and includes both the historical representation of a Mi'kmaq woman and work by the contemporary Indigenous women artists,

Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Kainai-European), Rebecca Baird (Cree-Metis) and Jane Ash Poitras (Cree).

In turning to other art mediums, the first substantial inclusion of Indigenous women's art practice in Canada is in the work of performance artists, Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe) and Lori Blondeau (Saulteaux). These women are documented in the histories of North American, usually feminist, performance art (Mars & Householder, (2004); Wark, (2009).

It is only in Huneault and Anderson's (2012) history of the professionalization of Canadian women artists, when Indigenous women artists working before 1970 are more fully written into the record in two essays. In this edited volume Farrell Racette (2012) inserts women from many Indigenous cultures and art practices into the history and Phillips (2012) explores the intersected history of Onkwehonwe (Mohawk) women bead workers and Victorian society. Both these historians bring their study to the present by including contemporary artists and their practice.

In order to more fully understand the stories of women whose experiences of life, art and cultural identity resonated in some way with the stories I am searching out, I recognized the need to look at literature devoted exclusively to Indigenous art making and practice. Since roughly 1990 this literature has blossomed. The literature includes catalogues of art exhibitions that explore work by various artists questioning and commenting on such issues as: the contemporary Indigenous response to five hundred years of colonization (McMaster & Martin, 1992), place (McMaster, 1999), representation (Sweet & Berry, 2002), hide as material and metaphor (Ash-Milby, 2010), Haudenosaunee identity (Rice, 2007), colonization (Igloliorte, 2012), hip hop and Indigenous culture (Ritter & Willard, 2012), the wampum and treaties (Myers & Dickenson, 2014). There are also catalogues devoted to the work of one artist such as, *Nadia Myre: En[counter]s* (Tougas, Pageot, Dyck & Graham, 2011), and Shelley Niro's work is examined in *M: Stories of Women* (Frater, 2011). These and other monograph catalogues document the women's work in images and prose with the focus on their practice. Other examples of the literature devoted to Indigenous art and practice explore such topics as: aesthetics and media art (Leuthold, 1998), the trickster artist, humour and irony (Ryan, 1999), stereotypes of women (Mithlo, 2008), representation and film (Wilmer, 2009), as well as film and art (Cummings, 2011). In addition there is Rushing's (1999) survey of twentieth century First Nation art which touches on home, place, and sovereignty in the context of many formats and issues.

It should be mentioned in the context of these publications, an examination of materials that remains to be done is an examination of municipal galleries, artist run centres in Canada since the 1970s both for the discourse that emerges from exhibition catalogues and for the public programming practices of these women artists.

What I have discovered in the above-mentioned overview is that, while the literature does explore identity and art practice, the art and life experiences of women artists in the context of cultural identity, is rarely if ever examined. The exception is Lennon's (2014) monograph on Niro where in an interview format with the artist, identity and aspects of the artist's life experience as motivation for her practice are discussed.

In the literature specifically related to art education and identity, catalogue and database searches most often connect identity to teacher formation or professionalism (Kraehe, 2015) race, counter-narratives and art teacher identity, self-constructing identity as artist-teacher-educator (Dowling, 2011; Thornton, 2013), and art education and place as site of identity construction (Lai, 2002; Lin, 1999; Powell, 2008). Other searches reveal much research on identity in the context of visual culture as art education (Ballengee- Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Blandy and Bolin, 2003; Duncum, 2000, 2009; Freedman, 1994, 2000; Garber, 1995; Tavin, 2000). These articles variously make the connections between visual culture and cultural identity as they examine: the breadth of visual forms available for insertion into the curriculum, the strength of using representation, the meaning of visual narrative, reflection on technology in the classroom, issues of visual culture and social justice, and the value of cross disciplinarity.

Other researchers more closely link art education, art practice and cultural identity; for example Irwin, Rogers, and Wan (1997, 1999) recognize the need to make connections between and among cultures, especially Aboriginal and dominant cultures. These authors used short biographical stories to discover the connection between cultural memory, place and the meaning of art within the particular culture. They then made the connection between these themes and art education. This research comes closest to the work I have done in this dissertation. Irwin et al. state that their research is a model of doing research with people rather than on people.

Stuhr, Krug, and Scott (1995) also contend that it is important for the artists to speak for themselves. The notion of cultural transmission is situated as story, as part of the exploration of cultural identity. The authors note that as in all stories some things are told, while others are omitted. This concept is explored in order to embrace the idea of how a person's social and

cultural positions are factors in the ways one understands and is understood. For these authors cultural transmission is also a powerful way to comprehend how and why people make art. Because "it is what people choose to make and do that is constitutive of their cultural identity" (p. 37).

The artist participants in this dissertation are all using elements of their own life, family or community history to tell personal stories. In addition to these experiences they are scrutinizing their own identity as a source for their creative work. They raise questions about self-identity and cultural identity and through their work they are taking on the role of cultural mediators and educators in the art world.

This dissertation will add to the literature as it examines the role of art making in identity formation with a specific examination of the external influences on individual artists. The artists' families and kinships, within their home and the wider community, the educational sites and the mentors, artists and teachers with whom the artists interacted were explored to determine how these external influences had an impact on art-making and identity formation – in terms of both cultural identity and as an artist. I expect this research to broaden art educators' and their students' knowledge and understanding of contemporary First Nations art and the associated social and political issues reflected in the art practice.

Researching from a place of knowing is integral to an Indigenous research paradigm and for life history research. A central principle of both is to have a purpose and knowing one's intention and motivation for the research in order to arrive at a good research question. I chose this topic because it was personal and came from things I knew about, but it also grew from an interest in extending the inquiry into the field and experiences of women art-makers and their art education. Researching lived experience assumes that a bond will be made between the researcher and participant and the research will naturally originate and interconnect with our own life experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Kovach, 2009).

Research Question

Listening to women's voices, studying women's writing and learning from women's experiences has been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Focusing on the personal has not only given women the chance to describe, in their own words, their experiences but has also meant that we as

researchers and readers can begin to understand the contextual, subjective and relational processes within which women live and grow (Munro, 1998).

The research question is: What is the relationship between art and life experiences and cultural identity in the lives of four contemporary Indigenous women artists?

This question emerges from personal inquiry into family history, but will also open space to discuss school art education, the history of Indigenous art, art practice and education in Canada. The question was also formulated with the four women artists in mind. I expected they would all have had rich life experiences and I wanted the research question to be of interest to them, to spark good conversations and allow them to speak to their life experiences.

The research question will be a conduit to revealing women's stories as given the history of colonialism in Canada, there is an on-going need for research that is inclusive by foregrounding a feminist approach and confronting issues of decolonization. Creswell (2009) reminds us that, research questions anchor and direct research. Accordingly, the research question will open the space for specific material to come forward and also allow for new or unexpected information. My research question is based on personal experience and inquiry as it came from things I knew about, but it also grew from an interest in extending the inquiry into the field and experiences of women art-makers and their art education and the ways in which these four selected women artists understood their cultural identity.

I deliberately asked women with different heritages to participate, as I believe there are many questions about what an Indigenous identity is at this time. Identity in the modern context can be difficult or slippery because as mentioned above it can be socially produced. Politics of identity and the life experience of Native peoples has been addressed in recent years by scholars Deloria (1969, 1995) and Chaat Smith (2009), activists and activism (Bonney, 1977) and (Warrior & Chaat Smith, 1996) and by novelists including the writers of such books as *Keeper'n Me* and *Indian Horse* (Wagamese,1994, 2011) and *Through Black Spruce* by Boyden (2009). These various authors and scholars are dealing with issues of biology, cultural mores, assimilation, intermarriage, and questions of full- or mixed-blood or multi-heritage descent.

However it seems apparent that cultural identity can also be shared when individuals self-consciously recognize themselves as sharing the same culture. For Green (1995) cultural identity is one "that gives the individual a sense of a common past and of a shared destiny" (p. 7). While

Nagel (1996) points out that cultural identity is not fixed but the result of reconstructing old cultural traditions in conjunction with cultural renewal.

I have found that in women's writing one often finds the connections between cultural identity and family, the experiences of colonialism, cultural renewal and resilience in the work of authors such as Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna) and Lousie Erdrich (Anishinaabe). These authors have been, amongst others mentioned above, helping to define a contemporary Indigenous identity in their writing. Over the past forty years, in such work as Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) or the autobiographical *Turquoise Ledge* (2010) or Erdrich's early fiction *Love Medicine* (1984), or more recent work like *The Antelope Wife* (1998) or *The Round House* (2012) these authors have exhibited the ways cultural resilience and contemporary identity go hand-in-hand.

Indigenous identity is a complex issue that relates to cultural, social and political aspects of life. Research on cultural identity spans cultural renewal, to governance and language revival. Important work has been done but many issues remain and more research is needed to better understand the circumstances and issues.

According to Lippard (1990), artists express certain aspects of their identity, pride and self-esteem, and their sense of self and cultural identity through art. In the art making process, they can search for answers about their self-identity as it is intertwined with cultural (ethnic) identity. Art can raise profound questions about identity issues and contemporary socio-political conditions. Through the process of art making, which involves self-reflection, people can explore a sense of self and share their life experiences - What role does art education play – is it socially relevant - is art education a cultural practice or can it be? Is it possible to create art that is based on experience – cultural or otherwise? Where do Indigenous students fit into the multicultural paradigm?

Identity construction is unique to the human species. Identity is the focus of the research question for the simple reason that it is, shaped by life experience. Through identity we locate ourselves in time and place as this helps us understand who we are. At the same time we need to know and recognize the influences of others, events and experiences.

Artists often use their personal or projected identity of self and society consciously or unconsciously in their art for a visual examination of the past, present and future. The exploration of identity through art provides a tangible source of expression, as identity is linked to cultural heritage, sexual preference, and issues of gender, age, and social class.

Cultural identity describes the individual's relationships to their cultural environment, spans the multiple domains of life experiences, and is both dynamic and constantly changing. One's cultural identity can impact self-esteem, and it may also shape one's interactions with others and the social environment. The study of cultural identity is important because the knowledge of belonging to a particular cultural group plays a significant part in how an individual views and describes herself (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, &Wong, 2002).

We learn our cultural identity through the socialization process, as we grasp the values, norms and roles that contribute to our culture. At a secondary level (education system, peers, media) cultural identity is transmitted as part of the wider social structures (Jenkins, 1996). Giddens (2006) also posits that the structure of society and culture may interact and help people establish their cultural identity. Bourdieu (1993) used the term *habitus* to refer to the dispositions and attitudes that people develop through social interactions. The habitus is not inborn, but an acquired product of history, social experience, and education. The habitus is a long-lasting structure of observation, ideas and actions that unconsciously steers people's practices, behaviors, and feelings and reflects their social history and location. Hall (1992) suggests cultural identity is composed of stories, images and symbols drawn from shared experiences and people use these words and images to construct and express identity because identity is within the discourse. "Identity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are" (Hall, 1989, p. 16). Identity is constructed with elements that are included or excluded. These elements can be put into tension with one another and with other factors or personality characteristics. But they are always part of the narrative we produce for authenticity and to find meaning in our life and the stories we tell of it.

The elements inherent in the definition of identity and cultural identification– locating and expressing self, agency, taking action, transmission of knowledge and the importance of history, social interaction, and experience of discourse and narrative as well as engagement and creative energy are present in the direction this research project has taken.

Paradigm, Epistemology and Methodology

Researchers such as Hampton (1995) and Wilson (2001) state that by situating ourselves in the research we are clarifying our perspective on the world and this is necessary as we can

only work from or interpret the world based on our own experience. Non-Indigenous researchers also recognize the need for situating the self prior to commencing the research. Cole and Knowles (2001) maintain that the researcher cannot ask research questions that are counter to the personal beliefs and ethics that shape our lives and constitute truth and knowledge for us as individuals. "The question of knowledge always refers us back to our world, to who we are…" (Van Manen 2001, p. 46). Cole and Knowles also suggest that it is fundamental that in researching the human condition, "the work must come from a deep and personal commitment" (p. 45).

Throughout the research process I have returned again and again to the land that my maternal ancestors knew well. I have gone to the village, visited the crumbling school building, walked the shoreline of Rice Lake, and attended the annual powwow where I took delight from the sight and sound of the jingle dancers and the drummers. These ramblings and visits have been an intellectual filter and part of my way of thinking about this research. I retain the sights and sounds and use the memories to question my motives and negotiate the answers.

My research has also been informed by the seven Ojibway teachings. These teachings are the paradigm under which this research was conducted, as inner knowledge and practice are the underpinnings of the Anishinaabe epistemology. There is a growing body of Indigenous knowledge-based literature (Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2008; Ermine, 2004; Kovach, 2007, 2009, 2010; Lavallee 2009; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2001, 2008), in which Indigenous scholars are acknowledging and employing Indigenous theory. Wilson (2008) began by equating research with ceremony as in doing so, relationships are formed to, "honour[s] our systems of knowledge and worldviews" (p. 8). Anishinaabe scholar, Lavallee discusses how Indigenous (Ojibway, Algonquin, and Cree) knowledge, values, and beliefs inform her work. Not only does she recognize these cultural knowledges, she also discusses how the knowledge is situated in an Indigenous approach to research methodologies.

In this vein, I note that other Indigenous scholars have used a similar paradigm and methods in their research. Many have begun to use Indigenous, for example Anishinaabe or Haudenosaunee knowledge and teachings as a contribution to their research and knowledge production. Doctoral dissertations have explored the connection with Iroquoian art as knowledge (Rickard, 1996) and between knowledge, teachings and story (Archibald, 2008), botanical knowledge (Geniusz, 2009), creative process (Bedard, 2011) ways of knowing and beadwork

(Edge, 2011). As well, for others, the connection has been made to cultural identity and ways of knowing (Marshall, 1997), stories, filmmaking and Indigenous urban youth (Dowell, 2006) and in language and cultural revitalization (Gokee-Rindal, 2009).

It is important to note that this dissertation was also informed by Euro-western based methodologies. As mentioned above, research can be both holistic and open to placing different elements together to create a unified whole. In this regard, Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffery (2004) explore the idea of the ethical space as a new framework in research with Aboriginal people. Ermine, et al. refer to the "ethical space" as one existing between or intersecting the Western sphere of knowledge and the Indigenous sphere of knowledge. Ermine et al suggested that this space might exist as a neutral space or common ground where it is possible to create an ethical understanding between the two cultures as a "fragile window of opportunity" (p. 20). The opportunity is a valuable one to pursue as it provides for a relationship between the knowledge systems and procedures and at the same time "articulate[s] the possibilities and challenges of bringing together different ways of coming to knowledge and applying this theory to the practice of research" (p. 16).

In the methodologies for this dissertation I have brought together Indigenous and Euro-western strategies and procedures and created what I perceived as an ethical space, by respectfully recognizing my own intentions, values and assumptions regarding the research process. Previously, hooks (1990) used the metaphor of quilting to describe memory-based research methodologies as a way to "gather and remember" (p. 115) and to introduce the patterns of information. Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) *bricoleur* is a research method capable of piecing together, making changes, taking on new shapes, and adding in new tools, methods and techniques. The reason to use the multi-method approach is to ensure that there is "rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to [the]…inquiry" (p. 5) as the objective is to arrive at a deep understanding of the experiences in question. Denzin and Lincoln also suggest that narrative inquiry, story telling, Indigenous methodologies, and feminist paradigms are examples of post-modern methodologies that work well within the context of crossing-over or blending a variety of methods to arrive at in-depth understanding.

My research, based on the four narratives of life experience, intersects with a qualitative research strategy to investigate narrative and memory through life history research. A qualitative research strategy was used as it acknowledges multiple truths, the inter-subjective nature of the

construction of knowledge, and recognizes the need for contextual and holistic descriptions. Life history research is a methodology that recognizes and values personal voice, it can be both collaborative and transformative. As I was working within an Indigenous paradigm I followed Kovach's (2010) 'conversational method'. This method is based on oral traditions and through this approach, dialogue becomes an effective method to co-create knowledge in the relational context of a conversation. While semi-structured questions are developed to guide and prompt questions, there is flexibility for both the participant and researcher to participate in the form of a dialogue.

This method proved valuable in this research because there is room in the conversational method (with open-ended questions to get the conversation going and oriented towards the research question) for the research participant to tell their story on their own terms (Thomas, 2005). Interspersed as researcher, I also, when it was appropriate, shared my story. At times this meant that the conversation veered away from the prompt questions but this also made the conversation and the resulting narrative texts richer.

Educational Aims and Significance

The significance of this project stems from the information gleaned from the artists' art education and life experience. This will be a meaningful pathway to understanding the dynamics at play in the formation of their cultural identity and the individual cases may indicate a new direction into the larger narrative regarding Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. This dissertation proposes the exploration of the transformative experience of art education.

Developing a sense of one's identity is a gradual process, happening over time and emerging through sustained periods of dedicated and often educative activity (Phinney, 1990). Similarly, artistic identity can also be achieved over time as the artist creates a cohesive body of work with recognizable features and identifiable characteristics. This research will explore the development of an art identity. Through the narratives, the research explores how the artist is able to expand upon their self-awareness through a broadened knowledge of the external world along with a sustained interrogation of their inner world (Anheier & Isar, 2010).

Through the narratives this research will also describe and address the artists' experiences as a site of self-actualization. Based on Maslow's criteria (1943) the individual fulfills their potential through the acceptance of self, secure and positive relationships with others, and

gaining an emotional maturity that leads to a productive life. These four artists will give researchers and educators a sense of how life experiences impact how we understand people and therefore how we teach.

John Dewey (1934) believed that every person is capable of being an artist, and to live an artful life of social interaction that benefits and thereby beautifies the world. For Dewey, art functioned as experience. He believed that through the processes of inquiry, looking and finding meaning are transformative. He wrote that expanded perceptions gained through the experience of art would open new sites of understanding and action. He believed students would have transformative experiences when they had access to new concepts and in turn this would lead to the ability to find meaning and make valuable insights into their social world. Goldblatt (2006) states that based on Dewey's ideas, schools will (or should) help children learn of the things they will experience in the outside world. She also states that Dewey proposed that art melds viewer, artist and artwork into a relationship that teaches the notion that art can bring change and signal a new future. Because art helps us actively internalize what we see and experience, it also stirs memories and experiences, builds a story, fosters growth through active engagement and provokes critical inquiry.

Though limited in scope this current study will continue the narrative of Indigenous women's art practice. Farrell Racette (2012) reminds us that in preceding centuries Indigenous women's art practice was located on the human body, as their art practice was most often directed at dressing members of their family circle. New media introduced through European trade was quickly introduced into their practice. While women artists were known within their communities, their names were often unknown and the work was identified as anonymous.

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century a few Aboriginal women became established artists; Ellen Neel (Kwakwaka'wakw), Doreen Jensen (Gitxsan), Freda Diesing (1925-2002 Haida), Daphne Odjig (b.1919- Odawa-Potawami), Kenoijuak Ashevak (1927- 2013 Inuit) and Jessie Oonark (1906-1985 Inuit) were amongst the first women to gain a national reputation. These women were innovative practitioners and set a trail for the women of the succeeding generations. They worked in traditional materials and experimented with new media and subject matter as carvers, painters and printmakers in the decades following the 1951 revision of the Indian Act. The revision allowed for more artistic freedom after decades of cultural suppression. These women and those who followed them, established practices that influenced and set an

example for the women in this current study. The four stories in this dissertation are a vehicle for insight into the lived experience of the women artists, their practice and their philosophy of art and art education.

Finally, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Menzies (2001) have drawn attention to the lack of respect given to Indigenous people in the name of Western research. Indigenous peoples' experience of researchers has often been one mediated by more than five hundred years of colonialism. A principle of this current research project has been to carry it out in such a way that respect for the individual artist and for the community was implicit in all its aspects and secondly that there has been reciprocity in both the knowledge and the relationships that were created between myself and the artists.

Structure of the Dissertation

The time has come for the jingle dance to commence. The metaphor of the jingle dress and the dance is meant as a connective element that bridges the sections and elements of this dissertation as well as creating a level of understanding by bridging multiple ways of knowing the world and making sense of the context of the research. Because research is a social activity and founded in human interaction I have drawn on the connection of a familiar concept – making a dress for a particular dance - and the creation of meaning. The objective is to enable understanding of multiple realities and to broaden the interpretation of life and learning.

In Chapter Two I outline the literature and theories that have influenced the directions taken in this study. Chapter Three examines the methodologies employed. Chapters Four through Seven present each of the characters in this story—the participants. In each of the four chapters I examine the individual lives of the artists. The same format has been used in each of the artist chapters. The narrative begins with a short biographical entry that provides an overview of the artist's life and experiences that will be more fully explored in the narrative. The eighth chapter situates the stories of each of the participants and brings their experiences together through a two-part cross-case analysis. Finally the conclusion, Chapter Nine, highlights the insights revealed by the participants' stories and suggests the ways art education can positively contribute to identity formation particularly in the lives of young Aboriginal students and directions for future research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review of the Research Methods

I begin this chapter on the literature review of the methodological approaches by invoking the metaphor of the jingle dress. The symbolism of making a dress piece by piece and then adding the jingles that are strung across the skirt and bodice is strong, as a cumulative process is evident in both. In making my choices I pieced together, reshaped and adapted tools, methods and techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). My research approach choices, like the making of a dress, were a combination of aesthetics, materiality, and made on an ad hoc basis.

This chapter is a review of the literature of the methodologies and research techniques used in this dissertation. I have found the value in writing this chapter has been in identifying the relationships between ideas and practices. In addition to this it is an opportunity to outline the research framework, strategy, theories, materials, and projects that have strengthened my understanding of the intersection of cultural identity and art experience.

This research is based on a qualitative study with the purpose of making the connection between narrative and identity, memory, remembering, and storytelling and to make the link between narrative and life history research and the Indigenous conversational method that informed this methodology. Feminism and decolonization situate the theoretical perspective because since the 1980s feminist research has opened the way for more narrative work and more storied, embodied and participatory approaches to research thus leading to a movement to tell the stories of individuals and the world they live in. A feminist approach was taken for this dissertation for a number of reasons, chief among these was my own desire to express the importance that I personally attach to telling women's stories (Beavis, 2006). In addition, within the context of a post-modern purview, feminist epistemologies have played a role in the reinvention of critical qualitative research and methods. Feminist research has led to the reconceptualization of analysis, as well as challenging and countering dominant forms of knowledge, discourse and institutional practice thus making the connection to decolonization valid (Cannelle & Manuelito, 2008).

"We research who we are, in the same way that everything else we do is an expression of who we are" (Coles & Knowles, 2001 p. 48). As Coles and Knowles note, our research is imbued with our personal sense of self. Accordingly as researchers we need to situate ourselves

in the research in order to be genuine in the research that we do and to reflect how we orient ourselves to the world. In short, our politics, morals and ethics influence our epistemological (our ways of knowing the world) and ontological (what is knowledge) assumptions (Coles & Knowles). Wilson (2008) identifies the overall system as our axiology (p. 34). This ethic guides the search for knowledge as well as leading us to judge which information is worth seeking in order to better understand reality.

Theory of Knowledge: Indigenous Epistemology

In this research I recognized the need for a theory of knowledge that informed my research and because this research concentrated on Indigenous cultural identity, a theoretical framework that would honour and build relationship between the artist-participants, the ideas, and myself was implicit. As discussed in the previous chapter, my maternal heritage is Mississauga – of the Anishinaabe people and it is for this reason that the Seven Ojibway Teachings (see chapter 3 Methods, Procedures and Data Analysis) guide the research. According to Tuhiwai Smith (2005) the epistemological approach of any research fundamentally shapes a project, beginning with what is deemed worthy of researching, what questions are asked, how they are asked, and how the "data" are analyzed. The vision for my doctoral research was based on an Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous ways of understanding the world. The challenge was to find a way of bringing together Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ways of conducting research, specifically qualitative inquiry.

While literature on Indigenous methodologies is quite slim, the field is a dynamic and active sphere of knowledge production (Walters & Andersen, 2013). In 1999 Linda Tuhiwai Smith introduced the ground-breaking concept of Indigenous methodologies as fundamentally differing from Western social science traditions. In her work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* she developed and shared the principles and underpinning philosophies of the Indigenous ways of knowing the world. Her scholarship played a significant role and positioned Indigenous research methodologies as unique and a valid methodology approach. Her work also reviewed and emphasized how Indigenous people apply their own lenses, perspectives, and understandings to the research process. In the intervening fifteen years (since the publication of Tuhiwai Smith's work) it can be surmised that Indigenous research methodologies and related projects have

developed rapidly around the world with significant contributions being made by scholars and researchers working in Canada and elsewhere. I have incorporated their work into this research.

Cree – Métis Indigenous researcher Weber-Pillwax (1999, 2001) works within the understanding that Indigenous methodologies are community oriented. As a researcher she makes the commitment to respectful and responsible research practices that have integrity and are grounded in an Indigenous epistemology. She recognizes that the researcher using these methodologies needs to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all living things on earth.

Porsanger (2004) also iterates that an Indigenous paradigm recognizes knowledge as grounded in Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in everyday life. In taking this position this Sami researcher believes all aspects of the research process, both within and outside of Indigenous research, must be reframed and redefined.

Indigenous Methodologies

The extent of research spaces where Indigenous methodologies are producing new scholarship is visible in the range and divergence of research being produced. Much of this current research has come forward since Tuhiwai Smith (1999) both challenged how Indigenous people have come to be known and defined through the frame of Western research methodologies and at the same time demonstrated how research within a Kaupapa Maori methodology reframes all aspects of the research process. She also positioned research and the knowledge created as the beginning of a long-term commitment and as source of power for communities and individuals. Her greater challenge was suggesting that the objective of Indigenous researchers is to decolonize the research process.

Battiste (2006) defines Indigenous epistemology as being derived from "Indigenous people's immediate ecology, their experiences, perceptions, thoughts and memory, including experiences shared with others from the spiritual world discovered in dreams, visions, and signs interpreted with the guidance of healers or elders" (p. 115-116). Similarly, for Denzin and Giardini (2006), Indigenous epistemologies in research are based on "participatory knowing," as is the case with my doctoral research; subjectivity, personal knowledge and specialized cultural knowledge are essential to the research.

Building on the work of the abovementioned, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) used an Indigenous paradigm or theory of knowledge to investigate the experience of being an Indigenous scholar within a university system. His contention is that as a researcher working within Indigenous ways of knowing, his work must be based on relationality. He drew on Jean Graveline's (1998) work. For Graveline, Wilson and others, the concept of the self-in-relation permeates their work because this theory of knowledge both honours and builds relationships with the research participants or co-researchers and the ideas they present.

Other scholars like Dine academic Gail Cannella (Canelle & Manuelito 2008) draw on feminist decolonizing discourses to develop research practices that stress Native epistemologies and spiritualities as a way of life, thus bringing together research and experience. In using Indigenous methodologies these scholars may also be encouraging the emergence of anti-colonial or decolonized social science research. Still others have turned to examples of story and dialogue based on oral traditions as a way of further exploring and expressing the connections to an Indigenous methodology or paradigm. Storytelling figures strongly in explanations of Indigenous qualitative methodologies and methods as a form of communication and as a bearer of traditional knowledges.

Archibald (2008) in her work to find a respectful place for stories and storytelling in education (and more specifically curriculum) worked with Coast Salish and Stó:lō Elder storytellers. Through the research process they shared traditional stories and life experience stories of how they became storytellers as well as sharing the cultural use of stories and the ways that these narratives contribute knowledge in how to think, feel and be. Archibald used the metaphor of a cedar basket as a receptacle to indicate the learning and the stories she received. Cree scholar Kovach, in *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* (2009) places storytelling as central to the transmission of Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge and teachings. She clarifies her Nêhiýaw–based approach as one that incorporates tribal concepts and analysis. She finds the significance of stories is or can be central to culturally valid qualitative research practice.

Kovach's colleague, Michael Hart (2010) researched Cree ways of helping and found that an Indigenous epistemology is a fluid way of knowing as it is derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling, because for him each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. In a similar view Sioux literary scholar Cook-Lynn (2008) argues that

storytelling and incorporating tribal culture, knowledges, and historical perspectives assists in both defining what Indigineity is and clarifying the purpose of Indigenous origins in modern thought. Not only the stories coming through to Native American people from the past, but also the stories being told today, she argues, are bearers of traditional knowledge, history and myth.

Indigenous methodologies also share the common philosophical principles that define methodology more generally. Australian Nunukul/Bidjara researcher Martin (2003) articulated the philosophical underpinnings of Indigenous methodologies into four principles. These are:
- recognition of worldviews, knowledges and realities as distinctive while serving as a research framework
- honouring social mores as essential processes through which we learn and situate ourselves in lands of Aboriginal people,
- emphasizing the social, historical and political contexts which shape Indigenous experience, lives, positions and futures and privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and lands.

Indigenous critical theorist and academic, Sandy Grande (2008) describes the tensions of identity and the practice of research and negotiated this tension by developing the Native American Indigenous methodology "Red Pedagogy." For Grande this pedagogy operates at the crossroads of Western critical pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge. It is a space for engagement rather than a method or technique – within which she critically examines such aspects as the capacity of any non-Indigenous pedagogies to truly theorize Indigenous identity or the notion of Indigenous sovereignty and the sacredness of lands within an non-anthropocentric view of people, land and natural resources. She does not describe her chosen pedagogy as an epistemology but prefers to describe the pedagogy as a "space of engagement" (p. 235). She voices the opinion that Indigenous scholars need nothing outside of themselves and their communities to understand the world and their place within it.

Finally in considering a fine arts perspective, as this dissertation does, Trépanier (2008, 2011) suggests that an Indigenous knowledge or worldview is valuable for an understanding of the Aboriginal arts in Canada. She notes some of the authors described above who write about this way of knowing or worldview, in terms of research practice (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008), and education (Battiste 1995, 2000, 2002; Ermine 1995). In addition she included researchers such as art historians, Berlo and Philips (1992, 1993) who do not write extensively about

worldview but do reference it in relation to their work. She then looked to other arts-based scholars who use an Indigenous worldview more consistently in their work as curators and artists. These include Belmore (2005); Devine (2007); Doxtater (1992, 1996); King (1990, 1997, 2003, 2008); McMaster (1989, 1992, 1993,1999, 2005, 2008, 2010); Rice (2008, 2009); and Townsend- Gault (1992, 1998). For Ermine (1995) this epistemology informs Aboriginal culture and art making because each are part of a search for meaning. In addition he sees the use of this theory of knowledge and the arts as skills that promote personal and social transformation. Weber-Pillwax (1999) affirms that, an Indigenous epistemology incorporating Euro-Western methodologies will broaden the spectrum of whose voice is heard and thus makes the research richer. She maintains that integrating Indigenous methodologies into academic research should not be considered a "threat to existing forms or models of knowledge and knowledge creation" but instead leads to shared goals, objectives and responsibilities (p. 31).

Qualitative Inquiry and Indigenous Methods

As mentioned previously this research project was based on qualitative methods of narrative inquiry, life history and conversation. Both Indigenous (Kovach, 2009) and post-modern researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) propose that a research strategy that uses a qualitative approach is complimentary to Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. In her dissertation Lavallee (2009) suggested an Indigenous epistemology is akin to a qualitative research strategy; it is used to connect individuals whether they are conducting or participating in the research process. Lavallee's research was rooted in the Indigenous teaching of the medicine wheel as a qualitative inquiry. Though she found bridging Indigenous and Western approaches challenging, Lavallee needed to do this in order to tell the stories of her participants. She worked to integrate her university-based fieldwork into the Indigenous community and advanced the idea that an Indigenous epistemology is similar to qualitative research. In doing so, Lavallee incorporated communal Indigenous values, beliefs and healing practices into her research. Her interactions were akin to community-based research with the added recognition that the research work is only the first step in creating a lifelong relationship and commitment to the community.

Lavallee, like Weber-Pillwax, (1999) and Wilson (2008) all discussed the challenge of bringing together Indigenous ways of knowing and Western research methods. Kovach (2009) also queried integrating Euro-Western methodologies and Indigenous methodologies. She

described how, for her own dissertation, she satisfied both the institutional requirements and her own personal obligations when she fitted together a bridge-like structure that incorporated a Plains Cree tribal-centred framework with Euro-Western methodologies. She found that by reflecting upon her own culture she was able to understand the importance of Indigenous epistemologies.

Similarly, Bedard's (2011) dissertation, *Kwewag Emosaadimowaad Ge-Naajiwang "Women Walking in Beauty": Anishinaabe Women's Indigenous Creative Process in Context* incorporated an arts-related research methodology into her reflection on creative practice and Indigenous knowledges precisely because she felt the use of Indigenous ways of knowing the world offered multiple points of view and therefore one in which the Indigenous voice could be heard. She stated that "respect, relationality, and relational accountability" (p. 25) were central to her methods and procedure. In addition to this she needed to extend the boundaries of Euro-Western methodologies as to do otherwise would not adhere to her connections and duties as an Anishinaabe woman.

In the research journey that I have been on, the questions asked and answered by the four women, and my interpretations and development of the meaning all come from the knowledge that was shared with me. I believe that the four artists had agency as they told their story. My objective was to develop a two-way relationship with the four women artists. I wanted to hear and understand their stories to see how they made sense of their art and life experiences in connection to their cultural identity. Kovach's (2010) conversational method as a compliment to life history research was incorporated as part of the qualitative methodological approach.

Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), "is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is clearly its own" (p. 9). These authors define qualitative research as a strategy that places the researcher in an active role in the real world. The objective of qualitative research for Denzin and Lincoln is "to make the world visible…[through] an interpretive, naturalistic approach" (p. 4-5). For Creswell (2009), the researcher using a qualitative strategy is making knowledge claims based on a constructivist perspective. The researcher intuitively accepts the idea of various perspectives as meanings are socially and historically constructed, and with this comes the notion that multiple inferences can be drawn from individual experiences.

Qualitative Research and Narrative

The common feature of qualitative research is the naturalistic manner in which the studies are made, as researcher and participant work together in a familiar environment. Secondly, gathering and analysis of research material is interpretive as the primary focus is to explain how people understand and make sense of their life experiences and the world they live in. Another primary characteristic of qualitative research is accepting there are many ways to acquire life knowledge. For Minichiello and Kottler (2010) knowledge is constantly evolving and therefore never fixed. It is intimately connected to situations related to history, culture, language, and the ways that material is acquired. In order to advance knowledge through the research process, it is necessary to first recognize that the research strategy, whether through conversations, observations, analyses of documents, or through surveys and a controlled experiment strategy, will have a bearing on the outcome of the knowledge produced.

Creswell (2009) enumerates qualitative research as one in which the discussion leads to questions that are broad and general so multiple meanings can be constructed by the participant. He qualifies this by stating, "the more open-ended the discussion the better" (p. 8). Furthermore the onus is on the researcher to watch and listen carefully to what is said and done and to draw parallels between the conversational moment and the historical and cultural situation of the participant.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest practitioners collect and study a wide variety of materials through the use of case studies, personal experience, introspection, life history; as well as the use of artefacts, interviews, cultural production, and varia – any of which can aid in further describing and giving meaning to an individual's life. In an approach they identify as *bricolage*, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest researchers move back and forth across frameworks, especially when the researcher leans toward post-modern methodologies such as narrative inquiry, story telling, Indigenous methodologies, and feminist paradigms.

In *Indigenous Methodologies* Kovach (2009) restates that qualitative research is an "inclusive" research method. She sees this as a method that can honour multiple truths and seek understanding. She proposes that qualitative research offers space along with such theoretical frameworks as feminist or grounded theory. She suggests Indigenous epistemology and methods should be situated in qualitative research because inside any methodology is a theory of knowledge. Additionally this is also possible because as Kovach states,

> …the qualitative landscape encompasses characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches (feminist methodologies and participatory action research) that in the research design value both process and content. This matters because it provides common ground for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to understand each other. (p. 25)

Other researchers have argued for a personalized look at identities, used qualitative research methods in their explorations of identity as a format in which unique stories can be examined and shared. Using qualitative methods, researchers have opened the field to the ways in which artist-educators examine self-identity through art-making (Holloman, 1996), how elementary school-aged children conceive of identity formation within school and in the context of a multi-cultural society (Garoian, 2002), the manner in which artists, teachers and museum educators formulate their identity in the institution (Reid, 2012) and the ways adolescents reveal their identity through social media (Castro, 2014).

In particular Holloman (1996) used a qualitative self-reflexive study in which he examined his personal issues regarding identity by examining his own art practice, his art educational experiences and his consequent experiences as an art educator. His objective was to link his own experience of identity through art to issues of decolonization.[1] While Liu (2011) and Reid (2012) turned to qualitative methods in their respective study of narrative inquiry and life history in order to draw information from the artists and art museum educators who participated in their investigation of identity formation. Using narrative inquiry Liu analysed art as a lifelong activity and the manner in which social and cultural context impacted the individual learners. Reid's (2012) use of life history research helped her make a link between post-modernism, life and professional experience and the need to question whose story is told. As researchers, Reid and Liu found a qualitative research strategy was most useful as both questioned the transformative elements of identity development in the context of life situations and experiences. Still other studies that have explored questions of identity and taken a qualitative approach, for example, Assante and Opoku-Asare's (2011) arts-based inquiry into wall murals as an exploration of cultural identity for Sirigu women. These authors combined fieldwork, observation and structured interviews to connect the women's art to their role in art education and social sustainability. Recent dissertations that also considered artists' identity include

1 Artist-educator Holloman (1996) has written, "During the years that I spent in public school art classes, never once did I receive any indication that the artwork of the Native American could be held in the same esteem as that of the established European/ American traditions" (p. 55).

Suominen (2003), whose arts-based auto-ethnographic study explores the author's self-identity as affected by cultural changes; McLaughlin's (2006) investigation through an interview format with women artists to find how they mapped their own identity as artists; Eldridge (2006) who used life history research to investigate the identity of Native American art educator Ruthe Blalock Jones; and Weaver (2010) who examined Indigenous cultural identity through wampum as a social practice.

Theoretical Perspective: Feminism and Decolonization

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that the research strategy in turn situates the research and the researcher in the chosen theoretical perspective, research design and methodology. In the following section feminism and decolonization are positioned as the theoretical perspective of this research meshed with the mixed methodology of life history based on conversation, narrative and memory.

An objective of feminist research, as with Indigenous ways of knowing and the Indigenous research paradigm, life history research and decolonization, is empowering people by giving them a voice to tell their own stories. Feminist research is designed to create social and individual change, and like other liberatory research, the role of the researcher and participants is to seek an engagement in making change. The last quarter of the twentieth century was shaped by a search for new models of truth, method, and representation, as well as a refusal to privilege any one method or theory. The intention was to break down barriers of patriarchy and colonialism and move toward social justice throughout society (Rosaldo, 1989). With these methods researchers worked to ensure that previously silenced groups were heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The colonial discourse and master narratives were and continue to be questioned by feminists and post-modernists. Hesse-Biber (2014**)** makes the connection between post-modernism, feminism, narrative, women's lives and the descriptions that arise from in-depth conversations. For her, a feminist approach recognizes women's experiences and when they are told in the women's own words they become a rich knowledge resource.

Feminism and proponents of decolonization have worked to break down the dominant narrative and replace these with the localized, smaller stories of previously silenced people. In doing so the space has been made to accommodate multiple and fractured histories. Allowing stories to emerge, such as the ones told in this dissertation, means there is now room for a

narrative of identity as well as for issues of class, race, gender, and ethnicity to shape the process of inquiry. Additionally, the inclusive and dialogic nature of post-modernism opened the possibility of less traditional and more arts-informed methodologies. Recent research and dissertations (Bedard 2011; Bourgault 2011; Butler-Kisber 2010; Dowell 2006; Liu 2011; Reid 2012) have contextualized narrative research within a postmodern approach. Identity narratives and research align when the truth of the story is imbedded in the meaning it holds for the teller of the story and when the researcher contextualizes the story for the benefit of the community. Payne (2009) states that through stories we position ourselves for understanding by others and at the same time examine our understanding of our past, present and future.

Story and Narrative Inquiry

Telling or listening to stories is part of Indigenous practice. In all situations the story shared must be treated with respect and the engendered relationship from which the story emerged must be acknowledged. Kovach (2009) states there is a great responsibility in asking for and receiving a story. There is no doubt that stories capture our attention. Indigenous scholar Archibald (2010) refers to the action of reflecting on stories because the telling, reporting and the recollection, cause us to contemplate our engagement in the world. The Ojibway teachings (McGuire Adams, 2009; Simpson, 2011) that guide and balance this research, acknowledge with respect the wisdom that is found in story.

In their individual way, as visual artists, the four women in this dissertation all engage with story in their art practice. Niro, Myre, Myers and Cachene illustrate family stories, populate their images with their family members or explore their family histories in their work. Lippard (1990) in "Telling" discusses the role of memory, family and history in contemporary art and in this way states that artists working with story are making work that draws on tradition and life experience and in doing so create a hybrid that is based in emotion but at the same time can be analytically complex.

In the past three decades as many Indigenous artists have come to the fore, they have drawn on the hybrid of family, memory and history as they challenge the prevailing narratives. In addition to the four women in this study, these artists include amongst others, Carl Beam, Adrian Stimson, James Luna, Lori Blondeau, Rebecca Belmore, Dana Claxton, Kent Monkman, and Jane Ash Poitras. These artists explore the social and political currents of their experience as

Indigenous people, drawing on cultural and family histories, and personal experiences to tell both the old and the new stories. Artists are also looking into the future. Digital artists Skawennati Fragnito and Jason Lewis created AbTeC at Concordia University in 2006, as a multi-faceted digital landscape that situates the personal computer as a way to empower Native people, especially our youth, to both preserve and produce knowledge, culture and language.[2] Through storytelling users create new, Aboriginally-determined territories within the web-pages, online games, and virtual environments.

In knowing and telling alternative knowledges and histories these artists mentioned above, are creating work that furthers both the visual and written discourses by engaging with and then acting upon history. In this way they confront the dominant histories. One facet of which is, comprehending the impact of colonialism. The experience of colonialism (and the on-going effort to break the cycle through decolonization) is central to Indigenous culture and politics because "coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 34). The link between feminist research and decolonization is in the twin roles of empowerment and education with an objective to bring about change. It becomes clear that decolonization is not a single approach but comprises the knowledge, issues and motivations that are brought to the procedure. It is important to continue to raise questions and to hear life stories in order to foreground Indigenous voices.

In their *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai Smith (2008) state that the objective of decolonization is to work toward a common goal to demonstrate how language, research questions, and the academy have worked to silence people. The impetus for research now must be to explore the personal (critical) narratives and bring the life story into the open. With this in mind, in the following section I will examine the connection between narrative, stories, memory and the life history methodology as it pertains to my research and the theoretical perspectives of feminism and decolonization.

2 The name AbTeC originated with Skawennati's CyberPowWow (1997-2004) See: cyberpowwow.net In its newest incarnation at AbTeC Skawennati and Lewis are working with artists and community members on *Skins* (#1 2008- 2009, #2 2011,# 3 2012) and *TimeTraveller*™ (2007-2013).

Methodology: Narrative and Life History

Narrative and life history research are brought together as a twinned approach in my research design and methodology as both are useful in exploring life experience and the ways people recall their experiences. Both narrative and life history research rely on and depict the storied nature of lives (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Quite simply as people tell the stories of their lives to researchers the material (also dependent on theoretical perspectives) becomes life history research (Germenten, 2013).

While Cole and Knowles (2001) separate life history research from inquiries such as narrative, other researchers consider narrative in the context of the life history research. Langelier (1999), Mischler (1999), and Goodson and Gill (2011) all view identity as intimately connected to lived narratives. In particular Mischler found it necessary to study the forms and contexts of dialogic methods such as personal narratives and life histories, because within these, identities are produced and performed. He calls his personal approach "narrative as *praxis"* (p. 18). He has three reasons for looking at narrative in this way with the most important being that people are active agents who, through their interplay, become subjects making and transforming the world as they perform, adapt, and construct themselves and their conditions. Bruner (2002) made a similar observation when he stated that by intertwining action and consciousness the "knower and the known [become] inseparable and in this way cultural life and identity are united" (p. 27).

Some researchers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Mischler 1999) speak to the difficulty of writing narrative because of the complexity of trying to both understand and portray the ongoing stories being told and retold in an inquiry. This difficulty arises because as individuals we are still telling our ongoing life stories as they are lived, told, relived and retold. In addition to the ongoing story we continue to, as Connelly and Clandinin describe it, "re-story" other and older experiences as we reflect on them (p. 9). In this way the stories and their meanings are constantly in movement over time and in flux, as in both the memory and the retelling of the stories, elements are added or omitted.

According to Clandinin (2006) the emergence of storytelling in social sciences research has intensified and highlights the importance and role of stories and the production of meaning for researchers. In the collaboration between researcher and participants, the inquirers enter into their research by engaging with participants as they live out their stories by getting participants

to tell their stories. This begins an ongoing series of negotiations in terms of the relationships, the purpose of the research, transitions through the research and the researchers own role in the relationships and in the space of the research inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) have drawn on Dewey's exploration of experience as interactional. To them, the continuity of experience for both the storyteller and the inquirer means that separately and together they grow and shape the outcome. The objective of narrative inquiry is to come to understand how the personal and the social are entwined over time through a lifetime. It is also to explore the ways individual experiences are formed by the greater social, cultural and institutional narratives within which we, and our participants live and have lived.

Cole and Knowles (2001) make the distinction between life history research and other approaches such as biographical research methods and narrative inquiry as they believe their approach gives more of a context to the individual life. However, the definition of life history research is varied and there are a variety of approaches that explore the individual situation in depth and then place the narrative accounts within a broader context. Goodson and Gill (2014) define their method of narrative as akin to life history research because it has a thematic process within which the individual can take a broad view of their life and identify themes and then the themes can be interpreted. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) with their inclination to post-modernism include life history research in their list of methods to represent people's lived experience, suggesting that in order to find rich descriptions of the social world life history research is a strong choice. And according to Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) life history research is situated as a method for the exploration of identity as it makes space for personal context within the story told. In addition they examine the researcher's role as being one that requires an "investment of the self, a commitment to the issues being addressed and a desire to create [a study or document] that reflects …[the researcher's] commitments" (p. 9). Other researchers working with women's life experience also consider cultural, political, familial, or educational contexts of life experiences. One such is Oral Narrative Research. Vaz (1997) re-envisioned the principles of Oral Narrative Research as a way to affirm and validate women's experience, and to share women's life experiences. The purpose of Oral Narrative Research is for the interviewer (most often a woman) to learn and absorb information from other women. The essential elements are to establish a rapport and gain greater access to the life story, to actively listen and to pay attention to the body language. Vaz also suggests that before embarking on (as well as during) Oral

Narrative Research it is necessary for the researcher to take her own life experiences into consideration as the women's stories are heard and written. This is an approach that records the oral histories of women of colour in order to expand and transform knowledge of women's experience and history. These are histories of life experience that remain limited and collecting these stories means being able to hear women's words, and hear the history from a woman's point of view. I would propose that in combining narrative (and the connections between narrative, memory, story and identity) with life history, experience and life story research that the knowledge (and context) of the women's life experience will be richer.

Life story methodologies each have a slightly different emphasis and meaning, but all focus on the first person accounting of a life because everyone has stories to tell of their lived experience. Each of us, organizes the memories of our lives into stories and in narrating these experiences, they are given an order.

Conversational Method

Kovach (2009) suggests that working within an Indigenous research framework the traditional power held by the researcher (in terms of research process and outcome) must be altered in such a way that in gathering information the voice and the interpretation of the participant is foregrounded. For this reason she proposes the best method for achieving this equitable situation is through the use of story, as in this way people can share their experiences on their own terms.

Kovach (2010) states the structure used to hear the stories is important because there are implications for Indigenous inquiry. Therefore the conversational format of life history research made this an appropriate choice. She recommends the 'conversational method' as it is congruent with tribal epistemology and is flexible enough to accommodate Native oral traditions yet styles itself on a more traditional interview process. With this method there is respect for the participant's story and it allows the participant more leeway in what they want to share with respect to the research question.

The primary objective of life history for Cole and Knowles is to engage with the participant "so fully that the richness and understanding of [the]…life in context leaves readers satisfied" (p. 70). This also means breaking down traditional research hierarchies to make the research more thoughtful and reflexive. According to Kovach (2010) dialogue is an effective

method to co-create knowledge in the relational context of a conversation. For these researchers there is no protocol because the participant knows the general intentions of the work, and they will therefore be comfortable in telling their story. As researchers we honour their knowledge and situate ourselves in an equally trusting relationship.

Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest the likeliest format to share is in guided conversations with the emphasis on conversation. In the following chapter the conversational method will be discussed in greater detail as a primary method of the procedure. Kovach (2010) recognizes this method as bringing an Indigenous focus as it is orally based and situates the speaker and the listener/co-conversationalist in relation to one another. Cole and Knowles too reiterate that research intersects and emanates from our own experiences. As described above, in their opinion we research who we are and "to research is to reveal the autobiographical" (p. 45). In effect we put ourselves into the research. Accordingly for these researchers there can never be a true objectivity, as they admonish, "to infer [that] we do not have particular personal theories is…to act in bad faith with those we research" (p. 47). They also suggest that the life history researcher be articulate and define within their work "the assumptions, experiences, and passions" that guide the inquiry as this is the only way to connect with and speak to the complexities of another person's experiences (p. 48).

In this research format the research needs to be created on the basis of an equitable relationship. In this context Wilson (2008) suggests relationality as the key to keeping the research and interactions honest and humane. For him and other Indigenous scholars this means that for each one of us we are the relationships we hold and are part of (Wilson, 2001), the interactions should be empowering, healthy and strong (Wilson, 2008), and cannot be separated from community (Weber- Pillwax, 2001). For Wilson this extends to the bonds or circles that are created in the research. In short, the relational for Wilson means research is based in a community context and demonstrates respect, reciprocity and responsibility (p. 99). According to Kovach (2010) dialogue is an effective method to co-create knowledge in the relational context of a conversation.

All of the above concur that building a personal relationship between researcher and participant is essential, and the principles listed above must be part of the relationship. To engage in relationships of any kind, trust is implicit. In the particular circumstance of working with so-called 'at risk' populations the issue of trust in research has been slow to build. As Tuhiwai

Smith recorded in 1999, for Indigenous people "research is a dirty word" (p. 1). To counter such identification, Cole and Knowles suggest that maintaining the principles of "relationality, mutuality, empathy, as well as care, sensitivity and respect…[is not only]…emblematic of and crucial to life history research… [incorporating these principles] will invariably yield rich information" (p. 26). For this reason as researchers we need to maintain and bring into our inquiries the same equitable and honest relationships that we have in our daily lives.

With this research methodology I was able to build relationships with each participant that was respectful, creative and with a level of trust and honesty that made us all comfortable with the process of questioning and the ensuing conversations. We were able to reminisce, share stories and laugh.

Summary

In this chapter I have examined the literature related to the research methods chosen for this dissertation. I began with an overview of the theory of knowledge based on Indigenous epistemology and the qualitative research strategy. The theoretical perspectives of feminism and decolonization followed, as it was on and through this theoretical framework that many of my research methods were based. The research design of narrative and life history research was examined as the basis of the research lies in in-depth, one-on-one interviews with the four women and the narrative created from the life experience and memories. In writing this chapter I feel I had to make choices and find ways to suit both the practice and my personal theoretical stance or way of being in the world.

I return to the symbol and metaphor of the jingle dress and the jingle dancer; Denzin and Lincoln suggest in doing post-modern research the researcher, like the dressmaker, needs to be adaptive and capable of using diverse means of investigation. Life and memory-based research is akin to bringing the jingle dress and the dance together as bits and pieces of information and recollections form our memories and the accumulated patterns can then be collected and incorporated into our research.

Chapter 3
Methodology, Procedure and Data Analysis

In the previous chapter I presented the research materials, strategy, histories, theories and projects that have strengthened my understanding of the intersection of cultural identity and art experience. In closing that chapter I mentioned that I brought together, pieced, and reshaped materials to form a unified methodology – much as the maker of a jingle dress must as she adds row upon row of the metal cones.

In this chapter I continue to shape and compile the materials in order to tell the story of this research and the procedures employed in my inquiry. I am positioning myself as a researcher of Mississauga heritage focussing on an research subject investigating the lifelong art experiences of the four women artists of Indigenous descent. It is for these reasons that the predominant research paradigm was an Indigenous one and as such Indigenous principles and practices have been integral to the approaches taken. The methods and procedures also reflect this paradigm. As I am working within the context of a Euro-Western institution I have also considered the arguments for using ethically and culturally responsive (Euro-western) social science methodologies that are compatible with an exploration of cultural identity.

Introducing the Framework

In the first part of this chapter I begin by briefly outlining the seven Ojibway teachings that guide this research. Following this are the reasons for using an Indigenous paradigm. This segment is followed by an overview of the arguments regarding Indigenous research methods and its complementation with western social science methodologies and procedures. This section ends with a discussion of the attendant principles and practices that relate to the methods and procedures used in this research study. The second part of this chapter focuses on the procedures of data collection with a discussion of research preparation, the development of the research question and selection of the participants. The third and final section covers the data analysis. It begins with an overview of how the collected data was organized for meaning, a description of the theoretical approach and method, identifying and connections of the themes for the coding,

representation and interpretation of the data. Throughout each section I will examine the way that each method and procedure is respectful of an Indigenous methodology.

The Seven Ojibway Teachings and the Research

As described in the Introduction to this dissertation, I have been on a journey to understand identity in the context of life, relationships, art and education. In the context of writing this dissertation I am trying to understand the two worlds and the pedagogical implications of Western and Anishinaabe ways of knowing and inquiry. In performing this research I have tried to come to a level of comfort to be able to function in two ways of thinking and knowing. Once I realized that the two worldviews have commonalities (Absolon, 2011; Little Bear, 2000) I understood how they could come together in one project. As Little Bear (2000) stated,

> …all colonial people, both the colonizer and the colonized, have shared or have collective views of the world embedded in their languages, stories or narratives. It is collective because it is shared…but contested…it is the paradox of what it means to be colonized…everyone has to attempt to understand the different ways of viewing the world and then make choices [because no one can]… have a pure worldview…[or one] that is one hundred percent Indigenous or Eurocentric. (p. 85)

In this context, it is paramount to locate an ethical space in which to work. This is especially important as I continue to work through what it means for me to learn about and grow within my own sense of identity as a researcher. For this reason I explored how the Ojibway way of knowing the world intersected with the process of research. Anishinaabe scholars, including McGuire Adams (2009) and Simpson (2011), among others, often refer to the seven Ojibway teachings (also called Seven Grandfather Teachings). These are: To cherish knowledge is to know nibwaakan (*wisdom*), To know zhaagi (*love)* is to know peace*,* To honor all of creation is to have manade osiseon (*respect*)*,* To face the foe with integrity or courage is mangade'e (*bravery),* to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation is bandan (*humility)*, to know all of these things is debw*e (truth*), to be brave in facing a situation is gwekwaadziwin (*honesty*) as this is to know what "truth" really is in your heart and therefore live with integrity. These teachings are important in sustaining life and acquiring and maintaining balance that will lead to fairness in decision making. I believe that I carried these teachings into my research and procedures as I came to discover more about myself and understand the knowledge needed to proceed with this dissertation.

Why an Indigenous Paradigm

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states that research carried out on Native and Indigenous people was or remains, an imperialist measure to "problematize the Indigenous" (p. 91). Porsanger (2004) also maintains that research has often been used as a tool for the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their territories. And as such, scientific research is implicated in the extremes of imperialism and remains part of the remembered history of the world's Indigenous peoples. Wilson (2001) suggests that, "knowledge and peoples will cease to be objectified when researchers fulfill their role in the research relationship through their methodology…[and take] relational accountability" (p. 177). Simpson (2000) stated when research is done by Indigenous academics the material should be rooted in Indigenous worldviews to ensure an accurate Aboriginal perspective and work towards more positive or egalitarian relationships.

As a researcher working with Indigenous women, I was aware of this long and problematic history. It was therefore important to situate my research, methodologies and the procedures within an Indigenous paradigm. Working from this position permits and enables the researcher to examine who they are as the research is in progress and at the same time to be to be actively engaged in the research processes (Weber Pillwax, 2001). This way of being not only creates new knowledge but transforms whom researchers are and where they are located (Wilson, 2001). More recently Wilson (2008) suggested that an Indigenist paradigm requires the researcher to critically reflect on what he or she brings into the research process or relationship. For Wilson this requires a truthful emphasis on both the earned and the unearned privileges of each individual researcher, as he believes this exposure more truthfully reflects the complexity of real life.

Following Wilson's suggestion, I situate myself in the research as a learner. The methods and procedures in this research (into the art and cultural identity of the four women artists) have been guided by the Ojibway teachings that encompass the four principles of responsibility, respect, reciprocity, and relevance to the subjects (Ellis & Earley, 2006; Louis, 2006; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous Research Paradigm and Western Methodologies and Procedures

Wilson (2008) writes of the quandary that faces Indigenous academic researchers who draw on both Euro-Western and Indigenous knowledge as they work and present their material. Kovach (2009, 2010) echoes the researchers above (see also Ermine et al 2004; Tuhiwai Smith 2005; Wilson 2008) as she writes of the ways Indigenous researchers, including herself have integrated cultural knowledge into both Indigenous and dominant culture methodologies and procedures.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Wilson (2008), Kovach (2009), and Chilisa (2012) have all suggested that Indigenous research paradigms do not deny the usefulness of Western methods. However, they call on researchers to place Western methods and paradigms into the appropriate cultural context, which includes the colonial project and the valorization of Euro-Western ways of knowing and researching. As Tuhiwai Smith (2005) proposed, qualitative research now has a multiplying set of tools that can increasingly produce more finely wrought interpretations of social life and that, "expanding the understandings and tools of qualitative researchers is important in an era when the diversity of human experience…is undergoing profound cultural and political shifts" (p. 103). She sees qualitative research as an important tool that can enter into the discourse on representation and difference, disentangle opposing storylines, create spaces for decolonization, provide space for listening to silenced voices, and aid in the analysis of shifting experiences, identities and realities. For Tuhiwai Smith qualitative research into the lived experiences of people in conjunction with an Indigenous paradigm provides the necessary "tools, strategies, insights, and expert knowledge that can come with having a focused mind" (p. 103). Both Wilson (2008) and Chilisa (2012) suggest the integration of relational Indigenous ways of knowing with aspects of Euro-Western research paradigms for the dual purposes of decolonizing social science research and legitimizing Indigenous knowledge in the academy. Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai Smith (2008) suggest that within many qualitative inquiries, such as participatory action research, phenomenology, life history, and narrative inquiry, Indigenous researchers can find an ally.

My Methodology and the Procedures

As described above and in the previous chapter, the methodology for this research brought an Indigenous theory of knowledge together with a qualitative research strategy. Each theoretical layer indicates that knowledge is fluid, experiential, contextual and individual. In order to more fully explore narrative and life story I needed to explore participatory approaches that would lead me to the individuals and their stories of the world they have experienced. For this reason the research design is based on narrative and memory. Therefore a methodology and procedural frame that was compatible with the dialogic processes of narrative, story, and life history, and yet faithful to an Indigenist framework, feminism and the ethics of decolonization was implicitly necessary.

Kovach's (2010) "Conversational method" is just such a methodology, as it utilizes story, life history, oral history, and semi- structured interviews as part of an authentic engagement through open-ended yet guided conversations. She proposes that this method of life history research is a way of acknowledging the importance of oral traditions and sharing knowledge in Indigenous cultures. For the purposes of this dissertation, the conversational method is significant as part of an Indigenous methodology and paradigm because it is dialogic, relational, and supportive of others. This method benefits from open-ended, semi-structured interview questions to prompt conversations and encourages the co-creation of knowledge. Furthermore with this method, the findings are presented as condensed stories that provide both context and include the voice of the participant/s. There is flexibility for both the participant and the researcher to participate in a dialogue and most importantly there is room for participants to tell their story on their own terms (Kovach 2009, 2010).

The conversational method supports research that examines the relationship between cultural identity and the women's life and art experiences. It is consistent with an Indigenous methodology and paradigm because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition. In this way this method, as a dialogic format, brings forward elements of narrative, storytelling, memory, and life histories. I chose to adopt the formula of the conversational method as the main element of the procedure and analysis as it uses the sharing of stories and life histories as a means to inform others and because it is relational at its core.

By incorporating this methodology into this current research, my own self-knowledge deepened with each conversation. In all cases, the participants shared stories from their lives and this resulted in a highly contextualized and powerful source of knowledge. In receiving the gift of story, I was ever mindful of the responsibility inherent in the research and the reciprocity it entailed.

In the following section, I will show how these methodologies were incorporated into the procedures and data analysis.

Research Preparation

For Creswell (2009) the research preparation begins with the researcher considering what the motivations and purpose of the research are on a personal and academic level. From the beginning there must be an inward knowing that is based on the premise that the researcher can relate to her own process. Kovach (2009) suggests that to do this is to "self-locate, [and] to situate one's self in relation to the research" (p. 50) and one procedure is to include the story of both the researcher and the research participant. Lavallee (2009) states that when locating ourselves within the research, personal growth will be an important outcome.

While I included my story and my connection to the research in the Introduction to this dissertation, I did not interview myself or place myself in the research in a more significant way. I believe that I have grown with this project as I have learned more of my history, reflected on my identity as a descendant of Aboriginal women and gained a great deal of knowledge (personal and academic) from the community.

As part of research preparation, both Kovach (2009) and Absolon (2011) suggest talking with other Indigenous researchers about Indigenous research before the project is fully underway. I followed this advice and contacted colleagues at other universities in Canada when I had questions about the practicality of the research or needed help defining a particular concept. I also enlisted the aid of colleagues to suggest participants.

In her research preparation and practice, Kovach (2009) recorded her thoughts in a journal. She began with recording her preliminary thoughts as well as her concerns and worries and the more positive notions of what she would be able to accomplish with the research. As she started the research, she made field notes to record her observations and thoughts on the process, discoveries, anxieties and other personal responses to the research. For her these records were a

way to follow and analyse what her findings were and to track her discoveries. In preparation for her research, Absolon (2011) worked with textiles – she made a tapestry that for her helped to "holistically conceptualize" all the information she would gather, learn and need to represent in her research (p. 34).

In preparation for the research, I made notes in journal-fashion. I made copious notes on the material I was discovering including, among others–Indigenous ways of knowing, definitions of decolonization, wampum, the four R's of ethical Indigenous research, as well as making notes on exhibitions of Indigenous art, artists and where they went to school.

Developing the Research Question

Preparatory work for research begins with clarifying the purpose of the research and this invariably means considering the motives. It is therefore essential that the researcher is aware of the motivating factors and is able situate herself within the research as she develops the research question (Lucero, 2014; Steinhauer, 2001). Hampton (1995), Wilson (2001), Kovach (2009, 2010) state that by situating ourselves in the research we are clarifying our perspective on the world and this is necessary as we can only work from or interpret the world based on our own experience. Non-Indigenous researchers, such as Van Manen (2001), Cole and Knowles (2001) too suggest the need to 'situate the self' because the researcher cannot ask research questions that are counter to the individual researcher's beliefs. This is because "the question of knowledge always refers us back to our world, to who we are…" (Van Manen 2001, p. 46). Cole and Knowles suggest that it is fundamental in researching the human condition that, "the work must come from a deep and personal commitment" (p. 45). When the work is infused with the personal moral, social, intellectual and political roots and experiences of the researcher, it will lead to a research question that is authentic and legitimate. This is important because researchers need to recognize the motives in doing research and according to Hampton (1995) these motives are usually recovered in stories.

As discussed in the Introduction, my research question began with a personal identification with the material. The question came from a personal inquiry stemming from my Indigenous family history, as well as my investigation of women's art education in Canada, research on the art educational experiences of girls, and from my interactions and research with women in art education. The question was formulated with this background in mind.

Course work for a graduate class, Personal and Cultural Expression and Identity also contributed to my thought process as I was trying to formulate the research project and the question that would move the research forward. I created an installation based on memories of my grandmother and the intersection of schooling, art, domesticity and identity. A journal entry explained my process:

> I have used the work of Aganetha Dyck and Shelley Niro as jumping off points to explore my and my grandmother's shared history through the domestic icon of preserving food. Through the metaphors of preserving – "canning" "putting down" "conserves" I examine our educational path, role as daughters, wives and mothers as well as the outside influences that impinged on these. My intention has been to fill a dozen preserving jars with a variety of emblematic material – homemade paper dolls, dust, photographs, objects of adornment, government documents, treaties, letters and natural materials to establish a timeline from 1910 to the present.
> Dyck's use of everyday objects as a form of sculpture in progress embodies her notion that 'you make art from who you are and from what you know' (Walker, 2007 p. D1). In her work, Dyck is most interested in exploring issues of identity and by the nature of her work, absence. …I have also looked at Shelley Niro's work as she explores identity both with humour and a critical eye. Niro uses the image of the heart to evoke the inner strength that allows one to deal with adversity and confirm a sense of identity. My grandmother was always aware of her cultural identity, most often in a positive way but she also recognized the connotations of having dark skin or as she aged and health issues affected her balance she was very concerned that her staggering on the street could be perceived as her being, (in her words,) a "drunken Indian." My grandmother's story illustrated in this installation has given me a vantage point from which I am able to think about identity from a personal point of view as well as from the standpoint of two artists who incorporate questions of identity into their art practice (Artist Statement, March 2009).

The resulting primary research question for my dissertation became: What is the relationship between art and life experiences and cultural identity in the lives of four contemporary Indigenous women artists?

The question is intended to make inquiry into self-awareness, the benefits of understanding our cultural identity, the transformative characteristics art education and how we tell our own stories of identity. The question stems from my personal life and professional experiences as an art educator and art education researcher, and are therefore of great interest to me. The artist participants that I asked to co-create the knowledge were attentive to the concept and the question I was asking. The participants were keenly interested in being part of research that was thoughtful, experiential and identity-based.

Selecting Participants

I drew prospective participants from personal or collegial contacts. In using the conversational method to gather data, as with qualitative studies generally, a smaller selected group of participants is gathered together as opposed to a larger random sample. This is because the study focused on depth of personal experience rather than breadth. According to Creswell (2009), a necessary part of the selection process in qualitative research is "to purposefully select participants…that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185).

From the outset I was working within the context of "relational accountability" as, for each participant, there was some variety of a pre-existing acquaintance (Wilson, 2008, p. 97). For Kovach (2009, 2010) acquaintanceship of some degree gives her the sense of being both an insider and an outsider in relation to her chosen research contributors. She believes the relational aspect enhances her commitment to the research project, helps her adhere to the four R's and adds a positive degree of unknowability to the research material–in terms of shared or known information as well as new material to be discovered.

While I discuss how I knew or came to know each of the women in greater depth in the individual artist-narrative chapter, suffice to say that as life history researchers, Cole and Knowles (2001) state life history projects can require a relatively long-term commitment and it is therefore important that participants selected are known to the researcher. I was personally acquainted with two of the participants in a professional context. I introduced myself to the third participant at a symposium and followed up with her after a colleague encouraged me and intervened on my behalf. Another academic colleague recommended the fourth participant to me. In the following section I enumerate the procedures for collecting the data – from my initial contact with the women to meeting them, the progress of our conversations and the various follow-up activities.

Collecting the Data

In this section I outline the steps that were followed to engage with the participants as we made connections between art experiences and cultural identity. As we talked, my learning increased and I became more cognizant of the connections between their lived experiences and

the intersection of cultural identity. The process of collecting data was influenced by memory, narrative and storytelling.

Wilson (2008) situates gathering information as part of his notion of research as ceremony and building relationships through research. For Wilson and Absolon (2011) gathering data comes from many different sources–as diverse as empirical data or knowledge intuitively gained from dreams, the universe, or from the land. Wilson's notion is that we need to be able to use all the methods of gathering information available to us to fulfill our obligations and relationships.

As the first step in the information gathering process, I sent email invitations to the women with a similarly formatted letter outlining the proposed research, the purpose of the research, my commitment to telling the stories of women in art, a brief description of my personal connection to the research, and an outline of the time commitment on their part. In the same letter, each participant was informed that they would be signing a consent form as a requirement of the Ethics Review Board.

As the women agreed to participate I sent out another letter with the consent form. The artist-participants were asked to sign (two) copies of the Consent to Participate Template (as provided on the Concordia University Ethics and Compliance webpage). The Informed Consent form described the project, the time commitment, and also outlined the option of confidentiality, and opting out of the research. The artist-participants were given the choice of having their names remain confidential; use a pseudonym or their real name. Each participant used her real name. The form also provided information on the way I stored the data. This included the information that the interview material and research data would be stored, would remain on and be password protected in my personal computer files. One final request (outlined on the consent form) was that I could access the material for use in academic work (published papers and conferences).

As I was working with Indigenous people, I needed to show as part of the ethics protocol an assessment of my own preparedness for foreseeable risk or potential harm to the participants. For this reason I compiled a resource list for each of the interview destinations and a list of resources that I could turn to if needed.

The one change that I did make to the consent process came about after I had interviewed each of the women. During the course of the dialogue we spoke of their art practice and often referred to particular artworks, as a result I revised the Consent form to ask permission to include examples of their work in the dissertation.

At the same time, I also sent each artist-participant a biography-data form. My intention with this form was that it would be completed ahead of the interviews and would mean less time used gathering primary data. This did not happen in the way I had expected. I also sent the questions that would be covered during our time together. My expectation was that each participant would have time to consider the subject matter and begin to formulate memories of their experiences.

Instead of this element proceeding as expected, we went over the consent form and they signed it at our first meeting. Each artist also filled in the bio-data form at the beginning of our meeting. I found this was (in this situation) not an effective tool and in hindsight I would simply add these questions to the list as a way to start the dialogue.

Everyone committed to one long interview of ninety to one hundred thirty minutes and to a shorter follow-up interview that would take place after the transcript was written as a narrative. Each artist agreed to have the conversation audiotaped, with the understanding that the recording could be stopped at anytime.

Before I interviewed the research participants I decided that I needed to conduct a practice interview. I did this interview with my mother as it gave me a chance to practice my interviewing techniques and listening skills. This was a valuable exercise for a number of reasons–I was able to test the recording device, and I recognized the need to listen actively and to keep quiet as answers were being formulated. Unlike Reid (2012) it did not occur to me to have someone interview me so that I would gain an understanding or empathy for the situation I would put my participants in. As in my case, Kovach (2009, 2010) and Wilson (2008) speak of including themselves in the research but most often this is in the role of co-researchers.

In preparation for our meeting, I asked each of the artist participants to set the time, date and place we would meet. Yow (2005) suggests that when scheduling a time for the meeting, the researcher must accommodate the participant's schedule as much as possible. I wanted them to be comfortable and asked the participants where they would like to meet. Cole and Knowles (2001) insist that the setting is important and the participant must be comfortable with the choice.

These researchers' suggest different settings evoke different stories, offer various levels of security or encourage either a more formal or relaxed atmosphere.

Three of the four participants suggested that we meet in their home; the fourth met me at a neighbourhood café near her home. One artist lived in Montreal, the others were located in Brantford, Toronto and Regina. The participants chose the site and time for the interviews. The interviews took place over a four-month period as I travelled to each city. While the participants are spread across three provinces we continued to be in contact by telephone or email. And I have continued to update them periodically in person or through email over the intervening time. The second and follow-up interviews took place over the telephone, by Skype or through email and I-messaging. The interviews were conducted between April and July 2013. At each interview we began by getting to know or reacquainting ourselves with one another. As Yow (2005) suggests that no interviewer knows ahead of time how things will go and as a result there will always be some apprehension. She also states that at the beginning of each interview the two parties are sizing one another up and asking their own questions internally about what is going to take place. For these reasons, McCracken (1988) recommends that it is best to begin with general chatter to put everyone at ease by asking questions that are general in nature and non-directive in manner.

At the beginning of our first conversations I went back over the purpose of the research project and why it was of interest to me. The first minutes were used to get the business out of the way–going over and signing the consent, filling in the bio-data form, asking permission to record the conversation and talking about the follow-up interviews, reading the transcript and then their narrative text. Everyone agreed to my using my computer to record our conversations.

In a very short amount of time we were comfortably seated, drinking coffee or eating, and we began to talk. Szabad-Smyth (2002) found that the ritual of sharing food or tea will relieve "tensions and…establish rapport" (p. 43). Cole and Knowles (2001) also suggest that comfortable seating arrangements, drinking tea, making food and using a space where the participant has access to personal documents or artefacts may also be productive or conducive elements for the conversations.

We soon settled into easy conversations, there was often laughter as the conversation moved from larger questions of identity to incidents from childhood and family life and beyond. Marshall and Rossman's (1989) definition of the interviews as "conversations with purpose"

seems very apt in hindsight (p. 82). They suggest open-ended questions because this allows the participants the chance to tell their own story in their own words. At the same time it is important for the researcher to pay attention to how the participants frame and structure their responses during the interviews. At times this meant that the conversation veered away from the prompt questions. Kovach (2010) sees this as a naturally occurring aspect of the conversation method.

I used a recording device *i-talk* as part of my computer software. This was to ensure accuracy and that no words would be lost or misrepresented. As we talked I made notes in a notebook but often this was a reminder to return to something that had been said. I worked really hard to listen to what they were saying. I also had to learn to wait for an answer as my inclination is to jump in and fill the space with words but I found that the participants were forming their thoughts and it was valuable to wait for their words.

The interviews averaged from ninety to one hundred minutes, with one meeting extending for just over two hours. Kvale (1996) suggests that ninety minutes is the optimal amount of time for an interview. When Archibald (2008) interviewed Elders in Native communities she related that she learned much about the "interrelated actions of responsibility, respect, reverence, and reciprocity" during those interviews" (p. 377). Therefore she suggested that the interviewer must be ready in all ways–intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually–to absorb the information that will be imparted in the interviews.

As described above, the primary method of data collection or gathering information for this research was one-on-one, in-depth conversations that were situated around a semi-structured set of questions. Archibald (2008) also reiterated that research as a conversation means both sides engage in the topic at hand but the participant maintains control of what is revealed. Kovach (2010) suggests the conversation method is more elastic because participant and researcher can share their stories. She goes on to state that most participants will self-regulate and make certain their answers respond to the research questions.

The researcher's role is to make the research question clear to the participants, to genuinely respond to the stories, be an active listener and to be comfortable with the course the story takes without interrupting or redirecting. In regard to the flow of a conversation, Haig Brown (1995) suggests, "Perhaps because it is only rarely that people have the full attention of another adult human being, the interviews often became very intimate" (p. 30).

During our encounters the participants were encouraged from the beginning to speak to the questions in the way they found most suitable. They could also choose to not answer a question or alter the question in a way that better suited their life story. The objective was to create a shared dialogue. I did not want to be in a position of control. Research projects can become hierarchical with the researcher having final control. I wanted to set standards so that this would not happen in this project.

Following Ojibway tribal epistemology, relational accountability and respect for protocol, I gave a small gift to acknowledge the start of our research relationship and to offer my respect for the insights the women would offer to me. The gift also reinforced my commitment to them that I would use the research well and for a good purpose. According to Kovach (2009) and Stevenson (2000) the exchange of a gift signifies that the words shared are the truth as the person knows it. Kuokkanen (2007) maintains the reason for the gift is that it focuses the relationship as one that is built on responsibility and reciprocity. As I knew we would be talking over a cup of tea or coffee I wanted my gift to be compatible with this concept so I gave each woman a jar of my homemade jam and a home-baked tea loaf.

At the end of each interview I made long field notes and recorded my response to the material we had discussed as well as my sense of how the interviews had gone. These notes are described by Webb (1991) as a way for the researcher to work out her relationship to the work, to the participants and to her own way of relating to or seeing the material. I made notes about the setting and some of the non-verbal cues that I noticed during the interview. I also used this format as a way to include the associations I had made with my own life experiences, to more practical suggestions on ways to open the conversations, keep the discussion focussed or take the discussion in other directions. I used the journal as a space to think about issues that were coming forward regarding my place in this research and my own sense of cultural identity. These thoughts ranged from very positive to great concern about my place.

I looked forward to listening to the recordings after each session. The first reason to listen was to make sure that the software had worked. I liked re-listening to the "tapes" as I heard things that I had not necessarily picked up on during the interview. I also liked to hear how it had been a conversation and that we bounced information and similar experiences off of one another. I also really liked it when I realized that the larger research question corresponded to their experiences and their personal sense of cultural identity.

At the end of each interview I backed up the interview onto my computer and onto a portable hard drive. The notes were transcribed into a word document. When I had the completed word document I read it thoroughly as I listened to the taped interviews multiple times, each time I made observer notes on my copy, noted questions that I wanted to ask for greater clarification, filled in or made notes on the gaps in mid-sentence stops, and tweaked any incorrect word transcriptions.

The transcript was sent electronically to each participant and she approved, changed, clarified, suggested changes or asked to have material removed. Three of the artist-participants asked that the language or grammar be tidied up. This was done but as I made changes I made sure that I did not change the intent of their words. I often made the change by adding words in square brackets. One of the participants asked at our first interview that the transcript not be included in the final dissertation. I accepted this as an important request and have not included the transcripts. As I made the changes I re-sent the edited document to the artists.

I then began to write the narratives or story of their lives. During this stage of writing I compiled questions on material that needed further explanation and in turn I conducted a second interview with three of the artists. However one of the four artist-participants was often away or busy, as a result I was only able to use the material from the first interview. In this case I supplanted as much as I could from other sources such as exhibition catalogues or other printed interviews.

The research participant stories were organized around key statements of quotes that in turn contributed to the themes in the cross data analysis chapter. The life stories were presented in two ways. The first was through a condensed presentation of the participant's life story. This was followed by a reflective cross-analysis. According to Kovach (2010) this provided for a more Indigenous contextual presentation of knowledge. As my objective was to situate the findings within the framework of the Indigenous methodology, I aimed for consistency in the way the stories were told and to work in the parameters of decolonizing by bringing Indigenous life experience and knowledge to the forefront and breaking down the researcher-participant hierarchy.

As I finished with each narrative I sent it as a word document to each of the participants as I wanted each woman to acknowledge and approve the way I had used their words (and my own) to describe their life experiences. I knew a member check was necessary (Kovach, 2009).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify this action as part of the plan for trustworthiness to achieve valid and reliable results. For them the process of member checks ensures truth, value and credibility by soliciting reactions and responses to the reconstruction of what has been said. I found that in some cases the returned response was slow. I did however receive a reply from each artist-participant and their approval of the final life story narrative.

Each step of this research, from contact through to the conversational method, was congruent with an Indigenous paradigm, as I honoured the core Indigenous research values of respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility to the research participants.

In the following section I will discuss how the data was analysed, interpreted and represented.

Analyzing the Data

At the end of the data collection phase I had stored research material on my laptop, and in files and folders. All were full of notes and material related to the four women. At first I felt overwhelmed by how I was going to analyse and combine the four stories yet allow their individual experiences to remain as I made meaning of their lives and experiences. I tried a variety of methods to represent each woman's experience. Despite an initial nervousness at misrepresenting their stories and a need to make the analysis meaningful, I was eager to get the information into a workable format and find what all the interviews and field notes would reveal. In many ways the analysis began early in the process as during the data collection I considered, compared and contrasted the experiences of the woman as part of my summing up the experience, as well as my private musings on the things each woman told me. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (2001) recognize that qualitative research is a deeply interpretive endeavour and that analytical processes are at work in every step of the crafting of the document. The objective is to arrive at a "'meaning unit' more often known as coding" (Ely et al, 2001, p. 162).

In her 2012 dissertation, art educator Reid stated that she began her data analysis by examining the general topic areas of her interview questions and then used these as an early stage for coding. She then developed her own interpretive lens to better understand each participant's life based on Denzin's (1989) "interpretive framework" (p. 49). This gave her a means to examine biographical data "from within a literary fictional framework" (p. 49). From this

material she isolated units of code, then colour-coded particular statements that gave insight and meaning to the material. This data was then analysed for "the patterns of meaning and experience" in the lives of her museum educator participants (Reid, 2012, p. 89-90).

In fellow-student Liu's (2011) art education dissertation, she collected and analysed nine Chinese artists' life experiences and their stories of learning and creating. Her primary methodology was Narrative Inquiry. In this process she observed her nine participants in their studios, and then interviewed the artists and documented their artwork. She analyzed the individual stories to find the role that life-based, non-formal and formal experiences play in the artists' early process of learning art, and becoming and practicing as an artist. Liu used a narrative inquiry with some of the techniques of grounded theory when she coded the transcripts and her gathered data based on the three types of art learning.

In the manner of Reid and Liu, I used elements from more than one method of analysis, as I found that my quandary in the analysis of the data lay between my Indigenous research paradigm, narrative inquiry and re-storying as a tool of analysis. For the data analysis I return to the notion of the *bricoleur,* as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) submit the qualitative researcher is endlessly creative and interpretive and the analysis is constructed through various phases of the research process from field notes to the text document. "The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political" (p. 15).

I also followed the lead of an Indigenous researcher. Lavallée (2007, 2009) similarly needed to bridge Indigenous research methods with Western qualitative research methods. She began by coding the transcripts to analyze the data using grounded theory. She developed nine themes and then did her member check. She and her participants soon realized that isolating the stories meant they were torn apart and taken out of context. This was problematic as this method of analysis is inconsistent with the Indigenous research paradigm. She then told the stories collectively based on her identification of the 'threads of connection' (her themes). The themes were experiential (ie. family life) or philosophical (ie. self esteem). The stories were interspersed by mini-paragraphs of analysis and in her following chapters Lavallée enriched the themes she had developed with the 'collective stories' in her cross-case analysis.

As the broad categories of my questions for the participants were based on ages and stages of their life experience I drew on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) development of narrative inquiry as storying, and for analysis from Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) notion of

the analysis of re-storying. Clandinin and Connelly's research methodology was deeply guided by Dewey's principles of interaction and continuity as characteristics of experience. The fluidity in storytelling, moving from the past to the present or into the future, is at the heart of Dewey's theory of experience in the field of education. Accordingly, Clandinin and Connelly borrow from Dewey's narrative structure of interaction, continuity and situation. This approach suggests that to understand people's experience we also need to recognize the import of their interactions with other people. When analyzing a story, the researcher takes into consideration the past and present actions of the storyteller, as those actions are likely to occur in the future. The approach labeled re-storying by Ollerenshaw and Creswell, is the process of gathering stories and analyzing them for key elements of the story–time, place, plot and scene. The data analysis may be both description of the story and themes that emerged from it. Ollerenshaw and Creswell recognized the need for a narrative data analysis and suggested there are two approaches to data analysis–the broader holistic sketch of the three-dimensional approach or a narrower linear structure of the problem-solution approach. I drew on the three-dimensional approach, as my objective was to piece the stories together–thematically and across the participants' lifetimes. Re-storying data analysis creates a document that gives the reader the chance to understand the women's lives, art experiences and the connections to cultural identity found in these situations and sequences. Consequently my approach to data analysis has been to find and order the themes in the research using a coding system to find the themes using re-storying.

To begin the analysis, as McAdams (2012) suggests, I started with a careful reading of the transcribed texts with the intention of discovering and coding the themes (labelled "context of justification" by the author, p. 18). He goes on to state that the theme will not emerge from a particular word, phrase or sentence but in the inference in a particular passage of text. Therefore to find the greatest possibilities for themes within the text the researcher needs to read the text with an open and perceptive mind. The objective is to look for the comments, incidents or stories "that strike as especially salient, recurrent, surprising, or potentially revealing of central psychological dynamics and issues" (p. 18).

In my analysis I looked for recurrent phrases or key statements across the data and then searched for alternative explanations. I made copies of the transcripts and used various colour-coded versions of the transcript until the themes became very clear. The data often fell into the categories that emerged from the questions asked during the conversations. I used phrases to

head the sections and to indicate themes or discrepancies. For example, each participant had a very strong and important memory of making art in childhood, most often in the family home. The header statements from the artist-participants: “It just seemed to be very rich”; “My father was really into art”; “I was always making stuff”; and “she kind of drew me into it” all contributed to an important thematic–Art making in Everyday Family Life.

In using re-storying data analysis I was very aware of the individual’s past, present and future experiences lodged within specific settings or contexts and therefore kept to a roughly chronological sequence throughout the cross-case analysis. Particularly in the first section the headings were: Early Life Art Experiences, Schooling–Elementary to Post-Secondary, Art Education, Identity as Artist, and Community and Cultural Practice.

As I re-read the transcripts and the narrative I realized they were both narrow and limiting. I realized as I continued to sort the material that I needed broader categories. The three categories that emerged were still chronologically or sequentially based but were more overarching themes. These were: Emerging Artist, Transition and Accomplished Artist.

Finding these themes in the writing of the narratives was useful as they aided in organizing the collected data. Each of these comprehensive themes was divided into sub-headings that corresponded with time periods or points of philosophical inquiry. With these categories I was able to include rich detail about the setting or context of the participant’s experiences and the on-going relationship to cultural identity.

Using the re-storying approach to data-analysis meant coding the transcripts and other data materials to find themes or categories. This approach was a way to conceptualize both the personal and the social interactions of the participants. It also pointed to the way continuity is related to learning about these experiences and the importance of continuity. As was found through the analysis, experiences grow out of experiences and they also occur in particular contexts–be this classroom, city or First Nation territory.

Interpreting the Data

The data and the analysis support the research question. The research question anchored the research and allowed space for the data and the analysis to come forward. I was able to articulate the connection between art and life experiences and cultural identity. As the objective of analysis and interpretation is to assign meaning to the collected information and determine the

conclusions, significance, and implications of the findings I felt it was important (and necessary) throughout the process of analyzing data to continue to collaborate with the participants by checking the story and negotiating the meaning of the data. After writing the Cross-Case Analysis I also decided that I needed to send this chapter to each of the women participants. I deliberated on this for some time but realized that working within an Indigenous paradigm means that this was an essential action.

Representing Data: Maintaining Rigour and Integrity

Cole and Knowles (2001) introduce the need for research that is outside the bounds of more linear scholarship, to follow to exemplary standards of quality and rigour. For Battiste (2008), Kovach (2010), Weber-Pillwax (1999), and Wilson (2001, 2008), working within an Indigenous paradigmatic approach means ethical guidelines must be adhered to. These include: a mutually respectful research relationship; research that benefits the community; appropriate permission and informed consent is sought; research is non-exploitive and non-extractive; and that there is respect for community ethics and protocol.

Battiste also suggested an important principle in Indigenous research is the issue of control of knowledge and that people's voices are at the forefront of the research project. Wilson confirms that for him, relationality as the essential component of the research. This means that for the researcher as a researcher, you are both accountable to yourself and to the research participants. Integrity comes from honouring the lessons learned which then becomes part of who you are as a researcher.

According to Cole and Knowles (2001) rigour refers to the standards and criteria used to make judgements about the quality of the research, because "[e]very report of research contains knowledge claims and [therefore the researcher] must provide evidence to support these claims" (p. 123). For research to be dependable it is essential that all aspects of the research process reflect both rigour and integrity (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010).

This study followed standards of rigor during the research process and throughout the data collection analysis. "Rigour is the means by which we show integrity and competence: it is about ethics and politics, regardless of the paradigm" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 390).

Transferability has been described as the fittingness of the findings, when study findings correspond with the context external to the study situation, and in this way the findings are found

to have meaning and can be applied to the audience's personal experiences (Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009, p. 77). It was essential in this dissertation research that the study must make sense to the women artists, as well as to my peers, colleagues and my supervisory committee.

In my research there is the underlying assumption that everyone has multiple realities and that the storyteller (ie. the woman artist) is able to define her own reality. In my study the material developed through the women's sense of identity as they progressed through their life experiences. I also consulted literature on the development of identity at various life stages and had this material corroborated by the women.

Dependability and confirmability have been described as the "auditability" of the findings, "when another researcher can clearly follow the audit trail used by the investigator during the study...[or] could reach the same or similar conclusions with the use of the researcher's perspective, data and situation" (Ryan-Nicholls, & Will, 2009, p. 78). Though every thought process is individual, and another researcher may not have completed the study in the same manner, I am able to account for my decisions during all phases of the project. Engagement with, and interaction between the researcher and the participants in the study was essential and our relationships continue.

In this research project it was not my objective to do a study that was repeatable (with the intention of finding exactly the same material with other participants). Instead, the primary aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of particular experiences and not to generalize across populations. For my research, to meet the criteria of fittingness I provide extensive descriptions of the time and place of meetings and information about each of the women included. Additionally, a number of women's stories make up the research and the participants' own words were consistently used in the telling of their story.

Additionally in the research, I protected the study's credibility through the use of respondent validation. This technique involves sharing the research findings with the participants to see if they consider the findings to be a reasonable account of their experience (Brannen, 1992; Morse, 1998). The research participants read the transcript, then the narrative or story of their life experiences based on the transcription and finally they were given the chance to read the cross-case analysis in which themes were developed and the women's experiences were compared and contrasted.

This research project is honourable and has integrity. I believe there is evidence of a high level of authenticity that speaks to truthfulness and sincerity in the research relationships, process of inquiry, interpretation and representational form. Weber-Pillwax (1999) reiterates the need for research to live within the reality of the lived Indigenous experience. This means that the principle of integrity contains within itself an accurate definition of and proof of authenticity for Indigenous research**.** Ultimately integrity in research comes through working within the Indigenous paradigm of the Ojibway teachings. The model as it is set forth by Hart (2002); Kovach (2009, 2010); Lavallée (2009); Weber–Pillwax (1999); Wilson (2001, 2008) and others, is the understanding that the researcher will imbue the research with respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility.

Summary

This chapter examined the methodology–the Conversational method as described by Kovach (2009, 2010) procedures, analysis, interpretation and representation of the data used to explore the life and art experiences of the four artist participants. The research processes were grounded in collaboration and empathic relationships, and therefore revealed rich stories. The analysis of the data was conducted with rigour and integrity.

The following four chapters showcase the life experiences of each participant through their rich stories. Their personal experiences as children, students, artists and creators of art and their professional experiences are highlighted. Each character study revealed substantial insight into their identities, as expressed through their narratives.

Chapter 4
Artist Narrative: Shelley Niro

Meeting Shelley Niro

The first time I met Shelley Niro was when she exhibited at the artist-run centre Artspace in Peterborough, Ontario in1997.[1] At that time I found her friendly, approachable and an artist who spoke eloquently about her art practice. In the following years I followed her career and we occasionally met at artist talks and exhibition openings. As I began to formulate the first version of my research question I immediately thought of Niro as an artist that I wanted to include because she had attended the Ontario College of Art and the University of Western Ontario. Even when the research question was refocused away from the institution and towards cultural identity, Niro was still an ideal person to approach as a research participant because she is an artist who uses her art practice to question identity.

I contacted Shelley in July 2011 to outline my planned project. At that time she tried to dissuade me as she was facing time constraints with two big projects due in the autumn. I told her that I could work around any deadlines and that I was very eager to include her in my study. We spoke to each other at the opening of her Toronto exhibition *M: Stories of Women* in October 2011 and at that time I told her the process would be a long one as I had many steps before I would be able to meet with and interview her. At that time she agreed in principle that I should contact her once all the preliminary stages were completed. In March 2013, I was finally able to tell Niro that my committee and the Ethics Review Committee had accepted my proposal and that I had the go ahead to start the interviews. At that time I sent her the final list of questions, the consent form and the bio-data form. She replied the same day to say she would meet with me. I had been clear from the beginning that we could meet whenever and wherever she chose and

1 Artspace is an Artist-run centre that began in 1974. It is located in Peterborough, ON. It is part of the Canada-wide artist-run gallery network many of which, like Artspace have been in operation since the 1960s and1970s. These galleries generally employ an artistic director and an elected board manages and oversees the operations. Niro exhibited at Artspace twice in two years. She was included in the group show *Native Love* in 1996. This exhibition originated with the Nation to Nation collective at Das Media in Montreal in 1995. After exhibiting in Peterborough the exhibition travelled across Canada for two years stopping at AKA/Tribe in Saskatoon, SK, Urban Shaman in Winnipeg, MB, Open Space in Victoria, BC and finally at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, ON. In 1997 Niro exhibited at Artspace again as part of the three-person (Niro, Jamelie Hassan, and Catalina Parra) exhibition, *Across Borders*.

she decided that we would meet at her home in Brantford, Ontario in the late morning on April 15th, 2013.

On the scheduled day I arrived at her house a few minutes early, gathered my papers and recorder as well as the food gifts I had brought with me and suddenly feeling quite nervous, went to the door. Shelley greeted me and we reintroduced ourselves. She showed me her house and garden overlooking the city as we chatted about my journey and finding the house. While Shelley made coffee we discussed the interview process and I asked if she had any concerns about the method. She wanted to make it clear that she was apprehensive about her words being turned back on her at a later time. I confirmed that if she had no objection to my recording the interview as it would help to ensure accuracy, but that there would also be a transcript and a final draft of the chapter that would require her acceptance. Niro proceeded to read over and then sign the Consent Form. Once I had assured her I would not misconstrue her words, she was more relaxed and we began to talk.

We sat at the large kitchen table with a computer at one end that occasionally pinged as emails came in. On the walls around us were a mixture of paintings, prints and photographs, many of them Shelley's own work such as *The Rebel* and *The Iroquois is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society*. My nervousness fell away as we began to talk. The session lasted for almost two hours. All of the questions I had prepared were answered, none were omitted or changed, but some were answered within the context of another question. We laughed often and I soon realized it was best to ask the question and then wait for an answer. In return Shelley was very generous with her time and her answers and really thought about the questions as she took her time in answering.

When it came time to discuss her Embodied Practice, Niro liked the question and was thoughtful as she made a choice for which work was most representative of who she is. I was surprised by how much her filmmaking became a theme or topic of our conversation. Film is important to Niro for many reasons, but especially because through film she can give people who are "hungry for a visual", an image of themselves. We ended our conversation by talking about Pauline Johnson, the Nishiyuu walkers, and the Idle No More movement's importance and subsequent impact on Niro's practice.[2]

2 The Nishiyuu walkers was a initiative started by David Kawapit in the winter of 2012-13. He was joined by six other youth and an Elder on a sixteen-hundred kilometer walk in support of the Idle No More movement. As they walked from the northern Quebec town of Whapmagoostui to

Biographical Overview

Shelley Niro is from the Mohawk Nation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) and a member of the Turtle Clan from the Ohsweken, Six Nations of the Grand River. She was born in 1954 in Niagara Falls, New York. When Niro was five years old, her parents moved with their five children back to their home Reserve of the Six Nations of the Grand River in south-western Ontario. Art making and handicrafts were always present in her childhood home.

Niro attended elementary school on the Reserve at Ohsweken and then for high school she attended Cayuga Secondary School. In secondary school Niro's area of concentration was the Music programme. Niro attended Cambrian Community College in Sudbury from 1972 to 1975 were she studied the cello and classical music.

Quite soon after graduating from Cambrian College, Niro married and began to raise her family. She moved to Oshawa in the early years of her marriage and there she began taking design, drawing and photography courses through Continuing Education at a local community college.

In the mid-1980s, Niro and her family returned to southwest Ontario to live in Brantford, a mid-size city on the edge of the Six Nations of the Grand River. At that time, Niro took a one-year contract at the Native Indian /Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA) in Hamilton.[3] This work experience was a catalyst in helping her define herself as an artist.

In 1987, in her early thirties, Niro enrolled in a three-year program at the Ontario College of Art[4] (OCA) in Toronto. Her intention was to concentrate on painting, drawing and sculpture.

Ottawa, people along the route joined in with them. Their objective was to meet Prime Minister Stephen Harper on their arrival, however Harper choose instead, on the day of their arrival in Ottawa, to meet pandas from China at the Toronto Zoo.

Idle No More is an on-going protest movement that began in December 2012. It is a grassroots movement founded by four women, three First Nations women and one non-Native ally. It continues as a force among Aboriginal and non-Native people in Canada and the movement was marked by a series of political actions worldwide. It was formed in reaction to the federal Conservative government's omnibus bill Bill C-45 and other legislative abuses of Indigenous treaty rights.

3 NIIPA was an educational and support network incorporated in 1985 and designed to encourage and promote the use of photography as a fine arts medium. It ceased operations in 2003.

4 The Ontario College of Art has gone through many name changes. It was established in 1876 as the Ontario School of Art and operated under this name until 1886. The name was changed to the Toronto Art School for a four-year period from 1886-1890. The third name change, Central Ontario School of Art and Industrial Design occurred in 1890 to 1912. The art school was renamed the Ontario College of Art (OCA) in 1912 and this name was applied until it was changed to the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1996. The name changed again in 2010 when the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) was awarded university status and became Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU). As of April 2010 through Bill 43, the Post-secondary Education Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, the status of the institution was changed and the name was changed to Ontario College of Art and Design University.

Her objectives were to learn to work in three dimensions, to draw, and to paint the figure. In 1989-1990, during her last year at OCA, Niro was invited to participate in her first exhibition, *Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance* at the York Quay Gallery at Harbourfront in Toronto. Participating in this exhibition further encouraged Niro's art education journey and her professional art career. By the time Niro was ready to enter the two-year MFA Visual Arts Studio program at the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in 1995, her career as an exhibiting artist was flourishing. While in the early 1990s, Niro's work was included in one or two exhibitions per year, by 1994 Niro's work was included in nine exhibitions that took place in both Canada and the USA. Niro's exhibition record has continued to grow and her work has been included in key exhibitions such as *Reservation X* (McMaster, 1999), *Oh So Iroquois* (Rice, 2007), and *The World Upside Down* (Hill, L'Hirondelle & Nayhowtow, 2008).

Over the past twenty-five years, Niro has developed a multi-disciplinary practice that includes painting, sculpture, photography and filmmaking. Niro's family and the Grand River, the river that runs through the Six Nations' territory, act as on-going inspiration in her work. Niro often uses her personal history and has incorporated her own family, her siblings, her parents, and friends into her art practice.

Shelley Niro has an adult daughter with a young daughter of her own. Niro lives with her husband in Brantford in southwest Ontario.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Emerging Artist

Early Life Experiences

"It just seemed to be very rich"

Niro recalled that both inside and outside of her family home there was art making. She stated that growing up in a family with many siblings meant that they were often obliged to amuse themselves and one another. When asked about her art experiences in the family home, Niro remembered how she and her siblings competed to see who could tell the best stories, put

on the best plays, and sing the best songs[5] and during our interview she recalled they were always doing art projects, not necessarily with pencils or brushes but nevertheless,

> …it seems that we were always doing stuff as far as art went. Maybe not drawing or painting or anything like that, but definitely using materials that were kind of in the native community and some of it was beadwork. [At that time] I'm looking at beadwork designs, Iroquois designs, the floral designs and trying to imitate those. So that's always been sort of part of my art making. (Niro transcription 1, p. 1)

Niro said she was aware of the art production the adults were engaged in as this work was occurring both inside and outside of her home. Her parents and especially her father, were engaged in making,

> …he was always making stuff that had some kind of native theme to it. Not necessarily… Mohawk, but he would be making headdresses and he would make tomahawks and he would sell these to tourists in Niagara Falls. (Niro transcription 1, p. 1)

Niro remembers other artisans who were present on the Six Nations Reserve. Her strongest memories are of the skilled artists in her community,

> There were always carvers; soap stone carvers were always around. There were false face carvers, but not as, you'd see them but they weren't always on display. It just seemed to be very rich in that kind of early fundamental practice of art. And what's to be accomplished by art. (Niro transcription 1, p. 2)

She also remembered other skilled craft workers who were making bark rattles and cornhusk dolls. Our conversation also reminded her of two sisters who were watercolour painters. Niro and her siblings were sent to these sisters for language instruction. Her memory of the two retired schoolteachers has stayed strong most likely because they illustrated the words being taught with visual images painted in watercolour. Niro recalled how their painted figures lined the walls of the vacated schoolhouse where the classes took place. Niro intuitively recognized the figures as being from an earlier time period. She stated she recognized them as Iroquois by the hairstyles, the clothing and the painted beadwork designs. But for Niro the paintings were an echo of the past and seemed too static for her. She found the painted figures to be more of a "testament" to the past "rather than… artistic expression" (Niro MFA dissertation

5 See: Larry Abbott (1995) A Time of Visions: Interviews by Larry Abbott – Shelley Niro, Mohawk http://www.britesites.com/native_artist_interviews/sniro.htm

1997, 19). Even at a young age Niro recognized there was little connection between those historicized figures and the people then living on the contemporary Six Nations territory.

In hindsight, the disquietude Niro felt makes sense. On the one hand she saw her parents and people in her community working as craftspeople using what were considered traditional materials to produce objects that in most cases were made for the tourist market. But at the same time, there was resistance to holding onto the past. Niro herself admits that in this pre-politicized era of the 1960's "…even her father was occasionally laughed at for holding onto old traditions" (Niro 1997, p. 18). Niro may not have been able to articulate it at the time but she was aware of the disconnect between the elderly sister's historicized watercolour images and life on the Six Nations Reserve during her childhood and early adolescence. At about the same time, Niro learned of the work of the painter, Daphne Odjig (b.1919-). Odjig, an Odawa artist originally from Manitoulin Island, was creating images of contemporary life of life on the Reserve and these images resonated deeply with Niro as they represented people and a life she recognized.

All told, the presence of artisans in and outside of her home in her early life was very influential according to Niro. In her early childhood Niro witnessed a compulsion to make art whether for an economic or creative need. Both her immediate family and her community instilled in her a strong sense of self in terms of cultural identity. I posit that this may be because as she became acquainted with the materials - birch bark, cornhusks, types of stone, beads - and beadwork patterns and painted images of people from both the past and the present, she was incorporating an image of herself as part of a strong tradition as Mohawk and as an artist. But as we will note it had to be on her terms and in her own time.

Art and School Experiences

"I'm not going to pursue art until I find that direction"

Niro's accounts of her elementary and secondary school experiences at schools on the Six Nations Reserve do not include any significant memories of school art classes. Of her art classes at the Ohsweken elementary school Niro stated there is "…nothing that I can remember" (Niro transcription 1, p.2). There was a choice between art and music at the Cayuga Secondary School and Niro opted to concentrate on the music program and join the marching band. According to Niro,

> I didn't take it [art]. I took the music program. I didn't want to become [an artist], I didn't feel like I wanted to take art in high school just 'cause it felt like a fashionable thing to do. So I didn't do that. (Niro transcription 1, p. 2)

Niro described the high school music programme as having an "escapist element to it" and "you could join the marching band and the marching band got to go on the bus once in a while and go on a little trip - to go some place else" (Niro transcription 1, p. 2). Anyone who has gone through high school can identify with Niro's desire to be somewhere else.

The musical trend continued in her post-secondary diploma program at Cambrian College in Sudbury. Niro enrolled in the Music program at the community college after graduating from high school in 1972. She played the cello in college with the objective of taking her skills as far as they would go especially in terms of creating sound.

> I really loved music, but you get to a point where you realize: I'm not talented in music as far as being a performer goes. I took up the cello and I practiced the cello for many, many years, I even pursued it not to be a performer but just to see how far I could get with the sound. I really loved sitting with it and … for me, doing cello practice was almost like doing yoga because you're breathing and you're trying to connect your body with your brain.
> I thought, I'm not really good at this but why do I like it so much? And I think that's what it is. I think it becomes a full body experience. Again, I realized that, ok, I spend three hours a day doing this, practicing skills, all those things you practice and I'm not going to be doing anything with this. After a while too I realized that there are so many hours in the day and you could only do so much within that day. So I gave up the cello, I gave up trying to play the cello because, as I matured, I started realizing that art and making art was very important to me. (Niro transcription 1, p. 3)

She described the time away from art making during her teen years, as a reaction against making art that was either "a fashionable thing to do", needed a purpose, was a connection to the past, or was a means of economic survival. In her words she left art aside for some time because she felt "There was too much of an agenda" (Niro transcription 1, p. 2).

However it was while she was enrolled in college that Niro began to make art again. She began drawing and painting and was aware that she was capable of "A pretty good rendition..." (Niro transcription 1, p. 3). But at the same time she knew she did not want to just produce art for its own sake "without direction or thought":

> there has to be some kind of reason for me to want to look at this work more. So I thought, I'm not going to pursue art until I find that direction and what I want to do. (Niro transcription, p. 3-4)

Niro married immediately after graduating from community college in 1975 and was soon raising a young family. Nevertheless the urge to make art continued. While living in Oshawa she enrolled in a graphic design and drawing course at community college. The drawing classes were not as inspiring for Niro as a photography course proved to be. For Niro this course was "a big boost."

> [The experience of] learning photography was huge, because to me it was always kind of out of my economic range of owning a camera, of developing your own photographs, you know, that kind of production. So just learning how to use a camera and going into a dark room was like magic. It was like 'Wow, I can do this.' And so that was a big eye opening too. (Niro transcription 1, p. 5)

A subsequent move to Brantford and setting up a home with her young family meant that Niro only worked on her art during quiet moments for the following three or four years. But she did take a yearlong contract with the Native Indian Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA) in Hamilton. And it was after this experience that she decided,

> Well, if I'm going to be an artist I just have to do it. I just have to call myself an artist and sort of devote myself to being that. And not questioning my abilities or where I place myself in the world 'cause it's…you never know how to get into that art worldly thing. So when I finished my term at NIIPA…I thought I have to. I have to just start now. So I applied to OCA and got accepted and just worked my ass off forever. So then…never questioned the ability of being an artist again. (Niro transcription 1, p. 6)

"…very productive and energetic and positive"

Niro attended a three-year Studio diploma program at the Ontario College of Art (OCA) from 1987 to 1990. At the OCA, Niro recognized that she needed to concentrate on painting, drawing and sculpture as she felt her skills in these media were lacking. The atmosphere of the school and the studio classes *"*very productive, energetic and positive" (Niro transcription 1, p. 6). In addition, Niro found the teachers were very present and generous with their time– especially in the context of the studio classes. Niro gave an example of how she gained greater insight into the practical application of applying paints to canvas. This situation arose as a result of her observations of paintings in galleries and museums. Niro noted that she thought the gallery work,

> …always had this nice slick coating on top. And then I thought, oh, they must paint that way, [where] everything is very flat. And so, I tried to paint and I'd been painting, trying to flatten my paintings and the teacher said why are you painting that way? I said, aren't you supposed to? No, you're supposed to put texture into the work and let the brush do its thing. And just by him saying that: it was like Wow! It totally opened my eyes to painting and brushes, and brush strokes and all that kind of stuff. After that, I just took off. (Niro transcription 1, p. 6)

At OCA, for Niro her Native ancestry was really a non-issue with only a couple of exceptions. She remembered that one day a professor stood nearby and observed, "none of my Native students can draw" (Niro transcription 1, p. 7). In hindsight, Niro thinks he was comparing her skills to those of some of the highly skilled Asian students who she believed were capable of very fine renditions. Niro also stated that perhaps it was an issue of "our [Native] perspective is a little bit different" (Niro transcription 1, p. 7). At another time, she recalled that when she and another Native student attended the same class it was presumed that they were socially connected even though this was not the case. In discussing her time at OCA at the end of the 1980's, Niro remembered that to her, there seemed to be few Indigenous people in the institution, whether faculty[6] or students. Consequently, Niro said she felt she was often seen as representative of all Native people and cultures and as such, supposedly able to answer any and all questions with cultural authority–which ironically she did not feel she had or wanted to have. At one stage she did try to use her knowledge of Native culture by bringing Anishinaabe artist, Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007) into a discussion of Canadian artists in an essay format. She was discomfited when her professor questioned the validity of her choice of this artist as Canadian.

In our interview, Niro stated that during her time at OCA she had made the decision to concentrate on learning to paint the figure and not work on art that was "First Nations driven" (Niro transcription 1, p. 11). She said she felt this way because she knew she would be able to explore her cultural identity in her art practice once her training was complete. As she stated, "I was just trying to get a good foundation of art education and I did not want to label myself just out of convenience as an Indian artist. I was trying to be really exploratory" (Niro transcription 2, p. 3).

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6 Niro believes there were no identified Indigenous faculty members at OCAD at that time (1987-1990). The course catalogues for 1987-1990 are available from the OCADU Library and Archives. The archival material indicates that Robert Houle (Saulteaux, 1947-) began teaching at OCA in the 1990 Autumn term.

Niro stayed true to this intention and completed her OCA Diploma program in 1990. It is of note that our conversation about her art education at the OCA centred almost exclusively on her objective to strengthen her painting skills. In fact, Niro won three sculpture prizes in her last year at OCA.[7]

"I'm just going to do it "

After beginning to develop an exhibition record in the early 1990's, Niro decided that it was time to pursue a Masters of Fine Art in Studio Art. She enrolled in the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in 1995. Niro stated that she was uncertain about this decision but she went ahead with her plan. She also stated that the two years were a struggle in terms of family commitments, travel and time requirements, as well the academic obligations of readings, coursework, teaching and final term exhibitions. Although these were onerous she knew she had to keep working.

> And so it just felt like a lot of pressure. An incredible amount of pressure! But I just said I'm just going to do it. I just have to do it. I have to buckle down… because if I don't do it I will forever feel like a loser if I don't finish this. And so I just went ahead and just really ploughed through it. They gave us these huge studios so I produced these great big paintings. (Niro transcription 1, p. 11)

The size of her paintings was a significantly transformational aspect of her time at UWO as,

> Prior to this, I was always aware of a lack of confidence or always questioning, should I be doing this, should I make my art as big as I make it because you're taking up space and maybe you're taking space that somebody else could be showing at. So I always thought, how can I justify the bigness of this? And going through Western, was like, I'm over it now. (Niro transcription 1, p. 13)

"more pro-active"

At UWO Niro believes she was the only Indigenous student in the graduate studio program. Given how overwhelmed she felt during her Masters' Niro now feels that while the

7 Niro received three awards in her final year at OCA in1990. These were the Louis Odette Sculpture Award, the Emmanuel Hahn Award–Sculpture, and the Drawing, Painting/Sculpture Installation Award.

department or other students may have considered her a representative for Native art students, she did not have enough energy to do more than focus on getting through the program. In hindsight she feels that perhaps she should have been more active as an student and acted as a role model to others. Niro wishes she had had more time and energy, because she now thinks, "I should have been more pro-active that way. But I did a couple things, but not as much as I should have" (Niro transcription 1, p. 13).

Niro's MFA dissertation, *An Essential Personal Journey Through Iroquois Myths, Legends, Icons and History* (1997), does indicate that during her time at UWO she was processing and articulating both the development of her abilities as a painter and tracing the ways in which her Indigenous heritage impacted her personal life and art production. In the dissertation she stated:

> The last two years of research and study have allowed me to explore and peel back the multi-dimensional layers of Iroquoia cultural icons. Setting aside the time to search out and contemplate the intention and meanings of legends, myths and historical moments has confirmed my appreciation of their importance. (Niro, 1997, p. 7)

In writing her dissertation Niro evaluated the connections between her art-making process, Haudenosaunee culture and ancestral memory (Niro, 1997). Niro also traced the genesis of her subject matter and narrative qualities of her work from early oil paintings such as *Waitress* (1986, Niro Fig.1) to her site-specific painting-installation created for her thesis exhibition. The large-scale work, *Passage* (1997) executed for the MFA exhibition, reflected Niro's ongoing development as an artist and as a storyteller. She stated that, as her time at UWO went on, she became more immersed in the history of the Peacemaker and she began to "think larger…in a literal way" (Niro transcription 2, p. 2). Her new sensibility is evident in the physically significant *Passages*, a series of four large-scale (10'x12") paintings that were hung to create a confined yet elevated space. The paintings depicted landscapes of important spiritual and historic Mohawk sites, and visual metaphors for the origin of the world that had become increasingly topical for Niro as she completed her research on the Peacemaker and other Haudenosaunee myths, figures and stories.[8] Niro's stated objectives were to replicate beadwork designs,

8 The Peacemaker (Deganawida) is the Haudenosaunee spiritual leader who with the warrior (and gifted orator) Hiawatha communicated messages of peace and united the five peoples (Cayugas, Senecas, Oneidas, Mohawks and Onodagas. The Peacemaker and Hiawatha are thought to have lived in the fourteenth century, in a time prior to contact with the Europeans. In 1722 the Tuscarora nation joined and the six became the

commemorate and actively witness landscapes, create a sense of inclusion and be part of an ongoing dialogue as a Native person, and to illustrate Brant's "emotional disarray" upon his arrival in Upper Canada (Niro, 1997, p. 62- 65).

It was through the developing narrative quality of this painted series and other paintings as well as her photographic series that Niro has become increasingly aware of the possibilities of "storylines, drama, colour, composition, and…film" (1997, p. 12). While enrolled at UWO, Niro made the film *Honey Moccasin* (1998) and wrote the script for *Kissed by Lightning* (2009). *Honey Moccasin* is set on the fictional Grand Pine Indian Reservation (aka "Reservation X") and tells the story of the rivalry between two Reserve bars, the Smoking Moccasin and the Inukshuk Cafe, as well as being a 'who-dunnit' story of a powwow-clothing thief and the crusading detective storyteller, *Honey Moccasin* (Tantoo Cardinal). The film is a parody of common narratives using melodrama, performance art, cable television and a mystery to focus on issues of authenticity, cultural identity, gender roles and the contemporary Native experience.

At the end of her two years at UWO, Niro began writing *Kissed by Lightning*. The script started coming together at the same time as the four paintings previously discussed. Both projects were a result of the Peacemaker research and coincided with real events taking place around the world, as Niro stated,

> It all comes in together [the painting, the subject matter and the film script] and can't be separate... But doing the research on Peacemaker–and all the war that was happening between the Nations–and the war in Bosnia was happening–so I was thinking it was like a modern day story of the Peacemaker all over again and all the horrible things that were taking place. So I wanted to create a contemporary story that was a little bit about the Peacemaker. I didn't want it to become a biblical epic or anything like that but I thought,

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Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. Each group had a role to play in how the confederacy was governed. Women and men shared power in the decision-making (Robertson, 2015).

The first painting is Sky Woman and it was painted from her viewpoint after she starts falling through the hole in the sky. The work documented the strawberry plants and tobacco plants that are surrounding the hole (and were gathered by Sky Woman as she fell) and the little turtle in the middle. Niro stated she "wanted to create the feeling you were falling through that hole."

The second painting was The Cohoes. This is the place where the Peacemaker dared the Mohawks to tie him to a pine tree and throw him in the waterfall, saying if I survive you should listen to me. "And he did survive and they did listen to him."

The third is a longhouse, as Niro said. "I used that symbol of a place for the gathering of minds. It is a place where people come together to discuss things –it is a literal building but I like to think that it can be anywhere people gather like a movie theatre or anywhere people go to see a film, to have the same sort of experience together or a university classroom or any gathering where people come together."

The fourth painting is a landscape of the Grand River. Niro said she wanted to illustrate the journey the Six Nations people and their own chronological history. Beginning with Sky Woman to their journey from New York State (with elements such as the longhouse as a symbol of a place where thinking people can come and discuss things) to where we are now, along the banks of the Grand River (Niro transcription 2, p.3).

> it's such a great story and there has to be elements in that story that can be told without infringing on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy or anything like that. I wanted to also bring in the contemporary viewpoint, which is the love story of Mavis Dogblood. And I think by being at Western (UWO) it made me realize I could do that and I allowed myself to do it. (Niro transcription 2, p. 2)

In the second half of our interview the conversation often turned to Niro's filmmaking and the connections Niro has made between filmmaking and the profession and role of the artist and cultural identity.

Mentors

"there was a definite purpose of making stuff"

Niro cites her parents as her mentors. In making this claim she acknowledged her childhood experiences. Early on in our interview she described her parents as hardworking producers of Mohawk and pan-Indian art objects.

> I think my mother and father [because] they both did [art-related] stuff. They probably were the biggest influence. They would make things and they would take them to Powwows to sell. So there was a definite purpose of making stuff. It wasn't like: Oh, let's sit down and do something…pretty. So, I always felt that making stuff…there had to be a reason and that was for survival. (Niro transcription 1, p. 2)

As the family economy depended to some extent on making and selling the handmade objects, Niro and her siblings were encouraged to participate in the production. As a consequence Niro stated, I was always producing art, because my parents sold at Powwows. So it was always…you had to make things to sell (Niro transcription 1, p. 4).

In regard to the production, Niro said that she often had her own ideas about what she would make and she would then tell her parents,

> …well I want to make this weird thing, they'd say, 'sure, go ahead.' They let me do whatever I wanted to do, for a little while. [Laughs] But it was just about being productive. (Niro transcription 1, p. 4)

Niro says her parents and their cultural production made the connection between the material culture –"you always see the materials coming in the house, seeing them assembled to make something. And then we see them leave the house" and her Mohawk heritage – " the materials were always in the house, we were just really aware of who we were" (Niro transcription 1, p. 1).

Niro does not recall having a mentor amongst the faculty at OCA or at UWO, but she did enormously appreciate what individual professors had to teach and say about art and although she was very appreciative of the support given to her by professors, she would not call them mentors. She stated:

> No. Not really…I met Madeline Lennon…she was the chairperson of the department and she was really generous and really helpful. Sheila Butler was also there. And she was, she was helpful. David Clarke was there…So, there were some people there. But I was not the ideal student to have because the ideal student is…you don't have a family. And you send all your inquiry in the direction of your scholarship. And I was not that student. (Niro transcription 1, p. 12)

However, outside of the institution in the late 1980's and early 1990's, she was very aware of "powerful" contemporary Native artists, such as Joane Cardinal Schubert (Blood, 1942-2009), Jane Ash Poitras (Cree, 1951-), and Edward Poitras (Métis, 1953-) who were "really strong" and "really exciting" in terms of what they were exhibiting and accomplishing (Niro transcription 1, p. 8).

> They were the ones who were out there the most and everybody knew their work and their names. When you did see the work it was exciting and fresh–because I had never seen work like that before. It was like having someone open a book for you. Not a new way but they made the experience of art richer. (Niro transcription 2, p. 2)

In her last year at OCA, Niro was curated into her first exhibition. The exhibition, *Changers: A Spiritual Renaissance* proved to be motivational for Niro and even though she describes herself as "bumping into walls at that point" (Niro transcription 1, p. 16), she found the experience of being in an exhibition with ten of her contemporaries,[9] many of whom she was just becoming aware of, a powerful experience. Her participation in this exhibition pushed Niro's educational journey and her professional art career forward.

9 The other artists in the Changers exhibition included the curator Shirley Bear (Tobique, 1936-), Rebecca Baird (Cree, 1954-), Rebecca Belmore (Anishinaabe, 1960-), Ruth Cuthand (Plains Cree, 1954-), Freda Diesing (Haida, 1925-2002), Faye Heavyshield (Kainai-Blood, 1953-), Glenna Matoush (Cree 1946-), Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki, 1932-), Jane Ash Poitras and Joane Cardinal-Schubert.

Transition from Emerging to Accomplished Artist

"it makes me be a bit braver"

In the period immediately following her time at the OCA, Niro created a number of photographic images that made a connection between Native history, contemporary Native life in Canada and her own cultural identity. This work included the series *Mohawks in Beehives* (1991, Niro Fig. 2 i, ii), *This Land is Mime Land* (1992, Niro Fig. 3), *In Her Lifetime* (1992) and *Passing Through* (1993, Niro Fig. 4). In each of these photographic series Niro relied upon her mother and her sisters to be her models as she explored women's lived experience, particularly from a Mohawk woman's point of view. In working with her mother and sisters as her models, Niro found the personal connections very helpful and stimulating as they compelled her to "work harder" and she admitted, "Maybe because it is my sisters and mum; it makes me be a bit braver in the work" (Niro transcription 2, p. 1).

Niro's inclusion of her family in her work pushed her to create both humorous and politically relevant work. The work examined identity as fluid and complex as opposed to one that is fixed and singular. In addition she was disputing the on-going stereotypes of Native women. The work from this time period was politically charged and often humorous.

"an archive of their own imagery"

As she has moved from an emerging to an accomplished artist, Niro has often worked in film. By the end of her time at UWO, Niro had made three films and written the screenplay for a fourth.[10] These films have been emblematic of Niro's objective to both question and expand the representation of Native people. Niro stated that this made sense for her because when she thought of Hollywood films (and the long association with First Nations people) and the variety of people in those films, "[The public and the producers] were able to have an archive of their

10 The three completed films were *It Starts with a Whisper* co-directed with Anna Gronau (1993, 27:30 min. 16 mm, DVD), *Overweight with Crooked Teeth* (5min. 1997), *Honey Moccasin* (1998, 47 min, Color, 16mm, DVD) and by 1997 Niro had written the script for *Kissed by Lightning* (2009, 90 min, Beta SP).

own imagery" and because of the photographic record those people "are still alive in the films" (Niro transcription 2, p. 1).

For Niro this endeavour is both empowering and stands in opposition to the long history of photographing Native people in which they had no control over or access to their own images. In addition, this impulse towards empowerment also speaks to Niro's own assertion that when she did begin making art it was important that she take her personal or family history into consideration. It was important that there be a purpose to her art as she did not feel she just wanted to, "do Indian art–just to crank it out" (Niro transcription 1, p. 4). Ultimately it was important to Niro that her work reflected her community and her own voice.

Art, Cultural identity and the Accomplished Artist

Art Education and Philosophy of Art

"Just make art"

Niro would not admit to having a philosophy of art education, saying simply:

> No, I don't. Just make stuff. I think production is a really important thing to do. Because I've seen so many people who are talented and they can do anything they want but they get stuck…And I think they just have got to keep doing stuff, you know. Even if it's a simple drawing, you can really can get stuck and almost paralyzed where you don't want to do anything else. (Niro transcription 1, p. 13)

I believe Niro's 'just do it' philosophy reflects her generally tenacious approach to life. This approach also applies to her art education and subsequent career and this means when she takes on a project she persists until it is finished. For Niro the decision to go to art school was difficult because she had to weigh further education against factors such as time for her family, commute time, and making the commitment to a rigorous academic schedule. As Niro explained, the decision to further her education ultimately required a straightforward attitude.

> It would take an hour and a half to get from here to Western [UWO] and so that's three hours a day that I had to be on the road, going back and forth. And I just thought at the time, should I be doing this? Because it takes everything away from your family life, you know. I had a family and I really questioned, should I do this? So my father passed away, just as I was about to go into Western. And he came to me in a dream and he said: you

> know you're going to do well. So I said, ok, that's a sign. So I went ahead and did it. But it was always a struggle just to have the time to go there…the time to try to read the texts...Give yourself time to think about the interpretation of the texts. And then teach at the same time…also given those TA jobs…twice a week...And then produce an exhibition for the end of the term…And so it just felt like a lot of pressure. An incredible amount of pressure! But I just said, I'm going just to do it. I just have to do it. (Niro transcription 1, p. 11)

Niro's practical sensibility was reiterated when she explained how important good quality art materials and tools were in her development as an artist. She remembered that she would feel selfish when she went to buy brushes and paint "…because it felt like I was taking away money from my family and this [was] for me" but as time went on, "art education taught me that if you are going to be an artist you have to invest in your tools" (Niro transcription 2, p. 3).

Again in our second interview she remarked on the necessary connection between "getting materials in your hands" and then continuing to keep "going through the motions of making work" (Niro transcription 2, p. 3).

Niro's pragmatic approach to art education, materials and art making reflects her upbringing and the example that was set by her parents. From a young age Niro learned that there was freedom to explore "this weird thing" but ultimately, "there had to be a reason" and a need for the art production to be "productive" (Niro transcription 1, p. 4).

Identification as an Artist

"it took me a long time just to be comfortable saying that"

Niro proudly admits, "I am an artist. It took me forty-five years to say that. Maybe not forty-five; but it took me a long time just to be comfortable saying that" (Niro transcription 1, p. 1).

When asked who she as an artist, sees as her audience, Niro categorically replied, "I like to see Native women as my audience" (Niro transcription 1, p. 16). She said she is conscious of her audience and as she makes art she thinks about those who will be able to buy her work, …because my audience is Native, I think well, if I make art so big, how can my art audience afford to buy a piece, you know? So, I really have to think about the size. I really want to make

work that the audience can buy and take home, instead of only seeing it on a wall some place. (Niro transcription 1, p. 16)

Her stated belief that her intended audience is female and Native is intriguing as throughout her career Niro has recognized that the representation of Native people and especially women needs to be acknowledged and addressed in order to move the Indigenous and settler relationships forward.

When asked if the label 'artist' or a 'Native artist' had any bearing on how she identifies herself Niro replied, "Shelley Niro, native artist. Hum! I don't know" (Niro transcription 1, p. 14). Ultimately it does not matter how Niro defines herself as artist as she just gets on with the work of art making. She is well aware of her Mohawk heritage but she is not overtly political. For example, she said she had not walked in any of the Idle No More protests in early 2013, but this political movement was having an impact on work she was producing at that time, particularly in terms of the relationship between the citizens of Six Nations of the Grand River and the city of Brantford.

For Niro the Reserve-Brantford (or urban space) relationship is an implicit aspect of her work as it has been through her knowledge of the people, the history and the relationships between the two communities that Niro has had the opportunity to creatively imagine and carry on a dialogue about what it means to be an Haudenosaunee woman and a member of two communities that have been intertwined for more than two hundred years. Niro's stature and her position as an artist on the border of the Six Nations of the Grand River was significant to the curator, Gerald McMaster when he invited her to participate in *Reservation X: The Power of Place in Aboriginal Contemporary Art* in 1998.[11] The exhibition was conceived to consider the implications of space, place and identity. Niro's position as a Haudenosaunee artist living and working in Brantford and in proximity (both personally and temporally) to the Six Nations was of interest to McMaster. Niro's straddling of these two places fit McMaster's definition of the "borderzone" which for him is the creation of a space of negotiation, of creativity and is a space

11 McMaster borrowed the title of his exhibition from the Grand Pine Reserve aka Reservation X in Niro's film, *Honey Moccasin*. His premise for the exhibition was to delineate the relationship between artists, the Reserve system and the often-ambiguous spaces that artists move across or through as they create new spaces of art production.

that is frequently crossed.[12] McMaster recognized that through Niro's experiences of the town and the First Nation territory, she exploits the qualities of each to create a commentary on cultural practice, the embodied presence and the importance of place. Niro's film *Honey Moccasin* and the powwow fancy dress regalia, made especially for the film, were included in the exhibition. This was fitting for Niro as the film is an ode to life in a modern Haudenosaunee community and the need to be daring, inventive and creative in response to the new and unexpected.

As an artist, Niro has been consciously looking at both of these communities for twenty-five years. She has been recording images, stories, truths, falsehoods and histories that she then projects back onto each community. She continues to do so, but a slight shift has taken place since her time at UWO. The story of the Great Peacemaker and the Grand River and the connections between the past and the present has become an important focus. For Niro, the Peacemaker and his role as a mediator have become an element of her identity as an artist as she makes the link between legend, contemporary art and the importance of cultural heritage and history.

Role of the Artist and Community

"people were so hungry for a visual"

Niro said she commits as much time as she can to helping artists who ask her to read their proposals or look at their work. She feels this is important because others had done the same for her at an earlier stage. She noted that Tom Hill (director of the Woodland Cultural Centre through 1980's and 1990's) was a person she was able to ask questions of or talk to about her art.[13] She finds she is rarely asked to join in grassroots community art projects or workshops but

12 More fully, McMaster wanted to explore the border zone as: an in-between, an area of contemplation, a space where social spaces intersect, a space of re-territorialization or an expansion/creation of space, a space where social agents interrogate and negotiate their conditions of existence, and a space from which to begin a search for camaraderie.

13 Tom Hill (Seneca, 1943-) is an artist-curator. He attended the Ontario College of Art from 1964-67. He was amongst the First Nation artists who came together at Expo 67 to create a program of contemporary art for the Indians of Canada Pavilion. As a result of this experience Hill became very interested in curatorship and exhibition design. In the 1970s a federal program began funding cultural educational centres in First Nation communities. One of these was the Woodland Cultural Centre, established in 1982. At that time Hill became the director of its museum. He premised his career and exhibition work on the interconnectedness and authenticity of visual objects made by Native artists (see: http://ggavma.canadacouncil.ca/htmifixed/Archives/2004/-e.html

if she is asked, she does like to participate. Instead, she is more likely to be invited to take part in academic panels at galleries or universities and she finds these events and programs, especially panel reviews of her films, can be physically and emotionally draining.

Our conversation about the role of the artist in the community quickly moved to the fundamentals that Niro truly defines as the artist's role in the community. On the one hand she strongly believes that the artist's role is to make art that provokes or moves people.

> I think the role is… I really believe that art is enlightening and…sometimes I see an art piece or an art show and it's really quite moving. Images are created that I never would have even imagined. And I see something that [describes] somebody else's brain and their soul and it's out there and I think it's really amazing. And it's almost like invention. So, somebody is inventing something for other people to look at. And if it brings a certain amount of joy, I think that's really amazing… truly, that's an artist, you know. Because they are showing something brand new and it's bringing some kind of levity and I just think it's just really wonderful. So, hopefully some of my work does that. (Niro transcription 1, p. 14-15)

On the other hand, Niro feels passionately that it is her responsibility as an artist to involve the people of her home community in her films and through their involvement she can create an archive of images. She sees compiling this recorded documentation as integral to her role as an artist. She has an ulterior motive:

> I really wanted to have as many people involved, not [in] the production of it, but just sort of putting [them] there in the background and being extras. So that they could see how a film was made. [It is] …because people were so hungry for a visual of Native film. (Niro transcription 1, p. 19)

In referring to the need to see her own people on film she gave the example of her parents and their love of the television programme *North of 60*,

> They would plan their week around that show. And I think it's because they had Indian people on that show. All of us, we were brought up at a time when there was really no Indian presence on TV. But they were really deprived of seeing Indian people represented in that big screen arena. *(*Niro transcription 1, p. 19)

Niro never imagined that she would be able to make films as getting the equipment and the necessary funds seemed to be so out of reach. But she instinctively knew that making films was a valuable way of "documenting people" and as she grew older,

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(accessed Dec. 20, 2015).

> I started to realize that we do have access to that. We can make films where Indian people are on the screen...I'm just fulfilling my own objective [of] archiving, not specific people, but just archiving people in general. So, if I can include them in that practice of film making, even if they're just on screen for a little bit of time. I think…it's cool…that the camera kind of passes by and we can see them. (Niro transcription 1, p. 19)

Ultimately for Niro as an artist, her role is two-fold. The first is to create art that people can relate to and secondly to insure "the work is surrounded by community." Therefore it is "important to remember what [members of the community] know and [to think about] how they might relate to the work" (Niro transcription 2, p. 3). Niro wants to make work that people want to see, relate to and respond to it in some way,

> "[Art] opens up a door or a window and it lets you go through that door or window and it's places you wouldn't even think you wanted to go. It's not a definite thing that you're learning but it's like you're learning that you can go in that direction too." (Niro transcription 1, p. 20)

She constructs situations that allow the people of her First Nation community to see themselves, form a rebuttal to stereotypical images of Indigenous people and face up to their own experience of life on the reserve–both positive and negative.[14]

We return to Niro's introductory quote, "I'm an artist. I live in Brantford. I'm from the Six Nations Reserve, Mohawk, Turtle Clan. That's it" (Niro transcription 1, p. 1) as the key to her identity as a Mohawk woman. Her work concentrates almost exclusively on women who are trying to find their way in a modern world without losing sight of who they are. In presenting this point of view, Niro embraces her culture and her histories. By working in film she records herself, her family members and community and ensures there will be, as Barthes stated, a proof or a "certificate of presence" (Barthes, 1981, p. 87).[15]

Art Practice

"get through life with a sense of grace"

Niro's work often draws on humour and the unexpected. In particular, in her photography

14 For example one of Niro's on-going concerns is the incidence of violence against women on the Reserve. This leads her to present women as strong, capable and multi-faceted.

15 Barthes is discussing the fact that the photograph is an in-between space because it is not reality, but it is a reality of the past –a past we can no longer touch.

and films, she offers the viewer, both Native and non-Native, the opportunity to rethink their knowledge of Aboriginal people. One thinks initially of the photographs that Niro has made that draw on masquerade, parody, and appropriation. Across her career, Niro has placed herself, her mother, her sisters, relatives and her friends in her pictures. The personal relationships in the context of her art practice have allowed her to structure identity on the basis of personal experience and as stated previously their presence means that she will push herself a little further. For example, *The Rebel* (1987, Niro Fig. 5) and *The Iroquois Is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society* (1991, Niro Fig. 6) are photographs of her mother at home on the Six Nations. In the first, Niro's mum is coquettishly posed across the trunk of the family car, bearing the hallmark: Rebel. The second shows her mother smiling out from under the hood of a hairdryer in her sister's kitchen. Both images exude affection, warmth, humour, ease and familiarity. As Niro has stated, the anthropological and ethnographic descriptions of Haudenosaunee women that she heard and read of as a young person are what she riffs on in her title. In this work, she is talking back to the ethnographic and Hollywood representations. These two photographs are part of a continuum from *The Rebel* to *Mohawks in Beehives* (1991) in which the artist was exploring the presence and lack of Aboriginal people in everyday situations and settings. These photographed moments with her mother or her sisters are familial, but they are also triumphant because on many levels they act as a moment of self-actualization–for Niro as recorder and as a record of a moment in time.

In knowing her use of humour, it was therefore surprising when Niro suggested that *The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony* (2002, Niro Fig. 7 i, ii, iii, iv, v) was the work that best defined her embodied practice. In this series, Niro juxtaposes two young people within the context of the legendary figure of the Great Peacemaker. This work is made up of five large-scale black and white images depicting a man and a woman in a series of actions. In the first, the woman holds a bowl as she prepares to feed him and the following piece shows the young woman singing into his ear. In the third image, the young man is shown in profile with the tears being wiped from his eyes by the woman, and in the fourth photograph the young man is shown in profile with his

eyes closed while the young woman (just out of frame) holds the wampum over him. Finally, she performs a smudging over the man. [16]

The story of the Peacemaker is important to Niro and since her UWO thesis exhibition, Niro has continued to take inspiration from his story, in particular the ways the story of the Peacemaker helped the Haudenosaunee respond to the post-contact relationships with the Europeans. She understands that the objective of the mythology was to help the First Nations people deal with the ensuing upheaval and violence brought by the Europeans. In this series of photographs it is noteworthy that Niro depicts the Peacemaker as a woman. Niro sees the work as showing how the Peacemaker performed the ways the people could, "get through life with a sense of grace"(Niro transcription 1, p. 24).

The intimacy of the images speaks to the core need of caring for and healing one another and may well serve as an embodiment of the strength of Mohawk women and men as well as women's contribution to the continuation of Haudenosaunee culture. As an accomplished artist Niro has moved forward to find her own voice and is thus able to give others a voice.

16 Smudging is a ritual cleansing. It is done with different medicinal plants (tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, cedar) to create a cleansing smoke. As the smoke rises prayers are addressed to the Grandfathers and Creator up above. The smudge is also used to heal the mind, body and spirit and is often used at the beginning of ceremonies so the proceedings can begin with good intent.

Fig. 1
Shelley Niro
Waitress
1986
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 2 – i
Shelley Niro
Mohawks in Beehives, *Queen Bees*
From the series *Mohawks in Beehives*
14 hand-tinted black and white photographs
1991
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 2 – ii
Shelley Niro
Portrait of the Artist Sitting with a Killer and Surrounded by French Curves
From the series *Mohawks in Beehives*
14 hand-tinted black and white photographs
1991
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 3
Shelley Niro
500 Year Itch
from the series *This Land is Mime Land* (detail)
1992
hand-tinted gelatin silver print
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 4
Shelley Niro
Passing Through
Installation photograph at London Regional Art and Historical Museum
1993
Series of oil paintings and photographs
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 5
Shelley Niro
The Rebel
1987
Hand-tinted photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 6
Shelley Niro
The Iroquois Is a Highly Developed Matriarchal Society
From the series *Mohawks in Beehives*
1991
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 7 - i
Shelley Niro
The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony (1)
2002
Series of five black and white photographs
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 7 - ii
Shelley Niro
The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony (2)
2002
Series of five black and white photographs
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 7 - iii
Shelley Niro
The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony (3)
2002
Series of five black and white photographs
Courtesy of the artist

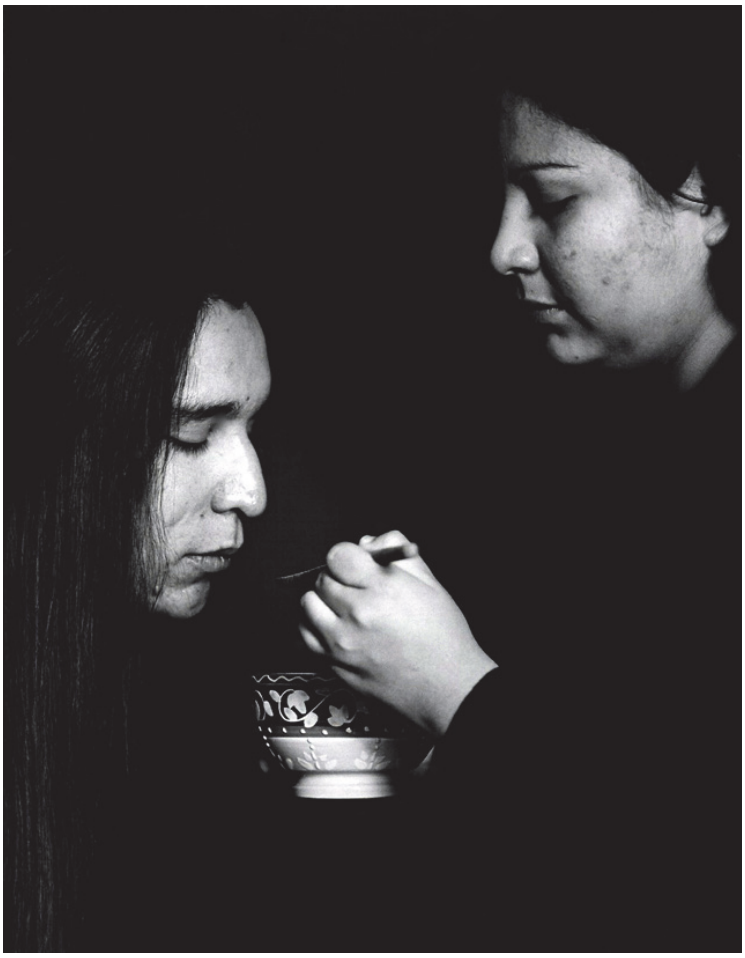

Fig. 7 - iv
Shelley Niro
The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony (4)
2002
Series of five black and white photographs
Courtesy of the artist

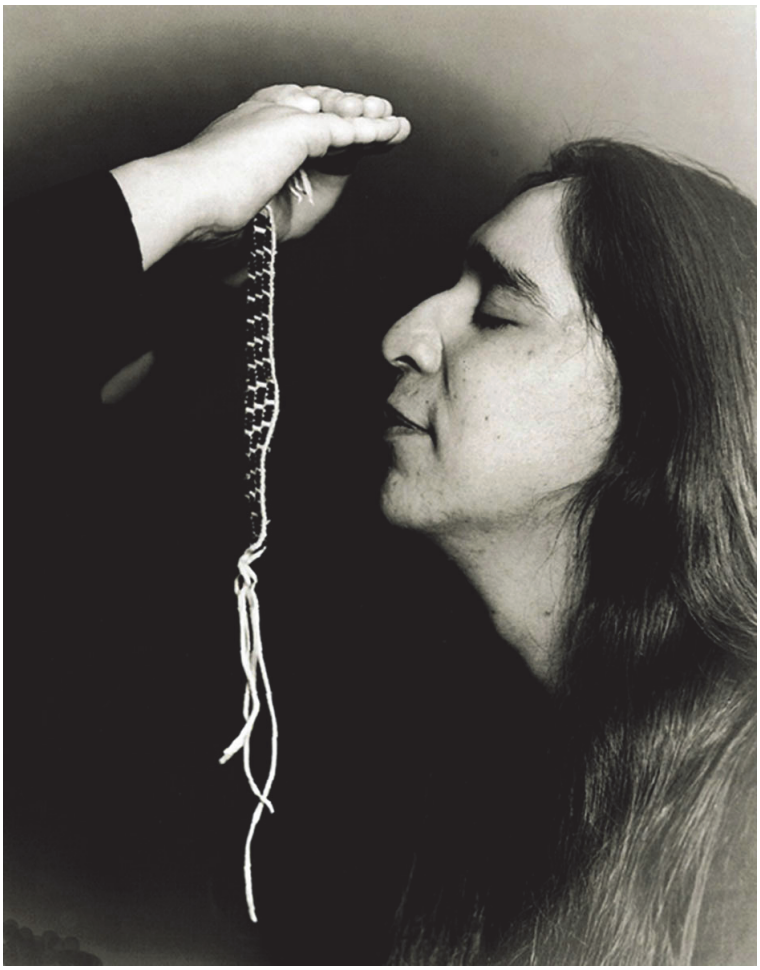

Fig. 7 - v
Shelley Niro
The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony (5)
2002
Series of five black and white photographs
Courtesy of the artist

Chapter 5
Artist Narrative: Lisa Myers

Meeting Lisa Myers

In October 2012, I attended a one-day symposium at The Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU). The day was in recognition of the newly inaugurated Aboriginal Visual Culture (ABVC) program.[1] Lisa Myers was one of the panelists for the "A Critical Look at Aboriginal Education" session. The other panelists were Barry Ace, Bonnie Devine and Jean Marshall. I was very interested in both Jean Marshall's and Lisa Myers's stories of their art, art education and life experiences.[2] A colleague at OCADU strongly recommended I consider Myers as one of the artists in my research. Once I knew more about her and her art practice, I completely agreed. When the symposium ended I introduced myself and told her a little about my dissertation research. We exchanged email addresses and I told her I would stay in contact.

I reintroduced my proposal and myself by email at the beginning of April 2013. Within two weeks, we had set a date to meet at her house in early May. By the time we had set the date, I had conducted my first interview with Shelley Niro so I was able to give Lisa a better sense of what to expect in terms of time commitment, the nature of the questions and the purpose of my research.

I traveled to Toronto by train on May 6th. The day started early because we had arranged to meet at her house at lunchtime. Myers lives in an older neighbourhood, a thirty-minute streetcar ride west of downtown, in a redbrick house with a big front porch. When I arrived she was preparing a salad of fresh pickerel and vegetables for us. We talked over lunch about people we knew in common and how cooking professionally has been an important element in both our lives. When we finished lunch, she read through and signed the consent form and we transcribed the bio-data form. After this I began to record our conversation. Myers was very thoughtful as

1 In 2008 Bonnie Devine was hired to develop the Aboriginal Visual Culture (ABVC) program, as one that would bring together a foundational studio art program and the history of Aboriginal visual and cultural practice. From 2009 students were able to take a minor in ABVC. The name of the program changed in 2013-2014 and is now known as Indigenous Visual Culture (INVC).

2 Barry Ace (Odawa) is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Ottawa. At the time of the symposium the installation artist Bonnie Devine (Anishinaabe) was Interim Director of the ABVC program. Jean Marshall (Anishinaabe) is an art educator teaching material culture and traditional practices and based in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

she answered the questions and answered many of the questions at length. She expressed concern once or twice that she was 'only' an emerging artist and why did I want to talk to her?

However, as the afternoon passed, I really felt that the result of all her accumulated experiences – as a cook, musician, as an arts student, curator and an artist – made for a rich mix in combination with her maturity and her growing awareness of her Indigenous heritage and therefore a fruitful contributor to this research.

I was surprised when I finally shut the recorder off as we had talked for over two hours; the time had gone by very leisurely and I had no sense of how long we had been talking. We finished the afternoon by looking at some of her prints and time-based video work and then retired to the front porch to have a piece of the raspberry-blueberry loaf that I had taken to her. In the end, blueberries were a theme that ran through the afternoon, which we ended by discussing grandparents and the questions we ask about our past.

Biographical Overview

Lisa Myers was born in Oakville, Ontario in 1969. She is of Anishinaabe ancestry from Shawanaga and Beausoleil First Nations, located in Simcoe County and Carling Township, Ontario. She grew up in and around Oakville in southern Ontario. Her mother is Ojibway (Potawami and French decent) born in Shawanaga First Nation, but raised in Carling Township in southern Ontario. Her father is of Austrian and English descent though he was born in Canada. Myers is the fifth child in a family of six children; she has an older brother, three older sisters and a younger sister. Myers attended elementary school in Milton and secondary schools in Oakville. In elementary school, she loved art and from an early age thought of herself as an artist.

For most of high school she went to a school in a well-to-do neighbourhood of Oakville. Myers's secondary school had a very good art program that gave the students access to different media and materials. The art teacher was very dedicated and Myers realizes that the art teachers gave her a good solid foundation in studio arts.

After secondary school, Myers attended the Ontario College of Art (OCA). Although she entered the foundation year with the intention of becoming a painter, Myers soon switched into New Media. At the OCA, she became acquainted with members of the Native Students

Association. In 1992, Myers completed her four-year program and received a Diploma in New Media (OCA).

On completion of her OCA diploma program, Myers took a fifteen-year break before returning to art school. During her hiatus, Myers first concentrated on playing music professionally. After five years of traveling around the country playing music, she decided to cook professionally. She attended the Stratford Chef School though soon realized she was uncomfortable working in 'fine dining' due to the sense of entitlement she found in this milieu. As a result, Myers went to work in the Midland Penetanguishene area of Ontario in a more community-oriented environment. There she was soon cooking and running the kitchen and the garden.

After this experience, Myers returned to college with more of a sense of who she was and what she wanted to do. She applied to the Ontario College of Art and Design[3] to upgrade her Diploma to a Bachelors of Fine Arts in 2006, completing this degree in 2008. The following year she began her MFA program in Criticism and Curatorial Practice from which she graduated in 2011. At that time, her intention was to develop an art practice within a curatorial practice. Myers's thesis curatorial project, *Best Before* brought together her previous engagement with food and her personal connections to food, feeding people and the daily life experiences of Aboriginal people.

Myers's own exhibition history began with her participation in student and group exhibitions at the McMichael Gallery, Kleinberg (2010), the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie (2004, 2007) and at the Harbourfront Centre, Toronto (2013). In 2012, she collaborated as an artist in *Noise Cooking* as part of the Toronto Now festival. In this exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, curated by Michelle Jacques, Autumn Chacon and Myers performed the preparation of recipes using sound-enabled cooking utensils.

In the summer of 2013, Myers had her first solo exhibition at Urban Shaman. The work in this exhibition was the culmination of Myers's education and many of her life experiences.

3 OCA became OCAD in 1996. In 2010 OCAD became OCADU. See Shelley Niro fn.2 for fuller description of the history of the Ontario College of Art.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Emerging Artist

Early Life Experiences

"I was always making stuff"

Myers has early childhood memories of being in the kitchen and making art with her siblings. As a younger child, she was aware that her older siblings were more proficient at drawing "…and my older sisters and my brother were good at drawing. So, drawing was something we did on the kitchen table" (Myers transcription, p. 4). For Myers, the epitome of her older siblings' ability to draw was being able to draw realistically with a good sense of colour and design. But she seems to have had lots of self-confidence and believes she was very capable in her own practice of drawing and making stuffed animals and other objects.

"I'd always want to look at the sunsets"

Myers remembers the importance she attached to her maternal grandfather and his role as the family photographer – it was an accepted fact that he always recorded the events at family gatherings. But Myers and her grandfather both felt that his truest artistic expression was found in his longstanding commitment to photographing sunsets. He compiled these images in photograph albums that Myers has strong memories of asking to see. She remembers that her grandfather was impressed by her aesthetic response to these photographs.

> My grandfather was a really keen photographer. He would show up to our family events with his camera. And…he would take pictures of the sunsets from his balcony in Parry Sound, my grandparents lived in the seniors' apartment building, right up on the hill. So he had photo albums of sunsets. And when I'd go see him I'd always want to look at the sunsets. I'd look through those and he'd say, you know, some people don't even see that as being beautiful. He appreciated that I appreciated his sunset photos. (Myers transcription, p. 4)

In her early childhood, the combination of her family's encouragement of art-making and the provision of art supplies, the experiences with her grandfather's photography along with her own positive sense of self, all lead Myers to think she could be an artist. As she relayed during

our interview, she was always making things and even as a young child she told people that she wanted to be an artist. This desire was not diminished by her experiences at school.

Art and School Experiences

"I had my own table – I was this little kid"

Myers said she loved art in elementary school. She was very self-motivated and as she said, "I would make some stuffed animals, I'd make little fridge magnets and sometimes sell them at school at fun fair things. I had my own table–I was this little kid and I had these little things with pompoms and googly eyes [to sell]" (Myers transcription, p. 4).

In her early school years, Myers enjoyed the art classes and she was very keen and wanted to do well at art because she understood the benefits of being a student who did so.

> I wanted to be good at art; I remember other students being good at art and I wanted to be [that] student...They are always the ones that can draw and they get recognized. There was this one guy who was a bit more accomplished than I was and I think I sought to be just as good as him. (Myers transcription, p. 4)

"thought of myself as an artist"

Myers recalled that even as a young child, when people asked, she told them she wanted to be an artist.

> … yes, from an early age I really liked making art, and thought of myself as an artist or wanting to be an artist when I grew up, or being a writer. So it's interesting to look back at little things–and [when people asked] 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' thinking and saying, I want to be an artist and writer. (Myers transcription, p. 4)

Myers's experience of art in secondary school was also very positive although she initially took an odd turn as a result of advice in regards to her future success. In her first year of secondary school, Myers opted out of art because "I had this funny guidance from one of my sisters who said you have got to go to University so you can do something. So, I didn't take art in Grade nine, I took a business course" (Myers transcription, p. 5).

She soon realized that it was more personally important for her to continue to study art and as she stated, she was still motivated by art and, "my mother was really encouraging too. She

liked that I made things, [and] that I was really kind of aiming [towards art]" (Myers transcription, p. 5).

"preparing people for law"

In Grade 10, when Myers changed to a school in a well-to-do neighbourhood of Oakville, she took the art option. The school was not an arts-focused high school, but Myers believes the curriculum was designed as a form of advanced placement because "I think it was preparing people for an academic life or university. They had other languages. They had German and Latin… almost preparing people for law school. It was in a well-to-do neighbourhood, so I think they had a lot more than the average high school" (Myers transcription, p. 6).

The school also had a very good art program with specialist art teachers. Myers remembers the program very fondly:

> We did printmaking in our high school. We did intaglio-etching, which is pretty unusual in a high school program, and it wasn't an arts high school, it's just we had a really good [teacher]… she even did a little figure drawing with us, not with nudes, of course, but with people wrapped in blankets. (Myers transcription, p. 5)

"an amazing art teacher"

For Myers one particular teacher made a great impression on her.

> …we had a really good [teacher], her name was Miss S.…I really learned tons from her. I think she was an amazing art teacher. That program [meant]…just taking art through high school was really good and gave me a solid foundation. I knew I wanted to make art. (Myers transcription, p. 5)

Myers believes she had the benefit of a really good school even if she was not in the same economic bracket as the other students. In hindsight, she appreciates the quality of the educational experience.

> I feel like I had some of the privileges of that [programming, access to materials, advanced curriculum] but they had a good program because they had a lot of rich kids. So, I got that privilege. But I definitely wasn't living the life. (Myers transcription, p. 5)

However, at the end of secondary school, Myers was surprised by her art teacher's negative reaction when the teacher learned Myers had only applied to art school.

> … and I told her [about only applying to art college]. And she was just, she was discouraging, she said, that's such a hard life; you don't want to do that. She was discouraging to me. But I had already applied and I was already doing it. I kind of knew she was telling me that because she thought I should get a career. (Myers transcription, p. 5)

This was surprising to Myers because the art teacher had revealed her own art career to her students when "she had an art show and she gave us little invitations" (Myers transcription, p. 5). And even if she was not completely comfortable about going into galleries at that time, Myers still instinctively knew that she wanted to become an artist.

"It didn't click"

In the autumn of 1988 Myers began a Diploma in Studio at the OCA. During the foundation year, she took an experimental painting class and she found that it was very male-centric. Myers realized that "I was this young woman and if I didn't really go to the pub and hang out with him [the painting teacher], you didn't get as much. It didn't click" (Myers transcription, p. 7).

"you should go into new media"

Someone suggested to Myers that she should go into New Media, as it was a dynamic new program with new faculty–many of whom were women. It turned out to be a good suggestion, "…and I was interested in video and had taken a few courses. So I took New Media. Lisa Steele was running that program at that time. I mainly did video and some audio recording" (Myers transcription, p. 7).

Myers feels she was lucky to begin at OCA just at a time when the administration was hiring female faculty as part of an affirmative action plan at the art school. Over time, Lisa Steele gained Myers's respect as a professional artist and as a woman with whom she could identify. This identification came mostly from the fact they had both experienced challenging periods in their own lives.

> … there was a retrospective at the AGO of Lisa Steele's work. And she had one video piece where she is sitting in a bathtub talking about coming home and finding her mother

> dead. And I think when I saw that piece and she was the head of my department, I think I… not that I had ever articulated it to her, but I felt kind of like a kinship with this experience [as Myers had just lost her mother]. (Myers transcription, p. 8)

"there was a hesitance for me"

As an undergraduate in the early 1990s, Myers found she was more focused on the female faculty and the part they played in helping her stay in school. She credits the female faculty members with helping her make strong work. She stated that at this time this was her main interest and she was less concerned with her own cultural identity. Having said this, she was becoming acquainted with people like Mary Ann Barkhouse, Richard Hill, Bev Koski and David Finlay. She knew of their involvement with the Native Students Association, but she now believes she was both too shy and too hesitant to really feel she could get involved with this student group at that time.

> It's not that I wasn't identifying as such but it was more that I felt like, there was a hesitance for me as far as claiming that because of my mixed heritage and my life experience was different. But, it was very much…an identity crisis perhaps at that point. Not so that I was losing sleep over it, it was just that when I got to those places where they were asking me to do things I felt, I didn't feel like I was Native and Aboriginal enough to be part of that. (Myers transcription, p. 7)

Nevertheless, in what may well have been a tentative lead-in to an exploration of her cultural identity, Myers was starting to bring memory and family stories into her work. As she was becoming more technically proficient, a family trauma had developed from which Myers began to look at life events and to reconstruct them in her art.

> I was looking at making work and looking at the technical sides of things and how to use technology. I think my work…looking at certain scenes from my life and re-enacting them. It was about memory. I think it was a therapeutic thing too. There were multiple things going on for me at that time. So I feel I was super quiet and super shy and I had gone through a lot. The fact that I stayed in school…was a huge thing and I don't think I was that involved [at OCA]. I started playing music more and doing stuff outside the school. (Myers transcription, p. 7)

"he told us the story"

At the end of her undergraduate degree, Myers began to make very personal references tofood and family. She made videos

> [of] all these homey…memories…. of kneading dough. And at that time, it was very personal work and we were looking a lot at the work that became 'personal becomes political' out of the 70s and stuff…I did a little bit of the work, actually the work I'm finishing now. I feel I started it then and never finished it…that was around the walk…my grandfather's running away from Residential school. It was after I finished [art] school that he told us the story about running away from residential school and I recorded it. And I haven't totally finished making what I thought I was going to make at that point. So it's been a long process. (Myers transcription, p. 9)

The story Myers's grandfather told happened when he was thirteen years old, he had run away from Shingwauk Residential School at Sault Ste Marie. He walked more than two hundred-fifty kilometres to Espanola. He told her he survived that trip by eating blueberries from plants located along the train tracks. Since hearing this story, her grandfather's journey has informed much of Myers's life and practice.

After OCA, Myers was out of school for about fifteen years. She continued cooking and had started to play more music in her last year at art school and this became a major focus for the years between 1992-1997. As a musician in the early to mid 1990's, she played in two different bands, *Chicken Milk* and *Venus Cures All*. They produced CDs and albums and did some soundtrack work for independent films and television. Following her stint as a musician, Myers's cooking career took her entire focus and in time she completed a Diploma at the Stratford Chef School. Myers cooked professionally for more than a decade–first in fine foods catering and then in a situation that was a much more positive experience for her at the Enaahtig Healing Lodge and Learning Centre.[4] This is also the region of Ontario where Myers's maternal family is from. While she was working there, she started to make connections between health, economic barriers, accessibility and food. Myers appreciated the way she got to know the people she was cooking for and found there was more of a sense of it being an exchange of equals. She feels very strongly that she learned a lot about food, its connection to health and the importance of

4 Enaahtig Healing Lodge and Learning Centre is located in the Penetanguishene region of Ontario. It provides residential and non-residential programming in healing and learning for Aboriginal people. The objective is to promote traditional Aboriginal values and beliefs to foster strength in Aboriginal communities. They also provide social, cultural and educational programming (see: http://enaahtig.ca/enaahtig.htm).

knowing what people put in their bodies. Her experiences of cooking as part of a community and her connection to art coalesced when Myers saw a performance work at OCAD by performance-multi-media artist, James Luna (Luiseno, 1950-) and performance artist Lori Blondeau (Cree, Saulteaux, Métis, 1960-). In this performance from 2006,

> [Luna] was talking about his family memories of food and then Lori Blondeau was doing this performance where she guts a fish and pounds berries on a stone and she's dressed in this buckskin dress and [it] has the essence of a time, of the past or this relationship to food. (Myers transcription, p. 10)[5]
> I was really blown away by this performance. This is before I applied and I [knew] I wanted to write about this, I wanted to do something, on use [of] food and the way that food carries such meaning into work. (Myers transcription, p. 10)

"hit home with the concerns"

In 2006, Myers returned to OCAD to upgrade her Associates Diploma to a Bachelors of Fine Art. She says she returned to college with more of a sense of who she was and what she wanted to do. Generally, Myers felt that as a mature student she had more life experience and was more confident. Her time away from school meant that she knew she now needed to do something that was constructive and contributed to society. During her first year back at college, Myers and another student, Luke Parnell (Haida-Nisga)[6] started the Aboriginal Student Association (as the Native Students Association of the early 1990's had lapsed). At that same time, she also started to organize, participate in and curate exhibitions with Aboriginal students at OCAD. One example was the exhibition *Sewn* (2008) that marked the revival of the student association. She found many changes had occurred at OCAD between 1989 and 2006. There were more Indigenous students enrolled, the administration was slowly hiring more faculty and had begun offering courses and studios that were culturally relevant to the students.[7]

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5 It is difficult to say with certainty but to the best of my knowledge (and based on Myers's description and the date of the performance) I believe this performance was Blondeau's *Grace.* This performance was originally enacted as part of the exhibition with the same title at the Mendell Art Gallery in Saskatoon, SK in 2006. This performance piece was later part of the Venice Biennale in 2007, as *The Re-quickening Project* with contribution by Shelley Niro and Nancy Marie Mithlo.

6 Luke Parnell is from B.C. He graduated from OCAD in 2012. He and Myers exhibited together at the McLaren Art Gallery in 2010. He has a Master of Applied Arts degree from Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Parnell now makes art as a carver, having taken traditional training as part of a three year apprenticeship with Master Tsimsian carver Henry Green.

7 See: OCAD Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Vision and Progress Report (May, 2009) http://www.ocadu.ca/Asset4729.aspx (consulted January 17, 2013)

Immediately after completing the BFA, Myers applied to the Criticism and Curatorial Practice program as she wanted to write, curate and return to her art practice. In her first year in the MFA at OCAD in 2009, she curated and exhibited work in a number of student exhibitions– *Verge* (2009), followed by *You are Here* (2010), and *Past Now* (2010). The premise of these exhibitions was to look back and find or reveal the relationships between the past and the present, and then explore how we tell stories and create new narratives. All are part of a theme of story and telling that Myers has returned to again and again since the early 1990's.

In her graduate work, she really felt that she needed to explore the work she had been doing with food and the issues involved with feeding people healthy food. She believed this work about food was relevant both personally and for a wider audience.

> It's different than other materials, I thought, for me anyway, [food] really hit home with the concerns about diabetes in the communities and these things I felt like I've been working towards trying to prevent or trying to work with those sort of health concerns. (Myers transcription, p. 10)

At the end of her Masters program, Myers mounted an ambitious thesis project that brought together food, food preparation as well as art and artists who were also referencing or working with food. The exhibition, *Best Before* (2011) included KC Adams, Keesic Douglas, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Peter Morin and Suzanne Morrissette.[8] The artists worked with food as a subjective signifier of family, home and community while at the same time referencing the colonial legacy of the Euro-settler and Indigenous relationships through food and food availability. Myers made the connection between this exhibition and her previous career and on-going concerns for food and health.

> The artists…[had] worked with food already and I asked if they would make work that responded to a recipe of their choice, whatever they wanted. And then I did… research into the way that certain policies and legislations and acts ended up… feeding people rations, the political aspects of food. And…[I connected] performance and food…and then drew from what the artists made for their work and took up the larger discussion. I knew what I wanted to do for my Masters and I did it…I think there is a connection even though it was 14 years. I think that I manifested it differently, it was not art practice so much as community practice of cooking for people for a bunch of years. But I think it was really valuable. (Myers transcription, p. 10-11)

8 KC Adams (Oji-Cree, 1971-) is Winnipeg-based multi-media artist, Keesic Douglas (Ojibway, nd) works in photography and video, Cheryl L'Hirondelle (Métis-Cree, nd) multi-media artist, performance artist Peter Morin (Tahltan, nd) and Suzanne Morrissette (Cree-Métis) multi-media artist.

Myers believes the time away from the educational institution was a positive experience for her on returning to the art college.

> I was becoming more active and participating and making shows happen for Aboriginal students and we had student shows at Xpace and Transit Space [which] I co-organized...There were other student spaces that we made work and put some shows in. I was much more active when I went back. I was also older and more confident too. (Myers transcription, p. 12)

Myers graduated in 2011 and in the time since then she has continued to build her curatorial experience, her art practice and add to her exhibition record.

Mentors

"He appreciated that I appreciated his sunset photos"

Myers described her sister Ronda as a person she held in esteem for her drawing ability. She is not an artist now but when Myers was younger she remembers that her older sister's skills were inspirational. Myers also credits her grandfather's photography as an on-going influence as he set an example of determination and a personal aesthetic response to an unlikely subject. As described above, she also appreciated the bond his photographs made between the two of them.

In her early years at OCA Myers stated that her New Media professor, Lisa Steele, was a mentor to her even though she never told her. But it was a combination of life events and the feminist politics of the late 1980s that emerged around Steele and Myers in that time period.

> … she might not realize that she was such a mentor, but she was at that time for me. Also she was head of that department where there was a whole shift, it was very male dominated at OCAD and there was a whole affirmative action that came in and she kind of led that and I participated somewhat politically in supporting the affirmative action. I think … that I was really concerned as a woman being identified as a woman before I was identifying as an Aboriginal woman. (Myers transcription, p. 8)

"If I am allowed to still have mentors... These are the people I look to"

At each stage of her post-secondary education, Myers has appreciated the work and abilities of her peers and the more established artists such as Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Bonnie Devine. These are two artists in particular that she both values and has had the chance to work with. She is also appreciative and inspired by writers such as writer- curator Richard Hill (Cree)

and curator Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish). During her time at OCA, there were two sets of peers Myers looked to. The first included people in the arts-based or studio-practice group such as Melanie Aquilla, Nadine Arpin (Anishinaabe), Jenny Keith, Richard Hill, and Mary Ann Barkhouse (Kwakiutl, 1961-). The second group of mentor-peers included people who were members of the performance art collective *Shake Well* and others outside of formal education such as musician friends, Paula Gonzales and Laura Petty. She stated that generally they have been strong colleagues rather than mentors in the conventional sense. As Myers has stated, it was her peer Barkhouse who gave her a space to think through her own issues around her identity. This relationship was especially valuable when she found she was

> … starting to feel more like acknowledging that part of myself at that time or during those politics and knowing people like Mary Ann Barkhouse and talking to her, I felt I could relate to her in some ways. Because it was nice to have someone to talk to about that and to be able to say, yes, I'm Native too. And knowing there was something there. So I think again it was peers more than any mentor. (Myers transcription, p. 12)

Transition from Emerging to Accomplished Artist

"I've been looking at blueberries for a long time"

Myers's first post-OCAD and solo curatorial project, *Night Kitchen Under the Tabletop* took place as part of Toronto's 2012 *Nuit Blanche* at OCADU. The exhibition featured the artists multi-media artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle, the film- video artist Christina Zeidler and soundscape artist Sean Procyk who created objects that played on the notion of food and the way the institution feeds or moves people through both physical space (architecture) and metaphorically through the procedures of academic life. Myers's objective was to use cookery and digestion playfully as a way for the audience to reflect on institutional practices, hierarchy and identities.

In the same year, Myers's career as an artist in her own right began to flourish. At the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Albuqueque, New Mexico based performance and sound artist Autumn Chacon collaborated with Myers in the performance piece *Noise Cooking* (2012) as part of the Planet Indigenous art festival. The two women had met at a Banff Centre for the Arts residency and discovered their common interest in the culture of and cultural contexts of food, cooking and sound. As the two artists performed food preparation, the sounds of cutting, chopping, peeling on

a steel table were heard. At the same time, the stainless steel mixing bowls had microphones attached to amplify the sounds and guitar pedals were added for the two performers to manipulate the sounds to create a soundscape.[9] In this performance, Myers was bringing together many strands of her own life experience–food, music, First Nations identity, and women's performative actions within the home or kitchen. As Myers explained it was now feasible to her as an artist to start a dialogue within the art community about these ideas.

> So I think there is a sense that this audience will have some experience or be able to relate to these experiences as Indigenous people, as Aboriginal people, as Metis people, as someone with ancestry. And the broader art community too. People can relate to the knowledge because it is about the stories, and stories of food and community. (Myers transcription, p. 16-17).

Myers was also amused by the fact that she had obliquely returned to her musical career in this performance. As she said, "…because we were using all these guitar pedals and I felt it was really drawing from that part of my experience" (Myers transcription, p. 17*).*

In the summer of 2013, Myers had her first major solo exhibition at Urban Shaman in Winnipeg.[10] The exhibition, *blueprints for a long walk* stemmed from the family story of her grandfather running away from his Residential School. She had tried to work with this subject matter at the end of her first stint at OCA, but had been unable to bring the project to fruition. Myers had not let the story go, stating early in our interview, "I've been looking at blueberries for a long time because the stories that come, [are] through materials…" (Myers transcription, p. 2).

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9 The performance took place in the Young Gallery (located next to Frank at the AGO). The opening was a performance where the two cooked and then served the food to the audience. The exhibition was set up so the videos were already installed for viewing. The space emulated a kitchen with shelving and utensils hung up ready to use. According to Myers the table remained microphoned so that when people came in they could order food or a drink in that space and when people were eating or doing anything around the table it created a sound space.
There were also videos made of other artists such as Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Elwood Jimmy (Cree community animator and artist), Bev Koski (Anishinaabe bead work/ multi-media artist), as well as other people and the curator Michelle Jacques who all participated and did some noise cooking. Some of the AGO chefs also participated when the artists were able to go into the AGO kitchens and tape some of the cooking there. As Myers told me, "I did the organizing and the set up. A big part of it was Autumn Chacon."

10 Urban Shamen is an Aboriginal artist-run gallery that presents contemporary Aboriginal art in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was established in 1996. It is one of three Aboriginal artist-run centres in Canada (see: http://urbanshaman.org).

In 2009 Myers and her cousin re-traced their grandfather's walk from Sault Ste. Marie to Espanola, video and other material also fed into her art production for this exhibition–including prints and other images based on the train tracks and topographical maps, and time-based video works. Blueberries are imbedded in the exhibition as direct references to the berry and more circuitously as colour and as art material (for example blueberry juice is a base tint for the printing inks). For Myers, this work is a culmination of all that lead to this exhibition because for her it directly refers to " the way that the stories, or our histories are passed on and how that has an impact on how I live. I think I'm interested in the way it comes through [in] different things" (Myers transcription, p. 2).

Art, Cultural Identity and the Accomplished Artist

Art Education and Philosophy of Art

"a place for developing ideas"

Myers smiled when asked if she had a philosophy of art education because the question was prescient. As she had recently written a philosophy statement, she was prepared to explain that foremost for her was that art education should provide a space in which there is a

> … reciprocation of knowledge, [as in] knowing that I am going to learn something as well as offer something and also…facilitating learning as opposed to me just imparting some kind of knowledge or wisdom, and making sure that [I am]… , hoping so anyway, creating a situation where everyone feels like they have a voice and that they can ask questions and they don't feel silenced. (Myers transcription, p. 14)

As Myers herself was a very shy and quiet student, it is apparent that she is now quite adamant that her students be given the space to voice their opinions and ask questions. She believes this was, and often is still, not always the case in art studios. She would prefer to create a supportive environment in which students can "bring your ideas and let us all try to workshop them with you" (Myers transcription, p. 14). A reciprocal relationship is the objective, with the student coming into the studio with some notion of what they want to achieve, then asking for and responding to feedback and finally moving the project forward. Ultimately, Myers's expectation of herself as a teacher stem from what she has learned from her own experiences at art school

and she feels she can now make the pedagogical decisions that she knows would have been helpful to her. Myers has recently begun to teach some studio classes at OCADU and elsewhere and as she has developed her own courses she has had an opportunity to think more about personalizing the art education environment. In her own experience, she found her art education was transformational and she would like to give her students a similar experience–even if they do not recognize it as such while they are going through the coursework.

Identification as an Artist

"I'll say that now"

Myers continues to redefine herself as an artist especially as she works to bring the rich life experiences that she has had into her practice. In the past few years, she has also been bringing her identity as an Indigenous person into her conception of who she is as an artist. She spoke of the contrast between understanding who you are as an adolescent and then as an adult and what the exploration of identity at these two different stages requires. Myers said that in high school the objective is to "just try to fit in in every way possible" (p. 15). But once one reaches the post-secondary level, it is much easier to differentiate oneself and talk about how you identify yourself. She has asked herself what role does the environment play in self-definition? She believes it may be easier to figure this out if one has had the benefit of an academic experience. This certainly seems to be the case for her. But then the community activist part of her asks– what about the person who grows up without the introspection encouraged by the academic institution–people still have to ask, who am I? And depending on their academic, personal or political experiences, how will they be able to answer that question? For Myers, self-identification often comes down to how you "position yourself [in] a certain way or learn about your own positioning…" (Myers transcription, p. 15).

Interestingly, it is only in the past year or two that Myers says she would identify herself as an artist. I found this noteworthy especially after learning of her life experiences and her great self-assurance as a child and adolescent. In contrast to her earlier self-proclaimed confidence and declared desire to become an artist, Myers explained that as an adult she had become much more diffident.

> Even when I played music for years, I wouldn't say I'm a musician, I'd say I play music. Like when I cooked, people would say, 'you're a chef?' No, I'm a cook. I can deal with living up to that much. But yes, I would say an artist, or I make things or I make art. (Myers transcription, p. 15)

"I would say I make art for my own people, but I make art for me"

Myers sees her audience as diverse. While she had a hard time with this question and really had to think about the answer, in the end she stated she made her art for "other Indigenous people as well as people…[from] a broader art scene…but I make art for me" (Myers transcription, p. 15). Myers said when she is making art she is not necessarily concerned about who the audience is but is more interested in making art that helps her work through concerns, ideas, and relevant issues. Myers believes that in some ways it is frightening to think that there is an audience because sometimes as an artist it may be impossible to know who will see the work and how they will then interpret it. That is why she says she does not want to make art that just illustrates ideas, but to "make art that works through these ideas, but then that piece of work also…does something on its own as different people approach it" (Myers transcription, p. 16).

She realizes that she has to distinguish her art and her curatorial practices but whether curator or artist, she needs to stay true to her own sensibility. For example, in the curatorial project *Best Before,* Myers was envisioning her co-workers and the conversations that they had had at Enaahtig over the years and as she stated,

> I felt I was really making it for my own community that I'd been cooking in for so long. And these were the ideas that I had been mulling over and over, and [then] one of my coworkers from Enaahtig came to see *Best Before* and said, 'Oh my god, this is exactly it.' (Myers transcription, p. 16)

The reaction from her co-worker was exactly the one Myers herself had had when she had seen the previously mentioned Luna-Blondeau performance piece in 2006. Five years later, she was very pleased that through her own work and research she had been able to elicit a strong response when one of the viewers reacted with a similar fervour.

Role of the Artist and Community

"Very limited"

When asked about her involvement as an artist with the public, Myers immediately declares she is an artist with a fairly short exhibition history and therefore has not often been asked to participate in community events, artist talks or workshops. She has not given many artist talks as she has most often shown in group exhibitions. She has had three artist residencies. As mentioned earlier, Myers had a residency in Banff in 2012 where she met Autumn Chacon and this lead to the exhibition at the AGO. Also in 2012, Myers had been selected for a curatorial and writing residency at Est Nord Est at Saint-Jean-Port-Joli on Quebec's south shore. Prior to this, she had an artist's residency in Dawson City, Yukon at the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture in 2010.

Myers finds that the community art projects such as the ones she has done for Toronto's *Nuit Blanche* stem more from the institution or the art market as opposed to grassroots-based events that have taken place in settings such as Enaahtig. Myers has participated in different festivals as a musician, an artist and as an art educator–some of which were more hands-on art workshops at Enaahtig and at the Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre in Midland. While Myers believes her public practice is still very limited, the residencies and community workshops she has attended and participated in have contributed to her development as an artist and through these interactions she has had a chance to consider the broader implications of the artist's role in the community.

"it's about contributing knowledge"

Rather than concentrating on the concrete examples of community involvement, Myers instead moved on to defining what the artist's role in the community meant. In doing so, she illustrated her ideas with descriptions of the experiences she has had with different artists. She spoke of coming to understand the connection between community and history through community artist-Elder Dan Commanda's workshops. He worked with children and youth at

Enaahtig and taught them beading. But in Myers's eyes, he was imparting much more besides the practical skills of learning to thread or stitch with beads.

> He would give them a little circle of fabric, some beads and a needle on the thread and those little kids would just ended up doing it. It was amazing and…I think of him as an artist, a community artist…through that work he taught about making dance regalia but also he was teaching language, but also ways of building relationships in the community too. So there was this passing on of knowledge and stories and passing on…a sense of community in a way. (Myers transcription, p. 16)

Myers thinks that community involvement may distinguish the Indigenous art scene from the institutional or market-driven arts world. As she stated, "I think it's a bit different than being in the art scene…I think a lot of artists I know have a function in the community as well as [in the] Indigenous art scene" (Myers transcription, p. 16).

She makes her argument by giving the example of Indigenous artists she knows who do such things as work with women in prison or work with children in schools. She also mentioned a close friend who formed a beading group at the Native Canadian Centre in Toronto. Myers appreciates the way this friend is able to base her art practice on this community action. Myers was not claiming that only Indigenous artists work with prisons, schools or community organizations but she was stating that perhaps in the Native community there is more of an expectation or an onus on the artist to contribute.

> There's often a community component… and then it blurs the divisions between community art and "real high art" [Myers quote marks]. I like that it does that. Just to say the artist's role is passing on [or] contributing to knowledge within the community…I think it's about contributing knowledge and building on what has already happened. Whether it's aesthetic or technique or the stories around those things, it's like passing these things on. (Myers transcription, p. 16)

Myers furthered the theme of community and passing on knowledge as we continued to discuss the artist's role. As she stated it, she also sees it as the artist's responsibility to contribute to the viewer's knowledge and understanding of what has gone before. In this case, she believes that as an artist there are things that people in Canada should and need to know about Canadian history, and to teach people through their experience of art is part of the process of decolonization. As Myers said, the first time she heard the word colonization her entire life experience was broadened.

> It was suddenly like 'Oh, I can explain this and I can explain why my sisters and I always feel like we don't really fit in…' Suddenly we are able to talk about it with each other and then you just don't feel just like a freak, you feel like there's a reason and it's not our fault. (Myers transcription, p. 14)

It makes sense then that learning the words and making connections with the events that took place in the formation of Canada opened Myers's eyes and she now feels that as an artist it is her job to arouse people's curiosity and to stimulate discussions. By doing so she is exposing both the broader and the personal histories,

> … around the experience of Indigenous people, [because most people] they have no idea. They don't really have much idea of…what my mother would have gone through or what I've gone through. Not…familiar with the legislation or even what the Indian Act is…Not that I am making work that illustrates this history. But if this was someone's experience–[it is important to ask] how would that happen? (Myers transcription, p. 18)

For Myers as artist, curator or community worker, it is important that people know the stories that have led us to this point.

Art Practice

"My work initially was much about being a young woman…"

Myers's art practice has always had some element of the personal attached. Her early student work explored young women's experiences. Her concerns at that time had to do with women's safe negotiation of the street. In response to this, she made a video that explored the interactions between women on the sidewalk and men in cars. Moving forward, she began to conflate the role of memory with parents and children's actions. This work was personal. Memory as a theme has continued to impinge on her work over the past six years. Recent work has also related to the intersection of histories, for example, how stories are passed on and have a continuing influence on how we live.

"the work I'm finishing now I feel I started it then and never finished it"

Myers says she has been thinking about family, history and the crisscrossing of time, since her art college days. Over the years from art college, through her time as a musician and over the course of her cooking career and into the present day she has constantly been aware of the objects and materials that hold stories. Myers believes she has to acknowledge the different phases of her life in the things she does and she particularly holds on to her years of cooking. This is because she finds she can make a connection between herself as an artist and food preparation, food and her family history.

> And also [it's] not keeping everything separate…I guess maybe I would argue that art and food and cooking, for me, I like to try and make a fluid kind of movement between those things. I would say that I have learned to acknowledge all those parts of what I've done and make it part of my art practice or make my art practice part of it. I like to talk about being a cook at the same time as I am talking about being an artist. I think it breaks down the hierarchy a little bit. (Myers transcription, p. 19)

She believes she melds her art and cooking practices when she turns everyday kitchen materials into aesthetic objects. For example, *Old Spoons* (2012, Myers Fig. 1) makes cooking implements, in this case an installation of wooden and *raku*-fired spoons, visually appealing. Alternatively, her time-based video of wooden spoons dipped in blueberries *Blueberry Spoons* (2010, Myers Fig. 2) mixes the intense colours of the berries with the repetitive actions that are a hallmark of food preparation. The repetition becomes playful as she creates a dipping and diving landscape by immersing the bowls of the spoons to different heights into the cooking juices and thus giving the viewer time to make the connections between the berries and her stories of crossing through a landscape.

As described above, Myers is acknowledging her years of cooking but at the same time she is using these materials because she understands that food can be a way to tell a personal history. In addition, the seemingly innocuous use of berries allows the stories of Canada's relationship to Indigenous peoples and in particular the history of the children sent to Residential schools. In some way, the blueberries as an innocuous medium present in the story in a both easily relatable and non-threatening manner.

Asked if there was one piece of work that describes who she is, Myers's first reaction was, "That's heavy. I don't know" (Myers transcription p. 19). But she quickly composed herself and decided that the series of prints *blue prints for a long walk* (2012, Myers Fig. 3 I, ii, iii, iv) was the work that brings her together as an artist, as an individual and the collective life experiences of her family. The work is a four-part series based on the topography of the land, water and railway tracks between Sault Ste. Marie and Espanola, Ontario. As Myers stated,

> The idea was that these blue prints, the story of my grandfather running away from residential school and he was there for only five or six days. I feel that…his life experience, my mother's life experience and my father's, all those things that you learn about your family and how you think of yourself in terms of those. So those are the blue prints of who you are. I made these prints and they were made out of blueberry pigment. They are blueprints, but they are maps, though. I think those are blue prints for me, of who I am. But they are only the beginning of the blue prints. I would have had to have a huge series of blue prints to fulfill that. That would maybe the closest thing right now. (Myers transcription, p. 19)

Myers says that she has often been inclined to use symbolic representations such as the blueprint. In this context, she recalled another work of art she had created a number of years previously that she saw as a sort of biography or trajectory of her life to that point. But as she said, she found that it was so intensely personal that no one else could read it for what it was. Nevertheless, at that point in her life it gave her "a really strong sense of who I was at that moment" (Myers transcription, p. 19). This recent work may also be read as an indicator of her trajectory into her family history as for her, "I would say that the blue prints maybe are the beginning of working things out" (Myers transcription, p. 19).

Myers is not overtly political in her work but she does state the concept of 'the personal is political,' that she first became aware of in her late 1980s media program, still enters into the dynamics of her production. This feminist model was a call to action to fight against oppression, patriarchal or otherwise. For Myers, her objective in an on-going exploration of this political stance is to initiate or stimulate a conversation about the experience of Indigenous people in Canada. As stated, the way she brings the personal into the political realm is through her on-going investigation of her grandfather's story. As she has moved into the realm of accomplished artist, Myers has had life experience and gained the confidence to now tell her own story.

She believes that as she has lived with her grandfather's story for twenty years or more, it is now time to transform the story of the walk and the blueberries and make it her own story. In this way, she will add a more personal layer to the old story, but she will also be able to activate the story in a different way, and in doing so, present it to a wider audience and create a link to a bigger history. That is why she went on the walk in 2009 – she felt that she knew the places, but also knew that she needed to get closer to the story. Ultimately, she needed to know what her grandfather had experienced to then be able to tell more than her grandfather's story.

Fig. 1
Lisa Myers
Old Spoons
2012
Raku
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 2
Lisa Myers
From then on we lived on blueberries for about a week, from the series *Blueberry Spoons*
2013
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 3 - i
Lisa Myers
blue print
from the series *blue prints for a long walk*
2012
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 3 - ii
Lisa Myers
land
from the series *blue prints for a long walk*
2012
Courtesy of the Artist

Fig. 3 - iii
Lisa Myers
water
from the series *blue prints for a long walk*
2012
Courtesy of the Artist

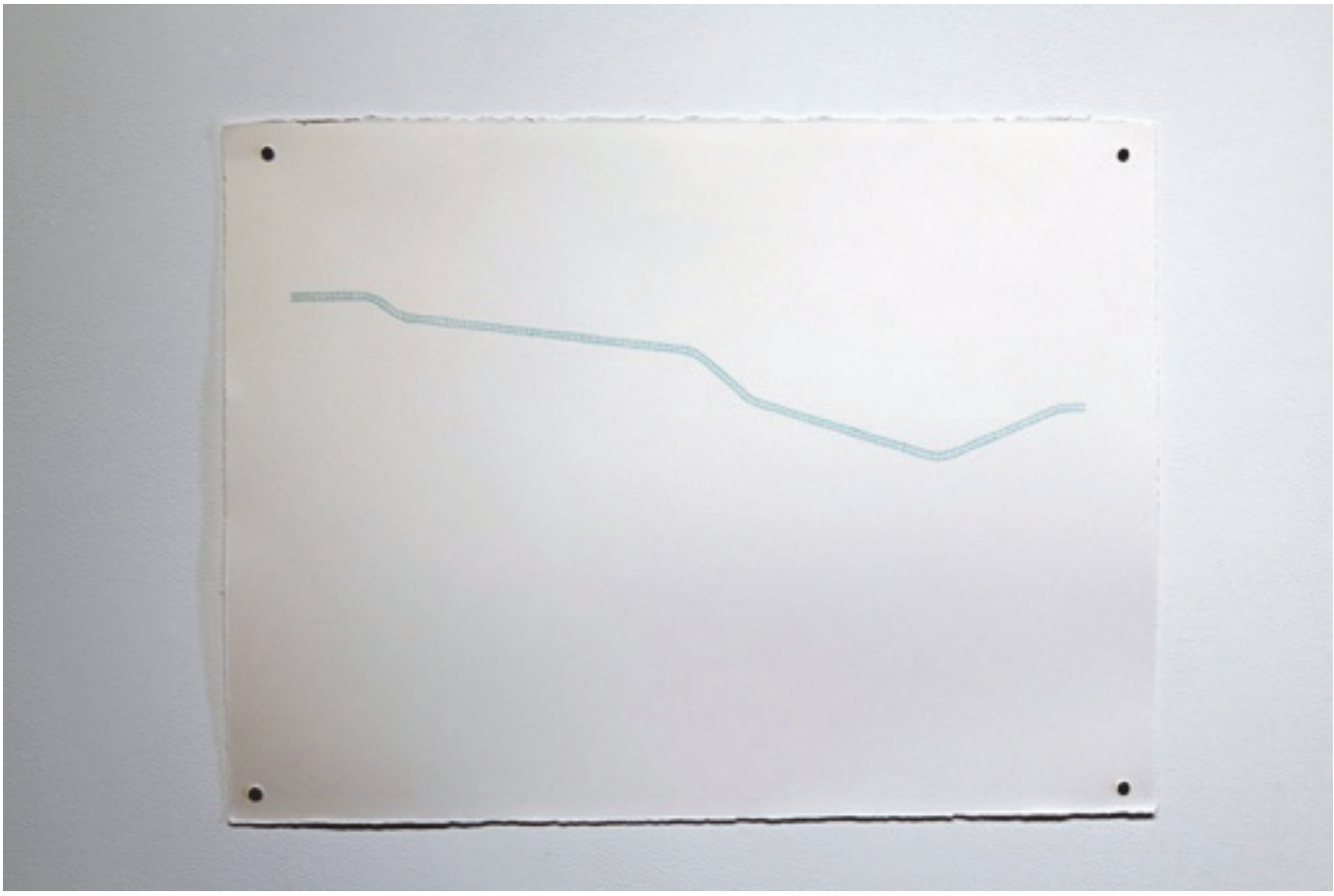

Fig. 3 - iv
Lisa Myers
tracks
from the series *blue prints for a long walk*
2012
Courtesy of the Artist

Chapter 6
Artist Narrative: Jori Cachene

Meeting Jori Cachene

I met Jori face-to-face at her home one warm early evening in June 2013. I arrived early and sat in a park near her home taking time to re-read the questions and to take a few minutes to enjoy the late afternoon sun after a hot and dusty day of finding my way around a new city. When I arrived at her house, Jori was napping so it took her a few minutes to get into the moment. We introduced ourselves and made small talk as she woke up. Jori's partner was also home and he made coffee for us, he then went off to work in another part of the house. As we sat in the kitchen, her two children passed back and forth from the sitting room to the back garden where they were playing with the hose. The children were curious about what we were talking about, but in time she asked them to go out and play quietly and leave us to talk. The children's voices, laughter and the sound of the running water filled the background of our nearly ninety minute interview session.

I had not met Jori prior to our interview. We had been put in touch with one another through a mutual acquaintance from the University of Regina. In my first correspondence with her, I was still working with a formerly proposed plan for this dissertation. At that time, I introduced myself and informed her of my planned research and told her I was especially keen to talk to her as a graduate of the Indian Art Program at First Nations University. In that first letter, I told her about my family background and my academic interest in women artists, both contemporary and historical.

She replied within a day and told me she had read my letter outlining the project and requested that I send the list of questions. In the follow up email, I sent the questions and told her more about myself and my family, my life path, my academic and research interests and how I had settled on this research question. In that early email letter, I also wrote of the implications for the research and why I thought the research was of value. Jori wrote back to say that she would be able to meet with me for the interview whenever I was ready. We didn't touch base again for almost a year. In January 2013, I wrote to say my proposal had been accepted and I proceeded to outline to her the changes the dissertation research would take. I also informed her at that time

that my Research Proposal (SPF) was going to the Ethics Committee in the following week. Shortly after, in early March I received the Ethics Review Committee approval for the research project. I wrote to tell Jori I was going to book my flight and that I would see her in June.

By return email, she told me she was comfortable with the process and commented that she would be available whenever I was ready. We set a date to meet but on my arrival in Regina, Jori had to cancel the first night and needed to re-schedule. I suddenly got very nervous about rescheduling, that she had gotten 'cold feet,' and that my stay in the city would be too short. However, my fears were allayed when we exchanged a new set of emails back and forth and set the next evening as the new day and time.

As I began to write the chapter devoted to Cachene's life experience, I realized there were gaps in the material that needed further explanation. I began to correspond with her in November 2013, suggesting that we could speak on the telephone or use Skype to answer the needed material–neither of these ideas worked out and the end result was that she answered my questions by email. This was not ideal as I was not able to respond to her answers or draw out more information, but I am grateful to her taking the time to add to the material and add new information to the original questions.

Biographical Overview

Jori Cachene describes herself as Saulteaux from the Yellow Quill First Nation, Saskatchewan. She experienced strong cultural associations from a very young age as she comes from a family with "strong traditions" and she remembers that as a child her family often visited the Reserve and took part in events and ceremonies. It is because of her family connections and their history there that she feels her Anishinaabe heritage has always been a part of who she is.

Cachene was born in 1980 in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. She and her family lived in Prince Albert during her early childhood then moved to Regina when Jori was ten years old. She has a brother, Joe, who is seven years older.

No other member of her family is an artist. Cachene does not have any significant memories of making art in her early childhood home life. However a childhood friend introduced her to drawing and making art. Cachene really liked the experience and says from that time onwards, she thought of herself as an artist.

Cachene attended the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and received a Bachelors of Fine Arts Degree in 2004. She graduated from the Indian Fine Art Program, which combined traditional art practices such as the skilled arts of tanning hides, quillwork and beading, with contemporary art practices, media and techniques.

After completing her Indian Fine Arts degree, Cachene enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program at First Nations University Canada[1] (FNUC) and in 2007 she received a B.Ed. She now works as an art teacher at Scott Collegiate, a secondary school in Regina, Saskatchewan. The school's population is almost entirely made up of First Nation students.

Cachene is an active member of the Regina art community. She is a board member of Sâkêwêwak a collective of contemporary Aboriginal art-makers and part of the national Artist-Run Centre network. She has also facilitated community projects that brought together the visual arts and traditional teachings or societal issues.

Cachene has a very limited exhibition record. She has found that as a full-time art teacher and the mother of two school-aged children her time has been limited and it has been challenging to find time to make art. Having said that, since our meeting in June 2013 she has begun to produce paintings again and has helped start a community-based non-profit art organization, the Sunday Art Market (SAM) in Regina. It is a members-based art organization and Cachene is a voluntary director for the organization.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Emerging Artist

Early Life Experiences

"I don't come from a family of artists"

Cachene said she was "not born an artist" and has no significant memories of early art-making at home (Cachene transcription 1, p. 1). Neither her parents nor her sibling are artists and

1 The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College officially changed its name to the First Nations University of Canada in June, 2003.

she does not believe there were any visual clues in her early childhood as to what it meant to be an artist. However, an early childhood friendship did have a significant impact on her. Her friend was a child who was always making drawings and art. It is apparent from our conversation that Cachene feels strongly that if she had not met her friend Amanda, she would not have become an art maker.

"she kind of drew me into it"

From about age ten, the two girls were filling their after-school hours with drawing and making art together.

> … my best friend grew up in a house where her mum was a graphic designer so she was always making drawings and art and stuff, that's kind of what she grew up with. And she kind of had me; pulled me into that. So, we started drawing when I was in Grade 5. And I told her, because we're still friends, that I really feel like she was the one who, said you're an artist, you know. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 1)

Cachene stated that it was important that her friend had told her she had a facility with art and art materials as she had little incentive or confirmation of her abilities as an art maker outside of this friendship.

Art and School Experiences

Other than the bond of friendship leading to art making during out-of-school hours, Cachene has no significant memories of art experiences in school. While she agreed that she would have had art class experiences in elementary school, she has no noteworthy recollection of any art projects from that time. Cachene did state however that once she had been drawn into art-making she took on, "that persona as I was growing up. It's like, okay, I am an artist so I will make art, paint and draw" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 1). As a result of this, Cachene resolved to take "as many art classes as I could and I joined the art club " (Cachene transcription 2, p. 1).

"It was really dry"

Despite her resolve to engage in as much art making as she could, Cachene does not have meaningful memories of her secondary school art programs. In regard to her secondary school art classes she told me,

> There wasn't anything special about it. Sometimes, I didn't like being there. It was really dry. I don't even know if it was or is the same curriculum now. But now as a teacher, I know, it's about how you, the teacher, take the curriculum and make it accessible or whatever to the students. I don't think I had teachers who did that. [Though] I should say one in particular had more…[she] let us be a little freer with it, which was good. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 4)

Even though she took art in secondary school, she believes the art program could have been much more challenging, but at the same time admits that, in hindsight and in her current position as an art educator, she knew there was and is a curriculum to follow. Nevertheless, the lesson she has taken from her own experience is that it is up to the teacher to make the curriculum accessible and challenging for the students.

After having said this, Cachene admitted that one of her secondary school art teachers did recognize her abilities and her enthusiasm for art and suggested that she attend a day long Open House in the Fine Art department at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC). Looking back, she seems to feel this teacher's suggestion was also mitigated by the fact that Cachene was First Nations and there were few other First Nations' students in the school.

"I just walked over there one day and walked back and that changed my life"

In the spring of her last year of secondary school Cachene went to the SIFC for an Open House and spent the day in the art studios. There she met the art professor who would have a huge impact on her. Jack Severson "was the one who hung out with all those kids" that day (Cachene transcription 1, p. 1). From her daylong experience, she knew that this was what she wanted to do after high school as the idea of "making art at school all day was…really intriguing to me" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 1).

According to Cachene this experience was both a starting point and a culmination for her. She said she walked out of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College after a day in the art studios and knew that this was the education she wanted. That day was also important as she also met the art teacher who would have an enormous impact on her as someone who made art both accessible and pleasurable. The experience of attending the Open House also confirmed her identity as an artist and reinforced the notion for Cachene that what she wanted to do was to make art.

Cachene enrolled in the Indian Fine Arts program at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) after graduating from secondary school in 1998. She gained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Indian Fine Arts and graduated in 2004. During her time at the college, she met many fine teachers including Bob Boyer (Métis, 1948-2004), Sheila Orr (Cree, Inuit and Scottish, 1964 -) and as mentioned, Jack Severson (1948 -).[2] She found the teachers were "amazing" and each was skilled in their own area of interest. Sheila Orr was a painter and a mixed media artist who also worked in traditional Native arts such as beadwork and porcupine quillwork.[3] Bob Boyer worked within a contemporary idiom, but his work as a painter was informed by both personal symbolism and Northern Plains design; he incorporated abstract or geometric imagery onto various grounds, such as canvas, skin or flannel blankets.[4] Jack Severson, the only non-Native art professor, was a painter and mixed media/collage artist who worked with both representational subject matter and in abstraction.[5] It was Severson who would have the greatest impact on Cachene.

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2 Boyer became an Assistant Professor at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University of Canada) in Regina in 1978, and two years later became the Head of the Department of Indian Fine Arts. He served in this position until 1998, and then again beginning in 2004. Boyer continued to teach art and art history there until his death in 2004.Boyer began his career painting portraits and landscapes, but he is perhaps most well known for his painted blankets

(See: http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtistDetail&id=7).

Sheila Orr Orr began studying at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now First Nations University of Canada) at the University of Regina when she was only 16 years old. Later, she received both a Bachelor of Indian Art degree and a Bachelor of Arts Education. Orr combines contemporary and traditional styles and techniques in her oil and acrylic painting, beadwork, porcupine quill work, drawing, and installations. Orr has taught at the First Nations University of Canada and served there as the head of the Department of Fine Arts (See: http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtistDetail&id=407).

3 http://www.artsask.ca/en/artists/sheila_orr

4 http://www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/bob-boyer-his-life-s-work (consulted January 17, 2014)

5 http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtistDetail&id=54 (consulted January 17, 2014)

"person who lives and breathes art"

Severson was important and influential because not only was he a very good teacher, but also because he was a "person who lives and breathes art" and she had never met anyone like that before (Cachene transcription 1, p. 2). As stated above, he is not of First Nation heritage, but as Cachene said, his impact on her and other Indigenous students in Saskatchewan has been highly significant.

> He had a huge hand in allowing us to be creative, encouraging us in any form… to be creative, it could be anything. He was really open to anything. He made it fun. He really was,–'well, what do you want to do?' (Cachene transcription 1, p. 3)

One of the things that Cachene credits Severson with was the way he exposed her to different artists and the manner in which the artists expressed similar subjects, but in their own individual ways. In his studio classes, he presented a wide range of artists to his young students; artists such as Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree, 1953-), as well as work by previous students, which he would use as examples or points of reference. In class, Severson also had his students work through an eclectic curriculum. He actively encouraged Cachene and her peers to look at materials in new ways as he had them create art from found objects, or make paper and then turn the paper into sculptural forms. In the same studio classes he also taught the students practical skills such as the application of washes and other techniques for using acrylic paints, as well as the practical work of stretching canvases and building frames. Despite the artistic diversity and her gratitude for the skills Severson taught her, in hindsight Cachene sees Severson's class as a safe place, perhaps too safe, as she now thinks that if she had taken classes with other professors such as Boyer, for example, she would have had more exposure to studio 'crits' and may have had more emphasis placed on mastery. As she said, "Jack really did just encourage me to make art and that was what was most important to me. I did put a lot of emphasis on mastery and I didn't feel that I was there achieving as high a skill level as [I] wanted so I might have benefited from teaching like that" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 6).

At the SIFC, there was not any class time given to learning how to write funding grants or exhibition proposals, but there were practical experiences as the students held an annual exhibition at the local police station. Cachene helped hang the work, although "I had to hang that

show with Jack, but he did most of the work and he just told me what to do" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 6). However, this did put her in a good position when at the end of the four-year program she and her fellow students "had to deal with it all, we had to make posters, and go in and hang work" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 6).

In the Indian Fine Art program, the studio art and the art history classes were a combination of Native fine arts and contemporary art practice. In each class, both contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous art were shown and discussed in terms of stylistic similarities and differences; leading to discussions of the ways in which the art students could combine, reinterpret or re-appropriate the different influences in their own work.[6] Cachene recalled that she was required to take the mixture of studio classes that reflected the department's commitment to teaching both Indigenous art and culture with contemporary art practices. She grew to like and appreciate the professors and their commitment. At the same time, she was developing her own preferences in media, subject matter and studio classes. In reference to the compulsory art studios, her priorities shone through.

> We did things in those classes like beadwork and birch bark, rawhide and stuff like that, which I was never very good at. So, I hated that class. I was like, I don't want to do this. I want to paint. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 2)

Cachene explained that at that time she was most interested in and therefore most focused on painting on canvas and especially painting the nude female figure. Cachene said that for her as a student in that situation, Severson personified artistic freedom because he did not appear to take note of or care about cultural divisions and he encouraged her to find her expression in painting the nude female figure. However, she still seems to have felt conflicted as she pursued this interest, because at the same time she was noticing other students who were making Native art using materials that could be seen as representative of Native life and culture.

> There were a lot of First Nation symbols in their work, animals, buffalo skulls and stuff like that, that you might associate with First Nation culture. I never did that. I always did more western art. I would make lots of nudes. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 7)

In addition, Cachene was very aware of the students in the same department who were exhibiting real mastery over their materials. Two peers that Cachene noted as especially prominent, were the painting student Dan Fisher (n.d.) and John Henry Fine Day (Cree, 1974-

6 Judy Anderson Interview, FNUC Indian Art Department Chair, June 10th, 2013.

2006, BFA, 2004 FNUC). Fine Day was a highly skilled carver, leatherworker and mixed media artist.[7]

Cachene spoke of the impact of being in the same program with these two particular students at SIFC, and she described them as "phenomenal artists" with "mastery over what they were doing" from a very early stage (Cachene transcription 1, p. 3). She accepted that their artistic abilities meant, "you could really focus on the content of their work quite early on" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 3). However, at that stage of her development as an artist, it seems she understood that she needed to continue refining her own skills. Instinctively she knew,

> I wasn't there yet, so I had to learn mastery. And I don't even know if I'm there yet, but I am still getting there. And then the content of my work kind of suffered as a result. But I just try to be good at what I was doing first before I can really think deeply about when and why I was doing it or something. So it was good to go to school with [them], a little bit hard as well though as I felt I was being in the shadow of these two guys. It was just amazing. It could have just been my young brain too. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 3)

In reference to the Indian Fine Art curriculum at SIFC, Cachene stated that while she was required to take courses in both Euro-Western contemporary and Indigenous fine art practices, she definitely preferred to concentrate on the Euro-Western practices. This was because she did not believe that she was very capable as a bead or quill worker, and found these studio classes a disruption to her own agenda as a painter. However, when she exhibited some of her female nudes in a student exhibition, Cachene experienced a cultural collision. As she said, she painted, "lots of nudes…always with my own slant on it." However, in a review of her work at a student exhibition the reviewer stated that her "nudes were unparalleled in First Nation Arts in Canada" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 7). Cachene wondered what that meant and she said that she had to ask herself, "Am I making Indian nudes?" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 7). Even now, Cachene continues to puzzle over this pronouncement because she did not feel that her painted female figures were anything more than studies based on her own explorations of the figure. She did not ever intend that there would be any cultural connotations. The reviewers' remarks did make her

7 Fine Day credited the two ways of art teaching at SIFC as "giving him the space to learn traditional methods [like rawhide sewing, and use of porcupine quills], which he then incorporated in non-traditional ways, such as sewing the hide on iron frames in the University of Regina sculpture studio" (Robertson, p. 347-348). Fisher, like Cachene was most interested in painting–he was predominately a realist painter but over his time at the SIFC he began to create mixed media works and then to incorporate identifiably Indigenous three dimensional objects into his work (Robertson and Weber, 2007, p. 351).

question her own motivations at that time as she was forced to consider whether she needed to or should be making art that specifically referenced her Native heritage and culture.

The push-pull between Western and Native art practices was something that Cachene was very aware of as a student. Even as a student, she was able to identify the most talented artists who were her peers at SIFC. She was cognizant of the ways they were able to blend materials and objects from the two milieus and create work that was skilled and reflected their cultural heritage. At the time, she felt conflicted because she felt that maybe she should be making art that was recognizably culturally based. Even though she understood that to be the case, she was not dissuaded from her interest in painting the figure. Cachene said that for her as a student in that situation, she again turned to Severson as an example because he personified artistic freedom for her, as he did not appear to take note of or care about cultural divisions. Additionally, he encouraged her in her desire to find her expression in painting the nude female figure.

Cachene decided while she was at SIFC that she did not want to make "Indian" art and she continues to feel this way. This is because at times she feels it is done a little too flippantly. If an artist creates this type of work, they need to have good intentions and not just make such art for purely commercial reasons. Accordingly, there is a responsibility to portray Native culture respectfully. Cachene believes there is an assumption of responsibility and respect that is required and not all materials or stories should be shared. Having said that, she does think she might be more commercially successful if she did "Indian art" as she labeled it, but feels that she could not force this subject matter and she would not be true to herself if she began to force it upon herself.

As our conversation continued, it became clear that Cachene has continued to work through these issues as she has worked to gain the confidence to express herself as an artist, make art and acknowledge her artistic abilities.

Mentors

As described above, Cachene identifies two people in her life as mentors. The first is the childhood friend who said to Cachene "come and make art with me" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 8). Cachene met this influential friend when her parents moved with Jori and her older brother to

Regina in 1990. Cachene continues to identify this friend as a mentor and as the person who made her the artist that she is today.

The second mentor is Jack Severson, the artist-art educator at Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. According to Cachene, he was a good teacher, but he was also the first person she had ever met who was completely consumed by art. He both modeled creative expression and encouraged creativity in his students. In addition, he personified for Cachene a commitment to art that allowed her the freedom to log long hours in the studio. Severson was very present in the classroom and he stayed overtime in the school each day. This allowed Cachene to follow suit, "I was just always there, painting, so that kind of extended into my world, my life, it wasn't just class for an hour, it was all the time" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 4).

Severson continues to exemplify for Cachene what it means to be both an artist and an art educator. In her personal life as an artist and in her professional life as a teacher, Cachene stated that Severson's influence has extended to her open-minded approach to expressing herself and to the way she presents material to her own students. In her classroom she is mindful of her students' cultural heritage and presents Indigenous material meaningfully, but she also works to show the senior high school students the ways culture can be interpreted and integrated with contemporary Canadian life.

Transition from Emerging to Accomplished Artist

Following the Indian Art Program at SIFC, Cachene enrolled in the First Nations University (FNUC) Education programme and received her Bachelor of Education in 2007.

After university, Cachene put her art making on hold for a number of years. She was busy with her young family and establishing her teaching career. Cachene began teaching art at Scott Collegiate in 2008. From the beginning of her tenure, Cachene has actively worked to get her students involved in the community–through class visits to the art gallery, student art exhibitions at city festivals, by bringing artists into the classroom, or working with artists and students on mural projects, amongst other activities. This community involvement extended Cachene's own commitment to bridging art and the various communities and groups in Regina that began during her university years. However, this work and organization meant that Cachene had little energy left for her own art making. Nevertheless, she "always knew it was there" and occasionally made

small works, but essentially her art production stalled (Cachene transcription 1, p. 8). Then one day in the past eighteen months she started painting again. She stated she had "met some new people and they were really encouraging" so time and events made it an opportune moment to take up her paintbrushes again (Cachene transcription 1, p. 8). This recent return to her art practice has been instigated by her involvement as a long-serving board member at Sâkêwêwak, the artist-run centre. In addition Cachene has also recently become involved with the formation of the community art market.

Through this transitional period, Cachene's on-going connections to the different arts-based organizations, whether as an art educator or as an interested member of the art world, has meant that she has been able to maintain a practice of sorts even if she has not until recently been able to put paint to canvas.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Accomplished Artist

Art Education and Philosophy of Art

"I don't ever teach culture"

As an art student at the SIFC, Cachene learned that it is important to keep looking, gather information and to try new things. These principles continue to guide her as an artist and art educator. As an art teacher, Cachene says her foremost job is to teach art and not culture. She recognizes that despite the fact the students are almost all First Nation, they are a culturally diverse population. According to Cachene, it would go against her own principles, and be both futile and disrespectful, to try to teach from a pan-Indian perspective or to "dumb down culture." She says she does not teach art by isolating a particular nation, "I don't ever…say, here's what the B.C. Indians do" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 8). Instead she does, for example, teach a unit on Native symbols using Bob Boyer's work as a way to explore signs or emblems to see

> …how he uses symbols to tell a story. Then we look at First Nations symbols… on rocks, on Petroglyphs...and [as] an example, say these symbols represent stories, or represent words. And in Bob Boyer, this is what this represents. Then I have them creating their own symbols that don't exist in the real world. Their own symbols or they make something up and then they use those symbols to make symbolic portrait in the style of

> Bob Boyer. So that would be as close as I would get to teaching culture in art. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 8-9)

Cachene stated that as an art educator in a secondary school where a high proportion of the student population is First Nations makes her very aware of her pedagogical role and the responsibility to recognize the cultural diversity of her students. She often achieves her own pedagogical objectives by exploring art concepts and material culture through the work of contemporary Indigenous artists who have investigated their own conception of culture, history or First Nations issues in a unique way in their own art practice. She relies on her own cultural identity as Anishinaabe and the inherited knowledge she learned within her extended family, as well as her own understanding of the impact of stereotypes and the pan-Indian culture that has unthinkingly lumped unique Indigenous groups together. She stated that she recognizes that she cannot pander to pan-Indian stereotypes or accept the belittlement of Native culture because she understands that as an educator she needs to be responsible and to portray her culture respectfully.

"just a little whisper"

Cachene makes it clear that she is an art teacher and focusing solely on cultural identity is not appropriate in her art classroom. But as she learned at SIFC, culture and art making can mix, overlap or become the focus. Cachene has crafted her philosophy of art to reflect the approach of her SIFC mentor, Severson. She brings lots of materials to the classroom, she introduces many artists as examples and overall she prefers an exploratory slant in the art projects she presents. It is worth noting that she suggests her style of teaching is to focuses on creativity,

> I think letting people tell their stories and then showing them, we'll try this medium and you can tell your story in this manner, or tell us who you are in this manner. And then as they go, it might be like oh, you know try this, maybe this, as they are doing, creating their art, just a little whisper in their ear or do a quick demo for them so that they can try that. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 9)

I noted that her desire to stress creativity over mastery goes against her own sensibilities in that she was aware of her peers (at SIFC) who were exhibiting great skills and her own stated need at that time to work on "mastery." Nevertheless, in her role as an art educator she does not

want to "quiet" or stifle the creative impulse in her students. Therefore, creative exploration is the most important aspect of the art classroom experience for Cachene. I believe she continues to carry within herself her own secondary school art experiences and works to make certain that all of her students are engaged by the projects in order to find success within the curriculum. Interestingly, Cachene admits she has incorporated Severson's inspirational and creative approach into her day-to-day teaching.

More recently in her teaching, Cachene has been able to combine art with other subjects; first Art and Native Studies and secondly Art and Science. In the Native Studies class, she invited students to explore issues in the curriculum through an arts-based response. She asked students to look at contemporary Indigenous art and discuss the political message in the work and how it related to the larger framework of the Native Studies curriculum. In the Art and Science class, Cachene initiated such things as combining a visit to Regina's Mackenzie Gallery to see the exhibition *7: Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*[8] with animal studies and model making (Cachene transcription 2, p. 1). While she has had the chance to explore other teaching curriculums, above all, Cachene identifies herself as an arts educator. She says it may be the fact that she has painted so rarely in the past number of years that her focus has been on education and being a teacher, but teaching has been the most predominant feature of her life for the past number of years.

Identification as an Artist

"The first thing I thought was, I will set up an art education table"

At the time of our interview (in June 2013) Cachene was part of a group of people organizing a Sunday arts market in Regina. The group had seen a need for a central place for artists to show or sell their work in the city. When approached for her support in this endeavour,

8 The exhibition, *7:Professional Native Indian Artists Inc* was organized by the MacKenzie Gallery in Regina and ran from September 21, 2013 to January 12, 2014. The exhibition concentrated on the group of artist that came together in the early 1970s. The artists were Jackson Beardy (1944-1984), Eddy Cobiness (1933-1996), Alex Janvier (b. 1935), Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007), Daphne Odjig (b. 1919), Carl Ray (1942-1978) and Joseph Sanchez (b. 1948).

Cachene's first inclination was to set up a table and organize art activities and help people make art.

Upon being asked, 'what about showing your own work?' Cachene leapt from educator to artist and decided to abandon the art table and exhibit. Cachene conceded that this inclination went right to the heart of her identity as an artist. She believed that she had made so little art over a number of years and was so involved in her life as an art educator, it took other artists to ask why she wouldn't be exhibiting her own work. This moment was a spark for her as once she recognized her devaluation of herself as an artist, she was able to begin making art again. In our follow up interview when I asked Cachene to discuss how the art market had evolved over the summer and through the autumn.

> Sunday Arts Market is going well. I have recently put in our incorporation papers to become a non-profit. Our goal is to create a space for artists to show and sell their work outside of the gallery. People do come to the market. We have ten regular artists and usually ten new artists every two weeks. We recently went through some changes as one of the key organizers dropped out. We have hired two staff and I now sit on the board of directors, though it is new, so I still do tons of work for it (Cachene transcription 2, p. 1).

As to the impact of the market on her personally, Cachene stated:

> I have not sold work, though I have a lot of interest, but I think my work is too big and pricey for a market setting. Being a part of a community of makers has definitely made me create more work. I am still trying to find my "style" and figure out who I am as an artist. I think it will come to me in time. I just need to stick with it and keep making. As for my role in the arts community, I feel like I am a part of it. I work hard to make art accessible for everyone. I want to encourage new artists and try to get people to make things. I feel like art is my therapy and my meditation. I think everyone can benefit from creating (Cachene transcription 2, p. 1).

Role of the Artist and Community

"getting other people involved"

The statements made in the second interview corroborate the things Cachene had revealed during our interview in June. At that time, she was reticent about showing her own work but believed that the artist's role in the community is to make art, to set an example and perhaps encourage people to be creative. Above all, it is important to convey the notion that, "It is a

playfulness, it's a collaboration. Getting other people involved in different ways. And hopefully people come and become inspired and are able to take that into their lives and do something– make some art" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 11).

Even though until recently she has been reluctant to show her work outside of her own circle of friends and family, she has made a commitment to her community to show her work in a market setting and to help people find a way to enter into a relationship with art. She is very enthused about the art market as she thinks it will be a way to bring art to people. Cachene feels that this populist effort will foster creativity at some level in Regina. The market is informal–like a food market but with paintings and she feels this is important because people need to develop an affiliation with art and the general public can be intimidated by galleries. Cachene believes it is important to offer an alternative because art can exist in a very real way outside of the context of the gallery system. As she stated, "I think a lot of times the real artists are not in the galleries" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 11). This point of view reflects Cachene's humanist notion of art making which I believe goes back to her experiences at SIFC. At SIFC and in her more recent community-oriented art activity, Cachene sees a creative life as being

> … about creation and playfulness and what do you want to do next? And life is like that, right. When you live your life, it's creative. What I am creating today? What am I creating tomorrow? What am I going to do with my life? It's more than just making paintings, it's just a way of being in the world… (Cachene transcription 1, p. 11)

To be an artist in the community is to take responsibility and Cachene stated that getting older and becoming a mother has made her realize that it is important to pass on information and the meaning of her Anishinaabe heritage and to help the members of her community.

Cachene has a history of working with the Native community and the multicultural groups in Regina. She has worked with community arts organizations such as Common Weal.[9] During the summer of 2008, she was among the group of artists hired by Common Weal to co-ordinate the *Common Circles* project. The project focused on domestic and family violence, and included multi-cultural organizations, community members and artists, brought together to discuss and explore issues related to violence against women and families. Artistic exploration of the ideas

9 Common Weal Community Arts Inc. is a provincial arts organization based in Regina and Prince Albert, SK. Their mandate is to collaboratively engage professional artists with communities to promote social change and cultural identity through creative expression.

behind the four areas of the Medicine Wheel, Circle of Courage, and the Perceptual Control Therapy through workshops were the central to the project.[10]

In 2009, Cachene facilitated another program, *The Seven Elder Teachings* for Common Weal.[11] Each week of the eight-week project an Elder presented a specific teaching, after which Cachene guided the participants in the expression and portrayal of these teachings through visual art. For example, on the theme of 'Wisdom,' Cachene led the participants in workshops such as batik wherein, through this medium they responded to the teaching and visually processed their understanding of the concept. Sherry Farrell Racette (2013) described these community projects as a form of pedagogy because beading circles and other art making exercises are a method for a group of people to find, see and create community. As individuals, people acquire or refine a skill and perhaps take on a new skill from which they are then able to honour themselves.[12]

In the intervening years and since becoming a full-time teacher, Cachene has maintained an on-going commitment of taking her students into the community whether to visit art museums, the FNUC Art department, film screenings or to work on such community projects as painting wall murals.

"how I can help"

Cachene says that as she matures she is reflecting on the fact that her sense of who she is remains steadfast in terms of her cultural identity, but she feels some urgency in passing on the things she knows. As she said, she sees the need to take responsibility, "to make sure that my kids are learning the same things that I learned [about Anishinaabe history, life, and the stories]" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 10). She is aware that the Indigenous knowledge that she has is less than that of older generations. She is certain that the knowledge that for example her mother and

10 The main principles of the model are based on the four areas of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel represents all of creation, harmony and connections. It is considered a major symbol of peaceful interaction on Earth (All races of people, the directions, all of the cycles of nature, day and night, seasons, moons, life cycles, and orbits of the moon and planets). These are also interpreted as: courage, mastery, independence, and generosity. Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S,. (1990). *Reclaiming youth at risk: Our hope for the future*. New Jersey: National Educational Services. (See: http://blogs.ubc.ca/afclc6/2011/04/29/reading-circle-of-courage-framework)

11 These are the seven teachings described in my chapter on Procedures and Data Analysis. Each of the teachings are related and one cannot be used with the others. They are used to help people live a good life and to respect the Creator, the earth and each other.

12 Sherry Farrell Racette, "Beading as Community Action: Addressing Community Violence Through Art" in Mobilizing Community Voice Through Artistic Knowledge, Part 1. Unpublished Paper, Native American Art Studies Association Conference (NAASA) , Denver, CO, Friday, October 18th, 2013.

her grandmother carry within themselves, is greater than what she has and that there is a danger that as each generation passes the knowledge, the history and the stories will lessen or even be lost.

With the passing of time, she believes it will be her obligation to help maintain this heritage. She also feels that more pragmatically it will be important for her to find a way to help people on the First Nations. She feels a need to give back to her community "back home" and as she gets older she is affected by what she knows about the poverty and social issues and even though she has never spent an extended amount of time on Yellow Quill First Nation, she has a sense that, "as I get older, I kind of feel like I need to start to think about how I can help and in different ways. Of course, being an educator is one way back" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 11).

Cachene's notion of what it means to be an art educator and an artist with a community practice has changed over time and she now recognizes the importance of sharing cultural knowledge with the next generations. She is actively doing so in her relationship with her own children. She is also incorporating the sharing of knowledge and the shared Indigenous history of First Nations people in North America with her Grade 12 students.

Family and community both are strong undercurrents of Cachene's art making practice. She sees her audience as "small," primarily her family, friends and other artists (Cachene transcription 1, p. 12). She says this because she has rarely shown her work to the public and that is why the Sunday Art Market is such an exciting venture. "It's kind of a big deal going in this arts market and showing my work. I haven't done that in a really long time, let the general public see what I do" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 12).

Cachene's reticence about her own work goes so far as to keep her skills under wraps most of the time in her teaching routine. However, she says she is exceptionally accepting of artists coming into her classroom to teach her students about their practice, saying, "I don't ever turn an artist away" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 13). She also sees one of her long-term objectives for her students is making art "accessible" to them.

> I hope that they see their way into the creative process and that it's an accessible thing for them…just because…somebody hasn't already identified you as an artist, and I may not identify them as artist, that they can still make things, they can still paint. (Cachene transcription 1, p. 13)

In the end she says her goals as an artist-educator are "selfish" ones because, "I just want to be involved in some way" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 13).

Art Practice

"it's more my own journey"

Cachene does not recognize her visual art practice as a site for making radical declarations or political statements; instead she sees it as a place for simply telling "my own story." However, she did state that if there is a political message in her work, it exists in her song writing, but generally she would not describe herself as being "politically outspoken" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 13). As is to be expected, Cachene's art has changed over time, due as much to her own growth into adulthood as it is connected with "family, marriage and kids…[and] feeling more secure…to explore other things" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 13). She categorically stated, "I don't think I would paint a nude now" (Cachene transcription, p. 13). Instead, the work she does now is more about her "own journey, my own feelings, my own growth as a person. I believe my spirit has a message or has a story and it's coming through my art" (Cachene transcription 1, p. 14).

I sense that Cachene's lessened interest in painting the female nude indicates that she is more secure in her sense of who she is and her art is now more about her charting her own progress and growth as a person.

"I feel like life is testing me, but in a loving and joking way"

When asked if there is one work of art that she has done that "describes who you are?", Cachene told me that she has not "made that one yet" and that she is "still trying to figure that one out" (Cachene transcription 2, p. 2).

In the paintings by Cachene that I viewed, there is a lyrical quality and a strong sense of design, with variations in the use of colour from muted to richly coloured. Cachene often returns to images derived from nature, though they may run from representational to abstract. For example, in two of the works in her studio, she depicted birds, one untitled (2013, Cachene Fig.

1) and the other, *Lyrical Bird* (2013, Cachene Fig. 2) that were made distinctive through her use of decorative markings, with strongly painted lines and beading. In a more recent work it seems apparent that the motif of the bird is part of her way of being or existing and thinking about who she is. In reference to the recent self-portrait, *Self Portrait (Raven)* (2014, Cachene Fig. 3) she stated:

> It is about finding balance between who I am and who I want to be. My Indian name references the prairie chicken, a dancing bird. I feel connected to that spirit lately, as I try to navigate my life coming out of being a full time mom and wife, and now getting back into my art and finding myself once more. As my kids get older, they need me less and less, and all my relationships are changing. I want to fly, but the bird holds me down and tells me to be respectful of myself and others and to wait until I am ready. Instead of using the prairie chicken though, I have been painting the raven because it's the trickster. It's light and dark, it's the bird that pushes you but doesn't want you to fly. It's a test, and I feel like life is testing me, but in a loving and joking way. (Cachene transcription 2, p. 2)

This quote was from the end of our second interview and was in reference to her art as an embodied practice. It does speak to Cachene's sense of her cultural identity, as well as her identity as an artist. It is a reflection on how her art has changed over time and elucidates her awareness that she still has a long way to go to have one work of art that defines who she is. It also speaks to her experience of art education with her two mentors in that she sees all the possibilities along with the inherent humour and creative potential that is available to her as an artist.

As she transitions to accomplished artist, Cachene is still working to find her way forward and to establish a balance between who she is and who she wants to be. She is also feeling more connected to her Native culture and heritage and that, in fact, may be what is helping her navigate a path as a mother, a wife, art educator and an artist who is building an art practice for herself.

Fig. 1
Jori Cachene
Untitled
2013
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 2
Jori Cachene
Lyrical Bird
2013
Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 3
Jori Cachene
Self Portrait (Raven)
2014
Courtesy of the artist

Chapter 7
Artist Narrative: Nadia Myre

Meeting Nadia Myre

I met Nadia Myre when I was doing contract work at White Mountain Academy of Art, in Elliot Lake, Ontario in 2000. Myre was a sculpture teacher in the school's Foundational Arts program. She was a member of a team of art professionals who taught students from both the Native and non-Native community in an innovative program that combined traditional Native arts and contemporary Euro-American art practices.

In the intervening years, I have followed her career and we have occasionally met at vernissages and other events. We made contact again at the exhibition, *Stake in the Ground: Contemporary Native Art Manifestation / Baliser le territoire: Manifestation d'art contemporain autochtone* in January 2012 at the Montreal gallery, Art Mur. Myre had curated the exhibition of work by artists from across Canada and used the works to situate some of her own concerns regarding language and land in terms of memory and erasure. At that time, I began to consider Myre as a participant in my research as she was looking at issues both in this exhibition and in her own art practice that were and are complimentary to my area of research. We spoke very briefly that day about my research and I told her I would be in touch with her.

In the winter of 2013, I volunteered to help Myre with an archival project. She needed help to "classify" handwritten texts that accompanied the scarred canvases that are part of the *Scar Project*, an on-going interactive art project that began in 2005. Shortly after completing this work, I contacted her and described my research project and asked if she would be interested in participating. I sent her an email with an introductory letter outlining the purpose for the research and the value of the project. As well, I sent my list of questions and the consent form as it too included a descriptive summary of the project. I heard from her about a month later and she told me that she would work with me on this project.

One day in late June 2013, I met Nadia Myre at a café near her home for our scheduled interview. We had begun trying to find a mutually compatible time to meet in May, but our schedules were often too full. When we finally met, it was a warm and muggy Montreal morning. The café was small and familial and no one had any concerns when we began to eat the cookies I had brought as a gift. I was a little worried that the café would be noisy with the

accumulation of street sounds, people talking and the whooshes of the cappuccino machine; I turned on the recorder, moved it close enough to pick up our voices and hoped for the best. We discussed the questions and the process of writing the material into a text form. Myre raised the question of the transcript of the interview and asked if it was necessary to include the transcripts in the dissertation itself. I told her I did not think it needed to be included. I believe she found this reassuring as we touched on some personal issues.

We were both a little apprehensive as our conversation began, but we soon settled into a pattern. I found that as this was the fourth interview, it was a little easier and I knew that when asking questions I should pause to allow the artist to process the questions before providing me with a response. We talked for about seventy-five minutes. As we ended our conversation, we left the café together and walked along the canal for a short time and then parted, Nadia to return home and me continuing on to the Atwater Market.

Biographical Overview

Nadia Myre was born in Montreal in 1974. Myre who was mostly raised in Montreal, describes herself as having many cultural heritages but as an artist in Quebec, she most often describes her cultural heritage as Algonquin. In 1997, Myre successfully reclaimed her full status as a member of the Kitigan Zibi First Nation under Bill C-31. She is now a member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation located in the Outaouais, a western region of Quebec.

Myre's childhood and early adolescence was divided between Montreal and Toronto, one consequence of this was attending several different schools. Some of these schools had an arts-focus, but others did not.

Myre's art education began at Camosun College, Victoria, British Columbia (Fine Art Associate Degree 1995). She went on to obtain a Fine Arts Degree at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 1997. This degree was followed by an MFA at Concordia University (1997-2002). An early work from 2000, *Indian Act* brought together Myre's personal experience, her cultural identity as First Nation and her sculptural practice.[1] The work is representative of

1 Myre's version of the Canadian Government Indian Act is based on S.R., chapters 1-5 as amended in 1985. The original document dates from 1876.

Myre's multidisciplinary practice and is the first of a series of participant-based projects that have become a part of her art practice.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Emerging Artist

Early Life Experiences

"My father was really into art"

Myre was born in and spent much of her childhood in Montreal. She is an only child. She has strong memories of her early art-making experiences and most of these are associated with her father. While her father is not an artist himself, he made certain that she had many rich experiences throughout her childhood and adolescence. He introduced her to the art world he knew by taking her to "exhibitions and openings and auctions and all sorts of things" (Myre transcription, p. 2). Her father also worked with a number of artists and in particular he worked very closely with the Quebec sculptor Armand Vaillancourt (b.1929). Vaillancourt, who is also a painter, performance artist and political activist seems to have made, in hindsight, an especially strong impression on Myre as she identifies herself as a sculptor and as a visual activist.

"he was always providing extracurricular art activity that way"

Myre recounted that her father hired art students to teach her new skills, for example a young artist from L'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) was hired to make art with her and in another instance a professional print-maker was hired to teach Myre printmaking. As Myre grew into adolescence, she and her father would also take road trips, "I remember when I was 13, we went down to New York for a month and I helped with the Pathfinder Press Building, with the Revolutionaries mural they were making" (Myre transcription, p. 2). The mural was conceived of by the artist Mike Alewitz and worked on by eighty artists from twenty different countries, one of whom was the Quebecer Vaillancourt. The no longer extant mural[2] comprised a

2 The Revolutionaries mural was permanently removed from the wall (in order to repair the wall) in 1996.

red printing press producing posters of revolutionary figures such as Fidel Castro, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Sojourner Truth. The central text in the image is "the truth must not only be the truth…it must also be told." This must have been a very powerful experience for a young woman and again this experience foreshadows Myre's later interest in political activism, art and the use of language.

"My dad would just keep stuff for me"

Myre recalled that her father collected interesting materials for her and she would use these objects and other "stuff" to construct and creatively explore the recycled or found materials. She said she would lose herself and lose track of time as she became immersed in using these materials. In the bond between herself and her father and according to Myre art was always

> … very prevalent. I have many memories but I remember I would just spend hours and hours in my room building sculptural cities out of cardboard. My dad would just keep stuff for me and I would just make full-on installations in my bedroom. (Myre transcription, p. 2)

Myre believes that this creative freedom played a large role in her decision to major in sculpture when she got into an art program at college.

Myre spoke less of the art-making activities she did with her mother though she did state in reference to her adult art-focus on beading, "if you ask my mom, she'd say I've been stringing beads since I was 6 years old" (Myre transcription, p. 7).

Art and School Experiences

"I went to F.A.C.E."

Myre attended F.A.C.E., the bilingual Montreal school that has as its core curriculum a Fine Arts education in music, visual art and theatre in addition to the required Provincial Ministry of Education academic curriculum. But her memories of art making at home and in other situations are much stronger than those associated with her elementary school.

"I went to Central Tech"

Myre went to live with her mother in Toronto at the beginning of her secondary schooling. She attended a summer art program at Central Tech, a school with an arts-focus. But her time at that school was cut short after six months. In reality, Myre attended what she believes was, "I think I went to seven different high schools in four years. I transferred every half-year. I went to private schools…" (Myre transcription, p. 2).

She now feels she did not have any grounding to prepare her for secondary school and as a result she changed schools often and eventually dropped out of secondary school. In fact, Myre did receive her secondary school diploma but only after completing her MFA.

As stated, Myre did not follow a typical secondary school route and after dropping out of high school in Toronto she found herself in Victoria, BC. At that time, she was a little ambivalent about pursuing visual arts and felt that she was much more interested in writing.

> I was really interested in writing. And so I thought I was going to become a writer and I was working a lot, bettering myself as a writer and doing poetry readings– all part of a bit of a different scene. I think what happened is, I dropped out of high school and I found myself in Victoria taking remedial classes and they had an arts program. So I worked out a plan where I took an English class, and this along with two art classes that they offered outside of the art program was just enough for me to get into the art program. (Myre transcription, p. 3)

"You had to try it"

It was at this point that Myre transferred into the visual art program at Camosun College. As she said, she went into the visual art program even though she still was not entirely sure that that was where she wanted to go. Nevertheless, she found Camosun a very rewarding experience. She encountered really strong teachers.

> I really liked Ralph Stanbridge because I feel like he pushed me critically. And we had the pleasure at Camosun of having Patrick Mahon as a new teacher and he was really wonderful because he was very, very dynamic and incredibly thorough. (Myre transcription, p. 4)

The studio art program at Camosun was foundational for Myre. As she stated, it was a requirement that each student try out all media before they restricted themselves to one medium.

> At Camosun it was an incredibly amazing art program and that it was five days a week you had to do every subject. You had to try it. So, it was very thorough that way. But in the second year, you came to these moments where you had to specialise. I took a double sculpture and double print making major and so, you know, that's where, but in all of that I realize that I was a shit ceramicist and you know, had no intention of ever building anything out of clay. So, I got to explore those things, and really see what my strengths and weaknesses were. (Myre transcription, p. 4)

After completing this program, Myre was accepted into the third year of a four-year Bachelor of Arts at Emily Carr College of Art in 1995. While at Emily Carr College, Myre developed an interest in design and "did a lot of design classes at [that] time" (Myre transcription, p. 5). She did remain in a general studio arts program where most of her work was painting, printmaking and graffiti. In the early printmaking work one can see the traces of Myre's love of language explored through graffiti and faux want ads.

By the end of the nineteen- nineties Myre was back in Montreal and enrolled at Concordia in a graduate Fine Arts degree program in sculpture. She went straight from the Emily Carr diploma program to the graduate program at Concordia in 1997. Through the circuitous schooling, she had managed to bypass both a secondary school diploma and a Bachelors of Arts. No matter, Myre was on her way to becoming an artist with a full-time practice. She was aided in this as she took classes that focussed on developing a professional studio practice.

> Cornelia Wyngaarden offered a class at Emily Carr, which was a professionalization class. We learned about Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) and how to ship your work, how to photograph your work and how to write a c.v. and all those things. And I was always very interested in all of that… (Myre transcription, p. 4)

But later in her MFA courses she found "there was not very much at Concordia in that way" (Myre transcription, p. 5). And in the end, she found that she really just needed to learn the practicalities on her own or through Quebec government-sponsored programs such as *Compagnie F: L'entrepreneurial féminin*, which ran a program dedicated to women cultural entrepreneurs. It was as a result of this program that Myre secured her high school diploma because she "did a young woman entrepreneurial art course that they were offering and that was just enough credits to finish my Québec high school degree" (Myre transcription, p. 3).

When asked about the diversity or cultural heritage of the faculty and other students who attended the colleges and art schools she attended, Myre admitted that there was cultural

diversity, but she was not specifically aware of art students or faculty who were of First Nations.

> I know that there were three or four other First Nation people there; one of them was kind of a friend to me. But it wasn't celebrated. There wasn't anyone in my faculty. The most interesting person in the faculty was Melinda Mollineaux… [and] Ken Lum and… at least I was exposed to Dana Claxton's work too. (Myre transcription, p. 4)[3]

Nor does she believe that the resources or in-class materials reflected a wide cultural exchange, as Myre stated, "it wasn't [there], even in the material that we were looking at in terms of the other artists in the world, or even those considered the 'blue chip' artists and all that. Not really" ((Myre transcription, p. 4). Myre believes that much of this changed after she left her college and university years behind and she says she is now in awe of the college and university students' experiences of having First Nations' artists come into class to talk about their practice and what Indigeneity means to them.

Mentors

"My father for sure"

The first person that Myre identifies as a mentor is her father. This is apparent because his actions in developing her awareness of art and visual aesthetics is paramount to where she has ended up as an artist with a multi-media practice and a commitment to political engagement.

She also cites Armand Vaillancourt as being "very central" to her development. She describes him as "the first person I ever interviewed for school projects" (Myre transcription, p. 3). This sense of ease or familiarity with Vaillancourt speaks to him as a friend and as a mentor. He was obviously an adult who valued Myre to the point that he generously offered her his time. Finally, Myre spoke of the mixed-media artist Ralph Stanbridge. She met this art teacher (who is also the person who originated the visual art program) at Camosun College and as her professor he was very influential in keeping her on track and moving Myre forward in her developing art practice.

3 Melinda Mollineaux is Canadian artist of Caribbean descent working in photography. Artist Ken Lum, who identifies as Chinese Canadian, works in multi-media including painting, sculpture and photography. Dana Claxton is the Hunkapa Lakota filmmaker, photographer and performance artist.

Transition from Emerging to Accomplished Artist

"I wasn't entirely convinced"

As stated above, Myre believes that she wavered between visual art and literature or poetry for a number of years. While Myre seemed to wholeheartedly follow a post-secondary fine arts education, she did state that it was not until she had finished her graduate degree that she was able to persuade herself that she wanted a career in the visual arts. As she said, "I think it was after my Masters. I wasn't entirely convinced up until then" (Myre transcription, p. 3).

"I had never made a birch bark canoe"

As she was in the transition from emerging to accomplished artist, Myre was hired to teach sculpture at the White Mountain Academy of Art in northern Ontario. The school, which began in 1997, offered a four-year studio arts-based diploma program. The objective was to hire art professors and technicians who were both Native and non-Native who would teach students who were also from both the Native and non-Native community. The original intention for the school had been to teach Native crafts exclusively, but it was soon suggested and implemented that other contemporary art media and skills such as ceramics, print making, computer arts, photography, and sculpture be incorporated into the programming along with Native arts. The school faculty and artist Elders gave the students the skills to make birch bark canoes, cradleboards and drums. Of equal value to its mission, was that the school incorporated philosophies of respect for individuality and co-operation, with the intention that the inclusion of Native culture, history and traditions would enrich each student's life no matter what their cultural heritage. Myre agreed that she "found the intention of the idea [for the school] really interesting, which is why I agreed to participate in the project" (Myre transcription, p. 12).

Myre stated she did find that it was a challenging teaching appointment. She now believes that with greater teaching experience and as a more mature artist, she would not have felt "at the time, [as though] I was completely out of my depth" and added that "I would feel much more

comfortable teaching now, with the experience that I have and the positions that I've since occupied" (Myre transcription, p. 12).

But at the same time, Myre mentioned that the school was

> … incredibly influential too…Yes, my interest was there to begin with and I was excited about learning these new techniques. And I had never made a birch bark canoe either, or any of these things. It kind of all blended. And I think that experience really was influential in the work that I made [later] for the Oboro exhibition. (Myre transcription, p. 12) [4]

"I'm jealous"

When asked if she believes an art-teaching institution could have an impact on the students' cultural identity, Myre does not believe this can be the case, but she did note that there can be a connection between cultural identity and art education. She recognizes that she would have benefited from the inclusion of contemporary First Nations' artists into the classroom and the curriculum in her own undergraduate and graduate schooling. As noted above, she felt positively about the pedagogical attempt that The White Mountain Academy was making to be totally inclusive. Myre sees it as very positive that professors in the art schools and universities she visits now make an effort to be inclusive. Myre stated that it was after she left school that the visibility of Indigenous artists rose and she is even a little envious of this new inclusive or open-minded attitude. As she stated,

> Yes, I mean, I'm jealous of these younger artists and younger people who have classes where they have artists like me, or Sonny Assu come in and talk about their practice or even about the history. I really feel like I didn't have any of that. So I had to figure it out as I went along, to read and listen. (Myre transcription, p. 5)

Myre takes the connection between cultural identity and art education even further as she sees it as a way of belonging–as a member of a cultural group, as a member of a collective or as an artist who has cultural connections to a group, suggesting that these connections may help to make sense of personal experiences.

4 This exhibition was Cont[r]act at Oboro in 2002. The major work in this exhibition was Indian Act. Nadia Myre enlisted over 230 friends, colleagues and strangers to help her bead over the Indian Act between 1999 and 2002. With the help of Rhonda Meier, they organized workshops and presentations at Concordia University, and hosted weekly beading bees at Oboro Gallery, where it was presented as part of the exhibition.

> I believe this because it is all about belonging [in some way] and I think not just belonging to a culture, but belonging to a group of artists as well. I think that for me, the *Indian Acts* Conference that the Grunt Gallery did in 2002 was my first situation in which I realized that there were a whole bunch of other artists working in the same way that I was. And I thought that I belong to or I am a part of that. That was really formative because I'd gone through all of my education and got my Masters and everything, but then I felt like I belonged to something and that I had a place too and that my experience was valid. (Myre transcription, p. 5)[5]

This sense of belonging is essential to Myre and her practice and may go back to her having experienced the search for a place with her mother when she was eight years old. At that time, her mother began to look at where she had come from and where she might belong as an adult. Myre and her mother travelled to Maniwaki in western Quebec to try and find answers to their shared cultural heritage.

> I became aware of my Algonquin cultural heritage when I was eight. And my mother was in search of her own roots and she took me to the Reserve at Kitigan Z'ibi to meet people and to kind of figure out who she was… (Myre transcription, p. 1)

As Myre later stated, "I think, personally, a lot of art making comes from a reactionary space" (Myre transcription, p. 6).

In the context of discovering her entwined self-identities, Myre again speaks of the circumstances of her life experiences and she contrasted the experience of looking at art and architecture with her father.

> When I was eight years old I was reacting to the sculptures that I had seen, to the formal kind of questions that, you know, we were looking at buildings in the city. My father used to walk around with me in the city and we'd look at architecture all day long. And so, you know those were my reactions and my reflections. (Myre transcription, p. 6)

It is a result of these and other experiences that Myre wrestled with how she would describe herself in terms of her Francophone- Anglophone – Quebecois – Algonquin heritages. Then in contrast to this experience, she spoke of getting her Native status at the same time as entering the MFA program at Concordia University and the collision of these two things meant she had to react and ask herself questions relating to her sense of identity.

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5 Grunt Gallery is a Vancouver artist-run centre founded in 1984. Its mandate is to present work that explores the diversity of Canadian identity. The *Indian Acts: Aboriginal Performance Art* conference was curated by Tania Willard and Dana Claxton in 2002 at the Grunt Gallery.

> What does it mean to me to be an Indian NOW having grown up in Quebec and being Québécoise, French, English in Montréal, or in Vancouver? And how do I identify with that and what can I do as a First Nation person? (Myre transcription, p. 6)

In order to answer her own questions about where she belonged, as well as those questions she had about memory and loss, Myre realized that to move forward she needed to catch up with her cultural knowledge. She used her self-motivated art education to identify what she needed to learn, because as she said, "I am personally at a loss to identify what is linked to my cultural heritage" (Myre transcription, p. 6).

> And it's about learning all those things. And for me to learn those things is really also in the process of making them and try to learn them within the process of making which is why to learn how to work with wood, I looked to an expert, an Algonquin…[wood worker], somebody who really has worked with wood all his life and made all sorts of things. And his position is very different. He likes to think about how his people were making things one hundred years ago or one hundred-fifty years ago. And figure out how they would have made some things back then. So I worked with the artist Elder Pinok (Kitigan zibi Algonquin) quite often or have over a period of years and he's taught me how to split wood and how to work with a crooked knife. (Myre transcription, p. 6)

In time and on her own initiative she later learned the art of tanning hides and building an ice-block house while working with Pinock and the youth at the friendship centre and in weekend studio sessions in her Studio in Saint-André d'Argentueil. As Myre discovered new skills that are part of Indigenous life and craft traditions, she was discovering new ways of looking at and thinking about sculpture. As she stated, on her return to Montreal she was identifying what it was in herself and in her art that was linked to her cultural heritage. It is in beginning to learn these skills and making connections between her creative process, and her newfound sense of belonging that Myre entered into becoming an accomplished artist.

Art, Cultural Identity and the Accomplished Artist

Art Education and Philosophy of Art

"a memory knowledge in the body"

Myre's philosophy of art and art education is that "it all goes to the transmission of knowledge." She believes that information or knowledge is best when it is transmitted or understood through listening, reading or actively doing. For Myre, her preference is more physical as she prefers "to listen" and she "also likes to participate" (Myre transcription, p. 6). She believes that the physical act of doing or making is the best or most efficient way to learn a skill.

> I really do believe that there is a memory knowledge in the body when you do things over and over again. And even if you don't know them, or have never done them, there's a memory knowledge that can be dormant. You have a skill that you're very good at, and you might not know why. (Myre transcription, p. 6)

Her philosophy of art and its connection to memory or body knowledge speaks to some of the projects that Myre has taken on, for example *Indian Act,* which began as a solo project. Myre originally conceived of the project of beading the fifty-six pages on her own. She began the project not recognizing whether she was a "good beader" or not but she started the project despite this. Once realizing the project needed to become a participatory one by bringing people into the project, Myre gained from the point she encountered, as she said, "My only reference now is I've had other people coming to help me. And they're like: 'oh, you do things the long way, you know. You do things the kind of thorough way" (Myre transcription, p. 6).

Myre says she taught herself to bead by reading how-to books but then admitted, that her mum would tell me that she has "been stringing beads since I was six years old" (Myre transcription, p. 6). Perhaps the best incarnation of this philosophy is that people should work with their body memory and share the wealth of their ability, but never doubt that there is no more to be learned.

Identification as an Artist

"I'm a professional artist"

Myre states that she always identifies herself as a professional artist. Her definition of herself as an artist has changed "many times" over time but she has become more comfortable in stating, "who I am, about the position I occupy, about the work that I'm doing, about being a mother, [and] all of these things" over the past twelve years. And in that time she believes, "I feel like I've really kind of grown into my own a little bit" (Myre transcription, p. 7).

"I want the work to be insightful"

Myre does not have a particular audience in mind when she is making her work. Her objective is for "the work to be insightful" and as she has always worked with language she says because,

> I've always been a poet…I've always been very interested in word play and double entendre and special meaning. And so, I guess I want the work to have special meaning for those who may be able to unlock the codes of what I'm saying or not. And if it doesn't, that's fine too. (Myre transcription, p. 7)

But even if the viewer does not understand the wordage or the double meanings, Myre accepts that of the viewer too, because as she states, in the end she is, "really trying to make a work that is universal, that [the work] can mean something" to everyone (Myre transcription, p. 8). To this end, Myre does not want her audience to be limited to a contemporary art audience. As she says, "I want my work to have meaning for people who aren't necessarily living in metropolitan areas and who can still connect to it" (Myre transcription, p. 8).

Myre explains that this is also why she works in different media because she wants to have a "broad range of work, because it responds to different desires, [for] myself, and different ideas that I want to communicate" (Myre transcription, p. 8).

Role of the Artist and Community

On a pragmatic level, Myre does participate in artist-talks when they are organized around exhibition openings, and as stated earlier she will talk about her work to specific audiences such as Fine Arts classes. Talking about her work with different audiences is important:

> I really believe that it's important that people have a connection to the artist and that they hear it from the artist. You know, that's another transmission of knowledge. And there is as much validity as seeing the show and seeing the work in the flesh as there is having the artist explain the work to you and seeing it from slides because that's just kindling the imagination. So, I do a lot of those, as much as I can. (Myre transcription, p. 8-9)

Myre finds that most of her community involvement is in institutions like universities or art galleries, and she associates the Maisons de la culture with larger cultural institutions. Though she does find that at certain of these sites, such as the Maison de la culture Marie Uguay, that the administration is prepared to develop projects that bring the artist into contact with viewers of all ages.[6] For example, for Myre's exhibition, *Nadia Myre: oeuvres multidisciplinaires* (January-March 2013),

> … the Maison de la culture Marie Uguay had a really strong community project that they developed with me, to go into schools and to do a workshop with three classrooms over a period of three or four times each. So, the students came to the exhibition. I spoke about the work, I talked about the process, and I talked about the history of all of this. And then I went into their classrooms and we did [beading], and I showed them how to do their own beadwork on a loom. We talked about symbols and math and all of these things, and technique. And then the students continued those works. So, I think that's really important. (Myre transcription, p. 9)

As the above quote shows, Myre is very interested in and eager to work with community members of all ages. According to Myre, the role the artist takes on in the community very much depends on the artist because there are many "different roles that an artist can play" (Myre transcription, p. 7). The artist can also assume the job of memory-keeper as the one who documents the processes, the history or the memory of what has taken place or gone by.

> There are so many roles that art can play and I think that's the exciting thing about art and that's why it's very valid to communities and to society in general is because, not only as

6 The centres were established in Montreal in the 1980s. There are twelve of them in Montreal that function as spaces with libraries and as a circuit of community based exhibition venues.

> the inventor, but there's the historian as well. So, it really depends on the person and on what the community needs. (Myre transcription p. 7)

However, chief among the many possible roles for Myre personally, is that of the artist taking on the role of activist. As stated above, Myre got an early start as an artist-activist when she and her father joined the Quebec artist-activist Vaillancourt to work on the *Revolutionaries* mural on the Pathfinder building in New York City in 1988. More recently, Myre was an integral part of the SOS Poigan campaign beginning in 2012. Myre designed a logo and a twenty-foot protest banner to aid in the Native-led fight against clear-cutting the forest on the un-ceded Algonquin territory in western Quebec.

> I think politics plays a role in life all the time. And [politics] totally plays a role… in my artistic production, it really does. But, I mean, just the impetus to do something, … like last year, and it's still ongoing, the Poigan cultural La Réserve phonétique. To me, that's a real community practice. (Myre transcription p. 10)

It is acts such as these that she sees as part of

> … community practice and it has to do with my art and it doesn't have to do with my art. And I could easily wrap all that up into an exhibition about my work, which I haven't done. So, I think both are informed all the time. It was very important for me to do that [Poigan banner, for example] because, a) I believe in those things…and I want change for those things, and b) at the same time it informs my artistic practice. And I feel like that about all sorts of things. (Myre transcription p. 10)

Myre believes this community work informs her artistic practice and this brings the discussion back to the artist as a memory-holder and having an understanding of what the community requires from her as an artist or as an Algonquin woman. As she stated, it is important for her to go into different situations and these situations could be as diverse as a communal studio, a park, a Reserve or a school. Her specific example was in reference to a school because by going into "the schools and showing people how to do bead work…I [am] giving, transmitting a knowledge to future generations and asking people who aren't Native necessarily to consider Native issues and Native rights" (Myre transcription, p. 10).

Through the participation of others, Myre is able to reflect on or re-think her own ideas on what her art practice means. For her, it is a continuous circle of herself as artist working in the community and gaining a new perspective on her own practice through her work with other

people. For Myre this is just one more political action, “it’s everywhere and it’s all the time” (Myre transcription p. 10).

Myre also spoke of the importance of encountering pivotal work by artists from different cultures and how valuable this experience was to her development. In particular, she spoke of encountering contemporary Japanese sculpture at the National Gallery of Canada just before she left for British Columbia, as well as the Edgar Heap of Birds work, *Native Hosts* that she found on the grounds of the Vancouver Art Gallery. This work consists of twelve aluminum street signs, which make reference to the relationship between First Nations and British Columbia. On a white background in red text, British Columbia is spelled backwards followed by the phrase “Today your Host is,” and completed by one of the twelve names that make up the British Columbia First Nations. Heap of Birds was mimicking official public signage. It is apparent that the work appealed to Myre because it stood outside of formalism, it questioned political power and played with language as it asked the viewer to question the circumstances of history, public space and land claims.

Since early 2012, Myre has shifted her focus slightly as she has begun to take on curatorial projects. That year, she curated her first exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art, *Baliser Le Territoire/A Stake in the Ground: Manifestation d’art contemporain Autochtone* at the commercial art gallery Art Mur (January – February, 2012). Since then, she was asked to join the committee of contemporary artists and scholars contributing their expertise to Montreal’s McCord Museum’s re-hanging of *Wearing our Identity – The First Peoples Collection/Porter son identité - La collection Premiers Peuples,* a permanent exhibition which opened to the public in May 2013. As Aboriginal guest artist and curator, Myre suggested the inclusion of works by a roster of contemporary Aboriginal artists, who explore the notion of identity. Terrance Houle (Blood, 1975-) and Maria Hupfield (Anishinaabe, 1975-) are the first two contemporary artists whose work has been featured.

Art Practice

"I have a strong desire to make materially invested objects"

Myre's art practice is multi-disciplinary. She is a sculptor and a bead-worker who also works in video and photography. She says of her practice, "I try and not get too locked down in any particular way of working because I want to keep things as open for myself as I possibly can" (Myre transcription p. 11).

Her work has been driven by the themes of identity, memory, loss and language. "You know, when I talk about it being about memory and loss, it's the fact that…I am personally at a loss to identify about what is linked to my cultural heritage" (Myre transcription p. 6).

Myre's sense of loss is related to the missing links in her maternal heritage. Her mother was orphaned as a very young child and it took Myre and her mother many years to reclaim their Native heritage. As a result of this, Myre has stated that she has made identity a theme of her work by reclaiming both specific Indigenous or Anishinaabe practices and the related material culture and by tracking the stereotypes of the pan-Indian experience. [7]

The experience of Myre and her mother re-gaining their Native status in 1997 was a starting point for the first of two long-term participant-based projects, *Indian Act* (2000-2002, Myre Fig. 1) and *The Scar Project* (2005-2013, Myre Fig. 2).[8] *Indian Act* was motivated by her mother's struggle to be recognized by her home community. Through this process, Myre was aware of the bureaucratic loops her mother had to go through to prove she was Algonquin. In reaction to the bureaucracy Myre developed the idea to bead over the government statute Indian Act. This would entail replacing the words with strings of white beads, and the white page with red beads. In the early stages of the work, Myre thought she could do the beading herself, but soon found that it could take up to seventy hours to bead one page. The solution to this was for Myre and her curator at that time, Rhonda Meier, to enlist the two hundred-thirty people who helped with the long-term beading project between 2000 and 2002. The interactive project brought people together in various settings, universities and galleries across the country. The project was successful even if not all of the pages were completely covered by beads. According

7 http://www.themedicineproject.com/nadia-myre.html (accessed April 4, 2014)

8 A third participatory project began in 2011. This was *The Forgiveness Project.*

to Myre, the project is complete because "the Indian Act is a living document that undergoes changes, the beaded *Indian Act* is left in an unfinished state. It was important that all the pages have beads on them, but not necessary that they all be finished."[9]

Three years later Myre initiated *The Scar Project* (2005-2013), an open-studio project that gave individual participants access to various threads, fibres and needles to record their physical, emotional or psychological scars on ten-inch square stretched canvases. The participants followed this work by giving their stories to the project archive in textual form. For Myre, this was a "grassroots study of how people describe their wounds, both literal and metaphorical…and a way for people to anonymously share their personal narratives and traumas with others."[10]

As stated above, Myre was torn between poetry and visual art right up to the time of completing her MFA. Words and playing with language occupied her during her early career and continued to do so with this project, but in a new format. While *The Scar Project* is more a study in the use of symbology than an expression of her (or the participants) love of language and words, the scars made with needles, threads and scissors did give Myre and her participants a chance to voice their own stories–to silently reveal the scars they had never spoken of. By completing the revelatory process of writing their own narratives, it was hoped that the people who took part would be able to erase a painful memory or empower themselves through the symbolic telling.

This interactive project began after Myre had been working on her own series related to scarring. For example, *Everything I Know About Love* (2004, Myre Fig. 3) has some of the elements that Myre would introduce to the participants in the open-studio–she used two stretched unbleached canvases that have been ripped and re-sewn. Myre then added paint and other materials such as ash to delineate the scar. For each of us, a scar represents a wound and we always have our own stories to tell of the way we acquired our scars. For Myre it seems love has to take some responsibility for this situation. Myre's own work and the anonymous scar canvases all have something to say about how our wounds help us shape our identity. Myre continued working with the theme of the scar into 2006 with the *Scar Paintings* series of monochrome oil paintings. This work has been described as being made up of scars that are of different "shapes and formats [with] traces of ancient or fresh wounds…Each is strangely reminiscent of a

9 http://indigenousfoundation.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/artisticexpressions/nadia-myre/about-indian-act.html (accessed March 24, 2014)

10 http://www.nadiamyre.com/Nadia_Myre/portfolic/Pages/The_Scar_Project.html (accessed April 2, 2014)

fossil…Here the artwork becomes a space to heal." [11] By 2010 in *Scarscapes* (for example *Yonic* (2010, Myre Fig. 4), the most prominent scars symbols for *The Scar Project* were worked in beads and had become more abstracted. The tiny beaded works were then scanned and printed as monumental macro-photography. When both the small loomed beadwork is shown with the large-scale images, such as *Celestial* in the series *Meditations on Black Lake* (2012, Myre Fig. 5) the viewer must move back and forth between the works to consider the way objects change, whether by virtue of the venue or more importantly, by the way objects change across time or in the embodiment of Indigenous history. Myre stated that she had "been wanting to express bead work on a really large format since 2002. But I started photographing them in 2007- 2008" (Myre transcription, p. 10). The increased scale of the two-dimensional surface completely alters the experience and memory of both physical scars and our expectations of the size of hand-held beadwork. At the time of our interview, Myre was eager to begin to make a large-scale sculpture, but was feeling a little stuck as a result of not having a studio space. She also recognizes that people have expectations when it comes to her production, but having said that, she wants to maintain her creative freedom and resist any limitations to her media.

She would not speak of any one piece of work that was representative of who she is. She did qualify this by saying that she could not specify anything at this time but perhaps she could have identified something five years ago or that I should come back in a few decades.

> … maybe when I'm 80, ask me and I'll say: oh, it was this one piece. For me, my own personal one, [dates back] five years when there was one work that really meant everything to my cultural production. But, it's not [one] that anybody knows and that's part of my own evolution as an artist too. (Myre transcription p. 11-12)

Myre did admit that she and her colleagues have had discussions on this very topic, but stated that there is rarely a consensus. For her, this means that it all comes down to personal references and individual interpretations of the work. For example, she spoke of one of her early works, *History in Two Parts* (1999, Myre Fig. 6), which she told me, she knows that another artist categorically associates this work with her. She believes this is due to their shared understanding of what it means to come from Euro-Indigenous mixed family histories. This remark leads us to a discussion on the ways an artwork can resonate with certain people. As an

11 Colette Tougas (2013) "The Truly Made Things of Nadia Myre" Nadia Myre: Needleworks. December 5, 2013- February 23, 2014. Barrie, ON: MacLaren Art Centre. n.p.

analogy, she related this to the half aluminum, half birch-bark canoe that for a Metis person is representative of "those cultures coming together and creating a new culture" (Myre transcription p. 11). According to Myre, this individual assessment or sensibility about an artist's work always "goes back to interpreting work and what it means to you" in terms of your own life experience or cultural understanding (Myre transcription p. 11).

In response to my question about having an expectation or objective for what a viewer will take away after seeing her work, she recalled showing the same two videos to two different people and they had completely different reactions, when one laughed at the first video and the other cried and vice-versa for the second video. This caused Myre to surmise,

> … that was a beautiful experience for me because at that moment, I cannot dictate how people are going to interpret work. To me, it really depends on where they are and what their own process is and what they're thinking about and how they're interpreting life. And I have no effect on that. (Myre transcription p. 9)

In Myre's opinion, it is not her intention to have people take away a specific message from her art. She does not believe she can promote or control any particular message through her own actions, but she does expect some kind of response. As she stated, "I hope people will take away something, you know. That's my first hope" (Myre transcription, p. 9).

Myre has now reached the position of being a mid-career artist with an international reputation. Her work speaks to encounters between Euro-settlers and Indigenous people and she is particularly focused on the point of contact and its by-products. She continues to work through the themes of longing and loss, identity and language.

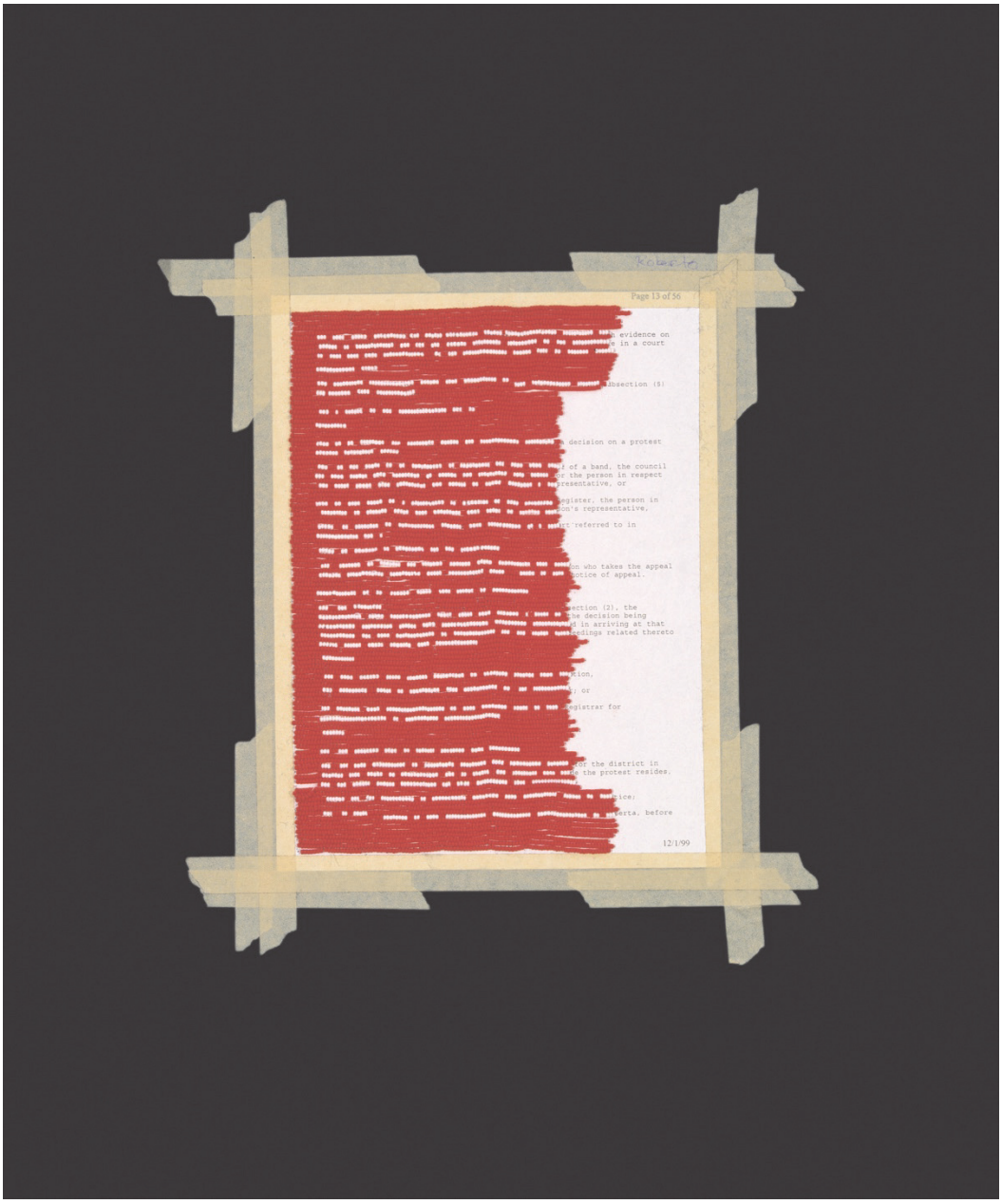

Fig. 1
Nadia Myre
Indian Act (detail)
2000-2002
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

Fig. 2
Nadia Myre
The Scar Project (detail)
2005-2013
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

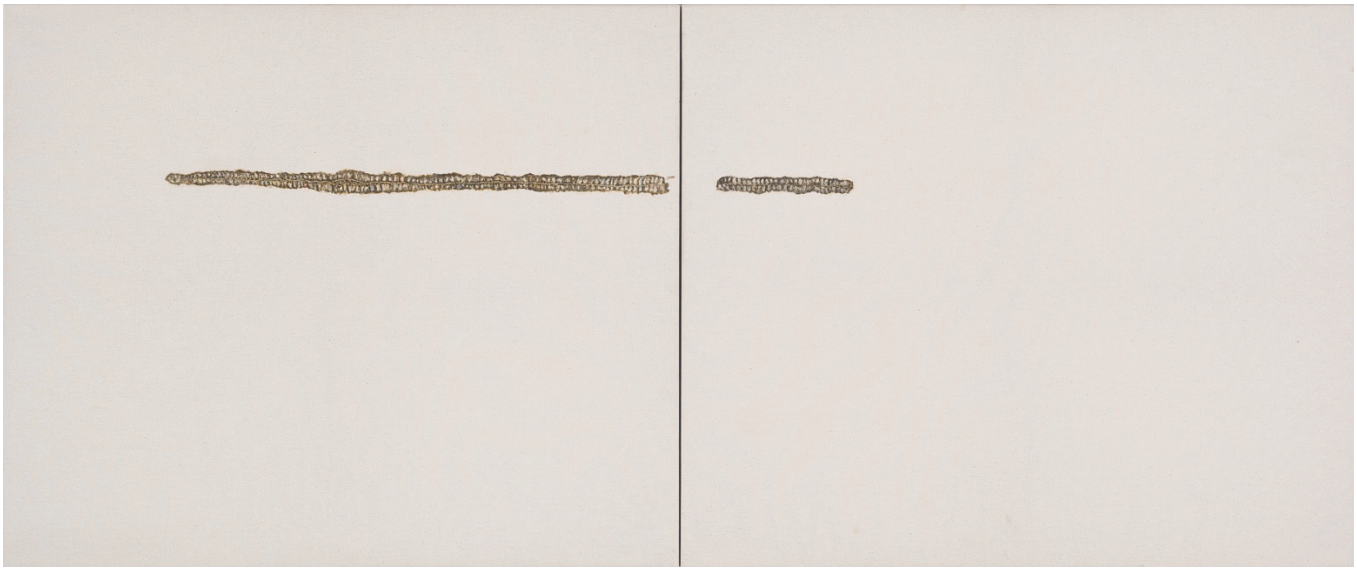

Fig. 3
Nadia Myre
Everything I know about love
2004
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

Fig. 4
Nadia Myre
Yonic
From the series *Scarscapes*
2010
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

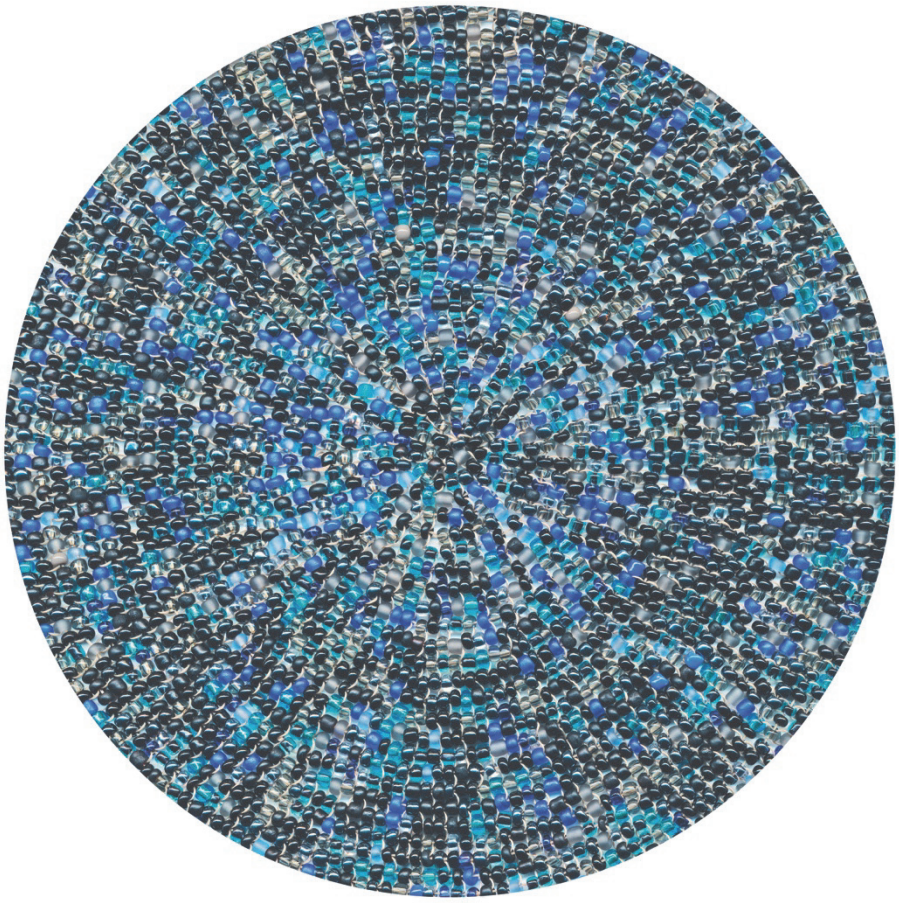

Fig. 5
Nadia Myre
Celestial
From the series *Meditations on Black Lake*
2012
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

Fig. 6
Nadia Myre
History in Two Parts
1999
Courtesy of Galerie Art Mur

Chapter 8
Cross-case Analysis

Structure of the Chapter

In writing the narratives three principal themes were developed: Emerging Artist, Transition, and Accomplished Artist. Developing these themes in the writing of the narratives was useful as they aided in organizing the collected data. Each of these was then divided into sub-headings that corresponded with time periods or points of philosophical inquiry. In this chapter, I present an analysis of the connections and divergences that were revealed in the artists' stories. My cross-case analysis has now been divided into two main sections that refer to the original overarching themes. The first portion covers the Emerging Artist. The second part of this chapter outlines the artists' experiences from Transition to Accomplished Artist.

Part 1: Emerging Artist, Art and Cultural Identity

This first section of the cross-case analysis begins with the earliest memories of art production in the home and spans the elementary to secondary school years and those years when the women were growing and establishing themselves as art makers within the post-secondary education system. In each section the connection between the individual and her cultural identity is considered.

Early Life Experience

Erikson (1968) stated that it was essential for children to develop perseverance as they learned to produce objects or things. "I am what I can learn to make work" (p.127). He further stated that age, developing abilities, and an increased exposure to art needs to occur in order for a greater connection to emerge. Additionally, he suggested that the process of forming an artistic

identity continues from childhood into adulthood. This is a situation I believe is borne out in the emergence of the four women as art makers.

Art-making in Everyday Family Life

Each of the artists in the research study remembered making art during their early childhood years. Most of the memories were in the realm of experiences where art making occurred in the home and was a part of day-to-day living with children gathered around kitchen tables with crayons, paper and scissors or other materials. Each of the participants recounted art making in their childhood as a form of unstructured play rarely supervised by adults. This activity was noteworthy because through art the young artists were beginning to become aware of the world around them and their artistic self was authenticated through their own actions. These actions meant that they became more capable and others began to recognize their ability and interest in art.

I believe that making art in early childhood and in a non-structured environment was an agreeable experience for each of the participants. Each of them spoke of the pleasing experiences of working at art as young children. They discovered art as a reciprocal experience especially in the context of working with other more capable or experienced art-makers, such as siblings or a peer. Through their interactions with others they discovered, new techniques, honed their own skills, learned that art materials could be diverse and that there were adult art-makers in their own communities.

Forty years ago Wilson (1974) labeled much of the art making done during this phase of children's lives as "play art." He described this as a period in which we can learn why children make art and why some children continue to make art while others stop. Wilson also stated that when children have lots of opportunity to play at art making they move through "something akin to developmental stages" as they begin to understand and become captivated by the world around them. Play art is the spontaneous and unsupervised form of visual art usually done outside of school hours and done for children's own fulfillment. Szekely (2015) maintains that children's play cannot be separated from art making because for him play is a preparation for art. In this art educator's opinion children need to play with the objects and spaces of their environment and this in turn suggests the potential for art making.

Both Niro and Myers talked of their art experience in childhood as part of their life with their siblings. Niro remembered that they did not always work with traditional art materials such as pencils and paper but they had lots of freedom to use a variety of materials and in doing so amused themselves and one another. For Myers, her strongest memory is of making art with her older siblings and attempting to mimic them. She believes they taught her techniques and skills and through observation she acquired her own ability and became more proficient as a young artist.

Gardner (1995) discussed the connections between different "intelligences" and the importance of children's interactions (in most cases in the context of the classroom) and found that children tend to learn by developing their strengths and then sharing their expertise with others. This often leads to a child being appreciated for the abilities they have and consequently for that child to appreciate, in turn the gifts others possess.

Myre as a single child worked independently with materials that her father collected for her and she, exceptionally within this group, worked with professional artists hired by her father to teach her printmaking and other skills in her own home.

Cachene was the only artist of the four who did not recall any early art making experiences in her family home. However she did reveal that she had a rich creative life with a childhood friend who introduced her to art and materials.

Walsh (2002) reports that as in child rearing generally children need to be nurtured in their art creation. In order for the work and imagery to become competent, children need to be exposed to a visually interesting world. For Walsh it is of the utmost importance that children are able to inhabit artistic situations within which they can spend a significant amount of time. In this way the "development of an artistic self is supported" (p. 104). He sees this support as being applicable to the micro-level as well as operating within the larger context of society. In his estimation children's efforts need to be supported, developed and transformed in order for the child to become capable in the arts as well as other areas of their development, no matter where they take place.

Korn-Bursztyn (2012) in her reflection on the importance of reciprocal engagement and its meaning in young children's lives, stated that such mutually pleasing encounters help children build their capacity for sustained interest and attention which in time increases their interest in being a part of an endlessly interesting world peopled by others. Cachene's childhood friend, the

Myers and Niro siblings and the artists hired by Nadia Myre's father, all in some way mirrored an agreeable activity for each of the young artists. As Walsh (2002) stated, the barrier to achieving an artistic (or any type of) identity is the unfamiliar. He believes the child needs to be shown what the world is, how it works and what their role in it will be because we are formed within a milieu and who the child is or becomes is dependent on the circumstances or environments she has access to.

Elementary School Experiences

In/ Significant Art Making: Part I

Walsh (2002) suggests that for children or young people to find success or competency in school arts they need to be able to relate what they learn to their own understanding of the world and if the development of artistic skill is meant to lead to the construction of an artistic self it must have a relatable social meaning. Accordingly greater interest and success in school arts may be more likely if the students can build on previous skills and bring these together with what they know of their culture and the world.

Lisa Myers was the only one of the four artists who enthusiastically remembered her elementary school art experience as positive. She said that she was engaged by the art in the curriculum and she knew that she wanted to become more proficient in her art skills. She says this was because she recognized that the teachers appreciated the children who were capable art makers. Myers also recalled that she was full of confidence and was so sure of herself and her abilities that she set up her own art table and sold her work at school fun fairs.

Shelley Niro did not recall any significantly important art making or art projects in her elementary school years. Similarly Jori Cachene believes the informal art making with her friend was much more significant for her than anything in her elementary school experience. She could not recall any significant art project or encounter from this period. Nadia Myre attended F.A.C.E., a Montreal school in which the core curriculum is arts-based with a focus on visual art, drama and music but Myre still believes that the at-home art experiences were more important and had a more direct appeal to her as art experiences than her elementary school arts-based curriculum did.

The experiences (or lack of) indicate that for these four artists, art at home and art in the classroom were very different. To alleviate such situations as the artists described, Walsh (2002) suggests that, "to develop an artistic self, [school-aged] children have to have artistic contexts within which to spend significant time" (p. 104). This is not always guaranteed in an elementary school classroom and Walsh believes schools can be accused of setting up situations in which children do not perform as expertly as they are capable of. Gude (2004) recommends that teachers create or find opportunities for students to engage in creative art activities that in turn encourage students to make connections and observations based on the own experiences. Both art educator Szekely (2006) and educator Saracho (2012) propose that children need to communicate ideas based on their own experiences and they need to be able to express their own narrative. Artist- art educator Szekely (2015) proposes that it is through art that children become aware of the world around them and art becomes more personal when their experiences are acknowledged. This starts a cyclical progression as such acknowledgement leads children to seek out new experiences for themselves. He has also found that the experiences related to art (and play) can provide children with a unique sense of their cultural identity because art relates culture to the time and situation where it occurs. Art enhances identity as it can be a self-affirming activity and can be incorporated into the personal narrative of the self. Hall (1996) describes identity as occurring at points of temporary attachment to subject positions and if considered in the context of socialization in the classroom learning or constructing identity, both social interaction and culturally responsive teaching is key.

Watch and Learn

For all but one of the artist-participants Aboriginal child-rearing practices and the ways learning by watching led to situations where opportunities for learning were provided in their home or community interactions. Niro and Myre were the artists who made a link between their home life and a community practice but these were very different experiences for these two as children. Niro believes her parents and others on the Reserve were committed to making objects as a way of keeping the past alive as well as for economic reasons, as many people were making items to be sold at powwows and tourist sites. This meant that she saw artisans of all types engaged in the production of objects made from many different materials.

There was a cultural expectation that she and her siblings would observe the active production and then enter into the practice. This watch and learn sensibility is considered an aspect of Aboriginal child-rearing practices (Brendtro & Brokenleg (1993); Letourneau, Hungler &Fisher (2005); McPherson & Rabb (2001); Neckoway, Brownlee & Castellan (2007; Scollon & Scollon (1983)) in which the parent's role is to provide the context for the child to express herself. For example Niro explained that it was in early childhood that she began to look at and in time, work with the Haudenosaunee floral beadwork patterns that her mother and other women were working with.

According to researchers such as Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) the objective is not to mould the child's response or conduct but to provide the opportunities in which the child can comport or express herself based on the observations she has made of others' activities or conduct. Many studies have described Aboriginal parent-child interaction as one in which children are encouraged to observe in order to learn a skill or a behaviour (Letourneau, Hungler & Fisher (2005), and make independent decisions in which the child is free to explore their own environment with a degree of non-interference unless there is a risk of danger (McPherson & Rabb (2001). Scollon and Scollon (1983), and Brendtro and Brokenleg (1993) also suggest that in Indigenous cultures children are taught to be in charge of their own conduct as this leads to autonomy and good decision making and this is made effective through a tightly woven network of immediate and extended family and community relationships that ensure an effective safety net is in place.

Niro corroborated much of this in describing the independence she and her siblings experienced in and outside of their home. She also described how her parents expected the children to participate in the family art production but were also accepting and tolerant when she had her own ideas about what she would make. The presence of artisans in and outside of her home in her early life was a very influential experience according to Niro because this meant she was able to witness from an early age the compulsion to make art–whether for an economic or creative need. Both her immediate family and her community instilled in her a strong sense of self in terms of cultural identity as well as a "just do it" sensibility.

Myre's situation was different in that her father was not engaged in his own art production but he did play a huge role in introducing Myre at an early age to the Montreal art community and to the role that art can play in politics. He took her to places where she could interact with

artists, art and aesthetics and he directly introduced her as a young adolescent to the idea of art and political action when he took her to New York City to work on the Pathfinder's Mural Project, *The Revolutionaries*. A friend of her father's and another influential person in Myre's life was the sculptor Armand Vaillancourt. This artist has had a lifelong involvement in Quebec political independence, as well as environmental and human rights issues and his commitment to community action was compelling for Myre. These early contributions to Myre's creative life and to her political and artistic activism have stayed with her.

hooks (1994) writes of the need to provide young learners with the chance to hear many voices and to have their voices heard; she also promotes the need to decenter the Euro-Western perspective and embrace multiculturalism. hooks is referencing the classroom experience but others have also written of the impact of political action and thought on the way children and adolescents view the world and their place in it. Duncum (2001, 2002, 2006), Freedman (2003), Giroux (1994), and Tavin (2003) have found visual culture and social justice issues often came together in the art classroom but could then be applied to the wider context of the child's social milieu or community involvement. According to Freedman an acquaintance with diverse social perspectives can lead to children (pupils) acquiring an understanding of the world in ways that can ultimately enhance and lead to the betterment of society.

Secondary School Experiences

In/ Significant Art Making: Part II

By the time each of the four artists reached secondary school they were prepared and capable of making their own decisions about whether they would take an art option or investigate another area of interest. Generally it is only in secondary school that young people can move past the obligatory elementary school art classes. However they often find that in taking art they are once again in a situation where they generally have to conform to the strictures of the curriculum. Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland and Palmer in the 2010 Harvard study, also found that along with good materials and accomplished teachers, quality in art education is "inextricably tied to…values and to fundamental issues of identity and meaning" (p. iii). The authors suggested that teachers and strong group interactions, as well as collaborative and

individual work lead to situations where the student creator can gain technical expertise in their creative expression. This can help bring about rewarding work sessions and in time a sense of pride in their abilities.

Walsh (2002) makes it clear that the teacher's role is implicitly important in two ways. The first is that the teacher support the student's artistic life as well as help them develop more fully as individuals. The second important ingredient in the formation of an artistic identity, or any identity, is for the student to learn about the world and how it works, as well as their role in it. For this Walsh believes it is essential that teachers know what skills children already have, listen to the stories that they tell about themselves, their families and their cultures and then begin to build on this knowledge. Garoian (2002) also suggested that schools should actively provide opportunities for children to create and perform identity in the classroom.

Again Myers was the only one of the four artists with an affirmative experience in art class at the secondary school level. Myers unconditionally stated that she had a very positive experience and she believes this may be due to the fact that she was lucky to attend a school with specialist art teachers who ran a very strong and innovative art department. She believes these teachers gave her a good foundation in the arts and this experience convinced her that she wanted a post-secondary art education and a career in the arts. Her resolve was not diminished despite becoming discouraged when her art teacher advised her against only applying to art schools.

Even though she had begun to think of herself as an artist in late childhood, Cachene stated she had no memory of any meaningful or noteworthy art project as part of her secondary school art curriculum. She now believes, in hindsight and as a secondary school art teacher, that the art curriculum in her secondary school could have been much richer.

Rostan (2006) cites Csikszentmihalyi (1988) and the importance he placed on the significant figure, either family member, school mate or friend, who encourages, supports and recognizes the young art students' efforts. As such positive reinforcement makes the child feel good about herself and her abilities.

Art classes in secondary school should have offered rich experiences to this group of artistically inclined students. The participants cited a variety of reasons for their indifference to their experience of the secondary school art curriculum. These ranged from uninspiring curriculum art projects, a desire to step away from visual art for another form of art, personal

disillusionment and failure to make a connection to the school or curriculum generally, and a preference for the freedom experienced with art making in less structured environments.

Opting Out

Secondary school was not a rich experience for Myre and she left before completing her diploma. Despite the fact that over a few years she was enrolled in, amongst others, arts-based curriculum schools in Toronto and Montreal. Myre did not find, in her words, any grounding in the curriculum or the general atmosphere. Niro completely stepped away from visual arts during adolescence and in secondary school she opted for the music program instead. She stated that it was because the music students went on school trips but for the most part she felt she generally wanted to set herself apart from art making.

Cummings (2010) described disinterested adolescents in the art classroom and the need for the reform of the art class curriculum which would better reflect the students' interests and instigate an enthusiasm for art making. Taylor, Carpenter, Ballengee-Morris, and Sessions (2006) suggested that as adolescents are searching for or establishing their own identities during the secondary school years, this pursuit could become integral to teaching art in high school. Gude (2000) noted that students would be more engaged in the secondary school curriculum when the physical space of the classroom was structured to facilitate discussion and interaction amongst the students. Engagement also improved when the intellectual components of the curriculum made space for the students to engage in meaningful inquiry and the investigation of questions relating to visual and social experiences. There is no doubt that during adolescence students are searching for identity and looking for motivation yet this phase of development can be marked with ennui. Seeking and affirming their identity keeps teens in constant flux, and this may lead to an extreme of risk-taking or over cautiousness. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen (1993) found that artistic activities may be halted while the young artist searched for the answer to what creativity exactly is. Adolescents' decisions about commitment to their talent activities appear to be related less to their actual level of competence or ability, and more to individuals' motivational characteristics

While the two participants who opted out of art during their adolescence did not mention the lack of cultural reinforcement in the classroom experience, they did cite both internal and

external reasons for choosing to curtail art. Their reasons for doing so included such elements as a lack of motivation, no personal connection to the curriculum or secondary school experience, and the need to establish an identity independent of their families.

The situation described by Freeman certainly rings true considering that as each of the participants in my current research came to the end of their adolescence there was a renewed interest in art. Most often this renewal was instigated by a new setting such as a new school or teacher, a pivotal experience with a work of art, the opportune space to make art on her own terms, a chance encounter with a new medium which then opened up the possibilities and led to finding new meaning in art. It is apparent that the strongest reason to begin making art again came from a confidence in their own abilities, and the recognition that art could be made on their own terms.

Community College

Finding New Meaning in Art

Myre and Niro are the only two of the four artists who also attended Community College. After leaving secondary school early Myre hitch-hiked across Canada and within a few months enrolled in Camosun College in Victoria, B.C. Myre said that not long after she arrived in British Columbia she had seen an art work, *Native Hosts* (1991-2007) by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne- Arapaho, 1954-) at the Vancouver Art Gallery that she found pivotal. As she recounted, the work made her question the instilled concept of art as formalist and therefore a purely visual experience with an emphasis on the foundational components of colour, line, shape and texture. The Heap of Birds work caused Myre to begin to question formalism and the political implications for art especially in terms of the Indigenous-colonial paradigm in regard to the history and recognition of Indigenous people in B.C. She was also affected by the work as it made a personal connection for her and her maternal heritage. Once at Camosun she found that the Studio Art program was foundational. She found both the curriculum and the faculty challenged her. In addition, Myre was fully able to explore different media until she found that her interest and talent lay in sculpture and printmaking.

At Cambrian Community College, Niro enrolled in the Music program. She stated that even after secondary school, she still was not ready to make art and knew she would not until she could do it on her own terms. Taking time away from art in an academic situation makes Niro unique amongst the four women as each of the others continued to take in-school art classes whether they found the school experience positive or otherwise.

Niro's formal visual art education began later, after her marriage she and her husband moved to Oshawa, Ontario. There she enrolled in part time Continuing Education drawing and graphic design classes at community college. She did not find these enjoyable and soon switched to the photography classes offered by the college. She found this medium was an empowering discovery for her and she began to use the camera extensively from this point onwards. Almost immediately Niro recognized the potential for the camera as a medium to explore her cultural identity and to make a record of her family and members of her Mohawk community.

Post-Secondary Education: Diploma, Associates and B.F.A.

Myers, Myre and Niro all attended a school exclusively devoted to the arts for their first post-secondary education. Cachene is the only one of the four who attended a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree granting college with an Indian Fine Arts program.

Indigenous Representation

None of the three artists who attended dominant-culture institutions felt that there was a strong Indigenous representation, in terms of faculty members or course content in the art departments during their first fine arts degree. Myre admitted that there was cultural diversity but she was not specifically aware of art students who were First Nation. In fact she found that Indigenous culture was not celebrated at that time (in the middle 1990s). She does not recall any Indigenous faculty members while she was at Emily Carr nor does she believe that the artists they studied, the resources or in-class materials they used, reflected a wide cultural exchange.

Myers felt that she was lucky to attend OCA just as the administration had initiated an affirmative action plan as this meant that many fine women teachers were hired or given new responsibilities. In terms of First Nations presence and her own cultural heritage, Myers found

she was more focused on the female faculty and their participation in her art education than she was focused on her own cultural identity. Having said that she did become acquainted with a number of First Nation students and she was on the periphery of the student group who made up the Native Students Association but feels she was too hesitant to actively negotiate her Indigenous cultural heritage at that time.

Niro found the faculty at OCA very generous with their time and felt she gained a lot of insight into painting. Niro feels that her Native heritage was mostly a non-issue although there were minor incidents such as the professor who qualified all Native students as having a limited sense of perspective in two-dimensional work or another professor who questioned her choice of Morrisseau as a Canadian artist. Niro remembered that she felt she was often seen as representative of all Indigenous people and cultures and as such, supposedly able to answer any and all questions with cultural authority.

Generally Niro believes there were few Indigenous students or faculty members at the OCA at the end of the 1980's. This is interesting and likely speaks to Niro's experience of the art school as a mature student with family commitments as she and Myers did overlap by one year at OCA and according to Myers there were a number of students including among others Mary Ann Barkhouse, Bev Koski and Richard Hill.

Cachene is unique in this group as she is the only one of the four who attended a First Nations-dominant institution. At the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (later the First Nation University of Canada) the student body was almost entirely First Nation. Also singular to Cachene, is that her art program, the Indian Art Program, combined Native art practices with contemporary Euro-American art practices. This meant Cachene was able to paint large-scale European-influenced canvases as well as take classes that concentrated on working with beading, quills and tanned hides, albeit often in the context of contemporary graphics and symbols.[1] Other unique characteristics of SIFC were that the administration and faculty was almost entirely First Nation and there were Elders on staff available to give the students the benefit of their knowledge of tradition, culture and Native spirituality. Cachene stated that she has always had a very strong sense of her cultural identity and while she understood the purpose of the required Indigenous practice courses, she was most interested in painting large canvases even when this

1 Interview with Judy Anderson, June, 2013 FNUC, Regina, SK.

caused her to question why or how she could infuse her art making with a greater sense of her own Indigeniety.

Art Making and Indigenous Heritage

Niro and Cachene discussed their time as undergraduates as both questioned how or whether they would make art that was influenced by their Indigenous heritage. At SIFC, Cachene says she was well aware of the student artists who were incorporating Native imagery and associated materials into their production but she did not feel that she could make that leap. In contrast she concentrated almost her entire studio work on painting the female nude. Despite following the European model of painting the nude figure, Cachene was surprised when her exhibited student work was reviewed and the journalist stated that her "nudes were unparalleled in First Nation Arts in Canada" (Cachene transcript 1, p. 7). This led her to question what the statement meant in terms of the nudes she was painting; were the nudes "Indian" and should she be making something that was more recognizably inspired by her First Nation heritage? Both Cachene and Niro spoke of the need to not make "Indian" art just for its own sake as doing so would feel dishonest to them. During her time at OCA Niro said she had made the decision to concentrate on learning to paint the figure and not work on art that was "First Nations driven" (Niro transcription 1, p. 11). She said she felt this way because she knew she would be able to explore her cultural identity in her art practice once her training was complete.

This is not a new concern of Indigenous students. Neuman (2006) writes of the pressure student artists in Southwest USA in the early years of Native American art education felt when they were encouraged to produce recognizably "Indian" art. She discovered that the students dealt with this injunction by actively making connections between ideas about "Indianness" and what it meant to develop an art practice of work that was recognizably Native. As a result, through selective choices the art students began to create new kinds of Indigenous identities. To accomplish this, Neuman declared, it was important for instructors to teach students the importance of conducting research and of the need to balance research and production with the public perception of what is Native. But more importantly it was important for the artists to come to understand what was authentic for themselves as artists of contemporary life in North America.

The Salish-Kootenai artist, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Red Star, 2011) has also spoken of the conflicting advice she received during and after art school. She described how professors told her the work was too Indian and then at other times described her work as not being "Indian enough." According to Quick-to-See Smith this is an on-going conundrum for Native artists because it means others have the power to decide the merit or value of the artists' work and a disavowal of who they are as individuals.

For both Niro and Cachene their identity as First Nation women is at the core of their being and their experiences and understanding of the (colonized) world. They were both making work that was personal and multi-layered but most importantly at that stage of their education, they were most consumed with technique and developing their skills.

In contrast, the other two artists had not yet begun to fully explore their cultural heritage. On the west coast, Nadia Myre was playing with her love of language and graffiti more than making any overt reference to her mixed cultural heritage.

For Lisa Myers it was only at that end of her time at OCA that she began to bring memory and the culturally-based family stories into her artwork. At the end of her OCA diploma program Myers stated she had had an intense experience with her grandfather's story. At that time she made a video of him telling his story and this project remained unfinished for almost twenty years; it did however percolate in her mind and influenced a number of the decisions she made in the following years. She believes her decision to take time away from art for music and cooking and the chance to become more acquainted with the community in the part of Ontario where her mother and grandfather had originated was linked in many ways to his telling her the story. In time the decision to return to school also hinged on these same decisions.

There was one similarity between the four artist participants, which was that each of them searched for and questioned the choices they made in their emerging art practice during their undergraduate degree. All of the artists dealt in some way with their concerns regarding aboriginal content.

Post-Secondary Education: Second Degree or M.F.A.

Decolonization and the Institution

Three of the artists returned to university to get a Masters' degree in Fine Arts. Cachene was the exception as she took a second degree in Education with a concentration on Secondary-Indigenous Education.

Myre attended Concordia (1999-2002) for her discipline based MFA where she integrated three-dimensional work into the context of contemporary art issues and ideas. In hindsight she felt that she had missed the critical mass of Indigenous representation at both Emily Carr and Concordia. She believes there was a "kind of [wave of]…First Nation identity, at Emily Carr [that] happened right after I left…And it was the same at Concordia too" (Myre transcript p. 4). She believes by not having the contact or the chance to be part of a group of First Nation students that she missed a good experience. As she now says, it didn't really have the same impact as she had to develop as an artist on her own and forge her own identity without the benefits of a strong Indigenous cohort.

In 1995 when Niro decided to continue in her educational journey; she had already established herself as an exhibiting artist. At UWO she found it was a small program with an emphasis on research methods and studio practice. She believes she benefited from the graduate student studio as it allowed her to paint on a larger-scale. Niro believes the expectation to express herself in writing and in paint was integral as she began to successfully intertwine her historical research with family and community stories. She brought these components together in her MFA thesis exhibition in 1997. Niro now has misgivings of her time at UWO as she believes that more personal interaction with other Indigenous students would have been beneficial to the students and for her.

In contrast Myers was actively involved with the re-organization of the Native Student Association during her second time around at OCADU. Additionally she began staging student art exhibitions for Native students in both ad hoc and designated exhibition spaces in and outside the University. This activity spoke to the objectives of her program, to develop a curatorial and critical practice but it was also a personal commitment on Myers's part. When she started her MFA at OCADU in 2009, Myers also found that the faculty encompassed Indigenous professors

but equally important to Myers was the realization that the course materials and references in class reflected a broadened recognition of the contributions of Indigenous peoples and an acknowledgement of the need for decolonization. She believes the integration of her experiences at the Enaahtig Healing Lodge with her graduate work has been very valuable. She believes that from the point in her undergraduate years where she learned the words of colonialism she has been better able to express herself and to better understand the experiences of the artists she works with as well as helping her to express her Euro-Indigenous personal history.

As the exception, Cachene's four-year program concentrated on preparing students to teach at the high school level with an emphasis on Aboriginal processes, worldviews and knowledge. Cachene majored in art but was required to take courses in the principles of education, curriculum development, Indigenous education, as well as reading, language and literacy courses. Cachene is the only one of the four who attended an institution that had a majority of First Nation students, a mandate to include First Nation content in all subject areas, and a guiding principle of transforming education away from the transmission style of teaching as described by Freire (1994) to one that is centred on decolonization, politicization and liberation (Faith 2007). It is also the university with the smallest student enrolment of the four different schools attended by these artists.[2] Given the small student population, Faith noted that the size of First Nations University means that relationships are built between students and faculty and this can lead to the sharing of knowledge between student and professor, a turn of events that can be key to the practice of decolonizing education (Faith, p. 10).

According to Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005) and Huffman (2010) decolonization is a concerted effort to resist subjugation of Native peoples in all forms and the first requirement is to "question the legitimacy of colonization" (Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005, p. 2). The insertion of an Indigenous worldview into the academy is an on-going issue, as Eurocentric thought either ignores or pushes all other points of view to the periphery (Little Bear in Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Walker, 2004). Walker states that this marginalization of Indigenous worldviews "has been and continues to be one of the major tools of colonization" (Walker, 2004, p. 531).

Within the institution, to decolonize requires a concerted attempt to establish Indigenous views and ways of understanding into the academic program. The larger view is two-fold: to

2 The figures I found for the student population for FNUC Regina were for 2011(600 students) and 2013 (750 students). http://www.fnuniv.ca/facts (accessed June 19, 2014).

challenge Euro-centric theories and methods (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and to create a shared perspective of unified scholarly purpose and identity for all people (Huffman, 2008, p. 209).

Faith and Hampton (1995) recognized, and as Myers corroborated as the case at OCADU, schools across Canada have been working toward inserting Indigenous content into the curriculum and teaching materials and adapting liberatory teaching methods since the mid-1990s. Nevertheless neither Niro nor Myre spoke of any personal recognition of the policies of decolonizing the curriculum or teaching practices within the Fine Arts faculties they attended. Each of the artists described the strong relationships they built with faculty members but only Myers described an active decolonization in the faculty and teaching practices that took place at OCADU. Niro, Myers and Myre all benefited from the class size of their graduate programs but there is a difference in that the teaching tradition of dominant culture universities is largely based on a dominant-male-Euro- scientific standard (hooks, 1994; Graveline, 1998; Faith, 2007) and as such the student-faculty relationship did not impact the teaching material beyond what each student brought to the program.

Negotiating Identity

The comparisons between FNUC and the other three universities go beyond the basics of student enrolment, department size and number of faculty especially in the context of this research study. Most significantly, the difference lay in the fact that three artists were required to negotiate their cultural identity within the context of a dominant culture institution.

According to Lowe (2005) there appears to be little research or literature on the Native post-secondary student experience or on their negotiation of cultural identity within the context of a dominant culture institution. For the Indigenous students who attend dominant culture institutions Huffman (2010) hypotheses that students must learn the cultural nuances within mainstream education while retaining and relying upon their cultural heritage to forge a strong identity and a sense of purpose. He goes on to state that a strong cultural identity is a necessary "emotional and cultural anchor" (p. 171). Much has been written of the difficulty Native students have in fitting into dominant culture institutions. Horse (2005) compiled a list of five elements that shaped cultural identity and which taken together would lead to greater success in an educational context. These included grounding in language and culture, valid genealogy,

adherence to traditional philosophy and worldview, a self-concept of being Native and tribal or band enrolment.

Lowe (2005) cited the problem of students not understanding the social norms of the school and a feeling of alienation experienced by students. She also stated that students find they must fight stereotypes, negativity and ignorance regarding Native cultures. Students also need to learn to be comfortable at school and away from home and to have a determination to graduate. These concerns relate to the importance of transculturation, which according to Huffman (2010), acts as a form of socialization in which cultural exchanges are or should be part of an enhanced process of cultural learning that results in the ability to effectively participate in more than one cultural setting.

However other researchers, feminist and Indigenous, offer another point of view stating that within the academy, women and cultural minorities can find their own creative and liberatory space–spaces which become a form of resistance as they establish or negotiate their identity. The artist, curator and scholar Gerald McMaster (1995) made note of the way artists find community and creative spaces no matter where they work and I believe this is applicable to the situation of the artists in the university setting, no matter which school they attended. McMaster described this creative space as the 'border zone.' For him this zone is "an in-between, an area of contemplation, a space where social spaces intersect, a space of re-territorialization, an expansion of space, a space where social agents interrogate and negotiate their conditions of existence, and a space from which to begin a search for camaraderie" (p. 75). The border zone is a site for various practices, including resistance and the articulation of self-identity but most importantly it is "a sovereign space from which the artists can hold up a mirror to the dominant society, disrupt the flow of images and be multi-vocal" (, p. 82).

Accordingly the spaces can be both cultural and physical. Feminist writers have also described how women artists have both historically and more contemporaneously found room to create their own identity, spaces and community within the institution. Foster (2000), proposed that women's often unacknowledged activity is at the margins of any institution, and that women's performance within this marginal space may lead to a counter-practice and most importantly to new forms of community. hooks (1990) too wrote of the importance of the marginal space for women and minorities. She saw this space as a site of resistance (p. 153) as it is not an imposed marginality but for her a place of openness and possibility.

Within the institution, each of the four women artists were required to make a choice of what being female and Indigenous meant to her personally and then find the space to begin creating art based on her family history, memories and stories. The Bachelor of Education for Cachene and graduate work for each of the others gave them opportunities to further explore their self- and cultural-identities and establish the connections to a culturally, socially, politically motivated artistic expression of their life experiences.

Part 2: Transition to Accomplished Artist

The second part of the cross-case analysis begins with a discussion of the mentors who supported each of the artists and the transformational elements or experiences of their education that led each of the artists to the next stage of her development as a professional artist. This section then focuses on what it means to be an accomplished artist for each of the artists in terms of her identity as artist, her perceived audience, her philosophy of art and art education, her experience of the artist's role in the community and finally a discussion of her self-definition as an artist.

Family Support Mentor

Each of the artists had at least one person they considered an important mentor. All the artists except Cachene named a family member as a mentor. Niro recognized her parents exclusively as her mentors. She acknowledged their work ethic, the example they set for her and her siblings, the freedom they gave her to express herself and finally their implicit belief in her abilities and understanding she would do well. She also believes they made a strong connection between art making and material cultures and as a result instilled in her a strong sense of her Haudenosaunee heritage.

Myre gave credit to her father as a mentor to her as he introduced her to ideas, materials and created many opportunities for her to make art from a young age. In addition she feels it was very important to her that he had introduced her to artists such as Vaillancourt, actively supported her efforts and because he helped her to make the connections between art and political action.

Lisa Myers credited the support she received from her older sister Ronda as very important and mentor-like. Myers also sees her grandfather as a mentor because in his commitment to photography he exhibited both an aesthetic response and set an example of determination.

Cachene was exceptional amongst the four artists, as she did not identify any one in her family as a mentor. She believes that her mentor was her childhood friend, because she introduced Cachene to art and art materials and motivated her to become an artist.

Art Educator Mentor

Three of the artists also recognized a particular art educator as being important to them as aspiring art students. Stokrocki (2009) defined these mentors in much the same way each of the artists did, when she stated that a mentor could be essential for achieving success as they pass on important formative knowledge and provide the resources required for future success. Cachene recognized her art school professor Jack Severson as a mentor, as he modeled a commitment to art and creative expression and she believes she continues to exemplify his open-minded and non-partisan approach to artistic expression for her own students. Similarly Myers named Lisa Steele at OCA as a mentor. She stated that the art educator became important to her as a result of personal life events and the feminist politics of the late 1980s and these merged around this professor and therefore her importance to Myers's was heightened. After having had less than positive experiences at secondary school, Nadia Myre found success at community college in British Columbia. She made a point of mentioning the artist-educator Ralph Stanbridge who taught her at Camosun College and named him as a mentor because she felt he was very influential in keeping her on track and moving her forward in her developing art practice.

Niro was the exception, as she could not name an art teacher or educator as a mentor despite recognizing the support and skills she had received from various faculty at the post-secondary institutions she attended. She also named Tom Hill, director of the Woodlands Cultural Centre, as an important guide for her. Broadly speaking the mentors introduced the artists to a work ethic, art materials, art skills, new ideas and artists, and in certain situations made the link to cultural heritage.

The findings of researchers interested in mentorship were borne out in the conversations with the artists when asked about the people they considered mentors. Carpenter, Sullivan, and

Zimmerman (2009) compiled the qualities of a good mentor, and amongst others these included having the traits of guide and critic, the ability to recognize the individual's qualities and then investing in or make a commitment to encouraging them. This was certainly the case for each of the artists as they all showed promise at the undergraduate level and beyond and one can imagine that the art professors recognized their commitment. Stokrocki (2009) further asserted that mentoring provides meaningful dialogic relationships because the relationship is built on shared experiences, and both mentor and pupil share the similar concerns and qualities of "persistence, desire for connection, evolv[ution], …[and] reciprocity" (p. 144).

Coates (1996) and Zander (2007) have written of mentoring between women and in educational settings and concluded that mentoring can go both directions, as teachers need support too. They found that students often over time teach their teachers new art forms and motivate them with new pedagogical ideas. The idea that students can influence their professors is borne out when considering the fact that by the time the four artists were enrolled in their post-secondary institution each of them had a well-developed sense of their cultural heritage, which they were expressing in a way that impacted the institution and the teachers they came into contact with. They were also entering universities and art departments at a time when faculty and administrators had hired or were beginning to hire Indigenous faculty members as well as incorporate and broaden the scope of their programming to include artists from various traditions and to address decolonization in the course materials. This may well have been the case when OCADU brought a student such as Myers into the university as she would certainly be an asset to her program and its faculty. This is because she brought with her both community experience and an interest in bringing together art and issues of importance to Native communities. In addition she was prepared to share the stories and materials she had accumulated with a new audience as well as curate student exhibitions and other on-site events. Myers said having had time away and developing a real sense of community with the people and Native associations of central Ontario meant that on her return to OCADU she was very interested in looking at Indigenous work and thinking about the issues and the context for this material in the university setting. Similarly Niro with her expanding expertise in First Nation filmmaking took on the job of curating two Native film festivals while at UWO, thus taking an opportunity to introduce cultural material into the university setting that may not otherwise have occurred.

Leaving Home

The experience of education was transformative for each of the artists. According to Freire (1994) the objective for transformative learning is for education to broaden one's experiences and allow one to begin to think in ways that open the mind to new possibilities in one's own life and in the ways one views the world. hooks (1990) writes of the need to leave one place or one's home, as the work of leaving contributes to the transformative impact of education. Both Niro and Myre left home to go to school.

While Myre traveled to the other side of Canada, Niro did not go too far. She originally left Brantford to go to community college in Sudbury and later she went to Toronto and then to London, Ontario. She said that she knew from her adolescence onward that she needed to leave the Six Nations to see what else the world had to offer. On returning home she was able, as hooks theorized, to see what she had not seen previously. This is evident in her work from the time of her undergraduate degree onward. From that period Niro began to work more often with her mother and sisters and used their presence in her work to talk about women's position in contemporary Mohawk culture, and her work grew more political as she responded to the Oka Crisis in the summer of 1990. In the next phase of her education, she was able to research and experience the transformative impact of learning more about the role of the Great Peacemaker and the contribution he made to improving the lives and spirit of the people after the colonial conquest. This research coincided with her increasing interest in telling stories through film. But it was in the positively altered sensibility of what she could accomplish as an artist-filmmaker that her educational experience was most telling. As Niro said, it was the point at which she realized she could represent Native people in a way that was true to her as a Native woman.

As mentioned above, Myre crossed the country to restart her post-secondary education. For her, leaving home and travelling on her own ended with the positive academic experiences she had at Camosun College and later at Emily Carr, both of which set her up for success and the eventual MFA at Concordia University. The experience of education was transformative for Myre. As she said in our interview she only made the decision to become an artist, rather than a poet, at the end of her graduate degree as it was through her art education she realized work that incorporated language in new ways. For example seeing the way language or words can enter into artwork, as in the work by Edgar Heap of Birds, helped Myre recognize the connections

between language and the issues of land and colonialism. The Heap of Birds's work was foretelling in terms of her attraction to both art and language and allowed her to think of art beyond the formalism she had grown up with and helped her set out on her own educational path.

To go to OCA Lisa Myers moved from the suburbs to downtown Toronto but then she made another slightly different type of move away–from one department to another– when she made a choice in the first weeks of her undergraduate stint at OCA. This was a galvanizing decision for Myers, to move out of the Painting program and into the New Media program. This move heightened her self-confidence and brought her into contact with a new medium and faculty members, many of whom were women prepared to share their feminist politics with their students. It was a good decision as it led Myers to learn the ideology of the personal is political and that lesson had a tremendous impact on her and the stories she has since incorporated into her art practice. Myers also moved away from academia and took more than a decade to pursue other interests, first music and then cooking in a centre that focused on healing and food security for Indigenous people in central Ontario. For Myers this very practical approach brought together the academic material she had learned, such as learning the language of colonialism, and the on-the-ground experience of working with people who had a daily experience of colonialism. These combined experiences were transformative for her as in her time away from academia she was able to articulate her sensibilities and formulate a response to her mother's and grandfather's experiences, and this put her in a good stead on her return to a graduate program.

While she did not move away from Regina, the experience of working with a very compatible and inspiring teacher was transformative for Cachene. Through the professional relationship she developed with Severson she realized that she should become a teacher. Cachene is the only one of the four artists who did not leave home to go to school, be that as it may, meeting Severson and immersing herself in the SIFC and later FNUC gave her a new way to look at the world. At school she learned creative approaches and developed open mindedness to art experiences. Both these were important lessons taught to her by her mentors and helped transform the way she thought of herself. The experiences that Cachene took away from the Indian Art Program and working with Severson carried forward into the work she does now as an art educator.

For hooks (1994) it is essential that if education is to be transformative, pedagogical strategies must be developed to ensure that all students (especially in the context of dominant

culture universities) can "engage…fully [with] the ideas and issues that seem to have no direct relation to their experience [and in doing so]…create [a]…classroom that engages everyone…[and ensures] personal experience is incorporated in ways that deepen discussion" (p. 86). For the student, recognizing the transformative moment or experience is essential. It does not need to be a moment of awareness during the event itself but on reflection or in another context one should recognize that change has occurred. hooks believes education is transformative when students have time to reflect on their changing perspectives and begin seeing things differently and this may take place either immediately or over time. In this instance transformation occurs by living life and accepting change, new knowledge or experiences.

I am an Artist

The women all said they self-identify as artists when asked, though some said they were more reluctant to state this. All talked about how they came to the point where they were finally able to say this out loud. While I asked specifically about the women's identity as artists the question of identity formation and the connection between cultural identity and their role as artists entered into this question. Phinney (1990) and Garoian (2002) trace the construction of identity to childhood and adolescence. Garoian stated that from childhood we learn that identities are constructed and that who we are or who we can be is always in formation. It is the combination of social and cultural experiences that help the adolescent construct an identity. He further states that rich family relationships contribute to the formation of a strong identity when children can build on their own gathered experiences and memories and at that same time are given a good sense of their family history. For Phinney individuals develop distinctive personal identities because of their unique life histories, experiences and personality traits. She delved into the connections between ethnic or cultural identity and found that an achieved ethnic identity contributes positively to self-esteem and this in turn promotes a positive sense of self, which has an impact on life decisions and adjustment to one's career or profession.

Cachene was the one who stated that if asked she would most likely tell people she is an art educator rather than an artist. This may be because , of the four she had taken the most time away from making art and had substantially stopped thinking of herself as an artist. She stated that for many years most of her energy was directed towards teaching; as she wanted to give her

students the chance to experience art as a creative force in the same way she had. She admitted that her students did not know that she was a professional artist and she had never or rarely exhibited her own artistic skills in the classroom. She found that getting re-involved in art as a community arts organizer caused her to re-evaluate who she is. She realized as she became involved with this group that her sense of herself as an artist was put in question. This is because her first inclination has always been to be the art educator and set up an art table where others can make art. She stated that she has begun to think of, if not proclaim herself to be an artist.

As a child Myers said she quite categorically told people that she was going to be an artist when she grew up. As an adult she has become slightly less confident but she said that recently she has begun to say 'I'm an artist'. Her increased sense of herself as an artist- curator means that for Myers as an accomplished artist, she can now tell her own story. This has meant that as she has emerged into her own professional career she has taken the story she had known all her life and given it her own perspective.

For both Cachene and Myers we can perhaps return to Phinney's (1990) argument regarding self-identity, where she reasons that personal identity can come from the combined experience of life history, experiences and personality traits. She also stated that personal identities are acquired and developed within the web of our culture, arguing people can make a self-identification when they feel that they are members of a group, and have a sense of shared attitudes and values and practices such as language, behaviour and customs.

Myre said she always identifies as a professional artist. She is very comfortable with who she is, the position she occupies and the work she is doing. She has not always felt this way but over the past decade she is much more confident in her self and in her professional identity. She says as a professional (with her own skill set) she does not hesitate to seek out people who can assist her in filling in what she believes are the missing links to, and knowledge of, her cultural heritage. This applies as much to finding bead workers or woodworkers as it does to putting out a call for others to take part in her participatory art projects or contribute stories to her projects.

Niro said it took her a long time to be comfortable enough to say she was an artist but now she can. As stated earlier the Great Peacemaker has become an important and heroic figure for Niro. The figure was first incorporated into her paintings during her MFA and later into her film work. The Peacemaker has given Niro a way to think about the role of mediator and the links between the past and present. In turn, she has been able to make links between her identity as an

artist, her accomplishments as an artist and the Native community. In this way she is acting as a mediator and an instigator of change and this has entered into her identity as an artist.

In *Mixed Blessings* (1990) Lippard argued that within minority groups, the search for cultural identity and self-identity is an on-going process, and art making allows people to connect to their identities. She further stated that art has social and aesthetic meanings and it enables artists to see the larger meaning of their life experiences. In a later essay on feminist art, Lippard (1995) stated that over the previous thirty-year period, establishing a self-identity as an artist has been an important process for women artists. Additionally she found that women artists with a strong sense of identity were more often creating work that operated as a form of resistance to colonialism and oppression.

More recently, Choi Caruso (2005) in her study of Korean American women artists found that women in this minority group were creating art in response to cultural heritage and through their art questioning identity, gender, ethnicity, politics, cultural and socioeconomic status. Choi Caruso cites Lauter's (1993) position that women reveal important components of their life experiences and thought processes through their art-making and that art can connect one's aesthetic values to political activity. Liu (2011) investigated the lives of nine Chinese artists and found that life experiences, rather than the varied art educational experiences, were of more importance to their artistic creation than she had originally expected.

Pollock (1988) in her classic volume on women, femininity and art history made the connection between women and art as a social practice through which one's sense of the world is formed, reproduced and delineated. Feminist art historians and women artists often speak of the history and continued experience of women forming an identity as artists in private quarters or in the context of a shared experience with other women. Hannigan (2012), as an artist-educator wrote of how the combination of her education, her life habits, living spaces and professional path have all intertwined to create her sense of identity. In addition she has noted the importance of situating herself in a place or in a locale in which like-minded people are found, and the ways in which doing so both adds to and incorporates her artistic practice.

As we have seen the women artists in this study have a strong sense of their identity as professional artists and have immersed themselves in communities or situations where they are validated as artists. Identity formation is a long-term process that changes and develops over time and as a result of different experiences, these four artists at the time of our interviews all

professed to be comfortable with naming themselves as artists. In doing so (or as a result of this) they have developed workspaces, support networks and venues for exhibiting their work. They each have a good idea of who their audience is and what they want their audience to know about or take away from viewing their work.

Giving a Voice

The liminal space that exists between the artist's work and the viewer can be a highly charged or vulnerable point for the one showing the work and for the viewer. There are many theories regarding the audience and its response to an artist's work. These include: a purely aesthetic response, an emotional response, a shared understanding, a statement to the art world or a particular audience or the work is part of a continuum in the viewer's mind that works in combination with all the art seen (Zangwill, 1999). Zangwill stated that the artist always has an intention in regard to the work of art – "no intention, no work of art" (p. 315).

Each of the artists was asked about their perceived art audience. Niro was the most categorical and stated that her audience is women. She was unequivocal in saying that this is the case because her objective is to give women a voice. Myers spoke in terms of a wider audience made up of different groups that she has come in contact with including her students and others in the academic institution, as well as the people who were her co-workers and others she became acquainted with when she worked in food preparation and as a cook. She wants her audience to take away an awareness of food issues and food safety as well as the connections between food and story telling. Myre sees her audience as diverse and she said she prefers that this is the case. She also said she wants her work to be seen by many people, in diverse settings and situations, and she does not want the audience to be confined to an urban art audience. While Myre exhibits widely it would be a rare occurrence for her work to be exhibited on First Nation land. In Trepanier's (2008) Canada Council sponsored study, *Aboriginal Arts Research Initiative* she noted that Aboriginal artists generally keep in contact with their communities and this may have an impact on their art practices but there is rarely the infrastructure to exhibit contemporary art. This is often because art is usually linked with powwows, friendship centres, cultural centres and these settings are not recognized as professional sites (and therefore are ineligible for arts funding). Myre has followed through with her stated aim of exhibiting her work outside of large

urban centres–close to but not on Native land. For example in her home province of Quebec, in the years, 2011-2014, she exhibited in the Laurentians, in the Quebec City region, in the Gaspe Bay, in Rouyn-Noranda and in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region.

Cachene is the artist with the most limited professional exhibition experience, and as a result she sees her audience as the people who attend the Art Market. In this capacity she sees people who are interested in art but may not have had many opportunities to interact with art-makers. Her ethic shines through in this intention as she is at heart an art educator and her objective is to introduce people to art and to give them the opportunity to creatively engage.

None of the artists specifically mentioned a First Nations' audience as their intended viewers, nevertheless the intent is clear as each of the artists show or have shown their work in settings that attract a diverse audience–from large institutions to small commercial galleries, artist run centres, community centres and Maisons de la culture in both large and small municipalities. Each of the artists is interested in creating a dialogue between artist and viewer. Overall it is important to these artists that the art viewers attending their exhibitions or viewing their art come with an open mind and an interest in seeing work that questions old assumptions and proposes both new questions and ideas.

Many theorists, Eisner (2002) Gruber (1989), Greene (2000), Hill Collins (1998), and Nussbaum (1997) have argued that artists have an obligation to both speak up and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Patricia Hill Collins states that in speaking for oneself an artist can empower herself and her audience when they examine their own experiences and create work based on this material. Thus returning to the ideology of the personal is/becomes political. Nussbaum considers art playing a vital role, because it cultivates the audience's imagination in terms of social responsibility. Howard Gruber proposed that the objective of art is to mobilize people, unmask prejudice, and secure justice. In making the connections between art and the marginalized Greene suggested that the arts reveal the myriad of existence, of being human, relating to others and of being other. As a result she calls for artists to present a picture of inclusion, pluralism, different voices and democracy for their audiences. Eisner acknowledged art as a method to expand consciousness, shape dispositions, satisfy the search for meaning, establish contact with others, and share culture. He also explored the possibility of art as a tool for awakening people to the world around them as art can provide a way of knowing and understanding the environment and our place in it.

Reciprocity

For three of the artists especially, their professed objective for their art and the relationship to their audience is reflected in their philosophy of art education. The artists all revealed the elements of the internal dialogue they have in regard to why or what it means to make art and share their art with others. Three of the artists, Myre, Myers and Cachene identified themselves as art educators but Niro did not consider herself to be an educator. Niro has a very pragmatic philosophy of art that seemingly goes back to the way her parents set about making art–just do it! She believes that producing work is the most important thing an artist does, because for her it is simply necessary to keep working no matter what the end result is.

Nadia Myre's philosophy aligns with the diversity of her ideal audience in terms of her goal to further the transmission of knowledge. For her, knowledge comes to us through listening, reading or doing and everyone can participate in this diffusion of knowledge. For Myre everyone can become involved in art because she believes there is "a memory knowledge in the body" and even if this has been lost or dormant you can re-learn the material or the skill. Myre's interest in body memory speaks to two aspects of the inclusive nature of her work–one is her pushing herself to take on projects she knows little of or has previously had little skill in, such as beading or building a canoe and the consequent required support of skilled workers. Secondly, the participatory projects that she instigates give the contributors/collaborators the opportunity to reveal their knowledge, skills or memories.

Cachene's philosophy is based in her association with her art professor. In this she appears as unconcerned with mastery as Severson was. Her objective is to teach people how to bring out their own creativity. She wants people, whether students or viewers to bring their own stories to the forefront and express themselves. Her fear is that people will lose their "voice" and their creativity will be shut down and therefore it is important to continue to offer the space for people to learn or make art. Myers is also interested in the reciprocity of knowledge between herself, her students or her audience. As she said, she is very pleased when she knows she can offer information and then finds that she will learn something too. Myers has taken much from her own experiences, as a self-conscious undergraduate and as someone who has learned new things from a wide community of people. As a result she has learned that the best outcome is to give

people the chance to ask questions. She is very concerned that everyone understands that they have a voice and will not feel silenced within a safe space.

As artist-educators these women are using their art making as a vehicle for social responsibility. Through their art they are developing their own voice and making sure that others have the same opportunity. They are role models even if they are not knowingly situating themselves this way. Hatfield, Montana, and Deffenbaugh (2006) found that most artist-educators valued being recognized as both artist and teacher and that this was empowering for them. These authors concluded that being an artist is to have a "calling."

Promoting Knowledge

It is a common belief in western society that visual and other arts in our cities and towns are a positive element as they enhance community life and people's understanding of the world around them. A community-based relationship with the arts gives citizens a chance to broaden their perspective and the sense that they too can express themselves creatively.

In this section I again found parallels between the artists and their conception of their audience, their philosophy of art education and how they view their role in community. Cachene sees it as her role to introduce art and encourage people to make art. In fact her commitment and self-identification as an art educator has meant until relatively recently that she did not first consider a role for herself as an artist.

Myre needs her role in the community to be diverse. At the same time it is integral to her and her perception of herself as an artist that the artist be the memory holder. She sees it as her responsibility to remind community members of what has happened before and to document events for the time to come. This is related to the fact that Myre also sees herself as a visual activist and in this role she works for political causes, makes art that is politically based or has a political meaning.

Similarly Niro has a quietly political objective, which is to record the people in her community (from Brantford, Six Nations to the wider context of North America/Turtle Island) so that they have an image of themselves. She sees this as the compilation of an archive of images for posterity but it is also the active creation of a bank of images that give people a chance to 'talk back' to the stereotypical representation of the First Nations.

For Myers, her community role as an art educator and artist is multi-faceted. Her priority is that she contributes to both the re-definition of and the creation of knowledge. She also sees her role as a reciprocal one as she sees herself as an artist who contributes to society broadly based on the skills or techniques of engagement that she learned in the Native community. By this she means that it was while working at Enaahtig and with outreach workers that she gained an understanding of the connections between community and teaching. She feels that she furthers this knowledge when she participates in helping others tell the history, incorporates Indigenous people into the history, and by building relationships and getting people to tell their own stories.

On her blog, *Not Artomatic: A Blog Wrestling with Art* in 2010, artist and art historian Lara Evans posed the question, "What is so important about Native American Art?" As a Native American artist she stated that she asked the question because the Native population has been in flux since the beginning of contact with Europeans and this continues to be the case. Added to this situation are the changing demographics of the Native population including: the declining number of elders, the increasing population of young people, and relocation from rural to urban centres. Evans believes the simple answer to her question of why Native arts are important is that art strengthens support systems and provides models of survivance.[3] Accordingly to return to the question posed by Evans above, she sees art in all its forms, visual art as well as stories, dance and theatre, as helping to contextualize present day issues and provide the tools that are required to help Indigenous people manage change. In her blog post, Evans imagines that art producers are making a significant contribution to helping people build and maintain relationships and states, "art is more than a reaction to events in our lives; artistic practice also leads to real world changes" (Evans, 2010, n.p.) She gives the example of the connections between artistic production and environmental actions leading to positive changes but she also considers the fact that on an individual basis an artist is able to contextualize social, economic, political and spiritual dimensions of experience through their art practice. By doing so, artists help community members experience healthful lives, and find ways to establish and maintain relationships with diverse people.

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3 Survivance is a term invented by Anishinaabe writer and academic Gerald Vizenor, that brings together the words survival and resistance and is meant to imply a process of changing that is rooted in resistance (and is a distinctive feature of Native cultures). Gerald Vizenor's writing often relies on the figure of the Trickster and his major theme is the "Indian" as a construction of European invaders. In *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1998) he began to use the word survivance – as he wanted to convey the ways tribal people continue to change.

Telling Personal Stories

With post-modernism and the collapse of the great myths of, for example, colonial power and women's place in history, artists of late twentieth and early twenty-first century have sought a new sense of purpose. It may be said that many artists have found purpose by making political work focused on the present. In doing so, as the artists in this research project have done, contemporary artists are looking at their own life, basing their art on their own experiences and scrutinizing their own identity as a source for their art practice.

In considering the implication of what self-representation means to each artist, I consulted the Merriam-Webster dictionary where self-representation is defined as "the act of representing." It is therefore interesting to find that the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1994) argued that cultural identity is a production made within representation and undergoes constant transformation and it is continuously constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. And Homi K. Bhaba (1996) regarded the self as a construction that needs to perform and be in relation with other subjects.

As the focus of this research is the connection between art experiences and cultural identity, I asked each of the artists if there was work in their oeuvre that was self-representative. I took as my starting point that each artist would consider one work to be more self-representative than others. Interestingly only two of the four felt they could identify such a work in their production.

Cachene and Myre could not commit to one work of art but did not deny that their work has personal meaning or is self-representational in some ways. They did not want to link self-identifying markers to any particular work. In his discussion of the expressive art object and how meaning must go beyond the aesthetic value, Dewey (1934) asserted that making (or viewing) art cannot be separated from life. When the artist makes work, the work reveals the nature of the artist's experience, and when the viewing public sees the work it should bring about a new understanding of the world and possibly of the artist's experience (p. 84-85). Cachene told me that she has not "made that one yet" and that she is "still trying to figure that one out." It was significant during our interview that Cachene said that she could not see herself painting the nude female figure anymore. As she has taken up painting again and is making a commitment to her own practice, Cachene seems to be bringing a lyricism into her work. In her recent paintings

she is incorporating natural elements with pattern-making and expressive paintwork. It is possible to read an Indigenous sensibility into the work but this is not overt (in all cases) and Cachene herself does not believe the work is implicitly speaking to her Anishinaabe heritage.

Myre would not speak of any one piece of work that was representative of who she is. She did qualify this by saying that she could not specify anything at this time but perhaps she may have been able to do, "…maybe when I'm 80…" (Myre transcription, p. 11-12). It may be that Myre was reluctant to identify a work as she is leery of the subjectivity assigned to women's art and as an Indigenous artist there may be an added weight given to this. She did however state that she has a "strong desire to make materially invested objects" (Myre transcription p. 11). Her need to make work that is essential and relevant is obvious. For much of the past decade, Myre has repeatedly returned to beading worked on an intimate scale and then reproducing it in large-scale photographs. The beadwork has been referred to as acting as recuperation from the scars of loss and healing (Dyck, 2011; Garneau, 2009; Tougas, 2013). Garneau went on to suggest that Myre struggles with the desire to use beads as a form of language or visual language "to express but not be taken only at her word" (Garneau, *Nadia Myre: Landscape of Sorrow*, paragraph 2). It may be that she knows the works that are most significantly personal but does not need to make a public statement. In her own words, her objective is to stay open and not be pinned down.

Niro and Myers were the artists who would suggest that one of their works is representative. Niro chose the five-part photographic essay entitled, *The Essential Sensuality of Ceremony.* Niro has said of this work, "It is a survival kit for bringing good things into your life and trying to heal yourself " (Niro quoted in Sweet & Berry, 2002, p. 84). Niro also stated that she dislikes feeling that an artist is manipulating her (as a viewer) to take away a particular message from a viewing. Niro believes the work she chose as self-defining is much more nuanced and the viewer needs to look at each piece individually and think about what is occurring in each of the five images. It is useful but not essential to know that Niro is referencing the Peacemaker and in contrast to the legend Niro has placed a woman in the heroic role. Even without this background knowledge the viewer can read the woman as the healer as she is the one who smudges, sings, wipes away the tears, holds the wampum, and feeds the man. In this five work series Niro makes a connection between the relationships that occur across the human and nonhuman worlds and in doing so makes reference to the guiding spirit – The Peacemaker.

This figure is a strong presence in Niro's imagination as he embodies strength, honesty, peace, cooperation and equality amongst nations and between the sexes.

Myers reacted to the question by saying, "That's heavy. I don't know" (Myers transcription 1, p. 19). But she quickly composed herself and decided that the series of four prints in the series *blue prints for a long walk: blueprints, land, water, tracks* (2012) was the work that brings together her sense of herself as an artist, as an individual, and a part of the collective life experiences of her family. This print work is spare. It maps the lines of her family history, cultural memory and the physical memory of her own re-enactment of her grandfather's walk. The maps and topographical renderings of the land and railway tracks in this series are coloured by ink made from blueberries. In this way Myers brings together her commitment to telling stories and her respect for the food that comes from the land.

Whether they identified a specific work or not, all four artists are building an oeuvre that is personal and speaks to their experiences as Indigenous artists. In her own way Niro emphasizes the role of the matriarch from the perspective of the Earth as mother. She is seeking to re-situate the issues, refocus the histories and highlight the roles women play in society. Myre conceives of projects that delve into the territories of loss and healing both on her own and as larger projects that bring people together to explore memory, pain and personal histories. Myre has stated that the experience of her mother and herself claiming their Native Status in 1997 has made the exploration of her identity as a Native woman a priority in her work. For Myers the ideology of the personal is political continues to guide her work. She has taken the small family story of a boy walking two hundred fifty kilometres to chart the larger story of the experience of Indigenous people and the Residential schools in Canada. And Cachene continues to build on her own creative approach to understanding who she is, and in this way she is securing a knowledge base for herself and the next generation.

As discussed in a previous section, the development of cultural identity, self-identity and gender identity is influenced by life experiences within family, social, cultural, political and educational environments. The life experiences of these four women directly influence their art expression. As Choi Caruso (2005) noted in her study art operates as the means through which the artists searched, found and expressed their ethnic, cultural and self-identities. As she found, "Art making helps these artists reinforce political actions that express their personal motivations.

Through the art-making process and personal art expression, they gained a voice, self-knowledge, and a sense of self" (p. 84).

Each of the artist participants is establishing a representation of contemporary Indigeneity from an Indigenous point of view and in doing so they are giving their audience the opportunity to see alternative realities and histories and to gain cultural knowledge.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

This dissertation explored the relationship between art and life experiences and cultural identity in the lives of four contemporary Indigenous women artists. Within the Indigenous paradigm of the Ojibway teachings and protocol, I conducted research into identity explored through narrative. I also looked for an ethical space (Ermine et al, 2004) that supported "bringing together two ways of knowledge [Indigenous and Euro-Western] and applying this [model] to the practice of research" (p. 16). Narrative and life history research came together in a method rooted in Indigenous oral traditions. The conversational method supported the inquiry into life experience and identity. With this methodology I gathered substantial information through the personal narratives of the four women – from early childhood to their current art practice. The narratives are powerful, vibrant and full of memories, experiences, and stories. They offer insight into their experiences of family life and childhood, education, and their professional life. The women were forthcoming with their philosophy of art, education, exhibiting and community involvement. The texts are rich in their understanding of each woman's connection to her individual Aboriginal culture.

This chapter will explore how the research method as well as the material drawn from the women's art and life experiences, philosophies, beliefs and attitudes can inform other researchers working with Indigenous culture, story and art. This dissertation reflects the ways in which Indigenous artists connect to family, community, elders and the ancestors. There is an opportunity for further research that documents experiential aspects of artists' lives, and examines the work of artists contributing to the transformation of Indigenous culture in its various Nations and cultures. The chapter concludes with an overview of the potential future research into art education for Indigenous people as a source of decolonization and survivance.

Implications of the Research for Education

In my introductory chapter I began by situating myself in the research because this research is about personal histories and identity. My objective was to use my grandmother's life experiences to question how we construct the themes of our identity. I found that our self worth

is or can be established through the connections to tradition and kin. Identity theories assume that people care about themselves, want to know who they are and use this information to make sense of the world (Lawler, 2008; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2011). The four women in this research told rich stories of art making as children and students and the connections that they made through art to their community and through art education that in it self was transformative. Their stories were incredibly rich. This doctoral study has implications for Art Education because it examined the ways in which the four artist-participants have– through art and life events articulated their cultural identity. This research examined formative and professional experiences where art education intersected with identity and models how other educators may further explore the connections between personal, social, cultural experiences and community action.

The significance of the current research lies in the importance placed on storytelling and culture in the context of art education, and through the examination of the ways in which the art education classroom can be a site for decolonization. In drawing this work to a conclusion I became aware of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015), in doing so I have added new material here as I believe as educators we need to consider how the TRC's findings and related research projects such as Corntassel and T'lakwadzi (2009), Prairie Women's Health Centre (2012) and *inVIBISIBILITY (2013)*) can be incorporated into classrooms and practice. The objective of the TRC lies in decolonizing the education system and the writers suggest the use of story and telling the histories and exploring identities will be a positive move towards decolonization. This aspect is more fully examined in the first section here but there are further implications for decolonizing the academy in the structure of this dissertation. As through the methodology I have endeavoured to model the use of an Indigenous paradigm as a research methodology for art education.

Story-telling, Cultural Identity and Education

The life experiences examined in this dissertation corroborate Walsh's (2002) suggestion that for children or young people to find success or competency in school arts they need to be able to relate what they learn to their own understanding of the world. Additionally if the objective of art education is that the development of artistic skill leads to the construction of an artistic self there has to be a relatable social meaning in this mix. In order for children to build on

previous skills they have to be able to incorporate their own life experience and knowledge into the art programming.

A growing body of research demonstrates that Aboriginal students' self esteem is a key factor in their school success (Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003). An educational environment that honours the culture, language, and worldview of the student is critical to this process. The curriculum and pedagogy of schools needs to meaningfully represent and include Aboriginal people's contributions, innovations and inventions. It is essential for students that schools respect 'who they are' and 'where they have come from' (Antone, 2003; van der Wey, 2001).

Art educators Stuhr (2003) and Gude (2009) made a strong case for connecting art education practice from a variety of perspectives to student lives. For Stuhr this means offering meaningful experiences to students in the art classroom, participating with material culture, and interacting with contemporary issues and ideas. Her goal is developing "social justice" and a subsequent understanding of the world for the student (p. 303). For Olivia Gude, as an art educator working with adolescents, her emphasis is on very good quality art education that offers students the opportunity to articulate their experiences in contemporary society. Based on her own teaching experiences Gude understands that when adolescents have experienced relevant and articulate art education they have a transformative experience that contributes both to them as self-actualized art students and also impacts their worldview and perspective of the world. She goes on to iterate that arts education can teach the skills and concepts to students that will contribute to their sense of themselves as members of a community, and in turn through such teaching they will have been given the opportunity to investigate and represent their own experiences which in turn helps generate both personal and shared meaning.

Research shows that the use of story can connect education and cultural identity in ways that is beneficial to students and others more generally. For one, Peralta (2010) recognizes that story is a way of conveying a personal truth or perspective. Stories also have the ability to relay morality, judgment, history, life lessons, or cultural memories. Like art, stories can help create a place and build community.

The artists in this dissertation were also reconstructing and reconciling the present and the past. This was most evident in the introduction of material culture into their work. For example, Myers made use of the blueberries that are both an element of her grandfather's story of Residential School survival and an art medium as printing ink. As well, they served as a

sculptural element in her time-based media and the creation of landscape with berry dipped wooden spoons. Niro reinterprets the figure of the Great Peacemaker as she changes his gender and situates him in contemporary time. Cachene reclaims images often associated with Indigenous cultures to painted surfaces often re-interpreting these images as self-portraiture. Myre meshes the modern material of aluminum with wood and birch bark and in another body of work, she alters the state of infinitesimally small glass beads by increasing their scale magnificently. It was the stories related to their cultural identity and practice that brought much of this material to the forefront. I believe such stories told by other artists would be equally compelling.

Other researchers have learned the life stories of artists and cultural workers. Art education researchers, in two different studies Irwin, Rogers and Wan (1997, 1999) carried out research that brought together story, cultural identity and art practice. In these projects their research situates the creation of an artistic identity in a multi-cultural world as strength of cultural identity. These researchers tell the stories of artists who are reclaiming socio-cultural histories (as a result of colonialism) and in turn or thus, creating their cultural identity based on their practice as well as their connections to family, community and spirituality. This is similar to what Choi Caruso did in her study (2005) of culturally, socially, and politically motivated artistic expression in the work of two women artists (one Korean and the other Korean-American). Through story and analysis of their art practice, Choi Caruso examined the women's experiences as women and as Korean immigrant members of a cultural minority in American society.

Liu (2011) used narrative research to learn the life history of nine Chinese artists. She interviewed artists from different generations to ascertain their experiences of art learning and societal influences. She focussed less on the artist's cultural identity as it was significant to look more closely at the changing aspect of art education in China through the twentieth century. Reid (2012) took the art museum as her starting point for an investigation into the life history of art museum educators – both the personal and professional identities of five people were explored (including Reid). Through narratives she was able to have the educators articulate their beliefs, attitudes and practices based on experiences with art museums across their lifetime.

The stories of identity in each of these research projects are rich and insightful and indicate the value of such study. There is a great need to tell people's stories and I suggest that the life experiences and histories of Indigenous artists would considerably add to the literature. This

research would be worthy as it would recognize the collective intelligence and ability of Aboriginal people, and promote Indigenous ways of knowing and exploring the world. Secondly this research would note and act on the impact of colonization and the ways in which artists are telling their personal stories and in doing so, record the story of colonialism from a point of view alternative to the Euro-western. In this way they are making space for decolonization.

While Efland (1990) suggested that art educators may not be able to change society, we can propose ways to enrich the educational experience of learners through curriculum and pedagogy. More recently and since having done this body of research, I note that in the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015) emphasis has been placed on the role of storytelling and education. The TRC has made strong links between story, education, reconciliation and the need to transform the relationship between Native and non-Native Canadians. There is a lack of historical and cultural knowledge and this has created a gulf. The TRC report indicates the need to change educational practices to rectify this lack of knowledge. These changes include development of curriculum on the legacy of the Residential schools but additionally call for changes in policy and practices.

Much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributable to educational institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations. Despite that history, or, perhaps more correctly, because of its potential, the Commission believes that education is also the key to reconciliation. (p. 285)

For me this indicates that research that ensures children see themselves and their cultures, languages and histories in the classroom is necessary. There have been arts-based projects that accumulated stories and histories. However these have focused on the stories and experiences of adult (and again grew out of the TRC's work and advocacy). These projects include the digital story telling project at the University of Victoria and at the Prairie Women's Health Centre (2012). Both projects reinforced the importance of hearing stories of life experience. Further research on such projects as this, can extend beyond the perimeters of the history of the schools.

Research into how students understand story as it pertains to their own life is essential. In particular Indigenous people need to understand that colonization does not need to "be the only story of Indigenous lives" (Corntassel, 2009, p. 138). Corntassel suggests restorying is a way for Indigenous people to tell their story. T'lakwadzi and Corntassel (2009) formed a research project that had survivors tell their stories but emphasizing their cultural and spiritual experiences. They

recognized this research as an alternative and an adjunct to the work of the TRC.

Other researchers such as life historians, Cole and Knowles (2001), Cruikshank (1990, 1998), and Rich (2014) have used the story method as a story about one's own life may resonate more deeply. Life stories or stories of life experience may offer another perspective, and in turn offer an alternative version of the recorded history. Life history is an important method to convey the experiences of a wide variety of people in society because no matter who the teller is, as the storyteller, she holds the power of all the, "open-ended possibilities" (Cruikshank, 1998, p. 72).

Some researchers firmly put themselves into the story of their research, as has been seen in references used in this dissertation. Kovach (2005, 2009, 2010) places herself into the research and at the same time models the ways that stories can be elicited. Absolon and Willet (2005) too locate themselves as they tell their research story and at the same time situate their cultural identity and life experiences. As they write, "In our experience as Indigenous people, the process of telling a story is as much the point as the story itself" (p. 98). Qwul'sih'yahmaht (Robina Thomas, 2005) uses story as research because it honours orality and the stories themselves are a source of pride and give a sense of purpose, guidance and direction – as well as survival and resistance.

The objective of the research described above and the material in this dissertation can only prompt other researchers to add to the body of knowledge. As an art educator I learned much from the artists' personal accounts of their experiences of elementary school art education, the influence and impact of art making in their childhood home and the art education institutions they attended. Learning the life history of artists can only broaden and expand our knowledge of art and art education. By using story and memory we can make meaning of the past, learn from it and transform the future.

Through this research I learned that art could be a vehicle for self-development, self-identity formation and a means to examine one's individual and cultural identity. Furthermore, as seen in the stories in this dissertation art can play a role in personal and social transformation as artists serve as role models of cultural or visual activism. These four artists serve as important links among local communities, schools, art institutions as educators, community leaders and consciousness raisers to help others re-evaluate society from multiple perspectives as well as act as mediators across national and international art communities. The artists in this dissertation

research suggested that it was valuable for them to think about the links between their work and practice and the ways that 'who they are' enters into this process.

Cultural Identity and Decolonization

The stories told by the four artists were imbued with cultural identification. An implication of this research is that it can be a tool for empowerment and decolonization. Decolonization is necessary for all people living within the colonial experience – in communities and in classrooms where people do not often see themselves and their history, stories, identities, and experiences are not seen as valid. Decolonization is a process where colonized people reclaim their traditional culture, redefine themselves and reassert their cultural identity. I define decolonization as a receptivity to make change and think about the world with openness. This definition also recognizes that decolonization is a collective and creative responsibility that should lead to creative approaches to everyday encounters, and more importantly, should aid in constructing inclusive spaces for these encounters to continually take place.

Art education, like society, generally is constantly shifting and therefore needs to continually incorporate new artistic practices and contemporary discourses such as cultural studies, visual culture, material culture, critical theory and psychoanalysis into its realm. There is every reason to expect that this can also be a site for redefining the colonial experience. Education is a resource for teaching young people their own culture.

Gude (2007) outlined eleven principles that she believes, determine art experiences in art education. These range from the personal primary processes of making art as playful inquiry to the way that art education can be a site of forming the self. In this instance art making can be an opportunity for students to further emotional and intellectual development and formulate a sense of who they are and what they might become – art education can help students explore how their sense of self, identity, and culture is constructed within complex family, media, and societal experiences.

As part of this call for decolonizing and the exploration of identity in the context of education, Newhouse (2000) notes the many changes that are occurring and he sees education as a resource for teaching young people their own culture. For Newhouse, artists are the conduit for creating the opportunities within the classroom - as they are the ones who are telling the stories

of the people and their art is consistently examining and deconstructing the colonial stereotypes and creating new ways of seeing the world.

To date there has been little evident research into the experience of Indigenous artists and educators and their experience of the classroom as part of a reflection on their cultural identity. In her report to the Canada Council on Indigenous arts in Canada, Trépanier (2011) drew a parallel between artistic creation as evidence and a means of cultural survival and resistance. One objective of her consultation and report to the arts council was to make note of the impact of colonization on art practice and the effort that was made to destroy Aboriginal cultures and art expression. However, the summation of her report is that there has been a resurgence of Indigenous art in this country in the last three decades and this is noteworthy. We can position Trépanier's findings as a form of survivance in the arts - as formulated by Vizenor, in the contemporary Indigenous art world in Canada.

The very fact that Indigenous art has a history and continues to flourish in Canada at this time, speaks to a need to connect the arts through the idea of presence and cultural identity to education. One of the suggestions in the 2011 report mentioned above was the need for research projects that acknowledge youth. One such research project that has come to my attention since the research was complete made the connection between young people and artists exploring on-going presence took place in Toronto in 2013. The research project and exhibition *inVISIBILITY* (2013) drew on artists, students' response and scholarly research to examine education and rupture (Dion & Salamanca, 2014). They too worked with the concept of presence as outlined by Vizenor in which complexity and layering play a role in presence, survivance and decolonization.

An important objective of this combined research-exhibition was to create an Indigenized space in a gallery setting, in which art and personal interconnection would allow "for complex representations of people's lived experiences [and] that support learning in relationship" (p. 162). This research and curatorial project drew on an earlier research project, *Talking Stick* (see Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010) an initiative of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP) carried out in the Toronto District School Board from 2008-2010. The objective was to develop models for engaging First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, families and communities with education.

Both the research for these projects and the 2013 exhibition signal the ways art and stories can engage Indigenous youth and open the space for discussion on their identity and their presence in education and their relationship to schooling. The exhibition featured work by urban Indigenous artists that addressed issues of urban Indigeneity and education. The art work told the stories of the artists' presence in the education system. These visual arts-based recollections were later contrasted with stories told by students now in the education system. In meetings that took place in the exhibition spaces, students and artists were able to articulate the complications of the notion (and reality) of presence. The two groups were invited to "follow the traces and to learn" (p. 161). As a result of the exhibition-workshop, the researchers were able to articulate the ways students were able to formulate a greater understanding of their own experience. Many of the students have since gone on to contribute to projects of decolonizing themselves and create decolonized spaces in their institutions (such as organizing in-school powwows, activist talks, drumming and singing circles). The researchers suggest that what the project illustrated for them was, "Most significantly they've taught us that students' *first need* is for learning experiences that honour Indigenous presence and cultivate their capacities to know themselves as Indigenous people" (p. 161).

Further research into artist-student collaborations and initiatives would be a valuable resource for other settings. One of the ways in which the above research is worth further exploration is the ways in which it brings artists telling their stories (literally and figuratively) into proximity with a younger generation of learners. Numerous benefits of story have been identified including the enhancement of self-knowledge and the facilitation of student development. St. Thomas (2007) suggests that art, drama, play, and sound along with an investigation of Indigenous traditional knowledge and life story can awaken and sustain children in many situations.

Art education researchers have suggested that students are empowered when they are given access to stories (of presence and survivance) that are not confined to text-based resources (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Stuhr, 1994). Over two decades ago Stuhr (1994) noted that if artists are invited into the classroom, they should be encouraged to talk about their social positions within the various cultural groups to which they belong. Similarly, Efland et al (1996) recognized that student learning and understanding is greater and more holistic when they have the opportunity to engage in culturally relevant material and alternative resources – as in

materials and experiences outside the classroom setting. For example, he recommended that it would be of great educational value for students to explore the under-representation of Native American artists in galleries and museums across the U.S. (Efland et al., 1996).

The research in this dissertation is a challenge for educational researchers to investigate the ways students can engage and use the skills and knowledge they learn through art, conversation, narrative and story to creatively make an impact on the world around them.

Indigenous Paradigm as a Methodology for Research in Art Education

I have been on a journey to understand identity in the context of life, relationships, art and education. As stated above, my objective and an implication of this research has been to bring into the research the notion of researching with (rather than on) people, to follow protocols and to work in the notion of the relational.

In the context of writing this dissertation I have also been working to understand the two worlds and the pedagogical implications of Western and Anishinaabe ways of knowing and inquiry. In performing this research, I have tried to come to a level of comfort to be able to function in two ways of thinking and knowing. Once I realized that the two worldviews have commonalities (Absolon, 2011; Little Bear, 2000) I understood how they could come together in one project.

Simpson (2000) and Warrior (1995) both questioned why Anishinaabe academics would exclude or ignore an Anishinaabe worldview or methodology in their research. They suggested that including an Indigenous way of knowing the world recognizes the collective ability and intelligence of Aboriginal people as researchers and creators of knowledge. Simpson (2000) suggested it was time to move beyond the post-positivist methodology and ground research in Aboriginal paradigms, use Aboriginal methods and procedures and articulate these in the language of western intellectuals.

In the intervening decades scholars from different Nations have contributed to this discussion (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2004, 2010; Kovach, 2009, 2010; Meyer, 2008; Steinhauer, 2001; Wilson, 2001, 2008). They posit that the use of Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and paradigm contributes to and enlarges the field of research. Hart (2010) has declared that things are changing in the realm of research. “While at one time, we, as Indigenous peoples,

were faced with leaving our Indigeniety at the door when we entered the academic world, several of us are now actively working to ensure our research is not only respectful, or "culturally sensitive," but is also based in approaches and processes that are parts of our cultures" (p. 1).

For Wilson (2008), Weber Pillwax (1999, 2001) and others, their criteria are that the research they do is relational. It is essential, these researchers note, that Indigenous research answer to participants, the community and the researcher. Métis-Cree educator Jean Graveline (1998) considered self-in-relation as integral to an Indigenous way of knowing the world (epistemology). She recognized that people have a common understanding of interconnectedness as an expression of or circle of life because people, animal, plants, the elements, planets and more – past and present, are all dependent on one another. "We are able to see ourselves and our immanent value as related to and interconnected with other – family, community, the world, those behind and those yet to come" (p. 58).

The notion of the relational is broad as it can extend beyond the personal and has been adopted by scholars as part of their consideration of their research projects. The philosophy can reflect the ethos of a single research project or extend to working with other scholars, as well as consulting and sharing Indigenous-based research projects more widely, for example, beyond the academic world of conferences and journals. Hart (2010) suggests, if possible, to do work with other Indigenous scholars to share thoughts and strategies on Indigenous-based endeavours, because doing so will strengthen Indigenous knowledges and practices. Such activity will also positively serve in decolonizing efforts.

For me in working within an Indigenous paradigm of the relational has meant from the beginning of this project, that I worked with the artist-participants in a responsible and respectful way. I ensured that we made decisions together during the research process. This began at the point when I deferred to them when we made bookings for when and where we would meet. I asked for their opinion on the material I was including in the dissertation at each stage of the writing – from the individual narratives to the cross-case analysis. As mentioned previously one of the women asked that the transcript not be included in the dissertation and this request was followed. The life stories that were shared with me sometimes referenced a way of thinking about the world that reflected the speaker's own knowledge (Nation) system, and this was an important component of our discussions and considerably contributed to the way I began to think about knowledge creation. As stated previously, the question outlined the focus of the inquiry but

the women and I let our conversation move in an organic way as I listened and then prompted as we shared stories of common experiences. The analysis of the material reflected the method of gathering the stories and retelling based on a loosely chronological path. I was made aware, by each of the women that their cultural identity was always known and understood by them from early childhood. I had the same life experience and therefore as I worked with the stories I tried to incorporate this understanding into the material. In my first interview we talked a great deal about the portrayal of Indigenous people as victims, needy or impoverished. My objective with this research was to diminish this stereotype. All of the women were able to tell their stories as strong, self-assured women who are very aware of the experience of Native women in Canada. In addition, one of the artists refuses the identification of herself with the word Aboriginal because she considers the word itself limiting, scientific and historically stultifying – I have been aware of this connotation throughout the writing of this document and either eliminated the word or used it sparingly (most often when it is used by other author-researchers).

In addition, I followed the protocol of gifting as a way to acknowledge the information and stories that were shared with me. I wanted to know what the women's experience of art education had been and I found that they often felt unsure and occasionally alone in their journey as they were often the only Native person in the programme. It will be important that other people read their stories as these experiences may well reflect a common experience. As a result of this input from one of the artists, when this research project is completed I will make the material freely available on line, I will lodge copies of the dissertation in the home communities of each of the women.

This dissertation is not intended as a "how to Indigenize" document that can be read to transform the academy. However, it is an example of research built on stories of life experiences that examine the experience of interactions in education, at various levels. These stories can impel a forward motion and build toward change. In one regard, this dissertation may model the way an art education dissertation can work within an Indigenous paradigm (whether Anishinaabe, Nehiyawiwin/ Cree, Haudenosaunee amongst others) and use compatible methodologies. Furthermore the commonalities of the researchers and the opportunity to contribute and share philosophy and epistemology, skills, ability and knowledge of the Indigenous community will reinforce our collective work. As hooks wrote in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), "It is crucial that critical thinkers, who want to change our [educational]

practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention [and] sharing [of] ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection, and shared concern.... (p. 131)

Ten years after hooks was suggesting mapping out these new spaces Brown and Strega (2005) stated that even after decades of critical, feminist and Indigenous approaches to research, "anti-oppressive and critical research methodologies still rate little more than a mention in most research methods textbooks" (p. 4). For them the poor articulation and comprehension of these approaches within the dominant culture institution continues to sideline them. They also cite the positivist research framework of mandatory ethical review procedures as another impediment. The casting of research subjects as being in need of protection is limiting and may fail to recognize the co-construction of knowledge, voice and representation. An implication of this current research may be that it indicates an approach that is Indigenous with a clear theoretical foundation and practical strategies and processes of analysis.

In the intervening decade since the publication of Brown and Strega's *Research as Resistance,* The Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in 2015 "recognize[d] Aboriginal research as a priority… by and with Aboriginal Peoples… [and this research can]… encompass all academic fields, as well as domains of knowledge specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural traditions."[1] This conviction will be pushed further forward in years to come as more Canadian universities move to establish First Peoples Studies[2] and institute as integral to undergraduate curriculum, that all students will have at least one course incorporating Indigenous knowledge and/or content.[3]

Many of the researchers cited in this dissertation are naming and working with other researchers using Indigenous knowledges and through doing so integrating new knowledge patterns into the academy and working to decolonize the institution. Wilson's (2008) notion of research as ceremony drew attention to many other Indigenous scholars using a variety of

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1 http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/priority_areas-domaines_prioritaires/aboriginal_research-recherche_autochtone-eng.aspx (accessed Jan 2, 2016)

2 A internet short survey shows that such programmes exist at Concordia University, University of Western Ontario, Trent University, Laurentian University, University of British Columbia, and Simon Fraser University.

3 For example in June 2015 Lakehead University, Thunder Bay ON committed to all students by 2017 graduating having done coursework that encompasses Indigenous Knowledge and/or Aboriginal content, and faculty and staff will participate in Indigenous Knowledge seminar. See: https://www.lakeheadu.ca/research-and-innovation/about/research-and-innovation-week/schedule/indigenous-knowledge-in-the-curriculum

methods. The people who worked with or whose work is noted by Wilson include Eber Hampton, Patricia Steinhauer, Cora Weber-Pillwax, and Lewis Cardinal. In *Research as Ceremony* (2008) Wilson both considers the contribution of other researchers' work to his own project but also models research-as-relational by including his students, colleagues and associates in the writing. Similarly Kovach (2009, 2010) both modeled the way she conducted her research using Nehiyaw knowledge tradition and creation and wrote of others, including amongst others, the social work scholar Michael Hart, and Cam Willet and his interest in purpose and personal history, and educator Laara Fitznor who have incorporated Indigenous methodologies into their academic work.

In addition, this is research that continues the liberatory challenge made by Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999). She called on researchers to recognize colonialism and the regressive measures of research on the Indigenous subject. In response to this call more researchers are integrating many layers of creativity and knowledge production into their research (these include Settee (2007) women, gender, food sovereignty and traditional practice; Dion (2009) and the notion of family and history as a braid of perspective and experience; or Ormiston (2010) oral tradition and indigenous history and knowledge). Creating and sharing Indigenous research using a suitable paradigm research is needed. Doing so will strengthen both knowledge and practices and continue to serve decolonizing efforts.

This dissertation will add to the literature as it examines the role of art making in identity formation with a specific examination of the external influences on individual artists. The artists' families and kinships, within their home and the wider community, the educational sites and the mentors, artists and teachers with whom the artists interacted were explored to determine how these external influences had an impact on art-making and identity formation – in terms of both cultural identity and as an artist. I expect this research to broaden art educators' and their students' knowledge and understanding of contemporary First Nations art and the associated social and political issues reflected in the art practice.

Future Research

This dissertation is an example of research that focuses on the co-creation of knowledge through conversation as a method of life history research with Indigenous artists. The need for

further research came to my attention during my project. One of the issues that arose during the research with these four artists was their need for support by their peers during their art education, particularly at the post-secondary level. Niro and Myre spoke of the isolation that they sometimes felt within the institution, as there was no Indigenous cohort for them to connect with.

The other artists also spoke of the need for support and contact with other students and artists. One example of this is an experience given by Myers of the moment she came into contact with the established performance artists, James Luna and Lori Blondeau; Myers stated that seeing Luna and Blondeau perform at OCAD was a valuable experience and helped her come to a decision regarding the focus of her graduate work. Jori Cachene spoke of the importance of seeing other more advanced students working in the studios and having their work shown in the context of the university. This helped her formulate ideas and was provocative for her as an artist because she was challenged by the work she saw. Nadia Myre suggested that students in school now benefit from the fact that she and other Indigenous artists are active as in-class speakers and she expects this firsthand information is valuable for students. This points to the need for research that examines Indigenous students' experience of art school. Such research could include the collaboration between students, between students and established artists possibly as a mentoring exercise, collaboration between students and the urban cultural community, and the experience of traditional knowledge and the role that it plays in contemporary art creation and practice.

There is a need to examine the models for Indigenous art education. Research projects that document the history and examine the successful components of Indigenous art education would be of value to strengthen the knowledge of the various schools, especially as at this time many institutions are actively seeking students for Indigenous Visual Culture programmes. I believe there would be value in documenting the history of Indigenous art education, (work that is yet to be done) at institutions such as IAIA (Institute of American Indian Art) in Santa Fe. To date the work and contributions of the painter art educator Dorothy Dunn who established The Studio for art instruction at the Santa Fe Indian School in 1932 has been researched (Elridge, 2001) and the American Indian Art school (later the Institute of American Indian Art) itself, has been touched on in surveys of Indigenous art (Anthes 2006; Jacobs, 1999; Rushing, 2013).

The IAIA also has implications for Canadian art education as artists attending the school, in time, came to Canada (artists such as Gerald McMaster, Alfred Young Man) or returned home to continue careers as art educators. For example the artist Robert Houle studied in Santa Fe and later made a career as artist and art educator at OCAD. Some of the artists who studied in Santa Fe have contributed to art education in Canada – particularly La Macaza, Quebec and Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan – two sites of early Indigenous art education in Canada. There is an opportunity for new research. One such study could be to document the cross-border activity between Canadian schools including those in Saskatchewan (SIFC, FNUC), Ontario (White Mountain, OCAD) and Quebec (La Macaza) and such institutions as the IAIA.

Another research project would be to investigate and document the White Mountain Academy of Art, the short-lived art school operating in northern Ontario in the late nineteen-nineties into the early two-thousands. This is the art school Nadia Myre worked at for a short time. This school was a noble experiment in Indigenous art education that combined a Native and non-Native student population with programming that reflected both Indigenous epistemology and art practice (often associated with traditional skills and materials) with contemporary Euro-Western art practices. To date, no research has been done and primary research into this institution would yield valuable material on art education practices in a setting and situation where the staff, students and faculty came from both Native and non-Native cultures.

Significance and Summary

In the re-telling and analysis of the stories that these women shared of their lives I have tried to find the space created by an engagement between Aboriginal and Euro-western cultures, and contemporary practices and cultural identification. In developing the narrative of their lives into a story I hoped to make the connection between contemporary cultural identity and how the women's life and art experiences stem from stories, family, teaching, education, histories, new and learned skills and the negotiations between all of these elements has formulated their conception of who they are. In the diversity of their experiences as it relates to how they know their cultural identity, the women who took part in the dissertation research are part of the cultural map of Canada. In reflecting on the experiences through their lifetime they have made

connections between their family and life events, their practice and their commitment to taking a role in their community. I am sincerely appreciative of the role they have played in this research.

The development of cultural identity and self identity as it related to these four artist participants was influenced by their life experiences in the social, cultural, historical, political and educational environments across their lifetime. Their life experiences have a direct influence on their artistic expression and art serves as a vehicle for searching, finding, and expressing their cultural and self-identities. Art-making helps these artists reinforce political actions that express their personal motivations. Through the art-making process and personal art expression, they gained a voice, self-knowledge and a sense of self. They speak for women and others who cannot speak. Despite the fact they do not name feminism as a guiding principle or take it as a political stance, I believe it still informs their art practice and professional identity as artists. These artists in their own way are reclaiming Indigenous history and memory as a social and political issue. Their art like life, is part of a search for meaning and personal reclamation. As a result of living within or being from two cultures, these women are making art as a political act to raise social, political, and cultural issues that in time may lead to decolonization in Canada. In viewing their work, viewers are able to connect aesthetics with a political vision of social transformation. As the artists empower themselves and other Indigenous women and people, the feminist ideology of the personal is political returns to mind as they are speaking out and in doing so, they are making triumphant noise.

I end by returning to the metaphor of the jingle dress. It is representative of the cumulative life experience, as the rows or numbers of beads equal life experiences or events. The dancers are in unison but they are free to dance individual steps. As in life the dancers circulate, use the space to either side, behind, and make circles around themselves. The power of the circle is that there is always a returning and it acts as a frame. As Butler (1993, p. 95) stressed it is in the "iterability" the act of doing something over and over, in conjunction with the power drawn from dancing the circle that the dancers are saying and doing their own story. Axtmann (2001), Blackwolf and Jones (1996), have commented on the beauty of the dance as positive embodiment of what it means to be Native, which is to live well, to be strong and to thrive. As with life, the dance is not simplistic or easily accomplished. Nor is it isolated from the historical and socio-political context; the dance responds to the complexities of the life experience of the Native dancers as people live and remember through the dance.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Date

Dear _____,

I am writing to ask you to participate in a case study that will contribute material to my PhD dissertation in Art Education at Concordia University.

My thesis research is based on the art educational experiences of First Nations' artists. I would very much like to interview you, as I am interested in your life experiences as an artist.

Additionally I know that you have exhibited your work in a variety of exhibition spaces as well as taking on the role of teacher in your residencies, artist talks and demonstrations in more informal settings.

All of this is of interest to me because I would like my thesis to be built around the art education and art of a selected number of Indigenous women artists. To date all of my research has focused on women artists as I believe that women's work through history and in the present needs to be recognized and valued. In line with this, my current research work originated with my uncovering material related to my grandmother's schooling at an on-reserve school at Hiawatha First Nation on Rice Lake, Ontario. This may seem like a tenuous link but I believe that we carry within us the experiences of our grandparent especially in the context of what we believe and value and I would go so far as to say our grandmothers continue to have an impact on the images we carry within us and into our art-making experiences.

The central issue of my thesis is to consider women's ways of knowing but to also look at different art experiences in the development of becoming an artist. I have chosen to work with First Nations artists because I would like to explore the impact of various formal and informal art education and other art related experiences on the artist and her cultural identity and development within and as a result of her schooling.

As I suggested above I am asking to interview you for my thesis research. As I see it I would want to interview you twice, the first time for about one and a half to two hours and then if needed a shorter follow up interview. The interview/s will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you.

If you are able to work with me, you will be asked to sign a consent form (that has been approved by the Concordia University Ethics Review Board). I will send you the questions and a short bio-data form in advance and you will have the right to answer or not any of the questions. You will be able to discontinue the interview and you will be given a copy of the transcript to read and make changes to it as you see fit and you will be able to withdraw from this study up to and including your approval of the transcription of the interview transcripts and before the chapter devoted to you is written, without any negative consequences.

The materials collected will be kept securely in my computer archives. The resulting material will only be used for educational purposes, for my PhD dissertation but also for publications and conference data.

I hope you will work with me on this project. I will look forward to speaking to you soon.

Your Sincerely,

Lori Beavis

PhD candidate
Department of Art Education,
Concordia University

Appendix B

Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Creating a Dialogue with First Nations' Artists: The Experience of Art Education, Art-Making and the Connections to Cultural Identity (Working title)

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a program of research being conducted by;
Dr Linda Szabad Smyth
Principal Investigator/ Thesis Supervisor
Department of Art Education, Concordia University,
Montreal, QC.

Lori Beavis
Co-investigator/ Doctoral Student
Department of Art Education, Concordia University
loribeavis@gmail.com
514-481-0512

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is a Narrative Inquiry that explores different art experiences and educational formats as experienced by four First Nations' artists. I understand that the researcher's intention is to compile research based on interviews with selected artists.

I understand that this research focuses on women artists, as it is important that women's work through history and in the present be recognized and valued. The central issue of the research is to consider women's ways of knowing and working and the impact of identity and community, on the development of becoming an artist. I understand that this research will contribute to the knowledge base of the experiences of First Nations' artists in Canada as it examines the importance of identity and the ways in which the experience of art education impacts cultural identity. I also understand that the various experiences over my lifetime will be acknowledged as we explore the connection between identity and the development of the individual artist. I understand that one or more of my art works may be discussed in the context of the interviews and therefore in the body of the dissertation. I understand that I will be given an opportunity to correct any aspect of the description or interpretation of the artwork.

I understand that the information obtained as a result of my participation may contribute to the development of a history of the art education of First Nations' artists in Canada and furthermore create new definitions of art education in Canada.

I understand that the purpose of the study will be primarily to use this research as material for the researcher's dissertation and that the material will be used in an educational context, especially but not limited to publications and conference materials.

B. PROCEDURES

I understand the research is of a qualitative nature and will employ a semi-structured interview method for data gathering. This research will be conducted on an individual basis with each of the participants. I understand the researcher will be examining both formal and informal formats of art education as personally experienced by four professional First Nations' artists.

I understand the questions will be linked to my early art experiences, to the institutes of art education I attended, to my identity as an artist and to the connection of my art to identity and cultural practice.

I understand that the research will be conducted through individual interviews. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed time and venue with each interviewee in the spring of 2013. The interviews will be conducted during one 90-120 minute session with a provision for one or more follow-up interview/s as required. Each participant will be able to read the list of questions at least one week prior to the interviews. I understand that my identity will be disclosed and that we will discuss one or more of my artworks.
I understand that all effort will be made to ensure the accuracy of the participant's input and that the researcher will ask permission to audio record the interview. As the interviewee I will be given an opportunity to read the transcript of the interview and the final chapter that is devoted to me in order to ensure accuracy.

I understand the material collected in the interviews will be kept as an archive in the researcher's computer files. I also understand the files will be password protected. I understand that before the files are erased I will be asked if I would want the interview material go into an archive such as Artexte.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand participation in the survey and interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. I understand that I will contribute to a needed discussion about Indigenous identity and education in a Canadian context. Through this study I will be positioned as a knowledge maker and an informant on the connection between art making, art education and identity.

I understand the interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon setting in the spring, 2013 and that the participants will be asked to complete a *biodata* form and answer questions in an interview format. I understand that I may decline to answer any of the questions that I do not wish to answer. Further, I may decide to withdraw from this study up to and including my approval of the transcription of the interview transcripts and before the chapter devoted to me is written, without any negative consequences, simply by letting the researcher know my decision.

I understand that the nature of the interview questions are not intended to raise any discomfort or lead to any risky disclosures, , however if any troubling information is raised, the researcher will do "everything possible" to aid in putting me in contact with a reliable outside resource person or organization who will aid in resolving the issues. I understand the primary interest of the researcher will be my wellbeing and that the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of the information. I understand such information will not be discussed or written.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime up to and including (my) approval of the transcription of the interview transcripts and before the chapter devoted to me is written, without any negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is:
  NON-CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., my identity will be revealed in study results)
- I understand that the data from this study will be used only for educational purposes and that it will be published in a thesis and may be published or used in conference materials.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator:

Dr. Linda Szabad- Smyth
Art Education Department, Faculty of Fine Arts
Concordia University, Montreal, QC
linda.szabad-smyth@concordia.ca
(514) 848-2424 ext.4646

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481
ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix C

Revised Consent Letter

Date

Dear _____,

I am writing to let you know what stage I am at with the research work that you were an important part of. It has taken me more time to complete this research project and the dissertation than I had ever anticipated. But I wanted to contact you and let you know I am nearing the end of writing my dissertation and I am looking forward to presenting my research to my committee. After they approve the work and I make any changes they request, sometime in the next few months I will present my work to the larger committee who will participate in my doctoral defence.

I am writing today to give you this update and I also have to ask you if you would consent to letting me include some images of your art in my dissertation and to show the images at my doctoral defence.

For these reasons I have included the revised Consent form that outlines these additional requests. I hope you will recall during our interview I asked you about your artwork. In the course of writing the content of the interviews into a narrative I described one or more of your works to give the reader a sense of both your practice and a descriptive account of your artwork.

I have been asked to include some images of your work in my oral presentation at my defence and in the final dissertation. Therefore at this time I am writing to ask if you would sign the revised consent form and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed.

If you have any hesitation in allowing the use of your images please do not hesitate to tell me of any limitations or prohibitions. I will not use the images beyond these stated purposes and will contact you again if I require further use of the image/s.

If it is possible for you to send me a jpg of the images listed I would be very grateful as the quality and resolution will be much higher and will give a better view of your work. If this isn't possible due to time restraints I will use, with your consent, publicly available images.

The following images were discussed or described in the context of our interview or in material that was included in the narrative text.

If you have any questions or need to discuss my request further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for your help and generosity in sharing your stories and images with me.

I am very appreciative.

Your Sincerely,

Lori Beavis

PhD candidate
Department of Art Education,
Concordia University

Appendix D

Interview Questions

How do you describe yourself? When did you become aware of your cultural heritage?

Early Life/ Art Experience (3-10 years)
Can you describe your early art-making experiences? – at home/ community site/ school?

Is there an important arts-related person (family member, teacher, mentor) in your early art-making memory?

Secondary School
Can you describe your art education experience in secondary school? How would you describe the (art) school you attended, ie its focus?
When did you decide to become a visual artist? Was there a specific event of encounter that brought about this decision?

Post-Secondary School
Did you attend art school? What was your art programme? Was there a cultural diversity in the student population at your art school? Amongst faculty members?

Can you identify any person encountered in high school or above as a mentor? What characterized this person as mentor-like?

What methods were taught in the post-secondary art training institution that helped you develop your own art practice/ get work into exhibitions/ write grants, etc?

Art Education
Did your experience within the institution have an impact on your cultural identity? If so, in what way?

Do you think cultural identity has anything to do with art education? Do you think cultural identity has a role in art education? Please elaborate.

How would you describe your educational arc? For example would you describe your art education as transformational in terms of cultural identity?

What is your philosophy of art education?

Identification as an Artist
Do you identify yourself as an artist?

Has your view/ perception of who you are, in terms of your cultural identity, changed over time? If so, how does this impact your life in your community?

What do you believe is the role an artist plays in the community?

As an artist, who do you see as your art audience?

Art-related Work
Can you describe your exhibition history?

Can you describe your level of participation in workshops/ artist talks/ seminars/ residencies?

Do you participate in both “art institution” and social or community-based art events? Is there one type or another that you participate in more? Who do you see as your audience?

What do you hope to teach your audience?
How do you want or expect to have an art educational impact on your audience? Does “politics” play any role in your artistic production?

Cultural Practice
Can you describe your art practice now and how it has been influenced and changed over time?