

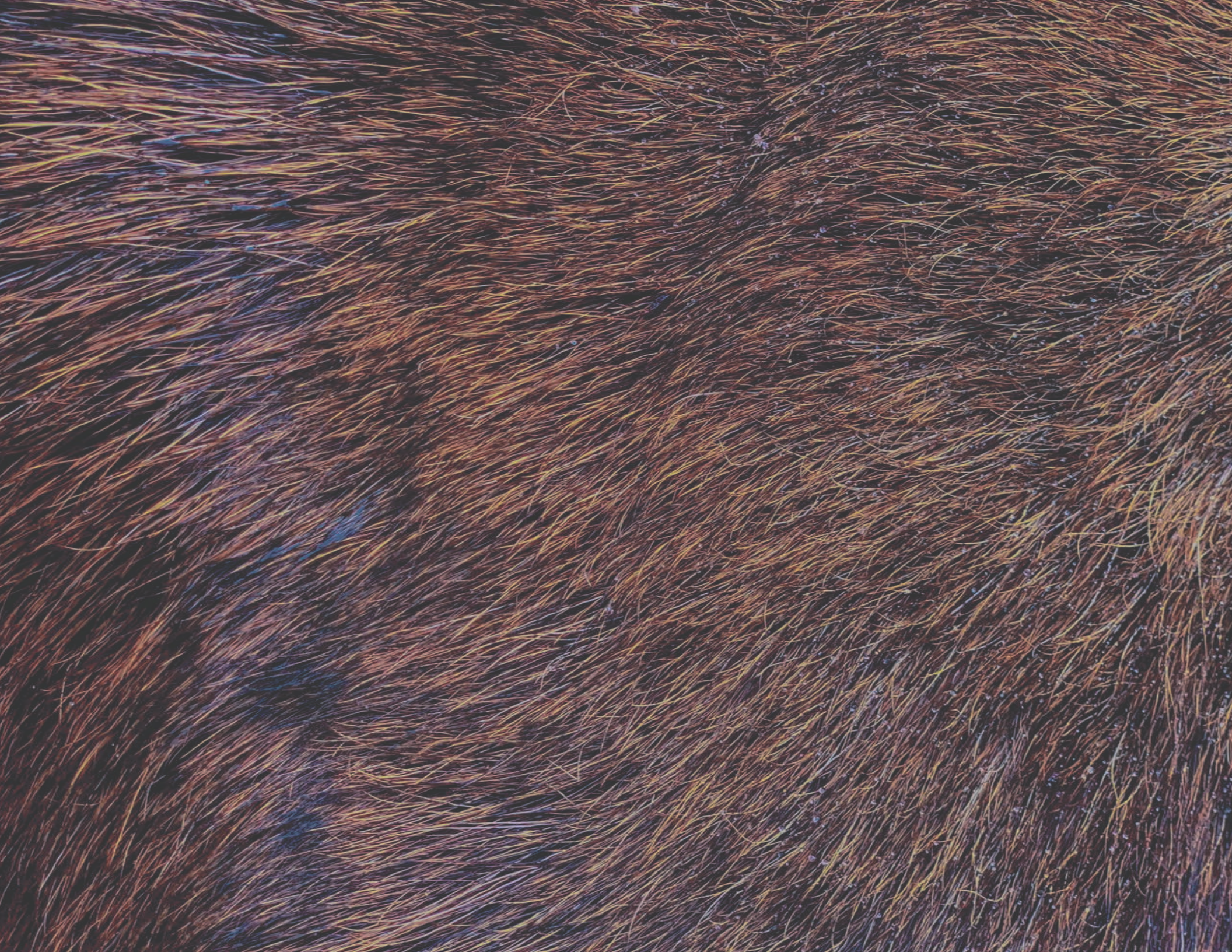


RECLAIMING TURTLE ISLAND

Activating Design Sovereignty Through Deep Time
An Urban Hide Tanner's Co-Design Case Study

a research-creation zine

by amanda lickers



Adapted from historian Patrick Wolfe's reflection "settler colonizers are here to stay; invasion is a structure not an event" (2006).

**SETTLER
COLONIALISM
IS A
STRUCTURE
NOT AN EVENT**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my gratitude to the many hands and hearts who have contributed to this work through sharing their gifts. This includes the legacies of Onkwehón:we architects, scholars and practitioners who have cleared the pathways for what we call Indigenous design thinking. To the Black and Indigenous scholars who continue to generating anti-colonial critical theories, whose work has through their own work supported, nurtured, and affirmed me in my journey; nia:wen.

nia:wen'kowa to my fellow Buckskin Babes whose work connects Indigenous land-based futures throughout deep time, subverting settler spatiality of the urban landscape. I am honoured to continue to learn and be reminded of why we do this work which is simply not possible without our Elders, Knowledge Keepers, artists, scientists, seed keepers, language speakers and community members who continue to embody our ways. What we do today would not be possible without each and every one of you.

All photography, artworks, illustration and graphic design are original by author.

created in partial fulfillment of
Master of Arts (Individualized) Studies
Concordia University

Unceded, Unsurrendered Kanien'kéha:ka territory

© Amanda Lickers (2026)



“BRINGING THE BUSH TO THE CITY”



DECOLONIZING DESIGN MEANS “PUTTING INDIGENOUS FIRST, WHICH IS RECOGNISING HOW THE DISPLACEMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FROM THEIR LANDS DISRUPTED THEIR CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS THROUGH DESIGN AND THROUGH THAT UNDERSTANDING, RECOMMITTING OURSELVES TO INDIGENOUS LAND AND CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY” IN ADDITION TO “REPRIORITIZING EXISTING RESOURCES TO DECOLONIZE.”

Dr. Dori Tunstall, in conversation with International Council of Design on her book, *Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook* (2023) MIT Press





CO-DESIGN OVERVIEW

Collaborative Design (co-design) practices are emergent across different sectors from healthcare, to education, and policy development, to architecture and design.

Across Indigenous-led architectural co-design frameworks, Indigenous communities are identified as “client” and although regional approaches may vary several key principles remain intact.

Co-design extends beyond participatory design into an inclusive, collaborative process wherein diverse perspectives are brought together to shape, co-create, fabricate, and execute all aspects of a project from governance to implementation.

Community members, Elders, designers, architects work collaboratively with special consideration to socio-cultural needs including values; such as visual and material cultural relevancy, intergenerational access, and creating community assets through sustainable structures which resonate belonging in community.

True Indigenous co-design is a living process with Indigenous stakeholders involved at every stage of the design process, into completion and review. Indigenous architects and designers must be prioritized.

Collaborative design processes must; be grounded in place-based methodologies, prioritising unique site specific contexts, histories, geographies, cultures, protocols, needs, and aspirations.

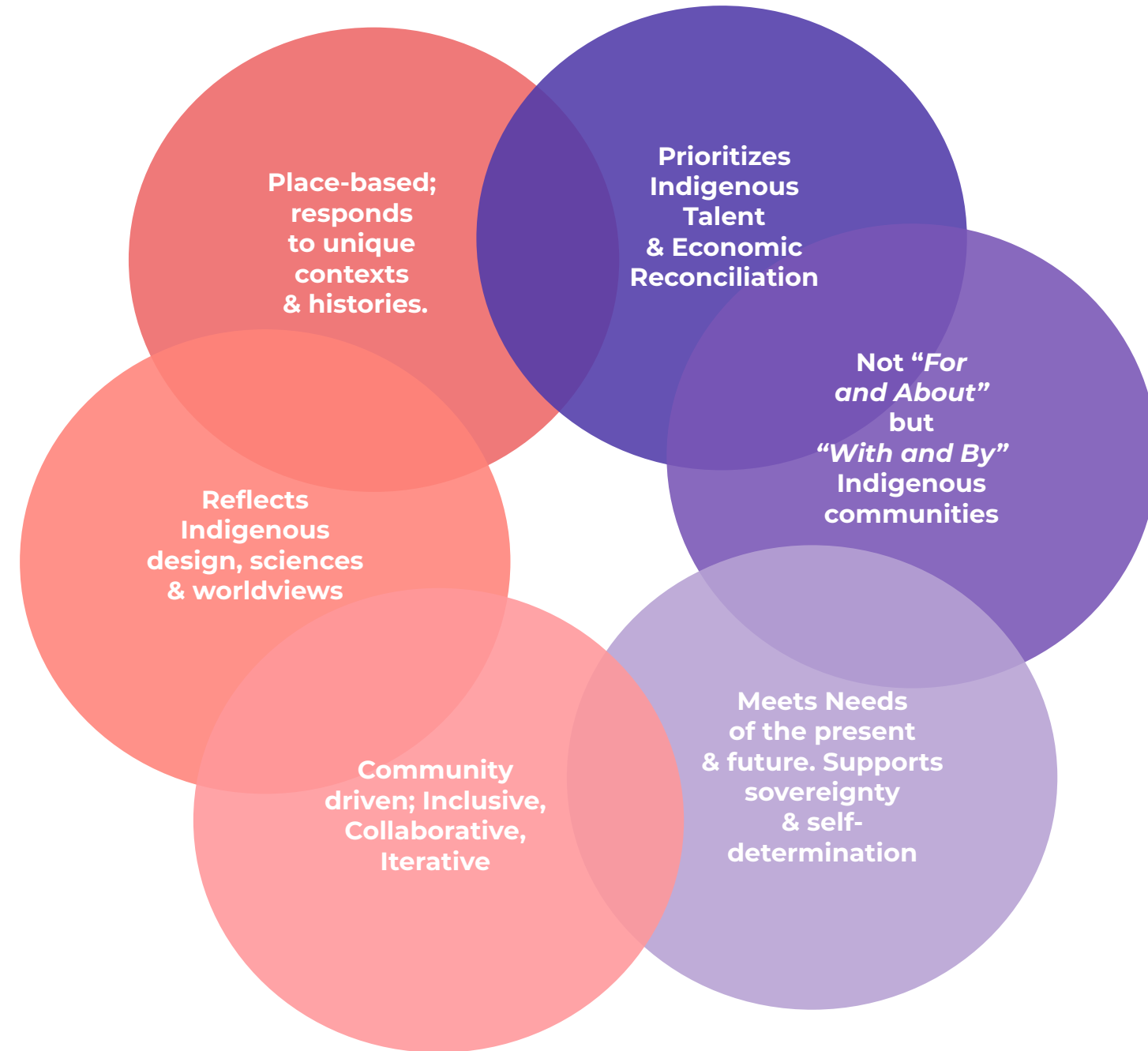
Co-design does not follow a formula; before consultation and collaboration there must be relationship building. Best practices include First Nations Advisory Circles and governing structures that support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

Co-Designs reflect culturally relevant forms, materials, shapes and references. Including place-based Indigenous sensibilities regarding seasonality and environment through considering orientation, siting, natural light, cardinal directionality and archeoastronomy; as well as energy conservation, insulation efficiency, natural modes of heating, cooling and circulation.

(Atkins, 2019; Hayes, et al, 2019)



INDIGENOUS CO-DESIGN



CO-DESIGN OUTCOMES MUST

+ Demonstrate understanding and deep listening with regard to the needs and goals set out by community stakeholders, Elders, Indigenous partners.

+ Reflect Indigenous worldviews and Nationhood – including traditions, values, cultures, and aspirations.

+ Build sense of community ownership; willingness to break the mould and take unconventional approaches to Western modes of doing.

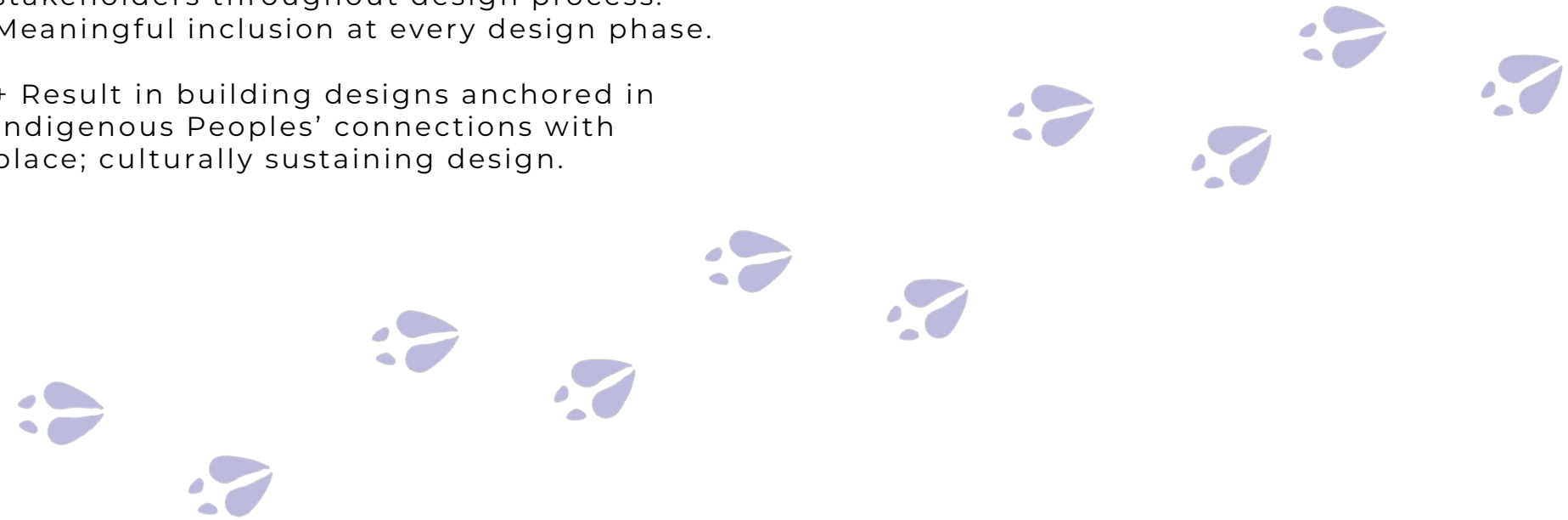
+ Account for community engagement; feedback sessions, community forums and public transparency.

+ Work closely with clients/Indigenous stakeholders throughout design process. Meaningful inclusion at every design phase.

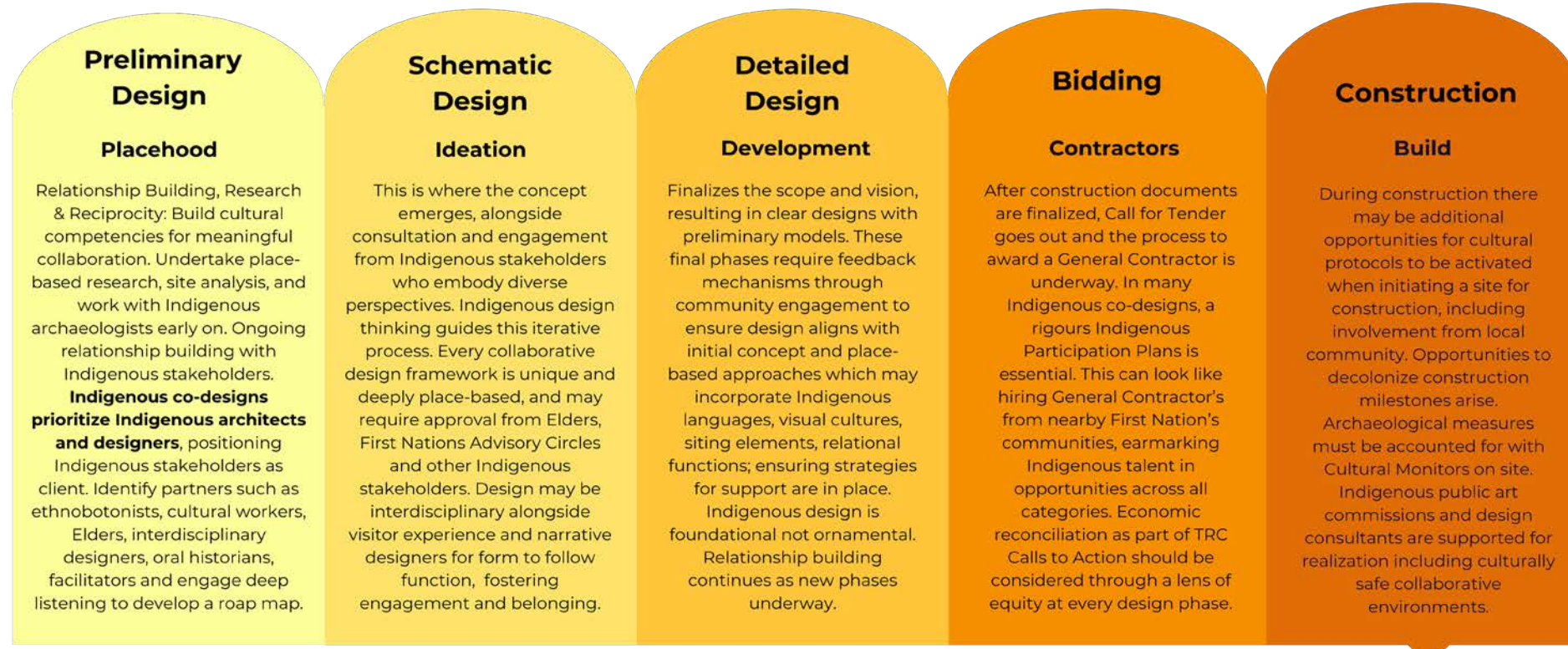
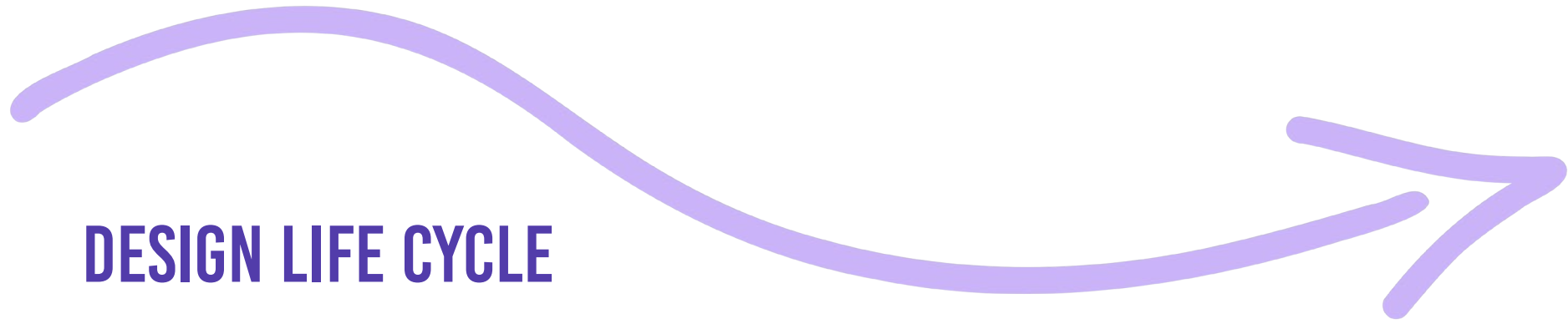
+ Result in building designs anchored in Indigenous Peoples’ connections with place; culturally sustaining design.

+ Prioritize economic opportunities through rigorous IPP’s (Indigenous Participation Plan’s) including Indigenous General Contractor’s, skilled trades, visitor experience, interior designers, fabricators, artists.

+ Prioritize Indigenous architects, designers and collaborative design facilitators who bring the capacity and methodology necessary to meaningfully execute projects. Indigenous designers apply their understanding of cultural contexts, histories, and lived realities, in addition to specialized knowledges as they relate to energy conservation, natural materials, and the ability to bring relevant options to meet unique needs while remaining technically sound.



DESIGN LIFE CYCLE



INDIGENOUS-LED CO-DESIGN

Focuses on actively involving communities and stakeholders to ensure that the end result meets our holistic needs on our own terms. Through this iterative process, the unique needs of Indigenous communities can be identified and better met. Ensuring accurate, authentic and diverse representation amongst Indigenous Peoples' impacted by the project.

Architectural Institute of Canada. Building trust for meaningful collaboration takes time.

In addition to collaborative governance, co-design values reciprocity through sharing power and benefits. Indigenous co-design is not an afterthought to check a box or posture inclusion.

Collaborative design (co-design) is fundamental to decolonizing design practices and meeting the needs of Indigenous land-based futures through the built environment.

Valuing lived experiences and relationality; centring Indigenous relationships to place through deep time (past, present and future). Ensuring inclusive processes: identifying who is not in the room and why. Onboarding structures and resources put into place.

Across a multitude of sectors and regions, identifying the need for ample time to build relationships prior to project collaboration was key and reflects recommendations to integrate Free Prior Informed Consent Protocols (as per United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission 92 Calls to Action (2015) by bodies such as the Royal

Cultural safeguarding and engaging protocols where needed. As part of authentic co-design practices, ensuring necessary cultural protocols are undertaken when representing Indigenous visual cultures, build methodologies/principles and more, including early collaboration with Indigenous archeologists.

“INDIGENOUS DESIGN THINKING IS ABOUT EMBEDDING NARRATIVE WITHIN [ITS] DNA, START[ING] WITH FACILITATING AGENCY, AND VOICE, AND ENGAGING WITH THE SPECIFICITY OF PLACE, [TO] AMPLIFY THE OPPORTUNITY. BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT’S A STRENGTH BASED APPROACH. IT’S CELEBRATING OUR SHARED HUMANITY. IT IS UNDERSTANDING THAT THERE IS GREAT WISDOM IN 67, 000+ YEARS OF HISTORY AND UNBROKEN CONNECTION.”

- Jefa Greenaway (Wailwan & Kamilaroi Nations) in conversation at Victoria State Library Series. Greenway Architects, Sydney, Australia.

4 R'S INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODS

Responsibility in Indigenous research methods speaks to culturally relevant values of belonging and interconnectedness that are core to Indigenous ethics. For Onkwehón:we we carry inherent responsibilities informed by our original instructions, to the faces not yet born and all aspects of Creation, which includes social, ecological, political and cultural renewal (Monture, 2014). Responsibility crosses time from ancestors past to future. For settler-Indigenous relations, responsibility reflects ongoing Treaty obligations and collective responsibility to work towards just futures which centre Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination on Indigenous lands.

Respect can be demonstrated by practices such as the Honourable Harvest and is an embodied way of inter-relating. Respect requires valuing differences and “goes beyond cultural competence in that it involves the principles of respecting cultural knowledge” (Roy, p. 8, 2022).

Relationality through Indigenous worldviews recognizes the “dependent interdependence” (Cajete, 2000) of relationships between humans, ideas, land/place, the cosmos, all aspects of the ecological and natural phenomenon exist (Wilson, 2008).

Reciprocity is not just political or individual but reflects embodied systems of exchange and relational accountability. Reciprocity seeks to understand legacies and systems of colonial dispossession in order to support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, and combats extractive and exploitative relational dynamics. Reciprocity includes all living beings and ancestors past, present and future.

Cree scholar Shawn Wilson suggests that axiology, methodology, ontology and epistemology are inseparable entities which “blend from one into the next”. He calls this an Indigenous research paradigm and states “the whole of the paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts.” He goes on to name this as distinct to Western approaches. Wilson states, “Relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm to me. Just as the components of the paradigm are related, the components themselves all have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships. An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability.” (Wilson, p. 70-71, 2008).



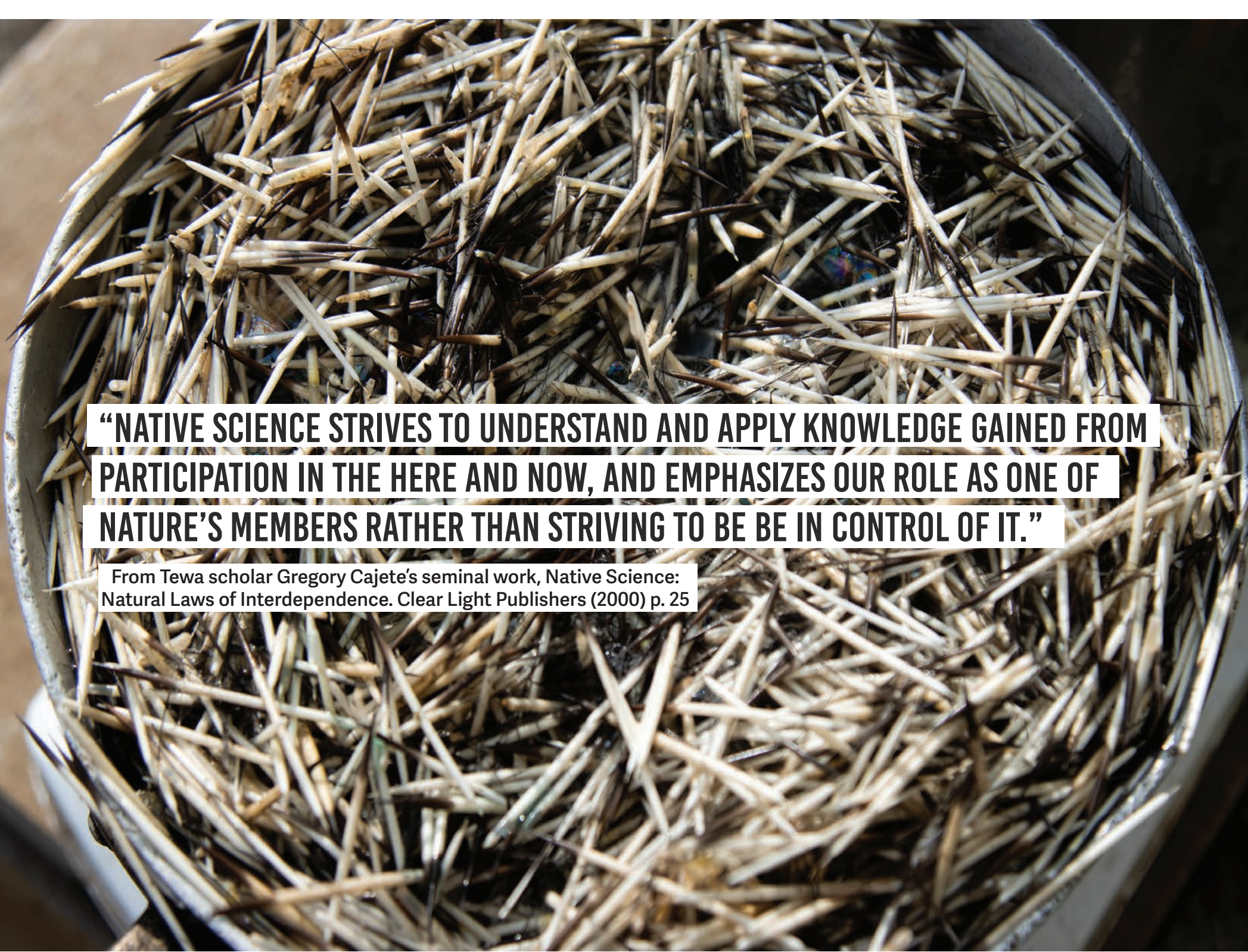


INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PARADIGM (WILSON, 2009)

“IF YOU WANT SOMETHING TO GROW, OR A RELATIONSHIP TO FLOURISH, YOU FIRST HAVE TO PLANT THAT SEED. I THINK THE [SPIRIT GARDEN] IS KIND OF LIKE THAT. IT’S AN IMPORTANT START TO REALLY BUILD A STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY AND THE CITY. IF YOU WANT THAT SEED TO GROW AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO FLOURISH, IT’S SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE TO CARE FOR EVERY YEAR, YEAR AFTER YEAR, THROUGH ALL OF THE SEASONS, THROUGH ALL OF THE 13 MONTHS OF THE OF THE LUNAR CALENDAR. YOU NEED TO WORK TOGETHER. YOU NEED TO NOURISH THE PLACE, BRING APPROPRIATE PROGRAMMING TO IT. IT’LL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW THIS SEED TAKES ROOTS, HOW IT SPREADS, HOW IT CAN FOSTER OTHER PROJECTS AND HOW IT CAN IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIPS. THAT’S REALLY WHAT RECONCILIATION IS ABOUT.”

Brian Porter (Oneida, Six Nations of the Grand River) of Two Row Architects on designing relations through land, in conversation with Toronto Council Fire



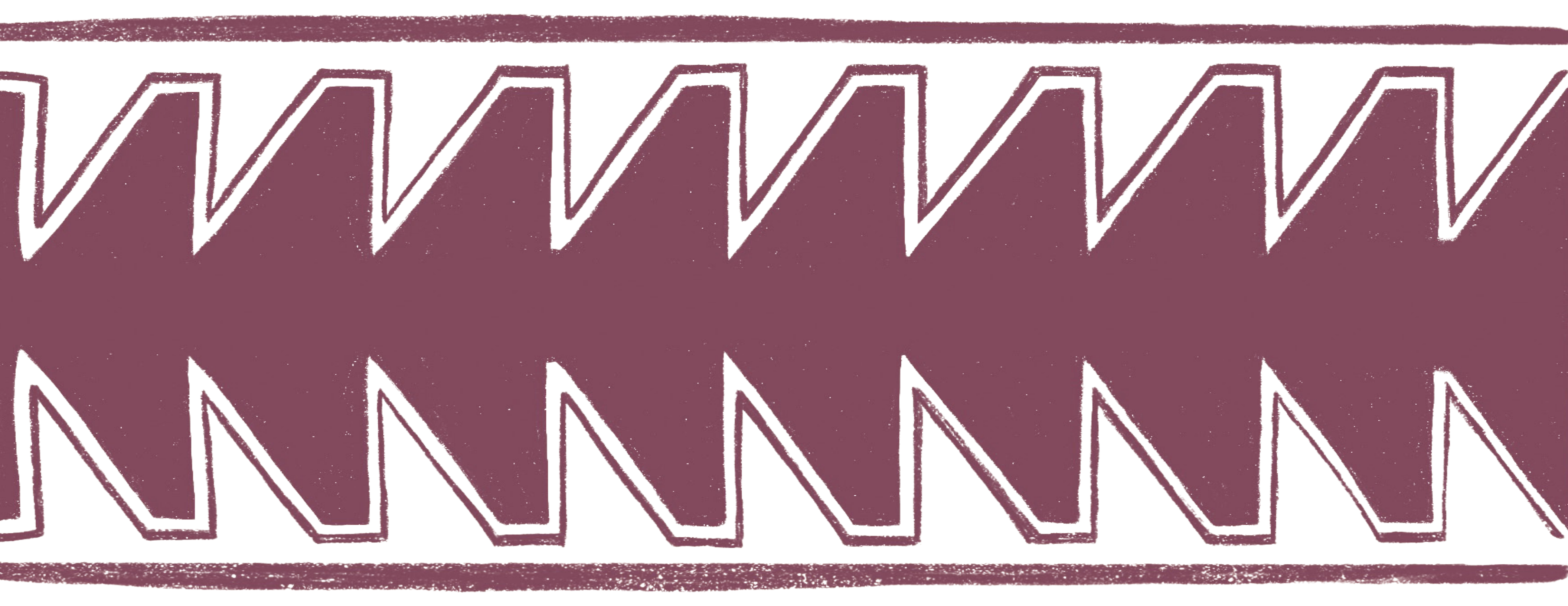


“NATIVE SCIENCE STRIVES TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE HERE AND NOW, AND EMPHASIZES OUR ROLE AS ONE OF NATURE’S MEMBERS RATHER THAN STRIVING TO BE BE IN CONTROL OF IT.”

From Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete’s seminal work, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Clear Light Publishers (2000) p. 25



**HONOUR EVERY
PART OF THE HARVEST**



DESIGN SOVEREIGNTY

RECOGNIZES WE MUST “DISMANTLE COLONIZATION BY DESIGN” AND ADDRESS THE “IMPACTS OF DISPOSSESSION AND STATE VIOLENCE”

DE SANTOLO & DIXON, 2021.




“DESIGN SOVEREIGNTY ASPIRES TO RENEWAL AND GROWTH IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND DEMANDS THE DISMANTLING OF OUTDATED WESTERN THINKING AND PRACTICES OF EXTRACTION. LOOKING TOWARDS DESIGN POTENTIAL IN THE STORYING OF SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH SELF-DETERMINING PROCESSES AND THE INFLUENCES OF INDIGENOUS AND DECOLONISING THEORIES, METHODOLOGIES AND PRACTICES.”

- from Towards Design Sovereignty by Jason De Santolo and Nadeena Dixon

This concept in the world of design turns a critical eye towards systems of power, naming the functions of dispossession, domination and erasure established through ongoing colonial legacies. Reflecting emergent critiques of Indigenous architects around some contemporary efforts to decolonize design tend to rely on more superficial approaches rather than deeply meaningful, restorative and collaborative design that addresses the needs, goals and aspirations of Indigenous communities. Importantly, design sovereignty confronts settler moves to innocence and invites us to value the relationship between culture and architecture; recognizing colonial systems which inform design are in fact intentional, ubiquitous and hardly benign.

Design sovereignty restores agency through self-determining, defining, and generating design processes that resonate belonging, reflecting relevant goals and aspirations across lands and lifeways. It goes beyond ornamentation into a practice of self-determination through design that embodies Indigenous worldviews and land-based knowledge systems. Design sovereignty addresses colonial legacies through an anti-colonial, systemic lens and seeks to create infrastructure through culturally and environmentally relevant Indigenous knowledges applied in the present, to safeguard Indigenous futures.





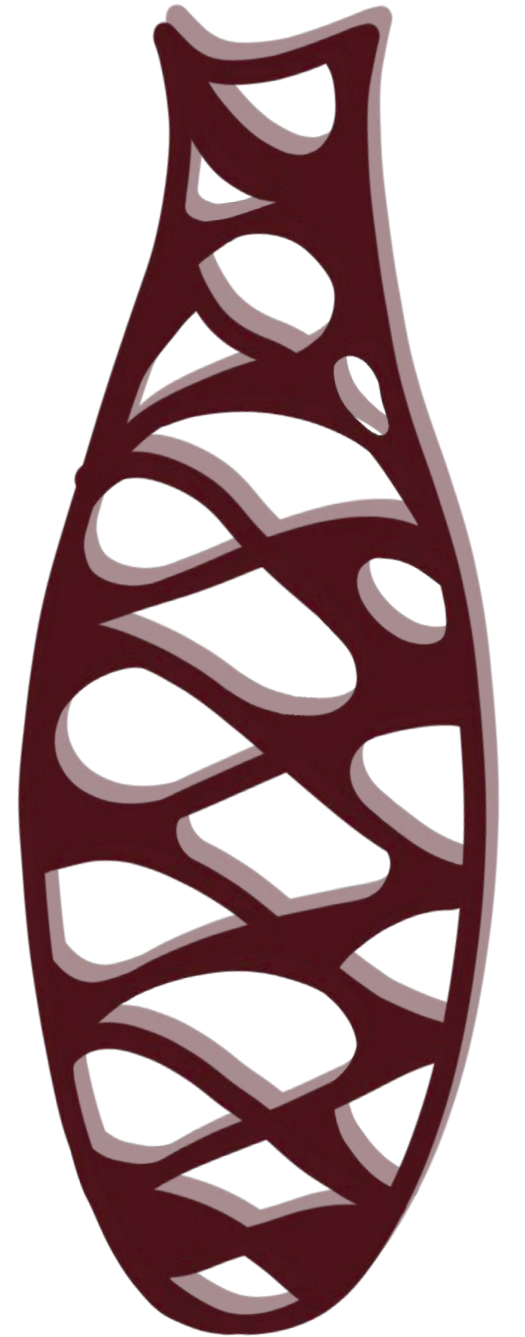
Polaroid: Buckskin Babes Hide Camp at B7, May 2023.

BUCKSKIN BABES URBAN MOOSE HIDE TANNING COLLECTIVE

Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide tanning collective emerged at the hands of those who wanted to create an initiative that centres the reawakening of Indigenous cultural and land-based practices with an emphasis on access in the urban context. This requires skills led by Knowledge Keepers and Elders who have maintained and continue to teach traditional ways of doing.

The Buckskin Babes (BSB) collective is rooted in Indigenous methodologies, land-based pedagogy and an arts-education practice that is deeply collaborative, reciprocal and care-based. The Buckskin Babes work in the hides project has focused on prioritizing knowledge transmission inter-generationally and across Indigenous communities, while deepening Nation to Nation relations through knowledge exchange and fostering belonging. Intentionally grounded in generating visibility and access in urban spaces for Indigenous peoples, prioritizing cultural safety while modelling community care. A land-based and material cultures art form, the moose hide tanning process in and of itself requires collective participation and generational knowledge transmission.

Starting as an ad hoc collective in 2021, BSB has nearly 2 hide camps a year at Bâtiment 7, with pop up camps at Concordia University's downtown campus and Bishop's University in Sherbrooke, QC. Buckskin Babes has been invited to demonstrate the practice at Karonhianónhna elementary and Kahnawake Survival School (secondary) in neighbouring Kahnawake Mohawk territory (buckskinbabes.ca).



Grace Ratt, soaking a hide. October 2021



As continuous learner's there is a shared sentiment of gratitude and respect for the contributions, support and encouragement of Elders and Knowledge Keepers that have worked with us, particularly Eleanor Hegland of Lac La Ronge Indian Band, SK and Grace Ratt from Rapid Lake, QC in the Algonquin Nation.

Gracy has joined us for many hide camps in the city and is known across Algonquin territory as the Road Kill Queen. There are many different ways to tan hides and one thing I have learned from Gracy is how decomposition and decay can be a helper in the process. We have had the honour to welcome Master Hide Tanner's such as Brian and Paulette Bird from Fort McMurray First Nation, AB to come and share their practice. Every year, we are donated hides from local hunters from as far as Waskaganish Eeyou Istchee territory to Kanien'kéha:ka of Kahnawa:ke as the passion to work on hides grows with every camp experience. We have had a Wendat artist demonstrate moose hair embroidery, and we often have various material cultures work stations emerge as folks bead, tuft, embroider and visit amidst hide camp.

Eleanor had planned to join us in person at our first camp in 2021, however the COVID-19 pandemic took off and closed Provincial borders. She video-called Autumn Godwin, her neice and fellow Buckskin Babe, to share her guidance at a distance. Eleanor made it to Tiotiah:ke in May 2023 to share her gifts with us in person.

Camp embodies a DIY ethos as Cree students from regional CEGEP's have organized their own goose plucking and harvesting on site. Folks bring hides they are working on, or come and support collective hide work. We have seen otter, beaver, moose, deer, geese, ducks, racoon and even a lynx being processed at our hide camp gatherings.

Eleanor Hegland (left), visits at hide camp May 2023



“THAT’S WHAT MOTIVATES ME TO DO THIS — TO CONTINUE TO PRACTISE OUR TRADITIONS ... AND ALSO TO PRESERVE THE ANIMAL, THE ANIMAL FUR, THE MEAT. THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT THE YOUTH NEED TO KNOW ... TO PRESERVE THE KNOWLEDGE.”

GRACE RATT
DEER (2023) CBC

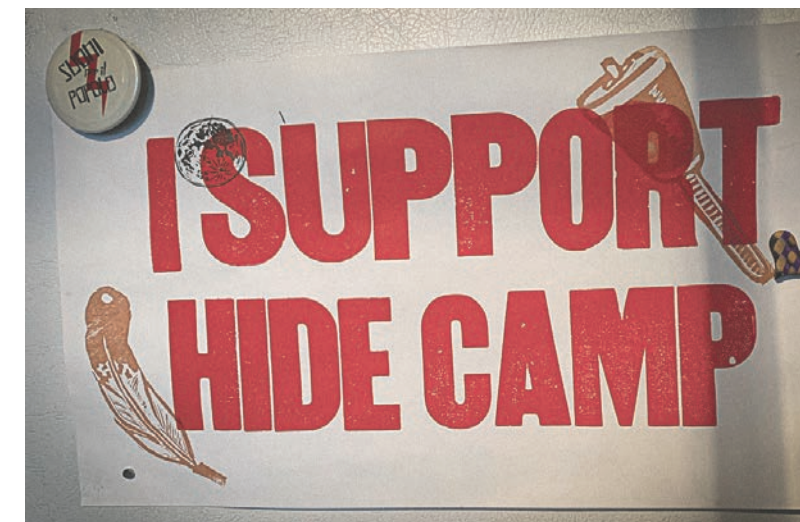


URBAN CULTURAL ACCESS

As Onkwehón:we based in the urban centres, simply put: We do not have adequate space in the City to do what Indigenous communities are doing on the land. For many reasons, going back to our home communities is not always an option. Since 2021, the Hide Camp experience facilitated by our collective has received overwhelming support from all sectors of the urban Indigenous community here in Montréal and in nearby regional communities. There is a clear and undeniable need for an accessible land-based cultural hub where we can transmit traditional knowledge, life-affirming practices and sense of belonging in the urban landscape.

Since our inception across 7 hide camps the collective has engaged land-based cultural practices with arts, education, not-for-profit and public sector partners for example:

- Native Women's Shelter of Montréal and Iskweu Project
- Indigenous Directions, Concordia
- Office of Community Engagement, Concordia
- Native Montréal
- Indigenous Student's Centre, Bishop's University
- Dawson College Journey's Program
- Kahnawa:ke Collective Impact pop up hide camp at Kahnawa:ke Survival School
- First Peoples Justice Centre
- Black Indigenous Harm Reduction Alliance



Prints by Kanien'kéha:ka artist Martin Loft at Popolo Press (2023).



Bâtiment 7, outdoor kitchen part of the Greenhouse (lot 5).



CULTURAL HUB CO-DESIGN (COLLABORATIVE DESIGN)

The cultural hub co-design took shape in an unorthodox manner, as the preliminary design to address the necessary soil remediation at Bâtiment 7 had already started as far back as 2009, with the archeological site assessment. Due to the nature of the former CN Atelier, with several community stakeholders and municipal governance entities, a collaborative design framework was already in place with early community consultation sessions taking place at B7 in 2015 (7 à Nous). Our collective hide tanning work only began on site in 2021, after a few years of continued use and with the scheduled remediation strategy already on the horizon, we were encouraged by Press Start Youth Coop, our anchoring point to the Bâtiment 7 ecosystem, to submit a proposal to formalize this relationship and address design needs before Detailed Design was underway. This shift to permanent facilities will enable more of our energy and capacity can be spent on hide tanning, rather than the daily work-flow of setting up and tearing down our camp infrastructure that working on a gravel lot had previously entailed.

The co-design was led by the needs of the Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide Tanning Collective with support from the landscape architects in-house at the Borough of the South-West, who we worked closely with to develop the space according to our needs and aspirations. Our cultural hub pilot was approved for Lot 4 of the Bâtiment 7 site which was already slated to roll into municipal jurisdiction as a public park and greenspace after the remediation took place.

PRESS
START
YOUTH COOP

BUCKSKIN
BABES
COLLECTIVE

BOROUGH
SOUTH
WEST

CO - DESIGN PARTNERS

BATIMENT 7

COMMISSIONER
INDIGENOUS
RELATIONS
OFFICE

BOROUGH
POINTE
ST
CHARLES

BÂTIMENT 7

“Bâtiment 7 is an industrial heritage building, a fragment of the popular history of Pointe-Saint-Charles, converted into an accessible alternative gathering place teeming with projects” (B7.org). Bâtiment 7 represents a particular culture of community engagement alive within Montréal, where collectivity and community economy is valued and protected. This partnership is a natural fit, as Buckskin Babes’ practices align with the collaborative, action-oriented ecosystem of B7 and their legacy of mobilisation to protect co-creative spaces through values of social justice and direct action. B7 was established as a “factory of collective autonomy” through grassroots community mobilisation as people came together to resist the demolition of the site for high-rise condo development and remains a community hub for creative collaboration, social justice and food security.

CN RAIL HISTORY

Bâtiment 7 is part of a flat-roofed, red brick buildings originally constructed between 1854 and 1890 by the Canadian Grand Trunk Railway. The structures were later modernized by Canadian National (CN) between 1927 and 1929, located on unceded, unsundered Kanien’kéha:ka territory in so-called Montréal’s Pointe-Saint-Charles district. The complex of rail buildings was dedicated to the manufacture and repair of trains, with a few designated office complexes (Heritage, 2024). The role of train expansion and economic development through rail barrons is a corner stone of settler colonial technologies with a long history in so-called Montréal. The site is now subject to a soil remediation and zoning requalification to bring together residential, commercial and industrial functions. B7 offers a foundry, automotive repair shop, a number of studios including carpentry, woodworking, silk screen print making and more.



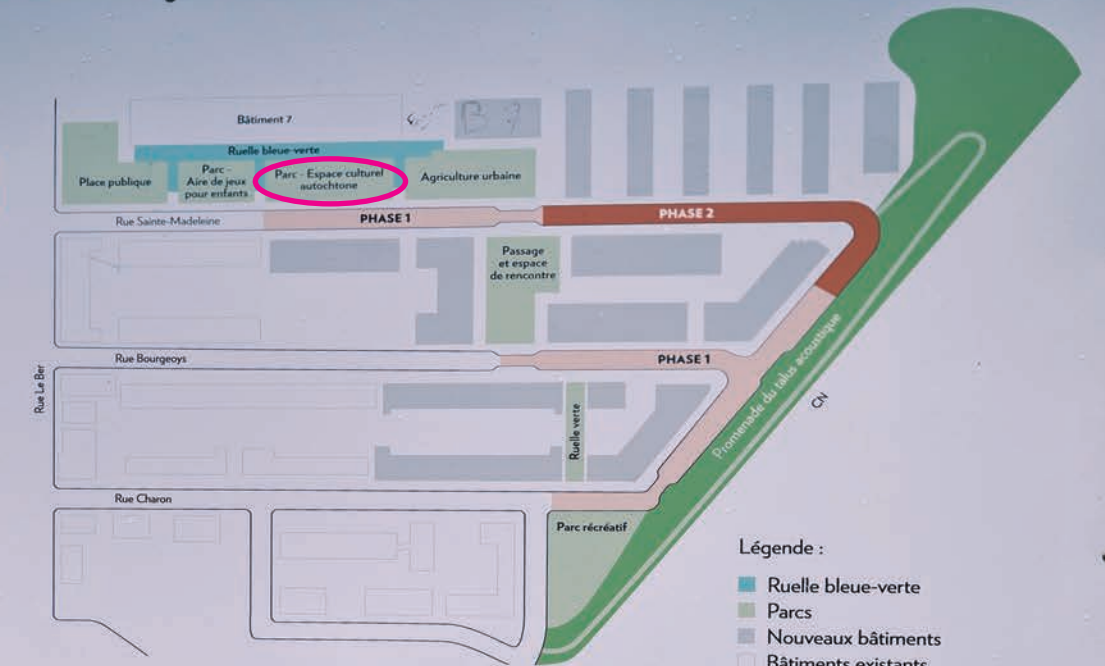
DÉCOUVREZ LES FUTURS

ESPACES PUBLICS

DES ANCIENS ATELIERS DU CN!

La ruelle bleu-verte constitue le premier jalon d’une série de futurs parcs et espaces verts qui transformeront complètement le secteur des anciens ateliers du CN de Pointe-Saint-Charles en un quartier où modernité et transition écologique vont de pair. Leur aménagement est le fruit de nombreuses consultations publiques et ateliers à travers la dernière décennie.

QR code
Suivez l’évolution du développement du quartier :
montreal.ca/sud-ouest (anciens ateliers du CN)
Questions : 311



Légende :

- Ruelle bleu-verte
- Parcs
- Nouveaux bâtiments
- Bâtiments existants

À noter que certains espaces pourraient être bonifiés.

Le Sud-Ouest
Montréal

Above: Site notice map of CN Ateliers Anciens park system including our Cultural Hub in Phase 1, July 2025.
Left: Polaroid of Bâtiment 7 new neon sign, at night. Nov 2024.



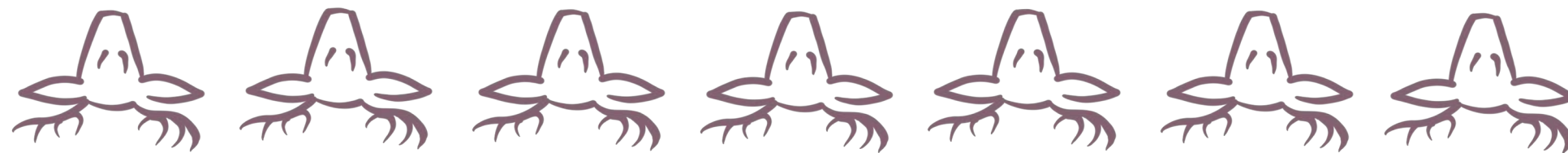
Master Hide Tanner, Brian Bird, showing off a completed freshly smoked hide. 2023.

REFUSAL AND CULTURAL SAFEGUARDING

Although the Bâtiment 7 ecosystem offers an environment rich in shared values of community mobilisation, social justice and collective care engaging in Indigenous land-based practices in an urban setting requires cultural safeguarding and necessary boundaries when exposed to the public. Firstly, we recognize the impact of colonial dispossession on access to traditional territories and land-based practices and the primary objective of our work is to create a space for cultural transmission and Indigenous-centred learning. We are mindful to create closed culturally spaces for Onkwehón:we to gather and learn in an environment free from judgement and spectacle. Additionally, general members of the public may have varying levels of education in regards to anti-racism or Indigenous sovereignty, and we are focused on being present in the practice, learning from our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Consent is the power to say no, and it is essential that we maintain healthy boundaries to protect Indigenous learners to foster cultural transmission. Reclaiming space in the urban environment that is just for us.

It was essential to ensure that the development of our cultural hub not become co-opted by municipal interests to check a box through tokenism and that we remain rooted in autonomy. Throughout the co-design we identified ways to establish privacy through landscape architectural solutions, especially through Indigenous trees and bushes that are culturally relevant.

We also emphasized the importance of Indigenous visual cultures to support our sense of belonging, creating a space where we are invited with autonomy rather than surface level diversity and inclusion. It is necessary to recognize that some systemic barriers we face may start off as exclusion or erasure and evolve into tokenization, fetishization and exploitation. Grounding our collaborative space in anti-racist and anti-colonial values supports our agency and self-determination within the context of ongoing settler colonial structures that seek to “eliminate the Native” (Wolfe, 2006).



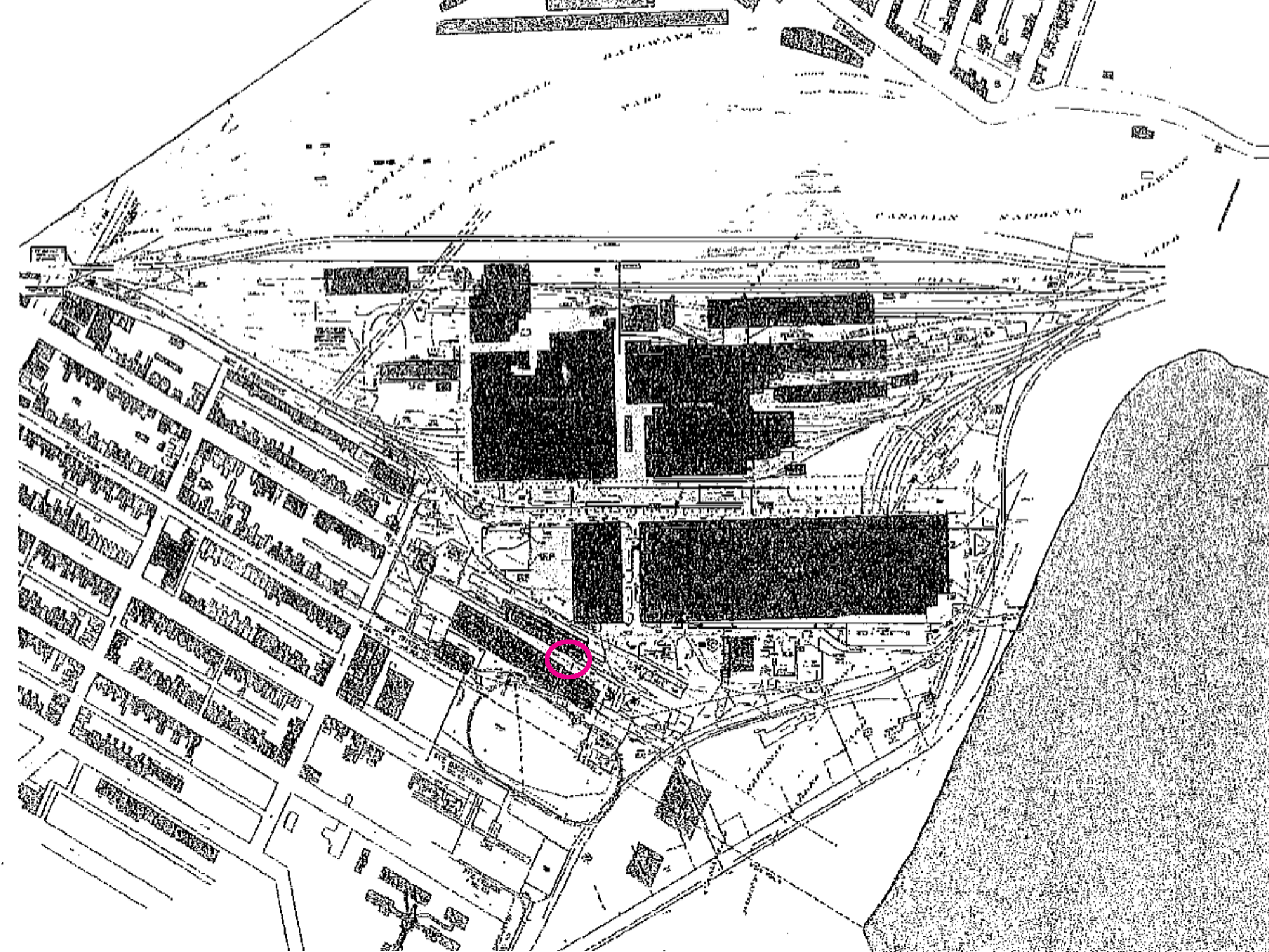
ARCHEOLOGY

The archeological report contains several blind spots as it was initiated in 2009, before any Indigenous co-design processes were enabled. The municipal entities must do better to initiate contact with Indigenous archeologists early on in projects to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to preserve archeological findings, recommending Cultural Monitors on site when construction is underway.

The scope of this report focuses on post-colonial presence of the area, highlighting Seignorial land parcels granted by Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve in the mid-1600's - a product of Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery. It goes on to highlight the presence of the Grey Nuns, Sulpicians and other religious entities on the site in the mid 1800's. There is recognition of Irish immigration through in the early 1850's with note of a typhus epidemic.

The report details a number of soil contaminants from the sites use during the Grand Trunk Railway and CN Rail yard including petroleum hydrocarbons (rail), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) (coal) and other heavy metals from metalworking, industrial waste and combustion.

Although the report identifies 33 known prehistoric sites within a 10 km radius highlighting sustained human presence from at least 4,200 BP through to 450 BP, there was not sufficient resources allocated to ensuring Indigenous archeological involvement. For the most part, a significant amount of soil contamination impacts the "contemporary layer" which was the focus of the remediation schedule. As our co-design was only initiated in 2024, this posed challenges regarding engaging with design processes that had already been underway such as the archeological assessment. This case study offers successes as well as areas of improvement and challenges to address for future collaborations.



Lot 4 Parc lonkwatia'tarò:ron is circled. Map from Service d'archéologie (2009).

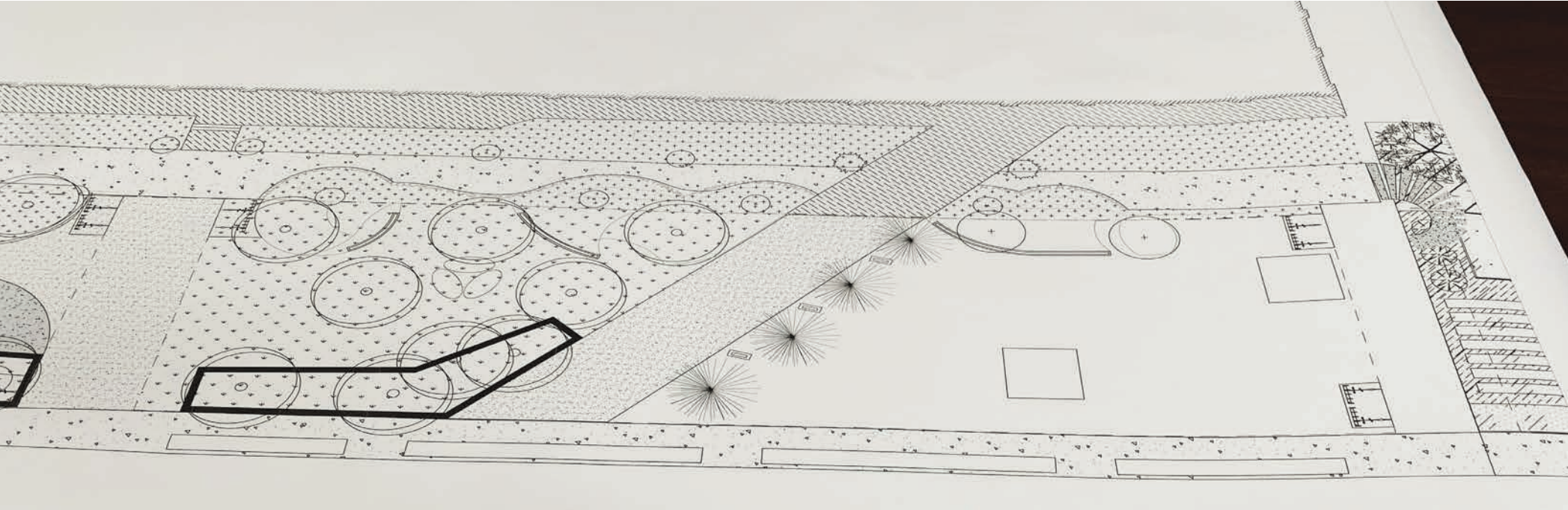
**“THE TIME HAS COME FOR PLANNING AND
DESIGN TO BE DONE NOT FOR US OR WITHOUT US:
JIGAXGU GUUN**

(PRONOUNCED JI/GACK/GO/GOON) [TRANSLATED: THE FUTURE IS NOW]

**FOR MANY GENERATIONS OUR VOICE WAS SILENCED
THE TIME IS NOW FOR US TO BE HEARD
MORE THAN JUST TALKING WE NEED TO BE DOING
WE NEED TO CLAIM OUR COMMUNITIES
OUR LAND OUR LANGUAGES
AS MORE AND MORE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE MOVING TO
URBAN AREAS, WE NEED TO CLAIM
THE NEW URBAN SPACES AND EXPRESS OUR CULTURES”**

- LUUGIGYOO PATRICK STEWART





Schematic design of Lot 4, designated site for the Cultural Hub, December 2024.

FUNCTION, FORM AND FUTURES

Through the collaborative design process, Buckskin Babes led the scope of needs and aspirations for the space with consideration to the limitations of the projects capacity. We were met with support and encouragement from the municipal entities involved in the Bâtiment 7 remediation, and the co-design focused on outdoor infrastructures facilitated through landscape architecture.

Corinne and Michelle (pictured right) were receptive, enthusiastic and willing to advocate where necessary to protect the integrity of our cultural hub pilot.

BSB identified key features that would support hide tanning and camp facilitation, creating a space for gathering and implementing land-based practices based on needs and aspirations for the space. One of the cornerstone features was the ability to have a cultural fire whenever necessary, in addition to various infrastructure which would improve hide camp experiences. We also prioritized creating multiple opportunities for Indigenous artists through identifying the need for highly visible landmarks for wayfinding through visual cultures.



Corinne LaForce (L), Michelle-Anne Storey (R)
Landscape Architects South-West Borough

As hide tanners and land-based educators we mapped out the necessary spaces we would need, creating zones for visitor experience with the dual service of creating a green space that fosters a reprieve from urban environments. We emphasized how to use natural elements such as Indigenous plants to create shade and increase privacy and discretion when we activate the space.

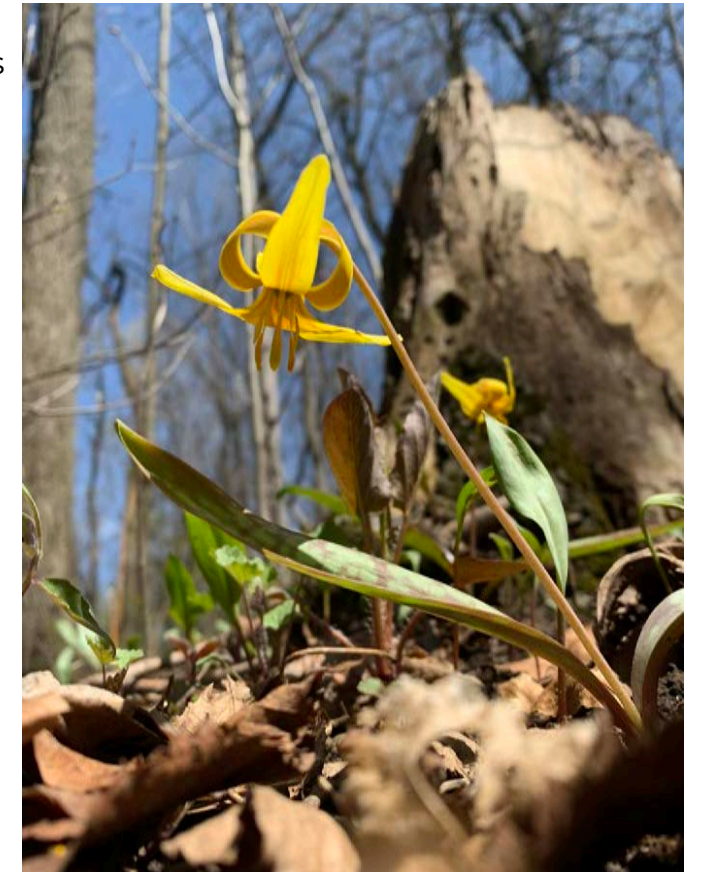
We wanted the hide tanning space to feel welcoming, like an escape to the bush seeking infrastructure that can maintain a rustic feel.

Key design elements

> Large A-frame pavilion with a concrete slab and inset wood burning fire pit. This space is designed to be able to host hide processing at various stages of the tanning process, large enough for multiple framed-up moose hides to work on at once with modular functionality to adapt to the needs of camp. Additional land-based programming can take place here and offers an outdoor gathering space with overhead shelter.

> Elders warming station, which will provide the ability to have on-site shelter during outdoor activities, in all seasons which increases accessibility for different ages and bodies. Here we have access to running water, electricity and includes specifications to store hides to dry, in preparation for the next stage of tanning. This space includes an outdoor cooking station and an outdoor seating area. We included space to store our tools and visioned opportunities for Indigenous artists to implement murals, beautifying walk-ways and creating wayfinding through visual cultures.

> The fire pit is large enough to accommodate clay pot cooking and maple sap boiling seasonally. The space includes a large enough area to put up temporary structures and includes a wooded area with benches and hammock stands with over 1,330 Indigenous plant species including roughly 50 native trees which focuses on habitat restoration and returning the landscape to pre-railyard ecologies (Deer T, 2025).



BUCKSKIN BABES URBAN MOOSE HIDE TANNING COLLECTIVE

CULTURAL HUB
ANNOUNCEMENT & NAMING

FEAST

SUN. NOV 17TH 1pm - 3pm
Bâtiment 7 1900 Rue Le Ber
Pointe St Charles



DEER ANTLER RAFFLE!

Polaroid set. Left: white tail deer tails as part of the Feast give away

Right: Celebrating after the feast. November 2024.



PARC IONKWATIA'TARO:NON



FEAST & NAMING

We came together to feast and share updates on the cultural hub co-design with our community members in Fall 2024. We gathered our minds together to discuss the importance of this site and what we would like to name it. After hearing from many perspectives we agree on the following toponymy. We were grateful to have the support of Buckskin Babe collective member Brooke Rice in interpreting/translating the name to Kanien'keha.

We Gather - Ionkwatia'tarò:ron - We Belong

Present at our Feast:

- Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide Tanning Collective
- Native Montréal
- Reseau NETWORK
- Tiotiàh:ke Health
- Office of Community Engagement, Concordia University
- Cedar Tea Project
- Black Indigenous Harm Reduction Network
- Tkà:nios Community Garden Kahnawà:ke
- Press Start Youth Cooperative

Various Indigenous community members, artists and hide camp participants.

“At hide camp, I felt empowered. Never felt like myself before in the city. It was my space. My kid, sat so comfortably. There is a beaver and an otter behind him while he eats his lunch. First time having this where he lives instead of having to go back home everytime. I'm not the only person fighting. There is a whole community in the city.” - Participant

However, even in an Indigenous co-design for a hide tanning cultural hub there was still political push back from various interests in the toponymy committee as there is “always an old White guy to commemorate”, whose names are sitting on lists waiting to be implemented into public space. Highlighting a site of necessary decolonial intervention, as Indigenous languages should be prioritized on Indigenous lands.



STATUS UPDATE: CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY - OPENING 2026

From our first hide camp to the formal application to host a permanent cultural hub, this project has been several years in the making. The co-design process was underway from the kick-off meeting in February 2024 until schematic design and detailed design phases. After we engaged our community hosting a Feast to develop the naming of the site, construction was underway as of fall 2025. At the time of this publication, construction continues with the cement slab being prepared to be poured shortly. Park lonkwatia'tarò:ron is slated to complete construction and formally open in the Fall of 2026. The collective is working on next steps and envisioning a community celebration to inaugurate the space.

When all of the General Contractor work is complete, we will be able to reach out and on-board visual artists to bring the space to the next level through a number of mural and public art opportunities. We look forward to taking steps to ground our work in the space on our own terms and to continue to build relationships across regional Indigenous communities to activate the site through hide tanning and land-based practices.

“IT’S MEDICINE”



Brooke Rice speaking with CityNews, status update. October 2025.



Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide Tanning collective's grassroots initiative started on the vacant gravel lot on the southeastern wall of Bâtiment 7. Our ad hoc hide camps began in 2021 and were met with enthusiasm, excitement and encouragement. Buckskin Babes entered the B7 ecosystem through Indigenous ways of doing rooted in relationship building. Press Start Youth Cooperative invited us into the space and operated as our buffer with the general non-Indigenous public. Press Start worked to build reciprocal relationships with the collective, offering child care during hide camps and banner making. Through the friendship of Autumn (BSB) and Michelle (Press Start), we reclaimed space that we would learn was classified as Lot 4. Our journey had brought us from hanging our medicines to dry on the chain link fence and having to haul all of our water in, to building a permanent gathering place to tan hides.

A Perfect Storm

A confluence of conditions precipitated the cultural hub pilot which ultimately contributed to the implementation of our co-design. This includes the culture at Bâtiment 7 who value autonomy, self-determination and collective action; the political climate around reconciliation in City of Montréal, including the support of all parties involved in the co-design.

Through the success of our previous hide camps with zero infrastructure, we were able to highlight the need for this type of space. Buckskin Babes collective members had various roles in the co-design which strengthened the overall outcome; from experience in visitor experience and co-design facilitation, to emphasis on Elder care and intergenerational access, to first hand experience of spatial use for the tanning practice, to hosting our Feasting and developing the toponymy this project would not have been possible without our many hands.

Additionally, the site remediation created an unique opportunity as a key point of entry for the pilot. This ongoing process made the projects' feasibility more palatable to the municipal structure, and the landscape architects we worked with were willing to protect the integrity of this project.

The ability to reclaim this space from a CN railyard for "bringing the bush to the City" is movement towards building Indigenous land-based futures in the urban landscape. There is a clear and undeniable need for an accessible land-based cultural hub where we can transmit traditional knowledge and life-affirming practices. The outcome of this work directly addresses systems of dispossession and displacement, key to enacting design sovereignty.





Polaroid documenting deer antlers from City cull. November 2024.

“BUCKSKIN BABES TO ME SIGNIFIES STRENGTH, COURAGE, DETERMINATION, AND PERSEVERANCE. WHEN WE SAY TAKING OUR LAND BACK WE’RE MEANING OUR CEREMONIES, OUR LANGUAGES, OUR CULTURAL PRACTICES, OUR WAYS OF BEING, OUR VALUE SYSTEMS, OUR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.”

- Autumn Godwin in an interview in the short film titled everlasting (2025).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron seeks to implement design sovereignty by directly addressing systemic issues of cultural access through colonial dispossession in the urban landscape “bringing the bush to the City” (Deer, 2023). Through collaborative design practices that reflected culturally relevant design, supporting the implementation of Indigenous-led initiatives which activate cultural heritage through collective action by hide tanning on the site.

Initial application was made in partnership with Bâtiment 7, Press Start Youth Co-operative and Buckskin Babes. We then gained the support of the municipality. In February 2024 we began briefing landscape architects, and working through collaborative design sessions to set parameters for the final outcome, identifying limits, needs and aspirations. We implemented community feedback loops and engagement for toponymy through feasting, offerings and land-based protocols. In late Summer 2024 the General Contractor was awarded, starting construction work with a public announcement (press event with Mayor of Sud-Ouest Sept 12th, 2025) with site inauguration scheduled in Fall 2026.

Strengths: Willingness to redirect existing resources, work collaboratively with Indigenous-led design processes, challenge dominant practices and mobilize individual agency to advocate, safeguard within larger systems that privilege settler practices.

Challenges: The established bureaucratic mechanisms created many challenges to sift through, including time pressures and institutional practices which do not account for Indigenous methodologies and relational frameworks. Often having to advocate and capacity build on the side of the municipality to ensure the process was meaningful and could accommodate our requests, questions and needs. Multi-levels of government also make the collaboration more complex, as there was some push back from the toponymy committee for using Indigenous language in place name as they navigate French-language political



Detailed design construction documents, kick-off meeting with General Contractors. July, 2025.



Public notice of construction signage at the site. September 2025.

REMEDIATING LANDS THROUGH RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

Although there are limitations to this co-design, this case study highlights what is possible when existing resources are allocated to Indigenous-led initiatives. At this site, soil remediation led to soil rematriation by creating designated access for Indigenous land-based practices in the urban environment. This is an important take away for other urban areas to examine the entry point of soil remediation and industrial land rezoning to create solutions that meet the needs of urban and regional Indigenous peoples.

When urban centres design in response to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, opportunities to enact “right relationship” that have meaningful impact and praxis arise. In the case of Parc lonkwatia'tarò:ron, the hardest part was put into place before the co-design kicked off: relationship building for meaningful collaboration. This is an important starting point that can grow into greater impacts when Indigenous sovereignty is at the centre of imagining urban relations.



U-HAULING HIDES



As part of ongoing relationship building, Randy Rankin (Pikogan First Nation), Commissioner of Indigenous Relations at the City of Montréal was able to connect the collective with a literal u-haul of deer hides. The white tailed deer came from large municipal green spaces in Longueuil, where the City was implementing a cull due to population overgrowth. The deer were butchered, the meat was tested for diseases and then donated to shelters serving urban Indigenous populations in the downtown core. Preventing the hides from going to waste, they were given to the Buckskin Babes urban hide tanning initiative for collective processing and community programming. The collective reached out to daphne (Indigenous artist-run centre) to store our freezers until their permanent home is ready at Bâtiment 7 in Pointe Ste Charles. Randy's office saw an opportunity to support community driven Indigenous initiatives and allocated the resources necessary to seize the moment.

Polaroids documenting deer hides in u-haul (over 70), stacked in freezers (right). November 2024.





REFLECTIONS

In many ways this co-design achieves design sovereignty, particularly as at its heart the work of Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide Tanning collective directly responds to and colonial legacies of dispossession, displacement and ongoing genocide. Reclaiming Indigenous land-based practices within urban centres designed to wield necropower against us is empowering and energizing. We have heard first hand the impact of urban hide camps for urban and regional Indigenous communities. We are applying Indigenous design through relationality, centring Elder care and sustainable harvesting practices through culturally relevant ways of doing and being.

We will be able to put more of our energy into the practice of hide tanning itself and have gained an important point of access through the ability to host cultural fires whenever necessary. In an interview with Tehosterihens Deer of CityNews, Brooke Rice shared, "Fire is so important, it helps to alchemize and transform things," Rice added "It's medicine. It's ceremony." In that same interview I stressed the this site's creation "visualizes the fact that this is unceded territory. This is still Onkwehón:we territory." (Deer, T. 2025). In an urban setting where we are deeply marginalized, often on our own lands, or forced to leave our communities for a variety of reasons to urban centres highlights that our practices are alive and continue to be carried forward wherever we are.

However, there are areas of improvement that this case study highlights. In particular, a few barriers remain in place. Although this is a very interesting co-design, ultimately the land remains within municipal property lines and although the Bâtiment 7 space was adaptable to our needs, Indigenous presence was not integrated from the outset of the CN rail remediation with particular attention on the need to improve archeological assessments and design in response to Indigenous sovereignty.



Limitations

STILL STUCK IN THE BOX...

LAND
BACK

Despite the excitement behind this opportunity, as Indigenous stakeholders we are still forced to fight our way out of settler colonial structures for a small square of land...





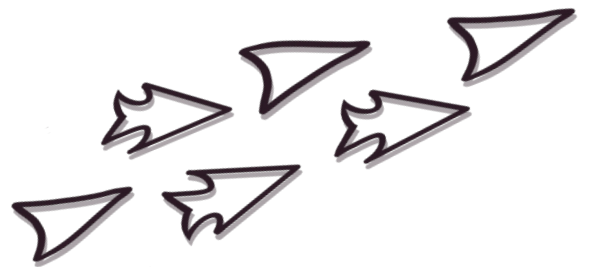
**“NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US”
IF IT’S ABOUT THE LAND
IT IS ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

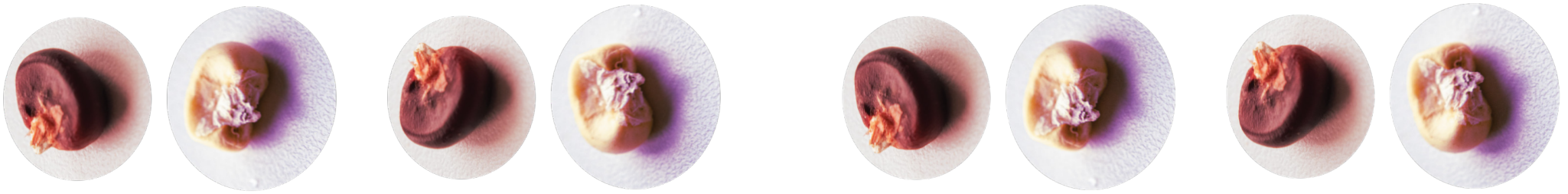


**DOES THE WORK
CHALLENGE OR
REINFORCE SETTLER
COLONIALISM?**



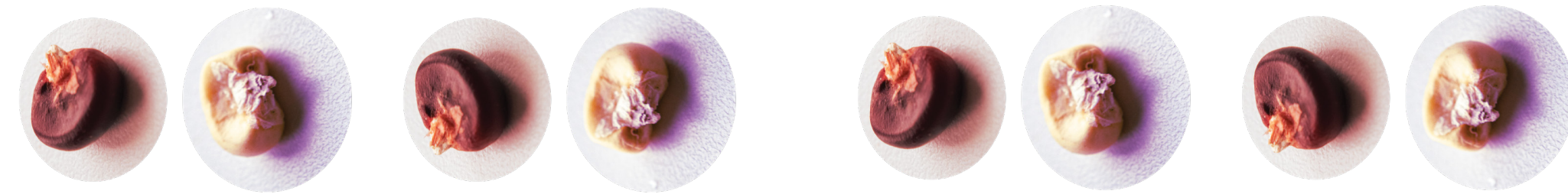
**SIGNPOSTS FOR
DECOLONIZING DESIGN**





PLACEKEEPING

A term widely popularized by Cree architect Wanda Dalla Costa (Saddle Lake First Nation) and the first Indigenous woman in Canada to become licensed in the practice, directly confronts the dominant paradigm of placemaking in urban design. Which emphasizes urban development or city building, constructing not just infrastructure but identity through designing destinations which meet economic metrics such as via tourism or industry hubs. This delineation acts as an example of Indigenous storywork “speaking back as a way to counter the violence of colonial storytelling”(Archibald et al, 2019). Placekeeping “prioritizes ecological, historical and cultural relationships to place, while bringing the presence of Indigenous histories and futures into focus” and recognizes Indigenous peoples as the first city builders on these lands (Evergreen, 2020; Chung-Tiam-Fook, 2022). This means grounding architecture in culturally responsive design that puts human needs in alignment with ecological and environmental needs.



UNIVERSAL INCLUSIVITY

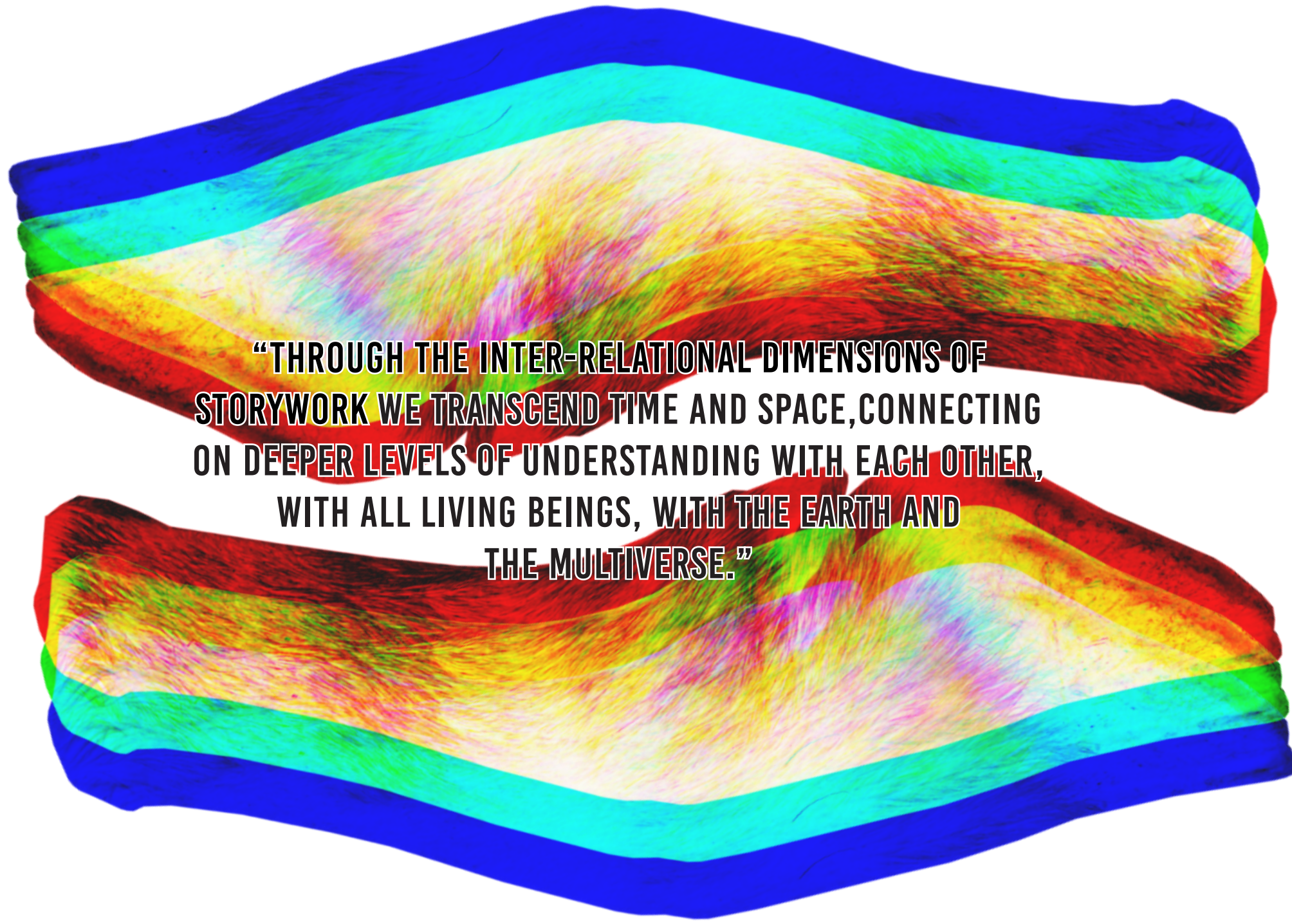
Kanien'kehà:ka architect Matthew Hickey asserts, "placekeeping for all species" (Hickey, 2022). This requires first understanding the histories, legacies, and ecologies that compile placehood on Indigenous lands. At Two Row Architects "placekeeping is really about how we respect our relations — the wind, the water, the land, the animals — and thinking about how we can build in a way that respects and enhances those. Through that enhancement, we're also, ultimately, enhancing life for humanity" (Hickey, 2022). This view reflects Indigenous values in design such as interconnection and relationality, where understanding ecological cycles and environmental features contributes to "good design" and ultimately reaps positive impacts for humanity through balance with the natural world rather than domination over it.

PLURIVERSE

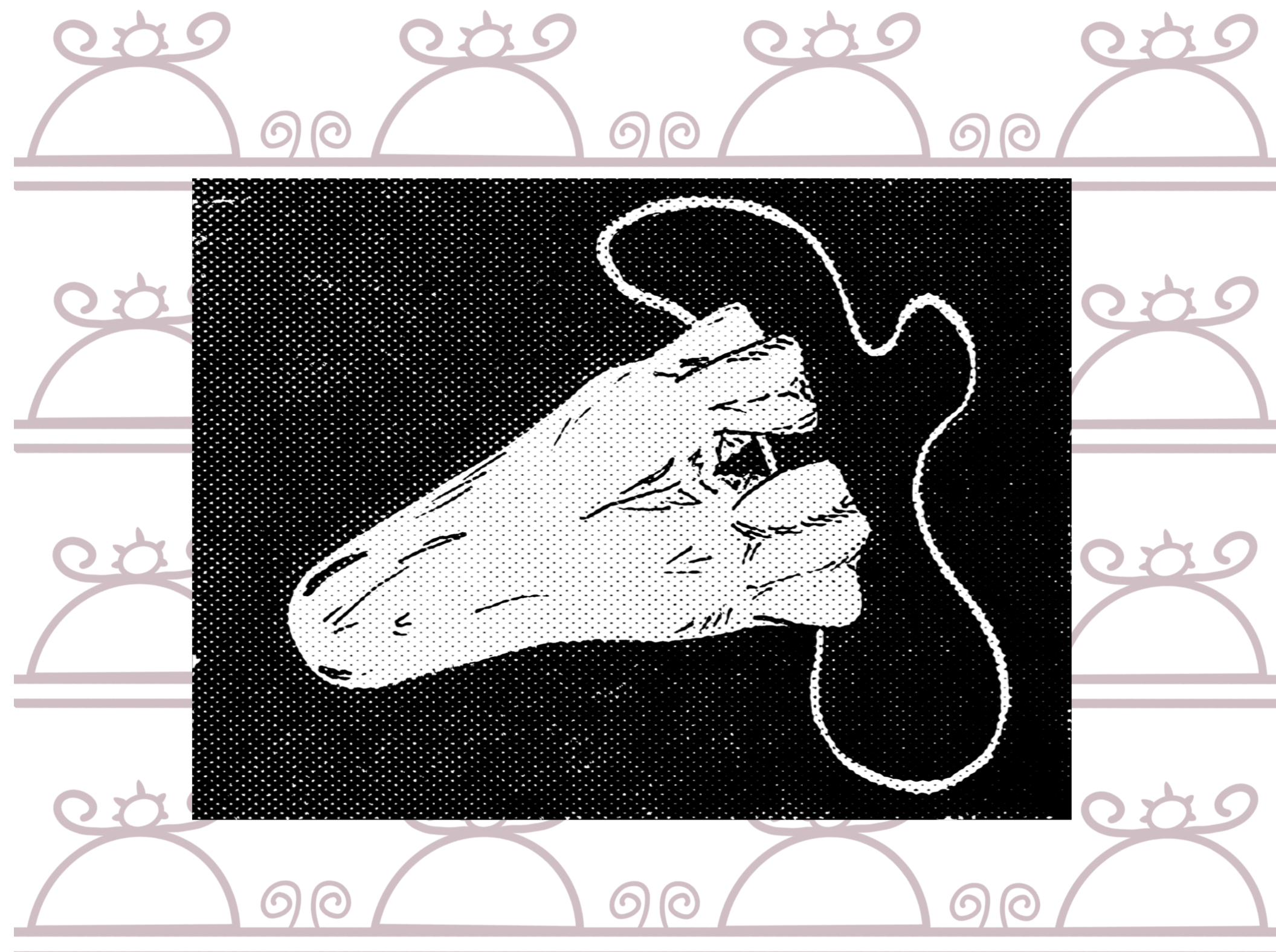
Rejects a universalized world of Western modernity under neoliberal globalization but rather desires,

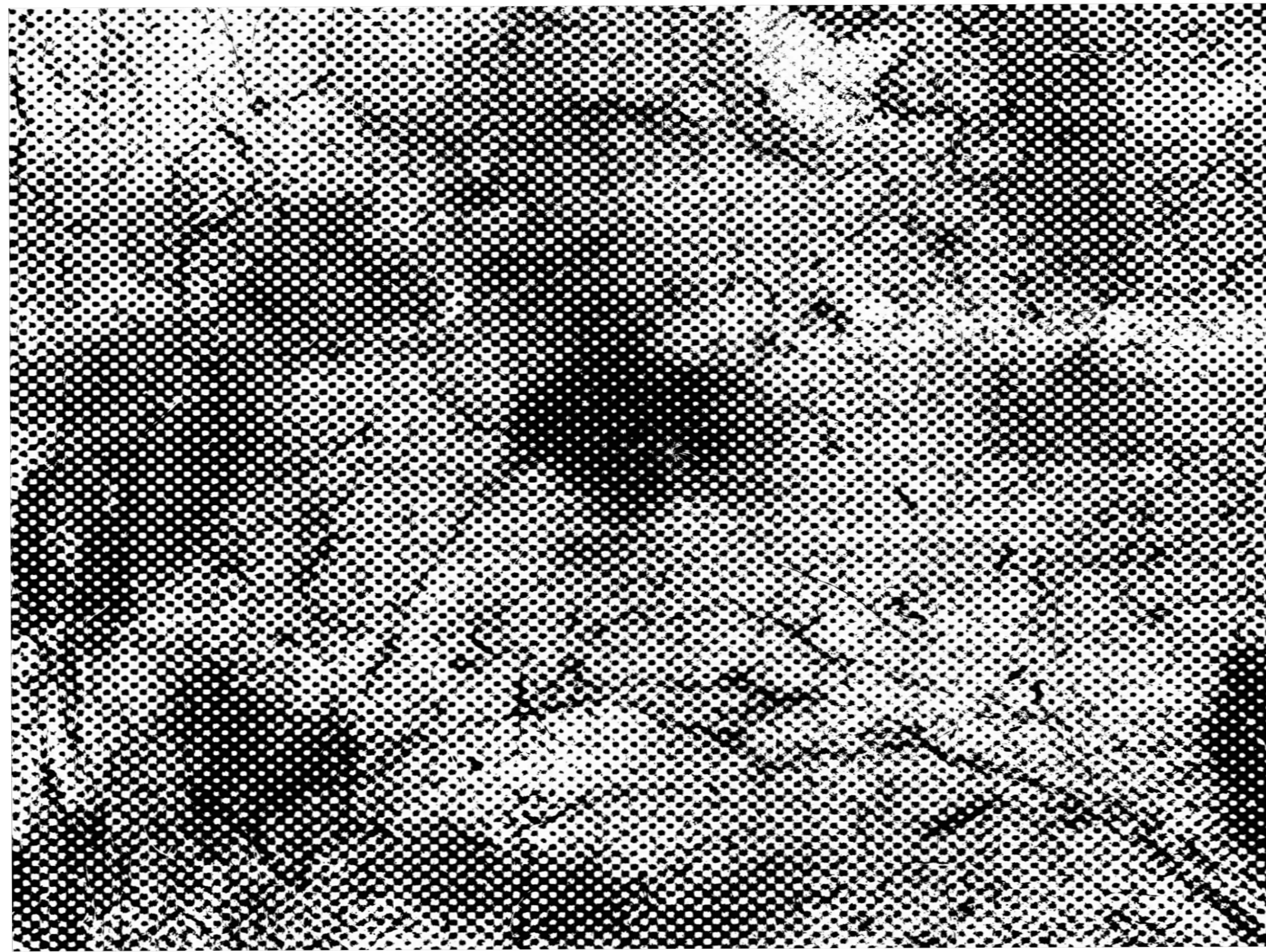


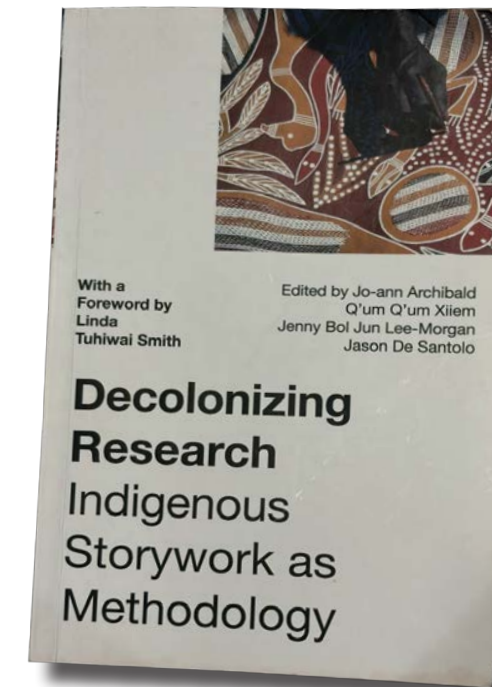
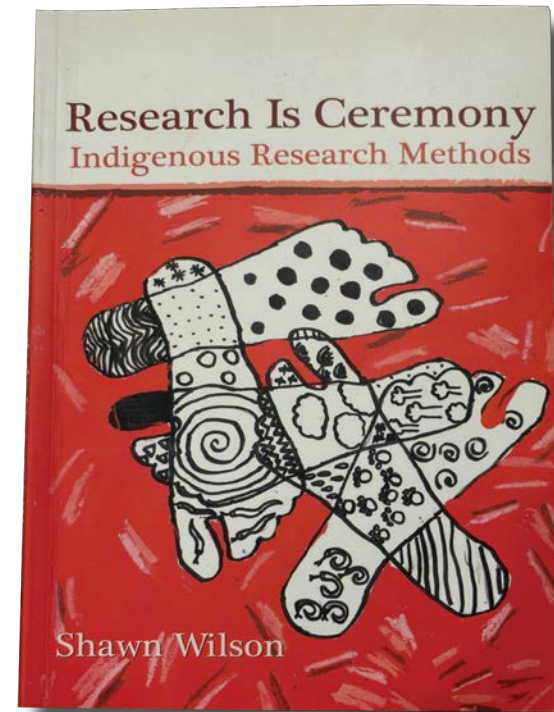
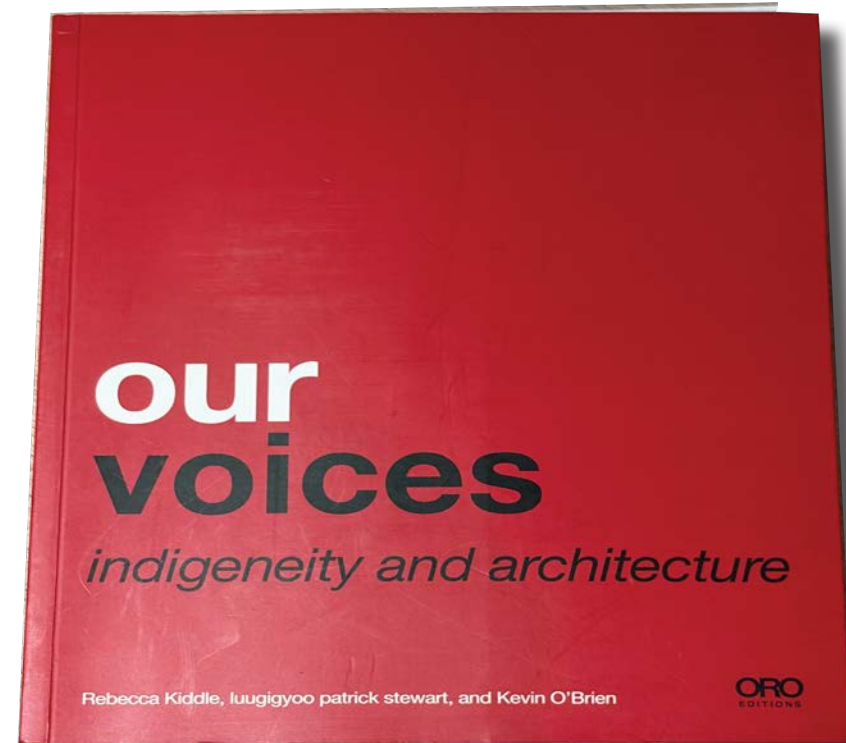
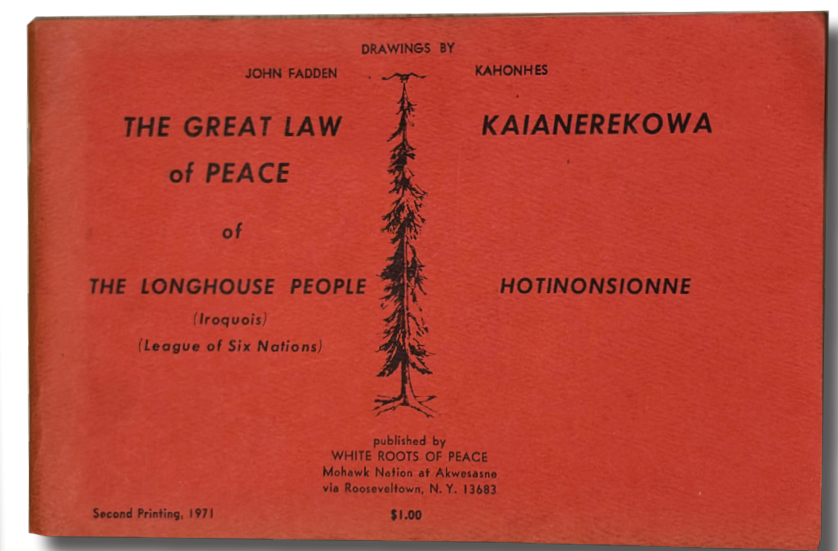
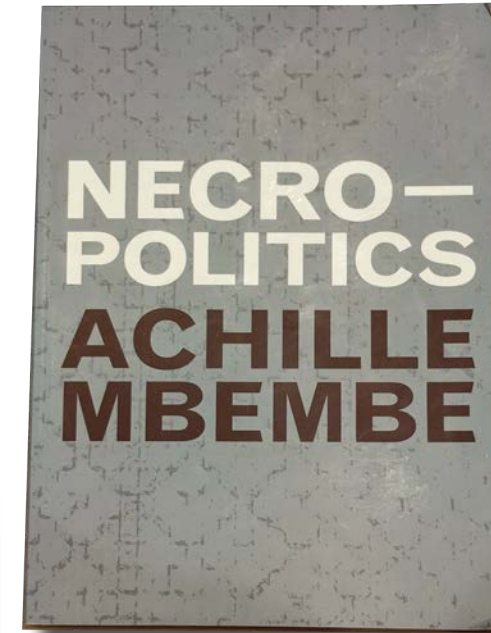
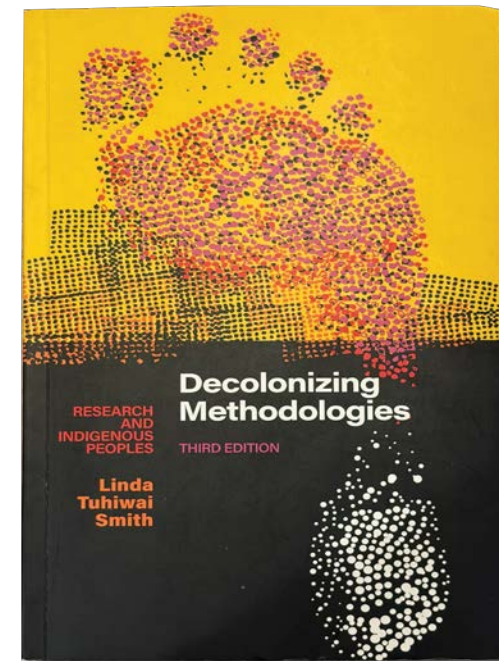
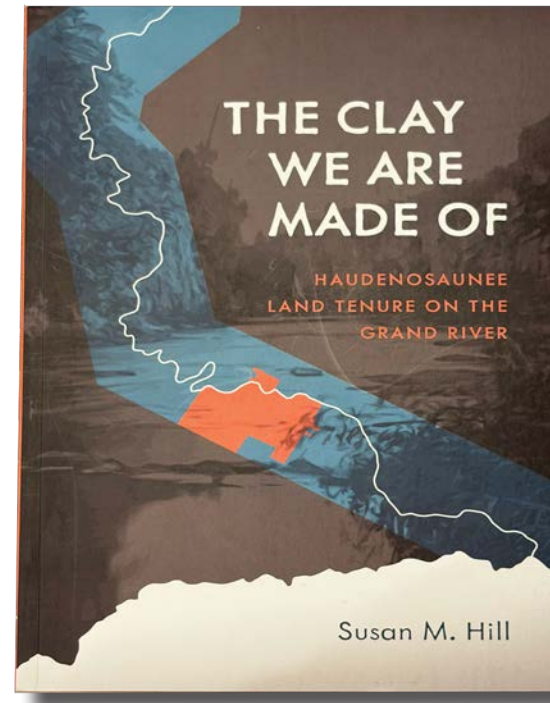
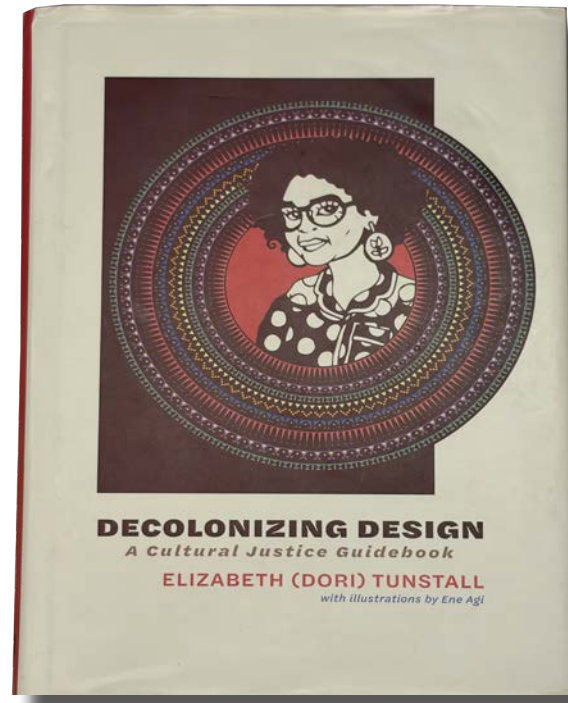
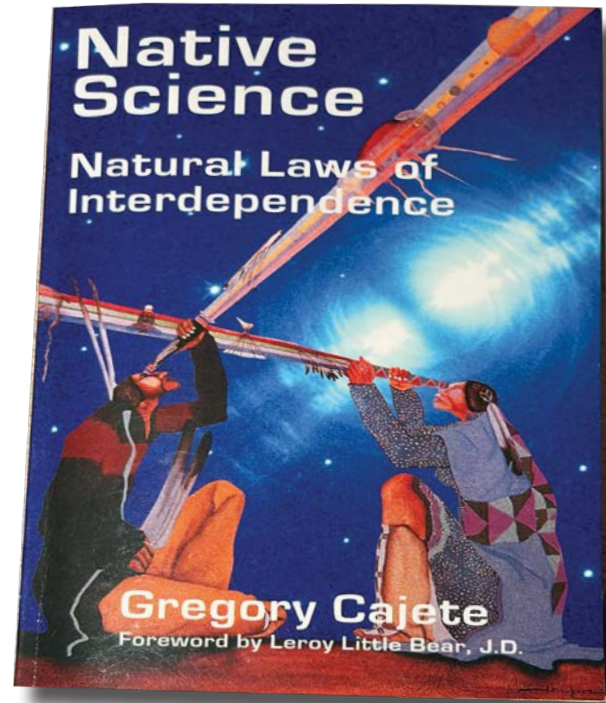
as stated by the Zapatistas
"a world where many worlds
fit" (Escobar, 2018).



**“THROUGH THE INTER-RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF
STORYWORK WE TRANSCEND TIME AND SPACE,CONNECTING
ON DEEPER LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING WITH EACH OTHER,
WITH ALL LIVING BEINGS, WITH THE EARTH AND
THE MULTIVERSE.”**









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