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**Whose Hero? Images of Louis Riel in Contemporary Art and Métis Nationhood**

**Catherine L. Mattes**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art History**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Whose Hero? Images of Louis Riel in Contemporary Art and Métis Nationhood**

**Catherine L. Mattes**

Louis Riel is perhaps one of the most controversial figures in Canadian history. In mainstream Canadian society, he is often described as a “Canadian hero”, a “Father of Confederation”, or the “Founder of Manitoba”. He has become an icon for various organizations, political parties, and cultural groups in Canada. Although for many Métis Riel is a “Canadian hero”, he is also an important figure for the Métis nation. Many Métis use the image of Riel as a source of inspiration in fighting for cultural autonomy, pride, and respect in Canada. Therefore how he is discussed in literature, or how he is portrayed in art greatly affects the lives of many Métis. The purpose of this thesis is to examine images of Louis Riel in contemporary art in reference to Métis nationhood. I use visual images of Riel to discuss the various opinions of Riel, Métis historical and contemporary cultural struggles, and the concept of “nation” in reference to the Métis. My intent is to give a Métis point of view on art that deals with the controversial Louis Riel. I attempt to challenge mainstream opinions of Riel, how history has been written about First Peoples, and various non-Métis perceptions about the Métis. Little or no research has been done about images of Louis Riel and Métis nationhood, and with this thesis I hope to help fill this void.

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on the issues discussed in this thesis, primarily defining what it means to be Métis. I found relatives, and friends like Bruce Sinclair to be very inspiring, and I thank them for instilling pride in me. I also thank the Winnipeg Art Gallery, MacKenzie Art Gallery, and the National Gallery of Canada for sending me written information on the artists. A special thanks to Linda Tucker for keeping me in tune with what was occurring in Manitoba via the many newspaper articles on Louis Riel she clipped and sent me.

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...In that part of the country  
we were always katipâmsôchik  
and our displaced history  
is as solid as every railroad tie  
pounded into place, linking  
each stolen province.

(Gregory Scofield, excerpt from "Policy of the  
Dispossessed" in Native Canadiana - Songs from  
the Urban Rez.)



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## INTRODUCTION

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century, Louis Riel fought for the rights of the *katipâmsôchik*, the people who stand on their own, the Métis. In recent years, contemporary Métis have begun new struggles to have their hero and nation acknowledged with respect in mainstream Canadian society. This has entailed demanding the right to self - government and land title, and having a voice in our own history. As our ancestors did in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- century, we have turned to Louis Riel for strength.

In the article "Haunted by Riel," Mavor Moore writes that a symbol is more powerful than the thing for which it stands.<sup>1</sup> In mainstream Canadian society, the images and perceptions of Riel are various, and often conflicting. In historical writings, visual art, politics, and literature, Riel is now often portrayed as a " Father of Confederation", a "French- Canadian hero", a "hero for all peoples living in the West", or a martyr for all those who have had grievances with the federal governments. In some ways, the diverse uses of Riel as an icon can be positive for Métis. A new surge of interest in Riel can mean a potential new interest in the Métis. This new public concern could possibly allow us to have our voices heard, and our cultural struggles acknowledged. However, as this thesis will discuss, often the new respect for Riel in mainstream Canadian society has little to do with the Métis.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the myth of Riel in mainstream

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<sup>1</sup>Mavor Moore, "Haunted by Riel" in Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture, (Holland: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992),p.411.

Canadian society affects the Métis nation. To discuss this, I look to portrayals of Louis Riel in art that were created from the late 1960s to the present. In particular I discuss the sculptures of Marcien Lemay(1971) and John Nugent(1968). I explore Miguel Joyal's statesman-like sculpture(1995), Jeff Funnell's collection of cartoon drawings the Riel Series(1985), and refer to John Boyle's Rebel Series(1967) and Batoche Series(1975). I examine these artistic portrayals of Riel from a Métis perspective, in the context of theories on nationhood, particularly those within a postcolonial canon.

Louis Riel was considered a traitor by the Canadian government and hanged in Regina in 1885. Riel is known for facilitating two major events in western Canadian history. In 1869, the Hudson's Bay Company sold territory from the Red River to the Rockies to the Canadian government (this territory represents the provinces located from Manitoba to British Columbia). The Métis, along with some Company employees, clergy, old Selkirk settlers and Americans, reacted negatively to this sale. Under the leadership of Riel, the Métis formed a provisional government that set up the Manitoba Act (or Métis Treaty) and fought for Manitoba's entry into Confederation.<sup>2</sup>

The Métis knew that settlement expansion and Confederation were inevitable. Therefore they fought for Manitoba's entry into Confederation on their own terms. Their demands included that 1.4 million acres of land be reserved for the unmarried children of the Métis, and that all existing occupancies and titles, including those of First Nations

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<sup>2</sup>John E. Foster, "The Plains Métis" in Native Peoples - The Canadian Experience, edited by R.Bruce Morrison & C.Roderick Wilson, (M&S, 1986),p.396.

communities, be respected. Unfortunately, the majority of their demands were not met.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Party attempted twice to overthrow the Métis' provisional government, which led to the execution of Orangeman Thomas Scott in 1870. Scott was executed for having refused to keep the peace and being openly racist to Métis people. Riel, who ordered the execution, fled to Montana because there were rumours that his life was in danger. From that point onward, the Métis nation began to decline.<sup>4</sup>

The second major event for which Riel is recognized is the Métis Resistance of 1884. By the early 1880s, the Métis' situation was very grim. The decline of the buffalo, the end of the 200 - year- old fur trade, the building of the railway, and settlement expansion all had negative effects on the Métis. Therefore, several Métis leaders went to Montana where Riel was a school teacher, to ask him to lead them once again. Riel agreed to do so, and returned to what was then known as the Northwest Territories, in June 1884. When Riel returned to the West to represent the Métis, he found that First Peoples struggles concerning starvation, land rights, and the reservation system were not being dealt with very well by the government. He petitioned the Canadian government, stating that "the people of the West had every right to be treated with the full dignity of British subjects, which was not happening."<sup>5</sup> Riel also insisted that white settlers were being charged too much for land by the Crown. Although Ottawa acknowledged the

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<sup>3</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations, (Toronto: Oxford University Press,1992),p.271.

<sup>4</sup>Antoine Lussier, "The Métis" in Canada's Native Peoples vol.11, Canada Heirloom Series, p.83 & 84.

<sup>5</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations (1992),p.307.

petition, there was no promise to change the situation.<sup>6</sup> The Métis took up arms against the Canadian government, but were not victorious. Louis Riel was executed on November 16, 1885 for treason, and the Métis nation once again went into decline.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> - century, Riel's image has been used by various persons and groups as a symbol for their beliefs, whether or not their views and situations are similar to Riel's and the Métis nation's. Although perhaps flattering to Métis, the use of Riel's image for movements that he himself did not believe in is problematic. As Glen Campbell states in the article "The Tormented Soul: Riel's Poetic Image of Himself," "This constantly changing image runs a dangerous course as far as the accuracy of Canadian history is concerned, in that Riel the symbol, the almost mythical god, risks supplanting Riel the historical figure."<sup>8</sup> Since Riel was the leader of the Métis nation, it is this Native group that is marginalised when people use the icon of Riel, because the myths about Riel receive more attention.

Janet Wolff writes that "the ideas, beliefs, attitudes and values expressed in cultural products are ideological, in the sense that they are always related in a systematic way to the social and economic structures in which the artist is situated."<sup>9</sup> She goes on to

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<sup>6</sup>Maggie Siggins, Riel -A Life of Revolution, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1994),p.367.

<sup>7</sup>David Lee, "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885" in Canadian Ethnic Studies, XXI,3,1989,p.1.

<sup>8</sup>Glen Campbell, "The Tormented Soul: Riel's Poetic Image of Himself" in Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture, (Holland: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992),p.353.

<sup>9</sup>Janet Wolff, The Social Production of Art, (New York: New York University Press, 1993),p.119.

state that "the perspective of any individual is not only biographically constructed, but also the personal mediation of a group consciousness."<sup>10</sup> Her argument can be applied to the various myths created about Louis Riel, where writers, historians, artists, educators and anthropologists decide what aspects of Riel should be discussed while making their various arguments. This is thus how the myths and the subsequent icon of Riel are created: by picking and choosing what is important to the cultural producers arguments.

Even though I consider myself a Métis, defining Métis nationhood has not been easy. Attempting to explain who we are has become a major focus in this thesis. This has entailed reading the definitions given in various sources surrounding Riel and the Métis, and most importantly, speaking with Métis persons and reading texts written by Métis persons, such as Joanne Arnott, Maria Campbell, Olive Patricia Dickason, and Gregory Scofield.

Definitions of Métis are often contradictory, or superficial. In the historical writings of English travellers or settlers, the terms "French half-breeds" or "English half-breeds" were used to describe the Métis.<sup>11</sup> An example is a comment made by a Prairie doctor, Dr.Stewart, which was reported in a confidential letter by the Assistant Under-Secretary of the Interior in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century. The letter states that "they are as poor as poverty itself, that they are not good farmers; that indeed they are not even energetic or

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>D.Bruce Sealey,Antoine S. Lussier, The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975),p.1.



willing workers, and that they drop quite into the Half-Breed habits of living."<sup>12</sup>

Historically, the "half-breeds" were the offspring of First Nations women and European fur traders. These men married indigenous women who were from prominent families, often for the benefit of the Hudson's Bay Company or the North West Company. In "Racism, Sexism, and Nation Building in Canada", Roxana Ng writes:

In addition to being slaves to English and French officials, they (First Nations women) were taken as wives and concubines. This was one way that white men, both traders and officials, gained access to the Native kinship system and lured Native groups into trading relations with Europeans.<sup>13</sup>

Once finished their work in the West, the men would return to where they came from, often to their non-Native wives who were waiting for them. Sometimes they would remain in the West, continuing their relations with their Amerindian wives. In later years, they might marry European women who came to the Prairies to settle.<sup>14</sup> As Roxana Ng writes, the offspring of these alliances gave rise to a new race, the Métis, who first acted as intermediaries between Native people and Europeans.

In Many Tender Ties, Sylvia Van Kirk attempts to show that "the norm for sexual relationships in fur-trade society was not casual, promiscuous encounters but the development of marital unions which gave rise to distinct family units...fur-trade society

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<sup>12</sup>Quote found in Diane Paulette Payment's text The Free People -Otipemisiwak, (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1990),p.78.

<sup>13</sup>Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Nation Building in Canada" in Race Identity and Representation in Education edited by Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (New York & London: Routledge Publishers, ),p.53.

<sup>14</sup>John E. Foster, "The Métis: the People and the Term" in Prairie Forum, Vol.3, No.1, 1976,p.83.

developed its own marriage rite, marriage *à la façon du pays*, which combined both Indian and European marriage customs. In this, the fur-trade society of Western Canada appears to have been exceptional."<sup>15</sup> Unique Métis cultural customs, manners, language, and dress arose from these interracial unions. As suggested in texts written by Diane Paulette Payment, Maria Campbell, and Duke Redbird, there are cultural specificities to being Métis. In The Free People - Otipemisiwak, Payment gives an in-depth description of the various Métis customs, food, clothing, language, and folklore. Payment asserts, "The society that we see at the turn of the century was one where the family and culture assisted in the identity of its members as Métis; a society determined to direct its own economy and which, by political means, asserts its 'rights'."<sup>16</sup>

First Nations people had various terms to define the Métis. The Ojibwa called Métis "wissakodewinmi", which means "burnt-sticks." The Cree called the Métis "O-tee-paym-soo-wuk", meaning "the free people". Other Cree terms are "Apitakkoosan", which means "half-breed", and "katipâmsôchik", meaning "the people who stand on their own."

The first use of the word "Métis" in English public print in Canada was by Louis Riel, in an article that was published in the Globe and Mail after his death in 1885.<sup>17</sup> Because it is a French word, some use the term to refer only to those who are of French

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<sup>15</sup>Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd, 1993),p.4.

<sup>16</sup>Diane Paulette Payment, The Free People -Otipemisiwak, (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Parks Service Environment Canada, 1990),p.11.

<sup>17</sup>Duke Redbird, We Are Métis, (Toronto: Ontario Métis & Non Status Indian Association, 1980),p.1.

and indigenous origin. In contemporary times, the term Métis is more acceptable than half-breed, and many people, Native and non - Native, use the term to define both French and English mixed persons living across North America. This has created some controversy for those Métis who are of French origin, and consider the term to apply only to French Métis. It is important to note that in the 19<sup>th</sup> - century, French and English Métis often lived alongside one another, and were related. As Bruce Sealey mentions in The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, some people with French names were Protestant and spoke only English, while those with English names could be Catholic and speak only French.<sup>18</sup> In contemporary times this still occurs. It is important to not negate the bonding and similarities that exist between French and English- speaking Métis, such as kinship based in marrying First Nations women, and experiences of alienation.

Another perplexity about the term Métis is whether mixed people from other places across Canada, other than the Prairies, can call themselves Métis. Because there is a specific Métis nation in the Prairies, there is confusion as to whether that term can only be used to define those mixed persons from the West. To use the term to refer to mixed persons from elsewhere could possibly negate the existence of a Métis nation in the West. Although this point is valid, the term Métis, which Riel used to define the nation which he represented, is a term used all over the world to define persons of mixed origin. The word itself is French, and means "simply mixed". In Mexico the term "Mestizo" is used to

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<sup>18</sup>D.Bruce Sealey, Antoine S.Lussier, The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975),p.13.

refer to persons of Spanish and Amerindian origin.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the act of defining the Métis is a difficult task, because the title is multi-layered with contradictions, conditions and exceptions.

In "The Métis: the People and the Term," John E. Foster gives a contemporary definition of the Métis. He writes:

Métis can refer to individuals and communities who derive some of their cultural practices from non-Indian native communities whose origins lie in the pre-1870 West. Perhaps the most useful view of the term today is as a label identifying a segment of western society which, in addition to recognizing an ancestry of mixed Indian and Euro-Canadian origins, seeks to realize various interests through particular political goals and actions.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that the definitions found while researching this thesis come primarily from non-Métis academics. I am not suggesting that these writers are ignorant of our cultures; in fact, I appreciate Foster's description. However, finding definitions from Métis academics proved to be a difficult task. In fact, texts written by Bruce Sealey, Duke Redbird, and Olive Patricia Dickason were the only ones found that dealt with the definition of Métis. Through my research I found historical definitions were often irrelevant to contemporary Métis persons. This is because being Métis is more complicated than knowing what term to use to define oneself. I have found through discussions with people and reading literature written by Métis, that the *definition* of Métis is not as important as what it means to *be* Métis. One possible reason is that the

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<sup>19</sup>Duke Redbird, We Are Métis, (Toronto: Ontario Métis & Non Status Indian Association, 1980),p.1.

<sup>20</sup>John E.Foster, "The Métis: the People and the Term" in Prairie Forum, Vol.3. No.1, 1976, p.83.

boundaries we are supposed to fit into are not precise or easily defined. There are always contradictions or exceptions to the descriptions given in academic literatures. Although it can be argued that there are discrepancies in defining all cultures, because Métis are hybrid people, the exceptions are more apparent. Delbert Majer states, "I'm Métis...It's a cultural, historical issue, and it's a way of life issue. It's not what you look like on the outside. It's how you carry yourself around on the inside that is important, in your mind and your soul and your heart."<sup>21</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, the Métis discussed will be those historical and contemporary persons of mixed European and First Nations heritage who originally come from the Prairies. I will refer to these persons as the Plains Métis, or use the Cree term "katipâmsôchik." Although I give a definition similar to those found in the academic texts I have read, the opinions of Métis who are concerned more about cultural experience than definitions, are just as relevant to this thesis.

In We Are Métis, Duke Redbird writes, "With no guaranty under the Indian Act, without viable communities, without land and without treaties, the Métis were the 'forgotten people'."<sup>22</sup> Being the "forgotten people" in historical and contemporary times has brought feelings of helplessness and shame to many Métis. As will be discussed further in this thesis, these emotions basically come from being colonized, marginalised,

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<sup>21</sup>People to People, Nation to Nation - Highlights From the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Minister of Supply and Services Canada (Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1996),p.109.

<sup>22</sup>Duke Redbird, We Are Métis, (Toronto: Ontario Métis & Non Status Indian Association, 1980.),p.32.

and excluded in various ways by the Canadian government.

One significant form of exclusion Métis experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> - century was the government's mandate to not include them in treaties. Dickason writes, "During the bargaining for Treaties Four and Six, the Indians requested that their 'cousins' be included. Ottawa reacted by amending the Indian Act in 1880, excluding 'half-breeds' from both the provisions of the Act as well as from treaties." Despite this restriction, the Métis influenced several treaties, and acted as ambassadors between Natives and non-Natives. The Ojibwa of Treaty Three declared to government treaty negotiators that "you owe much to the half-breeds". Dickason suggests that this contrasts with later stereotypes of Métis as being inferior, lazy, and untrustworthy.<sup>23</sup> These acts of exclusion had great consequences for many Métis economically, culturally, and spiritually. It was not until 1982 that Métis were included in the definition of Aboriginal in the Constitution Act, a significant victory for Métis in allowing us to define our struggles in terms of First Peoples' rights.<sup>24</sup>

Due to the reasons mentioned above, denial has been a major fact in the lives of many Métis. Métis deny themselves, and are denied their culture. This denial creates confusion about who we are. Frequently it comes from feeling alienated for being hybrid people, and attempting to belong in whatever neighbourhood or community one lives in. As Métis writer Joanne Arnott states in her book Breasting the Waves, "I know lots about

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<sup>23</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992),p.279 & 280.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Kulchyski, "Aboriginal Peoples and Hegemony in Canada" in Journal of Canadian Studies, vol.30, No.1, Spring 1995,p.65.

my European ancestry and almost nothing about my Native heritage: this is one impact of racism". Arnott calls the practice of this cultural denial the "white-out policy". She writes that while this policy was in effect during her life, she was constantly being recognized as a Métis by people who were "not under the sway of the family's survivalists lies".<sup>25</sup>

Because of the cultural denial, and the attempt and then failure to fully "fit in," comes the sentiment of being "invisible" to mainstream Canadian society: invisible because non-Métis persons are unaware of our concerns, our existence, and our roles in Canada. Some of my relatives suggested that because Métis feel invisible in mainstream Canadian society, and deny and are denied their culture, we are undefinable, because we are only now trying to understand who we are exactly. We have only recently begun to try to have our voices heard.

While attempting to have our voices heard, Métis ponder our cultural identities. We attempt to establish what it means to be Métis, and how we should be viewed by non-Métis cultures. As Stuart Hall suggests in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora",

Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.<sup>26</sup>

For Métis persons concerned with their cultural identity, it is necessary to look to the past, to understand the present, and prepare for the future. This search for understanding

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<sup>25</sup>Joanne Arnott, Breasting the Waves, (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1995),p.76-77.

<sup>26</sup>Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993),p.394.

explains the Métis' concern with images of Louis Riel in contemporary art, which will be examined in this thesis.

In Nation and Narration, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that "an image of the nation or narration might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the West".<sup>27</sup> Therefore, by using this western historical idea, the Métis can find much of the strength, unity, and empowerment they are searching for. At the same time, it is this powerful concept of "nation" that marginalises Métis and other indigenous nations. It is therefore necessary to discuss and constructively critique the Métis as a nation within a larger nation-state.

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.<sup>28</sup> Often these imagined beliefs of unity are problematic, because they negate issues of gender, class, and ethnicity. Within the Métis nation and Canada, selective memory exists. Ernest Renan suggests that "the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things."<sup>29</sup> It is therefore necessary to examine the inconsistencies that exist within Canada, as well as within the Métis nation. As will be discussed in this

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<sup>27</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, Introduction for Nation and Narration, (London; Routledge Publishers, 1990),p.1.

<sup>28</sup>Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, (London: Verso Publishing, 1991),p.6

<sup>29</sup>Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Nation and Narration, (London: Routledge Publishers, 1990),p.11.



thesis, it is selective memory that creates problems and contradictions within nations.

In Chapter One, I examine how in 1991 in Winnipeg, members of the Manitoba Métis Federation, a political and social organization, contested Marcien Lemay's sculpture of Louis Riel. Marcien Lemay's abstracted sculpture stood on the Manitoba Legislature grounds for almost twenty-five years (1971 - 1994), and was a commemorative sculpture for Manitoba's Centennial. There were several reasons why the members of the MMF opposed Lemay's sculpture, but most importantly they described it as disrespectful to Louis Riel and the Métis nation. Therefore, they requested that the sculpture be removed from the Manitoba Legislature grounds, and put in a more inconspicuous location. In its place on the banks of the Assiniboine River would stand a statesman-like portrayal of the Métis hero. The Manitoba Métis Federation's concern about Lemay's sculpture created an ongoing controversy between the artist, government officials, and the public.

I argue that the Métis Federation's request was a symbolic gesture, and was viewed as a source of empowerment for the Métis as a nation. I examine the various reactions to the Métis' request, and the conflicts that arose from it. I discuss the Métis' experience in western Canada from the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century until present times, to explain the reasons why such a request was made. Throughout the other chapters, I refer to this controversy, because the concerns that arose out of this issue are the basis of my thesis.

Chapter Two deals with another controversy that happened in Regina over John Nugent's half - nude sculpture of Louis Riel. John Nugent's sculpture was on the Regina Legislature grounds from 1968 until 1991. It was removed for the same reasons as

Lemay's sculpture, i.e., members of the Métis community found it disrespectful to Louis Riel and the Métis nation. The sculpture was taken down, and moved to the Mackenzie Art Gallery vault, where it remains.

The time period during which the sculpture was commissioned and erected is significant, because Canada celebrated its Centennial in 1967. As well, during the late 1960s the Canadian public became interested in its most vocal minority, the First Peoples. Many Native organizations were forming and disbanding, and the public, politicians and media were taking notice. Ross Thatcher, the Premier of Saskatchewan at this time, took advantage of Canada's Centennial and the new interest in Native rights for his own political agenda.<sup>30</sup>

One project Thatcher endorsed was the commissioning of John Nugent's sculpture. The procedure of commissioning and erecting this work was filled with grievances between federal politicians, the public, and the artist. I argue that the actions taken to have this sculpture erected show the negative implications of nation - building in Canada. Actions not taken, such as asking Métis and other First Peoples their opinion on what type of portrayal of Riel they would appreciate, is an example of the attitudes toward First Peoples in 1967, the year the sculpture was commissioned. Although Ross Thatcher claimed to be a "friend" to First Peoples, he disregarded their opinions, and spoke for them. In this Chapter I suggest that it was this disregard for First Peoples' opinions in the late 1960s that made the Métis of Saskatchewan, and the Manitoba Métis

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<sup>30</sup>See Frances W. Kaye's article "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture" in Prairie Forum, Vol.22, No.1 (Spring 1997).

Federation demand that Marcien Lemay's(1971) and John Nugent's(1968) abstracted sculptures be removed from the legislative grounds in the early 1990s.

When Canada's Centennial was being celebrated, and Canadians were taking a new interest in First Peoples, the story of Louis Riel appears to have become more significant to many people. The book Strange Empire, written by Joseph Kinsey Howard, and published in 1954, was an inspiration to artists John Boyle, John Nugent, and Marcien Lemay in creating their artwork. This book is a detailed discussion of Riel, the Métis, and the struggle between the United States and Canada for power on the Plains. Both Lemay and Nugent read Strange Empire while creating their sculptures for the provincial legislature grounds. Both created sculptures that were an emotional response to the struggles of Riel. In Chapter Two, I briefly examine this book in reference to Lemay's and Nugent's sculptures.

In Chapter Two I also analyse John Boyle's Rebel Series(1967), and Batoche Series(1975). John Boyle is a proud Canadian nationalist, and uses images of Louis Riel and the Métis to express his beliefs. He creates art pieces about history, attempting to include experiences that have not been acknowledged in mainstream Canadian history. However, as will be further discussed in this chapter, this attempt to find Canadian heroes is problematic, because Boyle exposes a romantic ( although appreciative) attitude towards the Métis. The images he creates, and the stories he tells, are his own opinion, stemming from his position as a successful, Euro-Canadian, male artist. I briefly discuss cultural appropriation in reference to Boyle's art. I examine his images and motives in reference to the experiences of the Métis with Canadian nationalism: how Canadian

nationhood benefits and marginalises the Métis nation. I challenge my own beliefs about nationhood and cultural appropriation, because although problematic, Boyle portrays Riel with the respect that many Métis have been demanding. He depicts Riel as a Canadian hero, and many Métis have been demanding for several years that Riel be treated as such by mainstream Canadian society. Therefore his artwork is complicated and contradictory to discuss.

Manitoba artist Jeff Funnell was also inspired by Joseph Kinsey Howard's book Strange Empire. In Chapter Two I end by discussing Funnell's collection of cartoon drawings the Riel Series, created in 1985. Funnell created this series as a reaction to Howard's book, as well as other sources, such as Sylvia Van Kirk's Many Tender Ties. Funnell attempts to erase the myths around Riel, by portraying him as being more human. This act of myth erasure, which is an act of respect and well - intentioned, is confusing and contradictory, particularly because of Funnell's concentration on Howard's book, which has aided in the creation of the romantic myth around Riel.

In the Conclusion I discuss the attempts being made to have Riel's title of traitor to Canada erased, and what the publicity surrounding the issue means to Métis nationhood. I take account of the way in which the Métis are attempting to move forward as a nation, and the role that art, specifically images of Louis Riel in contemporary art, plays in the Métis' search for cultural identity, respect, and rights in Canada.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **The Controversy over Marcien Lemay's sculpture of Louis Riel and Métis**

#### **Nationhood**

In 1991 in Winnipeg, members of the Manitoba Métis Federation began a new struggle to have their hero and nation acknowledged with respect in mainstream Canadian society. The Métis' focus was on how Louis Riel is portrayed in art, in particular in Marcien Lemay's abstracted sculpture which stood on the Manitoba Legislature grounds for almost twenty-five years (1971 - 1994). Their concern about Lemay's portrayal created an ongoing controversy between the artist, government officials, the public, and the Manitoba Métis Federation. The conflict exposed ideals of nationhood that exist within Métis communities, public opinions on the rights of the Métis as a nation, and the divergence and disagreements that endure among the Métis of Manitoba.

I will first discuss the issue concerning Marcien Lemay's abstracted sculpture, and conclude by addressing issues of nationalism within Métis and Canadian discourse. Of the three main organizations that I will be mentioning, the Manitoba Métis Federation is a political and social group founded in 1969 by Métis Angus Spence. The Federation's main goal is self-government. Its present goals include developing means to be more self-sufficient in economic, political, and cultural ways. The second organization to be noted is the Union Nationale Métisse St-Joseph du Manitoba, which was first inaugurated in 1884 by Louis Riel and the Métis. The organization's contemporary goals are to teach

Métis history and keep Métis culture alive. The third organization is La Société Louis Riel(1969-1971), which was formed by Métis Jean Allard. According to Allard the group consisted of twenty-two "leading members of society". Nineteen of the members were non-Native. The organization's goal was to have a commemorative sculpture erected on the Manitoba Legislative grounds.

Louis Riel was considered a traitor by the Canadian government and hanged in Regina in 1885. In recent years, Métis groups have lobbied to have Riel decreed a Father of Confederation. Although the Canadian government has not yet erased his title of "traitor to Canada", many people's views in mainstream Canadian society are altering.<sup>31</sup> From 1991 until 1996, various reporters for newspapers such as the Winnipeg Free Press and the Globe and Mail, described Riel as "a hero to many", "a religious visionary", or "a champion".<sup>32</sup> In the 1995 Spring issue of Street, a local Winnipeg arts journal, Bruno LeGal describes Riel as "a man of substance, a charismatic leader of the Métis who, several decades on, would be recognized as founder of the Province of Manitoba and a Father of Confederation".<sup>33</sup> This change in opinion has provided a space for the Métis to have a voice in our own history. An example is the request made by the Manitoba Métis Federation that Marcien Lemay's sculpture be removed from the Manitoba Legislature grounds, so that a more statesman - like statue of the Métis hero could be put in its place.

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<sup>31</sup>"Riel Still Guilty, Commons rules" in The Winnipeg Sun, December 11, 1996.

<sup>32</sup>"An Empty Statue" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 14, 1996  
David Roberts, "New Bronze Statue is the Riel Thing" in Globe and Mail, May 13, 1996.

<sup>33</sup>Bruno Legal, "The Lives of Louis Riel" in Street, Spring, 1995, p.14.

There were several reasons for this request which will be examined throughout this Chapter, but most importantly some members of the Manitoba Métis Federation felt that the sculpture was disrespectful to Louis Riel and the Métis nation, and that it should be put in a more inconspicuous location.

The circumstances that occurred over the removal of Lemay's sculpture in July 1995 raise several questions: Has the image of Riel been changing, and if it has been changing, to the benefit of whom? If it has been changing in mainstream Canadian society, does this benefit, or once again marginalise the Métis? Why is the portrayal of Riel in contemporary art so vital to these questions, and to the Métis?

There are several reasons for wanting to discuss this altercation in reference to Métis nationhood. As Ernest Renan writes, "The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion."<sup>34</sup> It is important to discuss the concept of nationhood in reference to the Métis, to give recognition of our historical and contemporary cultural struggles in the Canadian context.

How and by whom Métis history has been written is also relevant. In The Free People - Otipemisiwak, Diane Paulette Payment examines how Métis have been discussed and portrayed in Canadian history. She analyses various 19<sup>th</sup> - century writings, in which the Métis were perceived as an uncivilized people, whose culture was an obstacle to progress in the colonization of the West. An example of such writing is that of George E. Ellis, who suggested that the Métis were more "troublesome than real

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<sup>34</sup>Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Nation and Narration, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge Publishers, 1990), p.19.

Indians," and that "the traits and characteristics of the red man prevail in them over those of whites... Especially true when one parent is French...."<sup>35</sup>

Many beliefs and opinions about the Métis held in the 19<sup>th</sup> - century continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> - century. However, current research being done primarily by people of Métis ancestry, such as Olive Patricia Dickason and Duke Redbird, are giving different interpretations of the Métis, Louis Riel, and government policies regarding Métis land claims. Historically, studies have been based solely on government, church, and fur trade company records. As Payment asserts, "All interpretations are conditional, by definition, by the cultural values and intelligence of the author."<sup>36</sup>

In Native Peoples - The Canadian Experience, John E. Foster agrees with Payment, stating that:

Frequently, because of gaps in the historical record, the historical explanations that result are the 'best' case rather than the 'only' case possible. Historians, essentially 'middle-class' and /or English-speaking, appear to have had difficulty in perceiving experiences of substance in the lives of the Métis. In part, the problem lies in the fact that the Plains Métis, with exception of Louis Riel, have authored few of the documents that record their history. Most existing records were written by 'outsiders'.<sup>37</sup>

Having our ancestors experiences recorded by 'outsiders' who did not see substance in

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<sup>35</sup>Diane Paulette Payment, The Free People - Otipemisiwak - Batoche, Saskatchewan 1870 - 1930, (Ottawa: Published under authority of Minister of Environment, 1990),p.18.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid,p.18.

<sup>37</sup>John E. Foster, "The Plains Métis" in Native Peoples - The Canadian Experience ed.R.Bruce Morrison & C. Roderick Wilson (Canada: M&S Publishers, 1986),p.377-378.



their lives, is one reason why there was such a negative reaction to Marcien Lemay's sculpture of Riel.

In the late 1960s former NDP MLA Jean Allard, a Métis himself, partook in the lobbying to have Riel recognized for the Centennial of Manitoba.<sup>38</sup> At the time Allard was president of the Union Nationale Métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba. As president of the Union Nationale Métisse, he had approached the Conservative provincial government in the late 1960s about erecting a commemorative statue of Riel. He was bluntly turned down. He then formed La Société Louis Riel to lobby for the placement of a Riel sculpture on the Legislative grounds. The committee boasted about twenty - two members, who were mostly successful, non - Métis persons, such as judge Sam Freedman, Lawyer William Swystun, Professor Lovell Clark, and Anglican priest John Anderson.<sup>39</sup> Allard maintains that when the Société first lobbied for the sculpture in the late 1960s, it also received a very negative response from the government. However, due to his position as an NDP MLA and the successful lobbying of the Société, the new NDP government agreed to erect a Riel monument in 1967.

Marcien Lemay created the controversial sculpture in the late 1960's. Lemay is a retired firefighter, and artist. Presently he and his wife Helene use the old fire station where he once worked as a studio to create their art. Lemay had submitted his sculpture to the Manitoba Centennial Corporation in 1969, as a project for the provinces Centennial celebrations of 1970. The Centennial Corporation wanted to support any projects " 'which

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<sup>38</sup>Jean Allard, Letter to editor in Winnipeg Free Press, July 19, 1994.

<sup>39</sup>"La Société Louis Riel" in La Liberté, May 7, 1969.

will stand as a worthy memorial of Manitoba's centennial'.<sup>40</sup> Lemay submitted one rendition of Louis Riel, but was told that it was "too violent", because the form was more jagged, and the mouth was wide open. He then submitted a second, less tumultuous, maquette that was accepted<sup>41</sup>.

Lemay's abstracted figure is twisted, nude, with Riel's face contorted in anguish. Lemay attempted to "convey the mood and suffering of a man sacrificing himself for his beliefs."<sup>42</sup> The sculpture is twelve feet high on a three - foot plinth, and is made of Ferrocement. The sculpture exerts an expressive and emotive quality, and attempts to articulate the internal suffering and anxieties of Riel (Figure 1). According to Lemay his work on the sculpture developed from his passion for reading about the controversial Riel. He states, "I felt I wanted to put everything into the work that I felt about the man himself. It therefore, lends a little confusion to the structure."<sup>43</sup>

It is important to note that the purpose of this discussion of Lemay's sculpture is not to judge his art from a formalist art historical perspective. Rather my interest is in understanding the reception of the sculpture, particularly the responses from members of the Métis community. It can be argued that it is the Métis in particular who have

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<sup>40</sup>"Centennial Grants Program Established for Projects" in Tribune, March 14, 1969.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Marcien and Helene Lemay, August 7, 1997, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>42</sup>Lionel Dorge, Riel, (Winnipeg: Commissioned by the Manitoba Centennial Corporation, 1971), p.1

<sup>43</sup>Richard Gage, "Lemay's Louis - Result of Reading," Tribune Spotlight, April 19, 1969.

something at stake in how Louis Riel is portrayed in public sculpture. As Gail Valaskakis asserts in "Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians", "The Indian social imaginaries expressed in literary, artistic, academic and media images circulate in the discourse of our everyday action and events. And in the conflicting power relations of different communities and interests, they work to construct identities with different ideologies and meanings that become central sites of cultural struggle."<sup>44</sup>

Placed around Lemay's abstracted sculpture are two half - cylindral shells which are fifteen feet in diameter and thirty feet in height. Riel's name is etched into the shells at the top. In both French and English is the quote, "I know that through the Grace of God, I am the founder of Manitoba". The sculptor of the shells, architect, Etienne J. Gaboury, "attempted to achieve a feeling of both unity and separateness to create a tension appropriate to the conflicts and dichotomy of Riel's life."<sup>45</sup> According to an article written in Le Métis by an unnamed author, the cylindral shells symbolize Riel's life in isolation and prison (Figure 2).<sup>46</sup> In 1969, Gaboury and Lemay applied to the Manitoba Centennial Corporation to have their works erected together as a single piece. Although Gaboury's shells and Lemay's figure are meant to be a combined art piece, or one statement, throughout the controversies around the sculpture Gaboury has not been the

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<sup>44</sup>Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Sackajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians" in Marilyn Burgess, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Indian Princesses and Cowgirls (Montreal: Oboro, 1995),p.3.

<sup>45</sup>Lionel Dorge, Riel, (Winnipeg: Commissioned by the Manitoba Centennial Corporation, 1971),p.1

<sup>46</sup>Le Métis, August, 1992.

**Figure 2.** Etienne Gaboury's Sculpted Shells and Marcien Lemay's Riel Sculpture (1971)



main focus. In fact, very little has been mentioned of him within the media reports or literature surrounding Lemay's sculpture. When Lemay's sculpture was erected at the Legislature grounds in 1971, Métis Angus Spence remarked:

It's a horrible caricature. I would like to have seen him wearing clothes that the Métis people wore in his day. It's a horrible caricature to see him standing there stark naked, his head stuck out and leering. It's just a horrible looking statue...It's an insult to Louis Riel and to the Métis people. Mr. Riel did not live, fight and die to have a statue erected in his honour. The cause for which he lived and fought is more relevant today than ever.<sup>47</sup>

One supporter of Spence's reaction declared that "I can only imagine that, when they whipped the shroud off the statue on the day of the unveiling, if there were any Indians or Métis present, immediate plans for a new Riel rebellion must have precipitated on the spot."<sup>48</sup> Although Spence was invited to the unveiling and the following reception, he was not invited to speak, which disturbed the MMF president.

When the unveiling occurred there was another type of negative response. Henry C. Hall stated, "I was deeply shocked at this travesty of Manitoba's history, and wonder why, and who was responsible for spending \$35, 000 to erect a statue to a man whose unbalanced mind influenced and inflamed the primitive natives and Métis to go on the warpath."<sup>49</sup> The racist manner in which Hall makes his point is an indicator that the historical injustices that occurred in the past continue to affect the lives and well - being

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<sup>47</sup>"Riel Statue: Incongruous Monstrosity" in Winnipeg Free Press January 10, 1972.

<sup>48</sup>H.G. Gibson, "Insult to Native People" in Winnipeg Free Press January 15, 1972.

<sup>49</sup>Henry C. Hall, "Strong Reaction to Riel Statue" in Tribune January 13, 1972.

of the Métis in the 20<sup>th</sup> - century.

In 1991, the Manitoba Métis Federation first made its concerns about the expressive Riel sculpture known to the provincial government, during Yvon Dumont's presidency. Yvon Dumont is a Métis, and presently is the Lieutenant Governor - General of Manitoba. Nelson Sanderson, a Métis activist and President of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centres of Winnipeg, first brought his concerns about the abstracted sculpture to the Métis community in the mid - 1980s. With the support of the Métis Federation and Métis National Council, he began to lobby aggressively by writing letters to civic, provincial, and federal leaders to have the sculpture removed. He also staged sit-ins and marches at the sculpture site on Canada Day, Manitoba Day, and November 16, the day Riel was hanged.

In 1991, after much debate between the Métis Federation and the Manitoba government, an agreement was made that the sculpture and Gaboury's shells be removed from the Legislature grounds. According to Billyjo DeLaronde, predecessor of Dumont "the abstract figure buys into the lie that Louis Riel was a traitor, crazy, and tormented. But this was not true. Even at his execution he carried himself as a statesman."<sup>50</sup> According to Lemay, Riel was a martyr who had sacrificed himself for his beliefs, his people and his country.<sup>51</sup>

In 1875, Riel began insisting that he was a prophet of God. At this time he had already been exiled from Manitoba for six years. He kept changing his location because

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<sup>50</sup>Weetamah, "Gross Misrepresentation", July 27, 1994.

<sup>51</sup>Bruno Legal, "The Lives of Louis Riel" in Street, Spring 1995, p.14.

there were rumours that a bounty had been put on his head. The stress of having to be constantly in hiding perhaps created some emotional stress for Riel, and the friends and family he was living with could not handle having Riel in their homes. According to Maggie Siggins he saw himself as part of an unholy trinity of cast - off monarchs, and in 1876 was committed to the Hospice of St.Jean de Dieu, an asylum for the mentally ill in Quebec. In "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture", Frances Kaye mentions that one of Riel's friend's greatest concerns was that when he was admitted to the asylum, he had a tendency to remove his clothing in broad daylight. Dr. E.R. Markson, a psychiatrist who concentrates on psychoanalytic theory, reiterates Kaye's point, suggesting that while in the asylum Riel "declared that the Holy Spirit had told him that he must sacrifice everything, even his clothing."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, a sculpture of a naked Riel can be seen as a portrayal of a madman.<sup>53</sup> Kaye suggests that the depiction of a hero in utter humiliation is not a luxury that oppressed people can easily afford.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the years vandals contributed to the humiliation, by spray - painting and defacing Lemay's sculpture. This defacing included cutting off Riel's penis, perhaps a homophobic reaction to the area

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<sup>52</sup>Dr.E.R.Markson, "The Life and Death of Louis Riel, a Study in Forensic Psychiatry.Part I.-A Psychoanalytic Commentary" in Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal Vol.10, No.4, August 1965, Reprinted in Louis Riel: Rebel of the Western Frontier or Victim of Politics and Prejudice? edited by H.Bowsfield, (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company,1969),p.177.

<sup>53</sup>I am not suggesting that it was the intent of Marcien Lemay to portray Riel as a madman. Lemay has suggested in an interview that he disagrees with the common belief that Riel was mentally ill. I do believe however, that it is possible that some people would, and have, perceived Lemay's sculpture as the portrayal of a madman.

<sup>54</sup>Frances W.Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture" in Prairie Forum Vol.22,No.1, Spring, 1997.p.124.

around the sculpture being a gay cruising area and location for male prostitution.

When members of the Métis Federation approached Lemay and Gaboury to discuss their request to have the expressive sculpture and sculpted shells removed from the Legislative grounds, the artists agreed, but with the understanding that Lemay would be commissioned to create the new sculpture. A commission agreement was signed on October 25, 1991 between Lemay and the Manitoba Métis Federation. It was decided that the old statue and shells would be placed in front of Collège St. Boniface, where Riel had been a student. Lemay's maquette, accepted by the Métis Federation in July 1992, depicts a statesman-like Riel, wearing a suit and moccasins, with one hand behind his back, and the other hand holding a scroll, which represents the Manitoba Act of 1870, or as Riel called it, the Métis Treaty (Figure 3).

In July of 1994, when the old Lemay statue was to be removed, Jean Allard chained himself to the monument to protest its removal and relocation. Jean Allard stated about the removal of Lemay's abstracted statue, "This is part of our history. There has been twenty -five years of turmoil over this monument and it is part of our history and it shouldn't be taken away."<sup>55</sup> Allard vowed to remain chained to the sculpture until the government promised to reconsider its decision to remove the monument. "I will talk to the police when they come," Allard stated, "The Lord will provide."<sup>56</sup>

In several interviews during Allard's protest the fact that he was a Métis came up.

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<sup>55</sup>Alice Krueger, "Former MLA Attached to Riel Statue" in Winnipeg Free Press, July 15, 1994.

<sup>56</sup>Paul Samyn, "Allard's Last Stand Nears," in Winnipeg Free Press, July 16, 1994.



However, he did not want his cultural background to be discussed. In an interview on the televised news show Midday, reporter Tina Srebtanjak asked Allard: "As a Métis, you are proud of that statue and would like it to stay?" His response was, "as a Manitoban, I repeat as a Manitoban, I'm proud of this monument because it was the first historical recognition of Riel by the government of Manitoba. I think it's appalling that a government would be trying to remove it, to try and play the sanitized politics of the day."<sup>57</sup> Métis Cajé Shand agreed with Allard, suggesting in a letter to Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon that "the true Métis have integrated and assimilated into the broad fabric of Canada. We contribute to this society and build on our collective future. We do not want our identity to be lost in this quagmire of political and unethical rewriting of Canadian history."<sup>58</sup>

Allard suggests that by agreeing to remove Lemay's sculpture, the provincial government was being "politically correct". However, when Allard lobbied for a Riel statue in the late 1960s, the provincial government reacted negatively to the idea of erecting a Riel monument. Is it possible that when the government eventually agreed to a Riel monument, it was also playing, to use Allard's words, "the sanitized politics of the day"?

Shortly after Allard chained himself to the sculpture, Marcien Lemay joined him. At the time it was unclear why Lemay did this, after being commissioned to create the new statue. He has subsequently maintained that it was in the agreement between himself

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<sup>57</sup>Henry Champ, Tina Srebtanjak, Midday (Ottawa: CBC, July 21, 1994)

<sup>58</sup>Cajé Shand, Personal letter to Premier Gary Filmon, August 17, 1991, p.2.

**Figure 3.** Marcien Lemay's Riel Maquette (1992)



and the Métis Federation that the first statue would remain on the grounds until his new sculpture was ready. He was not notified that the old statue was to be removed in July 1994, when the new sculpture was not ready.<sup>59</sup> Lemay has also suggested that he was concerned about the safety of the sculpture during the removal. Lemay has been further quoted as saying, "I was surprised when I heard a man was chained to the statue and Friday afternoon I decided to join the cause to save the monument...It will hurt me if they tear it down."<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that since its formation, the Manitoba Métis Federation has always struggled with various grievances. Between 1993 and 1996, there were several political and organizational problems within the Federation, including accusations of misconduct and power struggles between employees and board members. This misconduct involved allegations of forgery in cheque - signing, name - calling, and mismanagement of Federation funds. In May 1996 a court action was led to have Billyjo DeLaronde dismissed as President of the Federation, because he was allegedly spending MMF money without consulting board members, and refusing to listen to their concerns.<sup>61</sup> The judge assigned to the court case, Justice Ruth Krindle, ruled that because of their in - fighting, board members were unable to run the Métis Federation themselves. Therefore she ordered the corporate wing of the MMF be dissolved, putting an interim

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<sup>59</sup>Interview with Marcien and Helene Lemay, August 7, 1997, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>60</sup>CP, "Sculptor Protests in Chains" in Globe and Mail, July 18, 1994.

<sup>61</sup>Bud Robertson, "Judge Went Too Far: Métis" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 8, 1996.

board in charge of the organization's affairs.<sup>62</sup> This political turmoil began while the controversy over Lemay's sculpture was erupting, suggesting that Lemay had reason to question the ability of Billyjo DeLaronde and the board members of the Manitoba Métis Federation to stick to the contract they had made with him in 1991.

Whatever their exact reasons for chaining themselves to the statue, Lemay and Allard remained there with other supporting protesters, for twelve days until they withdrew so that the statue could safely be removed. Allard stated about the removal of the statue, "This is a blow for national unity. How is this going to be seen in Quebec and by others who identify with Riel, who embodies all of us in Canada?"<sup>63</sup> DeLaronde suggested that, "the people with their own agendas, who were chained to that statue are a sad and painful reminder of the way the Métis have been treated in the past."<sup>64</sup> DeLaronde's response to Lemay's action was, "He made a public spectacle of himself by trying to embarrass the Manitoba Métis Federation."<sup>65</sup>

In Spring of 1995 the Métis Federation announced that it was voiding the contract with Marcien Lemay. Three years after approving Lemay's second sculpture, the organization "realized" that his new version of Riel was missing buttons on the coat, and

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<sup>62</sup>David Kuxhaus, "Métis Alliance in Chaos" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 7, 1996.

<sup>63</sup>Paul Samyn, "Controversial Riel Statue Taken Away" in Winnipeg Free Press, July 28, 1994.

<sup>64</sup>Nancy Westaway, "Out With the Old Riel, in With New: Praznik" in Winnipeg Free Press, July 18, 1994

<sup>65</sup>Donald MacGillivray, "Still Not Riel Thing" in Winnipeg Sun, Thursday, September 29, 1994.

the creases on the bent left arm and crotch were faulty in design.<sup>66</sup> It's important to note that within the Federation, not everyone agreed with the move. Nelson Sanderson, who had originally requested the first sculpture be removed, felt that breaking the contract with Lemay for the second one was a cruel gesture. He felt that Lemay's new sculpture should have been erected in the front of the Legislature, where a large statue of Queen Victoria (clothed) stands.<sup>67</sup> Erecting a statesman - like sculpture beside or near the statue of Queen Victoria would suggest that Riel was deserving of the same portrayal, in the same location, as the Queen. During the controversy DeLaronde put the inequalities into perspective, stating in a letter to the Winnipeg Free Press, "Think for a moment if our Queen Victoria was stripped of her royal attire or the cloth on our Blessed Jesus was removed. Would it still be art, treason or blasphemy?"<sup>68</sup>

After breaking the contract with Lemay, the Métis Federation made a new contract with Miguel Joyal. Joyal is a primarily self - taught artist, whose media include woodcarving and snow sculpture. Joyal created his rendition of Riel approximately ten years before the Métis Federation made their request to have Lemay's first sculpture removed in 1991. It portrays Riel wearing a Métis sash, a suit jacket, and according to

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<sup>66</sup>Donald MacGillivray, "Still Not Riel Thing" in Winnipeg Sun, September 29, 1994.

<sup>67</sup>Phone interview with Nelson Sanderson, April 20, 1998.

<sup>68</sup>Billyjo DeLaronde "Louis Riel Deserves Better" in the Winnipeg Free Press, May 31, 1993.

DeLaronde, "authentic" Métis moccasins, with a pointed toe similar to Cree moccasins.<sup>69</sup> Riel is waving a scroll in front of him, and his hair is made to look as if it is blowing in the wind (Figure 4). The sculpture was unveiled on May 12, 1996, before many contented members of the Manitoba Métis Federation. The unveiling of Joyal's sculpture was symbolic for the Métis nation and the MMF. A young Métis wearing a flower - beaded leather fringed jacket climbed on the statue, and unveiled Joyal's art with a large Métis flag. The flag, which has been in existence since 1816, is blue with the infinity symbol in the middle. The infinity icon is symbolic of two joining cultures, European and Aboriginal, and the existence of the Métis as "a people" forever. Métis Shirley Bernard recalls that people were very content with Joyal's rendition. She videotaped the unveiling, believing that it was an important day for the Métis: important enough to one day show the videotape to her grandchildren.<sup>70</sup> Joyal also related in an interview that at the ceremony many Métis people came up to him afterwards, congratulating and thanking him for creating such a "respectful" portrayal of their hero.

Despite this, Joyal's sculpture has created some small controversy as well. Roy Allen remarked, "The metal character may well depict any unadventurous insurance agent holding a policy or broker peddling a prospectus." He continued to ask, "Where is the sense of difficult liberation or brave birth pains of his New Nation?"<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Alice Krueger, "MMF Pulls Rug From Under Riel Artist" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 3, 1995.

<sup>70</sup>Telephone interview with Shirley Bernard, October 25, 1997.

<sup>71</sup>Roy Allan, "Riel's Ghost Still Homeless" in Winnipeg Free Press, July 22, 1996.

An unnamed writer notes that "the sculpture is historically misleading and intellectually empty... He was an enormously interesting person, not much like the scroll - waving bronze character who, since Sunday afternoon, flashes his raincoat open on the Assiniboine River bank."<sup>72</sup>

The Métis Federation's appeal to have the sculpture removed is one that was questioned by many members of the public. Why did the Métis Federation feel it was necessary to have a statesman - like portrayal of Riel, instead of Lemay's nude, expressive sculpture? What did this do for members of the Métis community? To discuss these questions, it is important to give a brief history of the experiences of the Métis, and discuss how and when Métis nationhood commenced, and the role that Louis Riel played as a leader of the Métis nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> - century.

According to Olive Patricia Dickason, a Métis sense of identity crystallized at Red River with the troubles that developed after the coming of the Selkirk settlers in 1812. In 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company granted 116,000 square miles of land in the Red River Valley to Lord Selkirk, with the hope of establishing a permanent settlement and agricultural economy in the West. The Hudson's Bay Company overlooked the Métis' presence in this location, their loyalty to the North West Company, and their nomadic way of life, which depended on the fur trade and buffalo hunt. The new presence of the Selkirk settlers created a clash of cultures, and rivalry between the Hudson's Bay

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<sup>72</sup>"An Empty Statue" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 14, 1996.

Company and the Northwest Company.<sup>73</sup>

In 1816, the idea of a "New Nation" commenced with the Battle of Seven Oaks.<sup>74</sup> With the new interest in an agricultural economy, the livelihood of the Métis was drastically affected, because their traditional nomadic way of life was being violated. After a winter of starvation, a Métis Nor'Westerner captain, Cuthbert Grant, assembled sixty buffalo hunters and attacked a Hudson's Bay Company brigade. Grant and his company then went to Seven Oaks, where they were challenged by Red River Governor, Robert Semple, and twenty - one settlers. The Métis killed the governor and the twenty - one settlers, and Cuthbert Grant became a prestigious leader of the Métis until the rise of Louis Riel.<sup>75</sup>

In the mid - 19<sup>th</sup> - century the government's encouragement of white settlement in the West for the benefit of Confederation caused the Métis to become militant. It is important to note that in 1870 the West consisted of about 10, 000 to 12, 000 Métis, 35, 000 First Nations people, and fewer than 2000 white settlers. By 1883, white settlers heavily outnumbered all First Peoples.<sup>76</sup> This influx of white settlers disempowered First Peoples because preferential treatment was given to white settlers by the government.

According to Dickason, "In 1872, the Métis asked Lieutenant - Governor

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<sup>73</sup>Antoine Lussier, "The Métis" in Canada's Native Peoples Vol.II Canada Heirloom Series, 1985,p.79,80, 81.

<sup>74</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations - A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart inc., 1992),p.263.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid,263.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid, 297.



Archibald to let them know what steps they should adopt to secure themselves the right to prohibit people of other nationalities from settling in the lands occupied by them, without the consent of the community."<sup>77</sup> The Métis believed that they had special rights to the land because of their Native blood. Archibald rejected their idea that a block of land should be given to them, as was being done for other First Peoples. The federal government was also opposed to the idea, and claimed that the Métis should apply for land on an individual basis, as white settlers did.<sup>78</sup>

In Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an imagined political community. He discusses aspects of western colonization and nationhood which are applicable to the Métis' experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> - century. Anderson writes, "Alongside the condescending cruelty, a cosmic optimism; the Indian is ultimately redeemable by impregnation with white, civilized semen, and the acquisition of private property, like everyone else."<sup>79</sup> However, as Dickason notes, after 1870 "neither could the Métis get recognition of their land claims on the basis of Aboriginal right, as that had already been denied, nor on the basis of prior settlers' rights, as they were considered to be squatters." According to Dickason, the Métis felt that "the government stole our land, and now is laughing at us."<sup>80</sup> In "On National Culture", Frantz Fanon discusses various aspects of

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid,293.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid, 293.

<sup>79</sup>Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities,(London: Verso Publishing, 1991),p.14.

<sup>80</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations - A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc. 1992),p.297.

marginalised national cultures. He writes:

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to oversimplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women. The poverty of people, national oppression and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing.<sup>81</sup>

Fanon's remarks are applicable to the Métis' situation in historical and contemporary times. In particular it is the negation of a national reality that has affected the Métis in Canada, because the concept of "nation" is so powerful. Under the rubric of "nation", people find common beliefs, security, and strength. Having a larger nation-state negate a culture's national reality, marginalises those members of that smaller nation.

Louis Riel adamantly believed in the Métis nation. In "The Political Thought of Louis Riel", Thomas Flanagan asserts that Riel was a nationalistic thinker in two ways. Firstly, he considered the western Métis to be a distinct people or nation. They were held together by "objective ties of race, language, and religion, and by a subjective sense of belongingness. The Métis were not simply another tribe of natives, nor were they an appendage of the French - Canadian people. They were a new nation in the West."<sup>82</sup> Flanagan also suggests that the Métis nation was the central concept of Riel's thought, and

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<sup>81</sup>Franz Fanon, "On National Culture" in Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994),p.45.

<sup>82</sup>Thomas Flanagan, "The Political Thought of Louis Riel" in Louis Riel and the Métis, (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc, 1988),p.114-115.

the focus of his life's work. All his plans, both religious and political, were meant to advance the interests of the Métis. Since Riel's primary focus was the Métis nation, contemporary Métis are using him as a symbol for our present concerns, such as having our voices heard by the government and mainstream society, and having our nation acknowledged.

In Timothy Brennan's article "The National Longing for Form", the definition of a nation is somewhat different from Riel's notion. Brennan remarks that "race, geography, tradition, language, size, or some combinations of these seem finally insufficient for determining national essence, and yet people die for nations, fight wars for them, and write fictions on their behalf."<sup>83</sup> An important question that needs to be asked then, is what aspects constitute the Métis as having our own nation?

In People to People, Nation to Nation - Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the definition given for an Aboriginal nation is applicable to the Métis:

Aboriginal nations should *not* be defined by race. Aboriginal nations are political communities, often comprising people of mixed background and heritage. Their bonds are those of culture and identity, not blood. Their unity comes from their shared history and their strong sense of themselves as peoples.<sup>84</sup>

Following the death of Riel, the Métis nation once again declined. John E. Foster

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<sup>83</sup>Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" in Nation and Narration, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge Publishers, 1990),p.49.

<sup>84</sup>People to People, Nation to Nation - Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples( Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1996),p.26.

writes that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> - century, "Many Métis communities were doomed to exist as islands of enduring poverty that did not accompany their settler neighbours into the 'good life' following the pioneering era."<sup>85</sup> Métis often lived on the outskirts of First Nations reservations, or on the fringes of white settlements, being a part of each culture, but not fully belonging in either community. Shanty towns were created, with the inhabitants being nomadic, moving wherever there were opportunities for casual employment. In The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, Bruce Sealey suggests that for many Métis, the world was a cesspool of unemployment, social ostracism, spiritual and physical degradation, hunger, long term malnutrition, disease and squalor. Sealey states that "lacking any assistance from the government, housing was usually poor. There was no money for economic development and medical services were intermittent".<sup>86</sup>

In 1929, with the commencement of the Great Depression, efforts were made to resurrect the Métis nation. Several Métis who were the sons of prominent men created the Métis Association of Alberta. Their concerns for the Métis communities were not cultural survival, but food, clothing, shelter, and medical treatment. They were successful in having the Provincial Government establish a Royal Commission "To Investigate the Conditions of the Half-Breeds of Alberta" in December 1934. The result of this commission was the Métis Betterment Act of 1938, the main goals of which were to

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<sup>85</sup>John E. Foster, "The Plains Métis" in Native Peoples - The Canadian Experience (Canada:McClelland & Stewart, 1986),p.399.

<sup>86</sup>Bruce Sealey, The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press,1975),p.145 & 147.

eventually assimilate the Métis into western Canadian society.<sup>87</sup>

In 1967, the Manitoba Métis Federation was formed. During an Indian and Métis conference at the Marlborough Hotel in 1967, Angus Spence, a Métis who was frustrated with the different agendas of the treaty Aboriginals and the Métis, asked any Métis at the conference if they would follow him into a different room to discuss issues that solely concerned Métis people.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the Manitoba Métis Federation was formed. In 1996 the MMF represented approximately 30, 000 Métis people.<sup>89</sup>

From the moment of the unveiling in 1971 up to present times, Lemay's sculpture has been controversial for all public sectors. However, it took the Métis over twenty years to have their concerns officially acknowledged by the provincial government. When the Métis Federation made its request to have Lemay's sculpture removed, many people wondered what this appeal did for members of the Métis community. In the journal What About Art?, Blair Simpson declares: "A Manitoba Métis Federation spokesperson stated that the statue doesn't belong anywhere. Perhaps the above should take courses in art history to appreciate and value art".<sup>90</sup> When discussing public policy towards Aboriginal people, Kaye suggests that when Lemay's abstract sculpture was

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<sup>87</sup>John E. Foster, "The Plains Métis" in Native Peoples - The Canadian Experience (Canada:McClelland & Stewart, 1986),p.400.

<sup>88</sup>Sheila Jones Morrison, Rotten to the Core - The Politics of the Manitoba Métis Federation (Canada: J.Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc, 1995),p.44.

<sup>89</sup>Bud Robertson, "Judge Went Too Far: Métis" in Winnipeg Free Press, May 8, 1996.

<sup>90</sup>Blair Simpson, "Leave Louis Alone" in What About Art? 2nd edition.Newsletter.Fall, 1994.

erected, people defined as Métis were not likely to have degrees in art history, and thus modern art was a foreign concept.<sup>91</sup> More importantly, when the sculpture was erected, the Métis did not have a say in how Riel would be represented. The move to not consult the Métis ignored the possibility that how Riel is portrayed in art, and the public's response to that portrayal, affects Métis who are attempting to crystallize their identities.

When Nelson Sanderson and the Métis Federation made their request for the sculpture to be removed, many people felt that they did not have the right to do so, because Lemay's sculpture was in the public realm, and all members of the public should be consulted before removing it. For instance, in the Globe and Mail, Doug Whiteway wrote:

I have this romantic notion, born perhaps of these days of citizens' forums and constituent assemblies, that the portrayal of someone as important to Manitobans as the founder of Manitoba might become subject for debate... Unhappy representatives of an ethnic constituency prevailed upon a provincial government. No one else was consulted.<sup>92</sup>

The argument that all Manitobans should have a say in the removal of the sculpture because Riel is "the Founder of Manitoba", suggests a selective memory and/or a form of cultural appropriation. Timothy Brennan implies in "The National Longing for Form", that the late 20<sup>th</sup> - century is "witnessing the universal reach of a culture of

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<sup>91</sup>Frances W. Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture" in Prairie Forum, Vol.22,No.1, Spring 1997,p.108.

<sup>92</sup>Doug Whiteway, "Cross Current" in Globe and Mail February 5, 1992.

unimaginable immediacy".<sup>93</sup> This creates a culture of instant heroes, instant tragedies, instant record - breaking, and instant classics. There is an emergent, or apparently new admiration for Riel in mainstream Canadian society which I deem to be positive.

However, it creates questions, such as: does mainstream Canadian society have the same new - found respect for the Métis nation which, from the early 1860s until his execution, was Riel's primary focus? It was the Métis who initially requested Riel to lead them in setting up the provisional government, which created Manitoba as a province. Has the Métis' role in the creation of Manitoba as a province been forgotten, with concentration being placed on the myths of Riel? Lastly, is the Métis' experience with marginalization in historical and present times being ignored or negated, within the discourse of Riel?

Although defining this new - found respect as cultural appropriation may seem harsh, it is an idea worth developing. In "Notes on Appropriation", Métis writer/filmmaker Loretta Todd writes that the definition of appropriation originates in cultural autonomy. Cultural autonomy symbolizes a right to one's origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without. Cultural appropriation, according to Todd, occurs when someone else "speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses or recruits the images, stories, experiences, dreams of others for their own."<sup>94</sup> At a time when Canadian unity and nationhood is in question, isn't Riel, a

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<sup>93</sup>Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" in Nation and Narration edited by Homi.K. Bhabha (London: Routledge Publishers, 1990),p.67.

<sup>94</sup>Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation" in Parallelogramme Vol.16, No.1, Summer 1990,p.24.

bilingual leader with Native blood in him, appropriate(d) as a symbol for Canada?<sup>95</sup>

Riel has become the instant hero that Brennan talks about, but is he a hero to mainstream society for the same reasons as the Métis? As Kaye suggests, it is problematic to make the hero of one group serve as the representative of another larger group which he opposed.<sup>96</sup> This poses an obstacle for Métis who are attempting to establish themselves as a nation. As Peter Kulchyski states, "Aboriginal politics are largely about the continued assertion of difference; they are in great measure a politics of identity concerned to ensure that distinctive Aboriginal cultures find a respected place in Canadian society...Aboriginal politics are cultural politics."<sup>97</sup>

The request made by the Manitoba Métis Federation to remove the 1971 sculpture was viewed as a source of empowerment for the Métis nation. By requesting Lemay's sculpture be replaced with a statesman - like portrayal, the MMF was attempting to be culturally autonomous. It was a symbolic request, as DeLaronde suggested in a Métis National Council press release. He describes the event as:

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<sup>95</sup>I am making this rhetorical question because of my own experience. In July 1997, I went to a private viewing of Martin Duckworth's documentary "Riel Country". After the film was over, a discussion was held, about how Riel was a true Canadian hero, because he fought for the rights of *all* Canadians. He was a symbol of Canadian unity because his first language was French, but he spoke English perfectly. When the Métis were mentioned, people discussed how wonderfully the Métis assimilated into European culture, or to contrast, how so many Métis can be found intoxicated, stumbling down Main Street in Winnipeg. One woman pointed out how fortunate it is that people aren't racist towards Métis and other First Nations anymore.

<sup>96</sup>Frances W. Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture" in Prairie Forum, Vol.22, No.1, Spring 1997, p.109.

<sup>97</sup>Peter Kulchyski, "Aboriginal Peoples and Hegemony in Canada" in Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol.30, No.1 (Spring 1995), p.61.



The removal of a dark and painful stain upon the memory and accomplishments of Riel and Métis people. While the abstract statue may have been well intended at the time, it has not been a source of inspiration or pride that Métis people have been looking for. Had there been consultation with the Métis people and other Manitobans, we would not have had to take these measures today.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout the controversy DeLaronde claimed that the majority of Métis wanted the abstracted sculpture to be removed. However, many community members did not agree with the MMF. Métis Guy Dumont suggested that:

The Riel monument as it now stands has probably evoked more controversy and brought more attention to the Métis people than even our most eloquent leaders. It underlies the mentality of an era when the Métis were still virtually excluded from the decision - making process.<sup>99</sup>

Although Dumont respects the first sculpture, he does agree with DeLaronde about the exclusion of Métis from the decision - making process. It appears ironic that these Métis are complaining about the exclusion of the Métis when Jean Allard, President of the Union Nationale Métisse Saint - Joseph du Manitoba, lobbied for the sculpture. It is here that the divergences among the Métis are apparent.

The Union Nationale Métisse's members are primarily "historical" Métis, who are culturally Euro - Canadian, but aware and proud of their indigenous roots, and the history of their Métis ancestors. The activities of the Union Nationale Métisse are directed towards French - speaking Métis, and French was used almost exclusively in its assemblies, which excluded those Métis who spoke only English. Bruce Sealey suggests

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<sup>98</sup>"Métis Nation Welcomes Removal of Riel Statue" in The Métis National Council, July 27, 1994.

<sup>99</sup>Guy Dumont, "Letters to the Editor" in Winnipeg Free Press, July 19, 1994.

that,

These historical Métis, both French and English, were largely acculturated to either English or French-Canadians. They were educated, economically self sufficient and had a wealth of expertise which, if it had been available to the less fortunate Métis, would have been of considerable assistance to the latter. Unfortunately, some historical Métis were contemptuous of their less fortunate brothers [and sisters] and stayed as far away from them and their problems as much as possible.<sup>100</sup>

As Hall suggests, "We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities."<sup>101</sup>

The divergences between members of the Métis Federation and members of the Union Nationale Métisse is why when Allard and Lemay were chained to the sculpture, the concerns for Métis nationhood were not acknowledged or dealt with by Allard or Lemay. The Métis made their appeal to have the sculpture removed as a source of empowerment for the Métis nation. However, during the controversy, Allard was concerned with Riel being a Canadian hero, and Lemay's focus was on his rights as an artist. Within the media reports and literatures about the controversy, neither Lemay nor Allard approached the subject of the request being about and for the Métis nation.

The issues that I have examined, and the points that I have tried to make in this Chapter are as follows: Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Métis nationhood has existed. Louis Riel has had an integral part in facilitating nationalistic ideals within Métis

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<sup>100</sup>Bruce Sealey, The Métis - Canada's Forgotten People, 1975,p.149.

<sup>101</sup>Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction, (Cambridge: University Press, 1993),p.394.

communities, historically, and now symbolically. At different times in Canadian society, many Métis have clung to the ideals of nationhood as a source of empowerment. It is evident that nationhood has prevailed as a source of identity, and the search for cultural autonomy in the setting up of the provisional government in 1869, the Métis Resistance of 1884, the creation of the Métis Association of Alberta in 1929, the creation of the MMF in 1969, and lastly, the MMF's request to have Lemay's sculpture of Louis Riel removed from the Legislative grounds.

Besides being exemplary of Métis nationhood, the MMF's request exposed other matters. It displayed the positive and negative implications of the changing image of Louis Riel in the Canadian context. As well, the demand exposed the divisions that exist within the Métis communities, the differences of opinions that exist over Métis nationhood, and the perceived role and rights of the Métis communities in Canada. The MMF's request to have Lemay's abstracted sculpture removed from the Legislative grounds was a symbolic gesture, based upon the respect for the past struggles of Riel and the Métis nation, as well as the contemporary search for respect, rights, and identity, under the term "nation".

## CHAPTER TWO

### The versatility of Riel

From the late 1960s until contemporary times, Louis Riel has been a subject for contemporary artists. Besides Marcien Lemay, John Nugent, Jeff Funnell, and John Boyle have all created images of Riel. Nugent was commissioned by the Saskatchewan government to create a commemorative sculpture. Funnell attempted to better understand the community in Winnipeg that he lives in, and Boyle used Riel as a symbol for his Canadian nationalist beliefs. Their reasons for depicting Riel show how versatile the icon of Riel can be for artists, communities and political parties in Canada. As Claude Rocan suggests in the article "Images of Riel in Contemporary School Textbooks", "the examination of how Canadians interpret what Riel stood for becomes more than simply an academic exercise. Rather, it becomes a window into the Canadian psyche."<sup>102</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Nugent, Funnell and Boyle have used the image of Riel in their artwork. I discuss their reasons for creating images of Riel, as well as the issues surrounding their portrayals that concern many Métis. I will begin by discussing John Nugent's sculpture, a partially nude Louis Riel that was removed from the Saskatchewan Legislative grounds in 1991. Discussing Nugent's sculpture and its removal from the Legislative grounds allows me to address the absence of an

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<sup>102</sup>Claude Rocan, "Images of Riel in Contemporary School Textbooks" in Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture, (Holland: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p.94.

Aboriginal voice in major federal decision - making processes. I will discuss John Boyle's nationalist art in reference to Riel and the Métis, examining the positive and negative implications of his use of the Métis as a symbol for his own beliefs. Lastly, I will address Jeff Funnell's attempts to demystify the icon of Riel by creating a cartoon series which attempts to humanize him.

In the late 1960s, there was a "resurrection" of Louis Riel in mainstream Canadian society. There were several reasons for this new concentration on the Métis leader. In 1967 there were Canada's Centennial celebrations, which enticed people to look for new heroes, and develop an understanding of how Canada came to be. There was also Pierre Elliot Trudeau's 1968 political campaign promise of creating a "just society", which began the promotion of multi-culturalism and equal rights for all Canadians.<sup>103</sup> Lastly, there was a new awareness of Native rights which created an interest in Louis Riel.

As Duke Redbird mentions in his text We Are Métis, the 1960s was the decade of "Red Power". This began around 1961, with the formation of the National Indian Council. Its members had often been educated in residential schools, and found reserve life unbearable. Therefore they moved into the cities. These new urban Aboriginals were better educated, more aware, and less willing to accept discrimination. The National Indian Council was thus very vocal and articulate. As Redbird suggests, "The news media was actively courted and certain politically oriented Indians attained celebrity status in the

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<sup>103</sup>Pierre Elliot Trudeau, "The Values of a Just Society" in Towards a Just Society, edited by Thomas. S.Axworthy & Pierre Elliot Trudeau, (Ontario: Viking Publishings, 1990).

white media"<sup>104</sup>. After the National Indian Council ceased to exist in 1968, many more organizations formed and disbanded, such as the National Métis Society (1968-70), which brought about a new awareness of Native cultures. As well, the Trudeau government's policy of assimilation, known as the White Paper policy (1969), became a formative event for First Nations leaders. This policy, which was a contradiction of Trudeau's promise of a just society (how can one argue for multiculturalism and equality and then still marginalise First Peoples?), fuelled anger in many Aboriginal people, and the federal government had to withdraw the policy of assimilation in 1970.<sup>105</sup>

This new interest in Native cultures by mainstream Canadian society facilitated an appreciation for First Nations art. The Canadian art world and mainstream Canadian society took an interest in the artwork of Ojibwa artist Norval Morrisseau and Oji - Cree artist Jackson Beardy. Morrisseau was the first contemporary Aboriginal artist to be noticed by mainstream society, and who created art with a First Nations aesthetic. His artwork was the first to be exhibited in art galleries in the mid - 60s.<sup>106</sup> Both he and Beardy created what is now called the Woodland School art. Their art was about their dreams, life experiences, and the stories and legends their grandparents told them. A product of residential schools, these artists were alienated both within and outside their

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<sup>104</sup>Duke Redbird, We Are Métis, (Ontario: Ontario Métis & Non Status Indian Association, 1980),p.29.

<sup>105</sup>Peter Kulchyski, "Aboriginal Peoples and Hegemony in Canada" in Journal of Canadian Studies Vol.3, No.1, Spring 1995,p.62.

<sup>106</sup>Selwyn Dewdney, "Norval Morrisseau" in Canadian Art no.1, January/February, 1963,p.36.

communities. Beardy wrote an emotional and politically charged poem about being an urban Indian:

...As I walk the dismal streets of this city,  
 Kicking a tin beer can ahead of me,  
 I think bitterly of that invisible government,  
 That took me away from my folks so early,  
 Only to be used as a psychological sop,  
 To relieve society's major hang - up.  
 They denied me the right to experience  
 My identity and my culture,  
 They denied me the right to experience  
 The intricacies of the White world,  
 While they stripped me of my pride and dignity,  
 In a secluded government boarding school,  
 During the twelve crucial years of my life.  
 I emerged a learned man with a hollow soul.  
 After a few faltering steps, I fell flat on my face.  
 I had never learned to walk in either world.  
 I was born of the noble Indian race,  
 Bred in the confines of a government test-tube,  
 And released a zombie.<sup>107</sup>

The media, public, and politicians all took notice of new Native rights groups, Native art, and the struggles that Beardy mentions in his poem.<sup>108</sup> However, as will be discussed in this chapter, many people took notice on their own terms, and for their own benefit, whether it be for economic, political, or spiritual gain.

One politician who took notice of Aboriginal issues and used them to his political advantage was Saskatchewan Liberal Premier, Ross Thatcher. In 1967, three weeks

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<sup>107</sup>Kenneth James Hughes, "Jackson Beardy-Life and Art" in Canadian Dimensions, vol.14, #2, (Winnipeg, 1979),p.17.

<sup>108</sup>Duke Redbird, We Are Métis, (Ontario: Ontario Métis & Non Status Indian Association, 1980),p.29 &33.

before a provincial election, Thatcher's government commissioned a commemorative sculpture of Riel.<sup>109</sup> In 1964, Saskatchewan's Creative Activities Subcommittee had planned to have a commemorative monument of Riel erected for the celebrations of Saskatchewan's Diamond Jubilee in 1965. The Subcommittee asked Clement Greenberg for his opinion on who the artist should be. Greenberg, who had spent a summer at the University of Saskatchewan's off - season painting workshop at Emma Lake, suggested modernist sculptor John Nugent.<sup>110</sup> Nugent had participated in the earlier Emma Lake workshops in 1949, which helped to precipitate his regional, and modernist genre of art - making. A sculpture was never erected for the Diamond Jubilee, but three years later, Ross Thatcher revived the cause to have Riel commemorated with a sculpture.

In 1967, Wilf Klein, Executive Director of the Centennial Committee in Saskatchewan, asked Nugent to create a commemorative sculpture of Louis Riel for \$10,000. Nugent, who needed the funds to support his family, agreed to do so. He read Joseph Kinsey Howard's provocative book Strange Empire. In an emotional, romantic, and sympathetic manner, Howard attempts to show the struggles of the Métis, other First Peoples, and Louis Riel. The book moved Nugent emotionally, and he viewed Riel as a man ahead of his time, with as much importance for the future as for the past.

According to Nugent the problems discussed in Howard's book were still relevant in the late 1960s. Aboriginal people were still being marginalised by the Canadian

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<sup>109</sup>Muriel Draaisma, "Regina statue panned - So is version in Man." in The Leader-Post, August 9, 1991.

<sup>110</sup>Barry Lord, "Living Inside the American Empire of Taste" in Saturday Night, December, 1971,p.31.



government, and many people still felt that Riel was insane and a traitor. Nugent thus believed that Riel needed a contemporary monument. He created two maquettes, one modernist, and one representational.<sup>111</sup>

If chosen to be erected, the modernist sculpture was to be made with twenty tons of heavy steel, thrust to the height of thirty feet. The maquette depicts one thin, long piece of steel that stands in the middle. On each side, there are two steel flanges, that are approximately 3/4 the height of the middle piece (Figure 5). Nugent suggests the piece symbolizes the soaring spirit and struggles of Louis Riel and the Métis.<sup>112</sup> The two side steel flanges, which almost but not quite reach the height of the middle steel piece, perhaps represent the aspirations of the Métis never being fully realized.

The other maquette was a bronze representational figure piece. In a classical manner, Riel is nude, except for a cloak which largely covers his genitals. His head and right hand are thrust skyward, representing a final act of defiance before the Métis' surrender to the troops of General Middleton at Batoche in 1885 (Figure 6). Nugent has been quoted as saying, "It was the ultimate humiliation for the Métis. When Middleton's army found them at Batoche, they had very little. No shoes or food."<sup>113</sup> Thus it can be assumed that his portrayal of Riel bearing nothing but a cloak represents the ultimate humiliation Nugent believes Riel and the Métis faced.

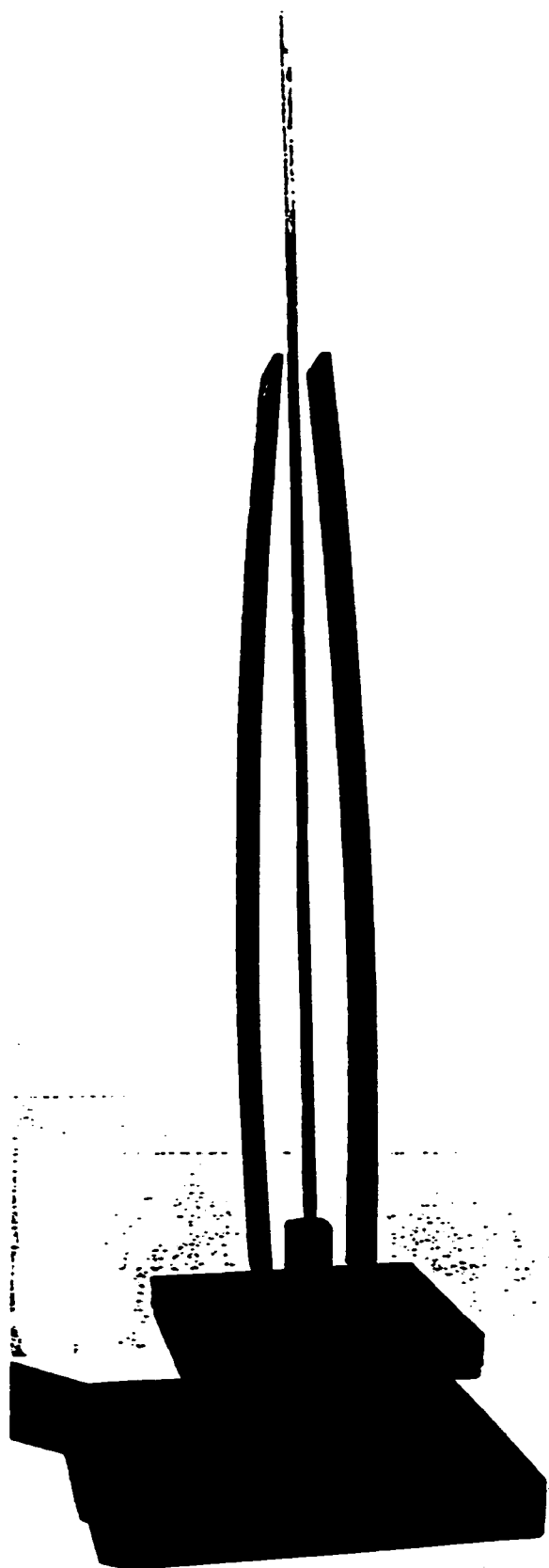
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<sup>111</sup>Telephone interview with John Nugent , May 9, 1998.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>David Roberts, "Scantily Clad Riel to Leave Legislature" in Globe and Mail, August 8, 1991.

**Figure 5. John Nugent's Steel Louis Riel Maquette (1968)**



As Marcien Lemay had expressed about his sculpture, Nugent also believed that with this sculpture viewers had to "look for what's inside the man, not the exterior". He also stated that in Riel he found an "explosive and dynamic spirit, a kind of classical tragic figure, a prophet frustrated in his grand design by petty politicians".<sup>114</sup> Nugent, who had a Catholic upbringing and education, implies that in Christian art, the nude portrayal of religious figures is acceptable and complementary. He therefore felt that a nude portrayal of Riel was appropriate, because Riel was a French - Catholic, and at one point in his life believed himself to be a prophet of the new world.<sup>115</sup> Riel has been quoted as saying, "Since December 8, 1875, the year I was banished, God has appointed me his prophet, and all my points are as clear as water of the purest fountain."<sup>116</sup>

Ross Thatcher reacted negatively to the modernist maquette. He called a special session in the Legislature to ask representatives of the art communities for their advice as to which sculpture would be appropriate. Although the art communities preferred Nugent's modern piece, Thatcher asked Nugent to create the representational piece. Although this was not the exact sculpture Thatcher had in mind, he would have preferred one showing Riel in a suit, Nugent was commissioned to create his nude Riel, wearing a short cloak.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Ross Miller, "Nugent sees Riel as a contemporary man" in The Leader-Post, Regina, October 2, 1968.

<sup>115</sup>Phone interview with John Nugent, May 9, 1998.

<sup>116</sup>Manitoba Daily Free Press Vol.XII, November 17, 1885.

<sup>117</sup>Robert Pincus-Witten, John Nugent-Modernism in Isolation (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983),p.22.

**Figure 6. John Nugent's Sculpture of Louis Riel (1968)**



Controversy also arose between Nugent and Thatcher over the height of the pedestal for the sculpture. Thatcher wanted it to be thirty - two inches off the ground, while Nugent wanted it to be eighteen inches. Nugent insisted that the pedestal be lowered before he would hand over his sculpture. With Prime minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau making a special visit for the unveiling ceremony, Thatcher had no choice but to give in to Nugent.<sup>118</sup>

In her article "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture", Frances Kaye discusses the controversy over Nugent's sculpture, concentrating on Thatcher's political purposes, and federal public policy towards First Peoples. Through her research, she found that many people in Regina believed that Thatcher commissioned the sculpture purely as a political measure. By commissioning a commemorative sculpture of Riel, Thatcher could present himself as a "friend" to First Peoples three weeks before an election in which he hoped to attract Métis, Non-Status and First Nations support. Kaye writes, "Whether or not Thatcher ever articulated the goal to himself, he seems to have understood that in his Riel - for he made it his Riel statue - he was reinventing the Indian, taking him away from the likes of Malcolm Norris<sup>119</sup> and the NDP and setting him up as the bourgeois, Europeanized, assimilated man."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Ross Miller, "Nugent Sees Riel as Contemporary Man" in The Leader-Post, October 2, 1968.

<sup>119</sup>Malcolm Norris was a vocal Metis who was a member of the NDP party in Saskatchewan at the time of the sculpture commissioning.

<sup>120</sup>Frances Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture" in Prairie Forum, Vol.22, No.1,1997 p.114.

Kaye suggests that Thatcher did not really understand the meaning of his "pet symbol". Thatcher commissioned a commemorative sculpture of Riel, in order to gain votes of a group of newly enfranchised indigenous people. However, a recent book written by Blair Stonechild, titled Loyal till Death - Indians and the North - West Rebellion, suggests that among First Nations communities there have often been feelings of resentment towards Louis Riel. Stonechild attempts to negate any voluntary involvement of First Nations with the Métis Resistance of 1885. He suggests that if Indians did get involved, it was because they were forced by Métis militants. He therefore views Riel as a problematic character, whose goals and influence on the Métis had a negative effect on western First Nations communities. Stonechild writes,

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to the resolution of these and other problems is the persistent myth that the Indians and Métis acted in concert during the North-West Rebellion. Contrary to popular belief, the Indians of western Canada did not look to Louis Riel for leadership; nor were they unable to think and act for themselves during the difficult transitional period following the disappearance of the buffalo.<sup>121</sup>

In addition, in his article "Métis Militant Rebels", David Lee shows that not all Métis agreed with the Resistance (an issue not discussed in Stonechild's text; Stonechild often generalizes about Métis sentiments). Lee attempts to examine the range of opinion in the Métis communities regarding the notion of rebellion. As well as acknowledging the obvious support for Riel (although he suggests it was often due to people being gullible and in awe of Riel), Lee addresses those Métis who were successfully adjusting their

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<sup>121</sup>Blair Stonechild, Bill Waiser, Loyal till Death-Indians and the North-West Rebellion, (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997), p.239-240.

lifestyles to meet the demands of an intruding Euro-Canadian society. He also discusses certain Métis who petitioned the government to be included in Treaty No.4 in 1876. They lived their lives closely with and among the Cree and Saulteaux communities around Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan.<sup>122</sup> Because these Métis lived similar lifestyles to the Cree and Saulteaux communities, they believed that they should also have treaty rights. Thus, it can be assumed that because Riel and his followers posed problems for many First Peoples who were signing treaties, or interested in doing so, some people in the late 1960s in Saskatchewan would not appreciate an image of Louis Riel.

In a recent interview John Nugent suggested that it was the responsibility of Thatcher to ask First Peoples what or who they would want commemorated with a sculpture. Nugent stated that it was not his responsibility, perhaps because it was a commission from the provincial government, and not a piece he did on his own initiative. Nugent believes that the majority of Métis would have preferred a sculpture of Gabriel Dumont, who was Louis Riel's military assistant during the Métis Resistance of 1885. According to Nugent, Riel is the white man's symbol, and Dumont the Aboriginal one.<sup>123</sup>

Métis Gabriel Dumont was one of the four men who rode to Montana in 1884 to ask Riel to lead the Métis of the Northwest. Their hope was that Riel could enforce Métis rights, as he had in 1870 in Manitoba. Dumont has often been described by historians as being more militant than Riel, and more willing to use violence against Canadian

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<sup>122</sup>David Lee, "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885" in Canadian Ethnic Studies, XXI,3,1989.

<sup>123</sup>Phone Interview with John Nugent, May 9, 1998.

soldiers. Dumont was also different from Riel because he was uneducated, and could neither read nor write. He grew up on the Plains, surviving as other Métis did: on buffalo hunts. He was considered a great hunter and leader, and in later years, became captain of the buffalo hunt, the highest position in Métis communities. In contrast, Riel was educated in Euro - Canadian institutions, was a school teacher in Montana when Dumont asked for his help, spoke both English and French, and for the most part, dressed in European style clothing. Thatcher was partly correct, then, in viewing Riel as a Europeanized man. Thatcher's belief that all Aboriginals should assimilate into the dominant society and be educated was not.<sup>124</sup> If he had consulted First Peoples about these issues, he would have surely found out that for many, Riel was not a source of inspiration.

The representational life - size sculpture was unveiled on October 2, 1968, and stood just north of the Saskatchewan Legislative building. Nugent was not invited to the unveiling, and as had happened at the unveiling of Lemay's sculpture, no Métis or First Nations leaders was asked to speak.

Kaye suggests that Thatcher needed the image of Riel he tried to create, as a symbol of what he wanted to do for - or to - Aboriginals. Not inviting any First Peoples to speak suggests that his plans were to speak for them on government policy. Although he was perhaps sincere in wanting to "help" Native peoples, his offer to construct better lives was on his own terms. He was willing to aid people, if they were willing to become

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<sup>124</sup>Frances W.Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture", 1997,p.114.



what "his Riel" was: assimilated, educated, Europeanized.<sup>125</sup>

In 1991, Nugent's nude sculpture of Riel was taken down, and moved to the vaults of the MacKenzie Art Gallery. The Saskatchewan Family Foundation had lobbied the provincial government to have it removed, because members of the Métis community had complained about the nudity of the sculpture. They found Nugent's portrayal an unacceptable commemoration of Riel. Clifford Laroque, a Métis, suggested, "This has been a thorn in the side of the Métis people for years. If that's the kind of recognition we're going to get, they might as well throw it in the lake."<sup>126</sup> He also suggested that the statue is demoralizing for Métis people and is historically inaccurate.

One reason why Métis might have found the sculpture demoralizing was the habit of many young children of peering up the cloak for "a lesson in human anatomy, not history."<sup>127</sup> Also, as with many public sculptures, Nugent's Riel was vandalized. This vandalism included spray painting the genitalia bright orange, an action reminiscent of the penis on Lemay's sculpture being cut off. Nugent was not too disturbed about the vandalism, because he believes it's part of the life of a public sculpture. Lemay on the other hand, lobbied the provincial government to allow him to repair his Riel sculpture

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Kevin O'Connor, "Riel Statue to be Moved" in The Leader-Post, August 2, 1991.

<sup>127</sup>David Roberts, "Scantily Clad Riel to Leave Legislature" in Globe and Mail, August 8, 1991.

after the vandalism became excessive .<sup>128</sup>

As with Lemay's sculpture, there was a negative reaction from members of the public to the removal of the sculpture. In a letter to the editor in the Regina Leader-Post, Rand E. Teed stated, "It is unfortunate that the critics do not have the vision it represents and that the current government does not have Riel's strength of character."<sup>129</sup> Muriel K. Griffin, asserted that "It surprises me that the Métis gentlemen who apparently started the fuss over our one real statue could not see the grace and dignity expressed in the face and figure of his countryman."<sup>130</sup> These statements, made by people who positioned themselves as being Euro - Canadian in their letters, imply a lack of regard for different cultural views and struggles. How Riel is portrayed in art, and the reactions to these images, directly affects the Métis more than anyone else. The Métis concerns can be interpreted as not only being about art, but also about the lack of having our voices heard in mainstream Canadian society. If Riel is portrayed as being in "utter humiliation" for the occurrences of 1885, that affects the esteem of some contemporary Métis.

Despite these reactions, there were other members of the public who supported the Métis' request. One unnamed reporter for the Leader-Post suggested, "If indeed such a move can overcome a slight against the Métis, who presumably are supposed to feel

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<sup>128</sup>CARFAC Manitoba Press Release, "Restoration of the Louis Riel Statue", August 24, 1992.

<sup>129</sup>Rand E. Teed, "Letter to the editor" in The Leader-Post, August 16, 1991.

<sup>130</sup>Muriel K. Griffin, "Reader's Viewpoints" in The Leader-Post, September 9, 1991.

honoured, not humiliated by the Riel statue, the move has some merit."<sup>131</sup> This comment acknowledges that it is the Métis who are most affected by imagery of Riel. Journalist Ron Petrie also made an interesting and supportive point for the Métis. He declared, "Imagine if you dare, the likely reaction of the Saskatchewan public if a statue of, say Tommy Douglas, John Diefenbaker or Ross Thatcher were unveiled in front of the Legislative Building and, like the Riel piece, portrayed the man with his genitalia exposed. The artist would be run out of town, his body covered with black-and-blue welts, that's what would happen."<sup>132</sup>

Petrie's comment brings up two issues. The first is that in Canada, there is a lack of nude portrayals of Euro - Canadian heroes. When Euro - Canadian historical figures, such as John A. MacDonald, Lord Selkirk, or Queen Victoria are commemorated with public sculptures, they are always clothed. These historical figures were all powerful, respected people, and it can therefore be argued that because of their prestige, they are portrayed fully dressed. The other issue that Petrie's comment brings up is how some view Riel as a prophet, and others as a politician. Nugent describes Riel as a prophet, and believes that in Christian art, there is a tradition to portray important religious figures in a nude form. Believing Riel to be a religious figure, Nugent chose to depict Riel half - nude. Petrie, and many others, view Riel as a politician, who should be treated in the same manner as other politicians in the realm of commemorative sculpture.

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<sup>131</sup>The Leader-Post, August 3, 1991.

<sup>132</sup>Ron Petrie, "It's about time this statue is moved to another place", The Leader-Post, August 3, 1991.

Despite the similarities in responses, requests, and actions taken around Nugent's sculpture, the controversy that arose in Saskatchewan was smaller than the one over Lemay's portrayal in Manitoba. One possible reason is Nugent's attitude towards the sculpture that was placed by the Legislature. Nugent, and members of the arts community had preferred his steel maquette, but Thatcher wanted a more representational image. From the beginning of the commission, disagreements had arisen between Thatcher and Nugent over what kind of sculpture to erect, where it would be placed, and how high the base would be. Perhaps because of Thatcher's intrusion into the creative process, Nugent felt that the sculpture placed at the Legislature was not one of his best pieces. He stated, "It was a bit of a potboiler. I'd rather they just return it to me or move it out onto the lake ice in winter. Then in the Spring it would sink down along with all the controversy."<sup>133</sup>

During the controversy over Nugent's sculpture in 1991, the Métis Society of Saskatchewan announced it would like a new statue of Louis Riel to be created and put in the place of Nugent's half - nude portrayal. President of the Métis Society Jim Durocher suggested that Native artists should be considered to create a new sculpture, one that would be "realistic, dignified, and respectful." As other Métis persons had declared with reference to Lemay's sculpture, Durocher felt that Riel should be "recognized for the hero he is".<sup>134</sup> Despite Durocher's statement, a statesman - like sculpture was never erected to replace Nugent's modernist one. Instead the sculpture was replaced by a cairn

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<sup>133</sup>David Roberts, "Scantly clad Riel to leave Legislature" in Globe and Mail, August 8, 1991.

<sup>134</sup>Muriel Draaisma, "Regina statue panned-So is version in Man" in The Leader-Post, August 9, 1991.

commerating Riel's trial. It was erected by the producers of a play entitled The Trial of Louis Riel, and by the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>135</sup>

Throughout the controversies over Lemay's and Nugent's sculptures, it was a necessity to have the sculptures removed from the legislative grounds as a source of empowerment for members of the Métis nation. However, commissioning talented Aboriginal artists to create commemorative sculptures of Riel was not a priority. Even though Durocher wanted a Native artist to be commissioned to create a new sculpture, it never happened. In Manitoba, there was no consideration given to hiring a Native sculptor, because board members of the Manitoba Métis Federation wanted to give the contract to Lemay, as a symbol of their gratitude to him. Perhaps if there was an emphasis put on not only having the sculptures removed, but having new ones created by Native artists, a greater sense of pride could have been established for the Métis. A Métis presence at both legislative grounds could have been felt.

When discussing the controversy over Nugent's sculpture, there are several things that become apparent. Although Nugent's sculpture was ultimately about Louis Riel and the Métis, the sculpture ended up being for non-Aboriginal persons living or visiting Regina. The sculpture was chosen by non-Natives and created by a non-Native. It was erected at a time when many First Peoples began vocalizing their concerns. Liberal Premier Ross Thatcher's decision to have a commemorative sculpture erected was a symbol of his political position. The request to have it removed was a symbol of Métis nationhood and empowerment.

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<sup>135</sup>Frances W. Kaye, "Any Important Form: Louis Riel in Sculpture", 1997,p.128.

Benedict Anderson writes that a nation is an imagined political community because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."<sup>136</sup> For First Peoples living within a larger nation - state that has colonized them during the process of nation - building, these sentiments of comradeship can be flattering, but also troubling. Believing in a united, equal nation can mean acknowledging a culture's presence, roles in nation - creating, and the existence of its history and thriving culture. However, in an attempt to find equal comradeship within a nation, the emphasis can also silence peripheral people, because energy is given to discussing the achievements and struggles of the larger nation -state. The experiences of colonized peoples then, become those of the larger nation - state. This in turn marginalises those who are attempting to have their struggles with the larger nation known within mainstream society.

In the artwork of John Boyle, the flattery, and the silencing, of the Métis are both present. John Boyle is a painter, sculptor, filmmaker, writer and teacher. He grew up in London, and presently resides in Allenford, Ontario. His work has been extensively exhibited in Canada in galleries such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Toronto.<sup>137</sup> Some of his pieces can be found in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Canada Council Art Bank, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

As new memorials were being erected, and celebrations occurring for Canada's

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<sup>136</sup>Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, (London, New York: Verso Publishing, 1991), p.7.

<sup>137</sup>Winnipeg Biennial, Winnipeg Art Gallery. 1966. Toronto. Toy Show Art Gallery of Toronto. 1966.

Centennial in 1967, Boyle began searching for fragments of a Canadian identity. In Boyle's Rebel Series(1967), and Batoche Series(1975), a form of artistic Canadian soul-searching is present. Boyle asserts, "Who better than the artists to help recreate our country in a way that will enrich the family of nations? What better subject for me than my own land and people?"<sup>138</sup> His words "my own land and people" can imply two things: possession, or believing in a unique, common cultural identity among Canadians. Stuart Hall suggests there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. He writes about the first manner:

The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and (or) ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.<sup>139</sup>

In Boyle's artwork, it is apparent that he considers Canada as being "one people" and one nation, instead of many smaller nations within a larger one. For people attempting to have their experiences and histories within Canada acknowledged, these ideals can pose a problem.

Boyle, who is ultimately proud to be Canadian, is troubled by one of Canada's closest neighbours, the United States. He feels that America has far too much presence in Canada, and that it is an oppressive force to all Canadians. Robert Fulford recapitulates

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<sup>138</sup>John Boyle, "From the Periphery" in John Boyle - A Retrospective, (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1991),p.12.

<sup>139</sup>Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction, (Cambridge: University Press, 1993),p.393.

Boyle's beliefs, stating that "Canadians know more about America than any other non-Americans and are more influenced by it because to a large extent America is the very air we breathe...Canadians often say that they shed one sort of colonialism. English. Only to embrace immediately another form, American."<sup>140</sup>

Boyle suggests that all Canadians experience the effects of colonization. He states,

My work is now to study the people and the country of Canada, the Atlantis of the North, the land that might have been, to reconstruct their customs, practices, rites, and myths, and to record them in word and painted image as a lesson to the world, and in particular to the other peripheral cultures of the world.<sup>141</sup>

Although Boyle acknowledges that people have been marginalised in Canada, he does not position himself as being part of the colonizing culture. Nor does he admit that the nation Canada colonizes people living on this land. In fact, he views himself as also being peripheral, which is problematic to people who have not had the same advantages, rights, and privilege as Boyle. It is important to note that Boyle is a successful, Euro - Canadian, English-speaking male artist. Suggesting all Canadians including himself are peripheral, and not admitting that within Canada, his race and gender have privilege, creates the same colonization he claims to suffer from. At the same time, his suggestion that the United States is a colonizing force in Canada is justified, as it can be argued that this continent is dominated by the United States. The impact of the United States on Canada is a big concern for Boyle, and his own personal struggles with that country, and feelings of

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<sup>140</sup>Robert Fulford, "Art On the Edge of Empire" in Artnews, September, 1974,p.25.

<sup>141</sup>John Boyle, "From the Periphery", 1991,p.12.



marginalization should not be dismissed.

Boyle believes that the Canada he has learned to love is slipping away due to Americanization, Quebec separatism, and the trivialization of Canadian experience and history. He suggests that the country is in danger, and it is his job to undertake its cultural archaeology. For Boyle, it is thus necessary to establish a unique Canadian identity and history. He uses art as a way to give his interpretation of what it means to be Canadian. Boyle states,

For me, of course, the fact that my work dealt with Canadian material had to do with the fact that my life was being led in Canada among Canadians. With great effort I pulled myself clear of the wash of what passes for American culture and learned to love myself. I could go on listing the effects of my cultural liberation, and each additional entry would represent a measure of the depth of my marginalization within Canadian society.<sup>142</sup>

In his role as a Canadian nationalist, Boyle began creating art that included the presence of people he found interesting. He created images of these people, often tying them to his own experiences growing up in Ontario. Many of his paintings depicted multiple persons, such as Stephen Leacock and Chief Poundmaker, who were not necessarily related to each other in their stories and experiences. However, for Boyle they were related through him and his various interests.<sup>143</sup>

In 1967, when there was a new surge of interest in Riel, Boyle created a piece entitled Rebel Series. On a double - sided wood triptych, Boyle created images of persons he believed were rebels. In the right corner of the front panel piece is an image of Louis

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<sup>142</sup>John Boyle, "From the Periphery" in John Boyle - A Retrospective, 1991, p.9,11.

<sup>143</sup>Phone interview with John Boyle, April 9, 1998.

Riel. Below Riel is a portrait of Woody Guthrie, the American folk singer, protestor and songwriter. Guthrie appears to be wrapped in a blanket, which has an image of a Doukhobor immigrant on it. The Doukhobors are a Russian religious sect who were exiled from Russia by the Czar in 1895. They emigrated to western Canada, only to continue to experience discrimination.<sup>144</sup> In the middle of the piece is Chief Big Bear (1853-85). Chief Big Bear, a Cree, is known for having refused to sign a treaty in the late 19th century. He had spent several years trying to secure an alliance of the western bands in order to force Ottawa to provide them with better solutions.<sup>145</sup> Big Bear was jailed at Stony Mountain Penitentiary in Manitoba after the Métis Resistance of 1885, for allegedly being a strong supporter of Riel. He died shortly after being released. On the right side of Big Bear is another image of Riel (Figure 7). To Boyle, these men are Canadian heroes, even if they were against the nation he so adamantly believes in.

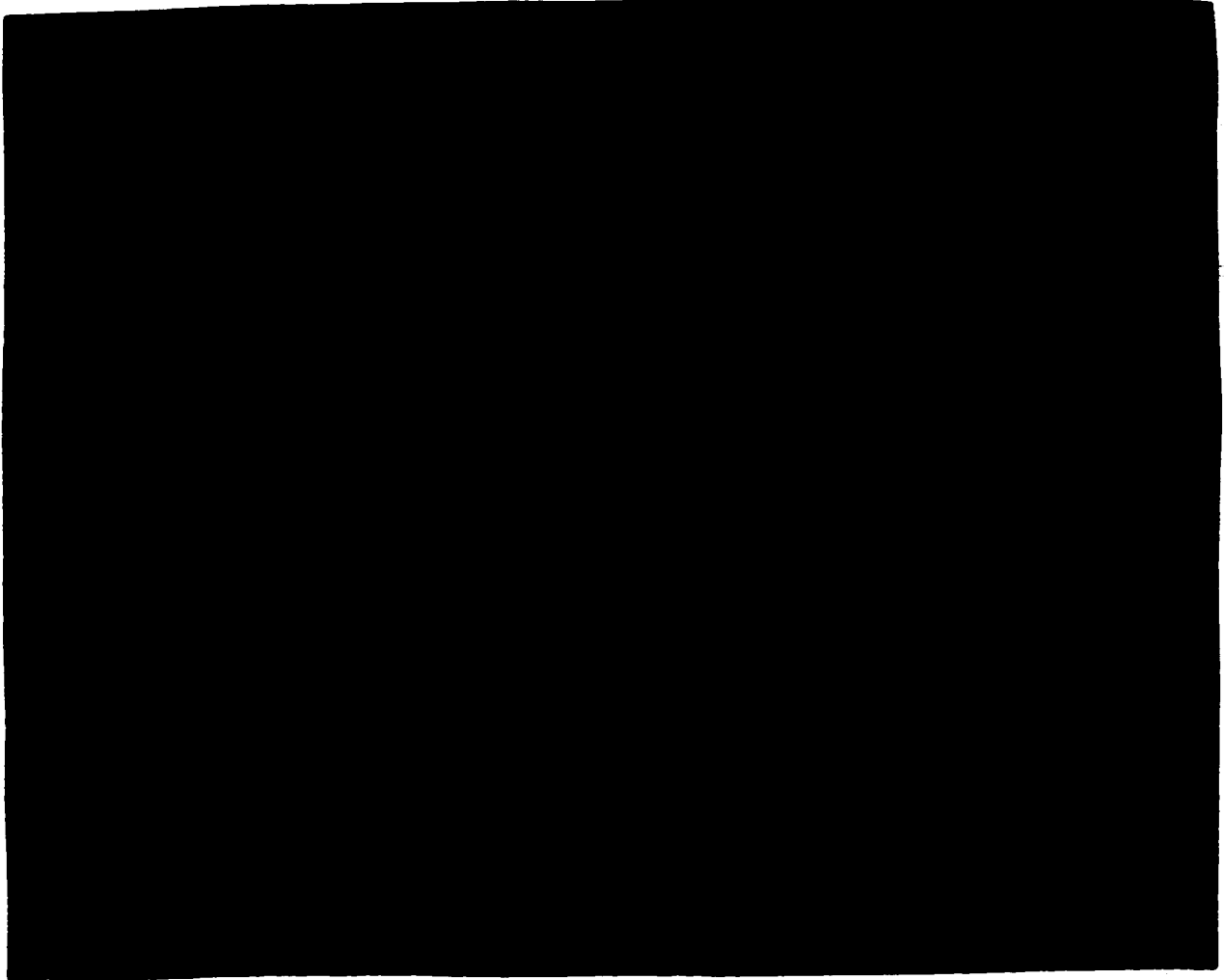
Boyle did extensive research on the men portrayed in Rebel Series, and used photographs to create images of them. The images of Riel that he painted portray him as a statesman, wearing a suit, and looking "dignified". Boyle's portrayals of Riel greatly contrast with Lemay's and Nugent's nude sculptures, which were created around the same time. Examining the controversies over Lemay's and Nugent's sculptures, and the recent lobbying by some Métis to have Riel decreed a Father of Confederation, it can be assumed that many Métis would appreciate Boyle's portrayal. Boyle created this piece in

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<sup>144</sup>Ivan Avakumovic, George Woodcock, The Doukhobors, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1977).

<sup>145</sup>Blair Stonechild, Loyal till Death - Indians and the North-West Rebellion, (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd, 1997),p.106.

Figure 7. Rebel Series. John Boyle.(1967)



the late 1960s, when First Peoples were beginning to demand their voices be heard.

Perhaps this piece suggests that Boyle was listening.

In photographs, Riel appears to be assimilated, educated and a Europeanized man. Riel is always seen wearing a suit, looking tidy and "respectable" (His feet, which always bore moccasins, are never seen). However, it is debatable whether he wanted to be assimilated by Euro-Canada, or whether he dressed in this manner as an attempt to be respected by non-Native persons. Frantz Fanon suggests that leaders of colonized nations go through three phases during their process of leadership, the first being a period of "unqualified assimilation". He suggests that often it can be seen in leader's writings.

Fanon states,

In the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of its opposite numbers in the mother country. His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country.<sup>146</sup>

When reading samples of Riel's writings, it appears that Fanon's description of Native leaders is applicable to him. Riel's ability to articulate himself through the written word was probably due to being educated in Canadian institutions. This can be seen in the "Proclamation to the People of the North-West", written in 1870, shortly after the Red River Resistance had ended. Riel writes, "Elevated by the Grace of Providence and the suffrages of my fellow - citizens to the highest position in the Government of my country,

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<sup>146</sup>Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, edited by Patrick Williams, Laura Chrisman, (New York: Coloumbia University Press, 1994), p.40.

I proclaim that peace reigns in our midst this day."

Fanon suggests that after the period of "unqualified assimilation", the Native leader becomes disturbed with colonization. The leader then decides to remember what he/she is. But since the Native is not a part of his/her people, and only has exterior relations with his/her people, he/she is content to recall their life only.<sup>147</sup> An example is this poem written by Riel in 1870:

Je suis métisse et je suis orgueilleuse  
D'appartenir a cette nation  
Je sais que Dieu de sa main genereuse  
Fait chaque peuple avec attention  
Les métis sont un petit peuple encore  
Mais vous pouvez voir deja leurs destins  
Être hais comme ils sont les honore.  
Ils ont deja rempli de grands desseins.<sup>148</sup>

In the last phase, which Fanon calls the fighting phase, the Native leader, "after having tried to lose himself in the people, and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people". The leader then turns himself/herself into an awakener of the people. At this stage a fighting literature is produced, a revolutionary literature, a national literature.<sup>149</sup>

An example is this following poem written by Riel:

One day Ontario  
Tried to invade our land.  
A fine trio was spying on us:  
Mair, Snow, Schultz were seeking some butter

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid,p.40.

<sup>148</sup>The Collective Writings of Louis Riel. vol.4

<sup>149</sup>Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" in The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968),p.41

To grease their bread at our expense:  
 But these miserable people  
 Found nothing but a scuffle.<sup>150</sup>

There are some people who believe because Riel was educated, well - mannered, articulate in his writing, and sometimes wore European clothing, he wanted to be assimilated into Euro - Canadian culture. However, Fanon's description of leaders of colonized nations, suggest otherwise. If Riel's motives helped in the creation of Canada, it was not necessarily intentional.

In 1975, Boyle created the Batoche Series, ten paintings based on the Métis Resistance of 1885, which took place in Batoche, Saskatchewan. Taking images from period photographs, Boyle painted various portrayals of the key figures, or occurrences in the story of the Resistance. In 1975 the Théâtre Passe Muraille East in Toronto presented an experimental play, interpreting the Batoche Series with action and dialogue. Boyle said in an interview that he did not want the play to be a debate about whether Riel was a statesman or insane prophet. Nor did he want people to interpret Riel and the Métis as "noble savages". His hope was to "jar people" when they saw the experimental play.<sup>151</sup> The images in this series can be interpreted in various ways.

One painting in the series, titled Batoche (Figure 8), depicts a battlefield in Batoche during the Resistance. There are two dead bodies in the foreground, and behind them on prairie soil, are Métis fighters . The front figure looks twisted, suggesting that

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<sup>150</sup>Maggie Siggins, Riel - A Life of Revolution, (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1994),p.69.

<sup>151</sup>Interview by phone with John Boyle, April 9, 1998.

his struggle for survival, and then subsequent death were agonizing. Boyle's painting indicates that he wants to show tribulations did occur on this land. However, who was the fight for, or against? Benedict Anderson concedes that, "Dying for one's country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur. Dying for the revolution draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure."<sup>152</sup>

In the piece Orange Bastards (Figure 9) Boyle is critical of the Canada he lives in. On the left is an older Gabriel Dumont, looking somewhat haggard. In the middle is an image of a hanging First Nations man, a reminder that First Nations people, whether they supported Riel and the Métis or not, suffered from the Métis Resistance at Batoche. On the right is Riel, also hanging. This piece is a reminder of the atrocities that occurred in Canadian nation - building. Here it appears that Boyle acknowledges that these men struggled against the nation of Canada.

In another piece entitled Drawing Room (Figure 10), Boyle attempts to establish a connection between the figures and himself. On the left is an image of well - known Canadian painter Tom Thomson. Boyle, who believes that Canada needs to establish a particular painting genre, idolizes Thomson for painting "Canadian" landscapes. Behind Thomson is an image of a buffalo, a reminder of how Métis once lived, with their survival and livelihood depending on buffalo hunts. When the buffalo became endangered, so did an important way of Métis life. In the centre is ex - Prime minister John Diefenbaker, who met Dumont when he was a child. According to Boyle, Dumont was a hero to Diefenbaker, and not a traitor. On the right is Gabriel Dumont after his

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<sup>152</sup>Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, 1991,p.144.

pardon from the Canadian government. Dumont is wearing the Queen's medals, a contradictory emblem to Dumont's actions in devising military actions against the Queen and the Canadian government (Figure 10).

The image of Dumont in the piece titled Gabriel (Figure 11) is very different from the one in Drawing Room. Dumont is nude, wearing a hat, and holding a gun. This piece goes together with one titled Thanadelthur (Figure 11): a portrayal of a Chipewyan woman who represented the Chippewas to the Canadian Legislative Assembly and Queen Victoria, in an effort to prevent the theft of Native land by the Canadian government. She too, is nude, with nothing but a scarf around her neck. The background patterns of these pieces are wall stencils from a Presbyterian church in Allenford, built in 1867. Boyle states about this piece, "Some would see nudes as disrespectful. I wanted to humanize the people. No one is more or less than human."<sup>153</sup> Over Dumont's penis is a hand, probably that of Thanadelthur. The presence of the hand turns this piece into an image of sexuality. It is questionable why Boyle would feel it necessary to "humanize" these two figures. Is it because people do not view them as such? Also, why is it socially acceptable to portray Aboriginal heroes nude, but Euro - Canadian heroes are always clothed? Although within the visual arts nude portrayal is acceptable, to persons not versed in art history these images could be extremely troubling.

According to Ruth B. Phillips, nude portrayals can be problematic to First Peoples, particularly Woodland Indians. In "Glimpses of Eden: Iconographic Themes in Huron Pictorial Tourist Art" (1991), she examines the different figure portrayals in

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<sup>153</sup>Phone Interview with John Boyle, April 9, 1998.



pictorial moose hair embroidery created by Native and non - Native women. She describes a pictorial moose hair embroidery on the bark bottom of a women's reticule created by a non - Native woman, which shows an image of a First Nations man in a breechclout, brandishing a weapon before his female companion. Phillips writes that in contrast to this image First Nations embroiderers always depicted themselves in full dress - up regalia. She writes, "We know that elaborate costumes was a highly important form of aesthetic and symbolic expression among Woodlands Indians that has retained its importance into this century...To Indians they were signs of specific ethnic identity as well as the well-being that was traditionally expressed through the wearing of fine clothing."<sup>154</sup> It can be speculated that an image of a nude Indian would symbolize the opposite of well - being to many Aboriginals. Thus, the status of hero is taken away for First Peoples viewing Boyle's piece, and instead are images of degraded, sexualized people.

In the piece Hero of the Northwest, Boyle attempts to tie struggles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century to problems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 12). On the left is an image of a Métis woman in a Red River cart, with Gabriel Dumont sitting beside her. In the background are the same wall stencils found in the two pieces mentioned above. Beside Dumont are two mug shots of Marc Carboneau and Jacques Lanctot, the kidnappers of British trade commissioner James Cross during the FLQ crisis in 1970. In this piece Boyle is attempting to suggest that the same acts of discrimination that led to the Métis resistances

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<sup>154</sup>Ruth B. Phillips, "Glimpses of Eden: Iconographic Themes in Huron Pictorial Tourist Art" in Native American Studies 5:2, 1991, p.25,26.

**Figure 12. Heroes of the Northwest, John Boyle (1975)**



in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century continued in the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Ernest Gellner suggests that "nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: It claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture: it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society."<sup>155</sup> In the art of John Boyle, the contradictions of nationalist ideology are apparent. In an attempt to defend, to use Gellner's term, "folk culture", Boyle aids in creating a "high culture". In an attempt to negate the power relations between Aboriginals and Euro - Canadians, and include the "hidden histories" (this inclusion of "hidden histories" is a positive step), the divisions become more relevant. However, there are also positive implications in his art. Boyle created the Rebel Series and the Batoche Series at a time when First Peoples were just beginning to have their presence on this land known. By creating these works, and exhibiting in galleries, Boyle exposed gallery visitors to the struggles and histories of First Peoples, albeit his interpretation. Another positive aspect is how he portrayed Riel. As can be seen with the two controversies that occurred over Lemay's and Nugent's public sculptures of Riel, many Métis want Riel to be recognized as a statesman. In the images by Boyle, Riel is portrayed as such.

Michael Greenwood suggests that in the artwork of Boyle, "The message is clear and eloquent. Herein lies the true heroism of Canadian history; the land, and the people whose courage and endurance built the nation, are commemorated with dignity and with a

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<sup>155</sup>Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, (London: Cornell University Press, 1983),p.124.

powerful sobriety of means befitting the subject."<sup>156</sup> With the Rebel Series and the Batoche Series, Boyle plays the role of national myth - maker. The act of myth - creating can pose a problem to many First Peoples living on this land. Gail Valaskakis writes, "Like our discourse, our communities are not cemented in unity or belonging, but in the transformation and difference which is constructed in our ongoing struggle with power relations. And this dynamic process of building and re-building individual and collective identity centers in conflicting social imaginaries and their ideological messages."<sup>157</sup>

Both Nugent and Boyle created their art pieces in the late 1960s, when there was a new interest in Riel. As texts such as Joseph Kinsey Howard's Strange Empire became well - known, and art series and commemorative sculptures of Riel were created, myths around Riel developed. It is important to note, that as mainstream Canadian society apparently became more tolerant, the myth of Riel changed. There were those, such as Howard, Lemay, Nugent and Boyle, who challenged the "fact" that Riel was a traitor. Riel became a new icon, one that would be used according to people's own interests, cultures, and beliefs.

In 1985, Jeff Funnell attempted to challenge the established myths and stereotypes about Riel and the Métis with the Riel Series. Jeff Funnell resides in Winnipeg Manitoba, and is an artist and teacher of painting and drawing in the Visual Arts

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<sup>156</sup>Michael Greenwood, "John Boyle - Pavilioned Heroes" in ArtsCanada, July/August, 1981,p.12.

<sup>157</sup>Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians",M.Burgess & G.Vailaskakis Indian Princesses and Cowgirls (Montreal: Oboro, 1995),p.3

Department at the University of Manitoba. Funnell, who in 1966 participated in the Emma Lake Workshop, has had his artwork exhibited in several western galleries, such as the Plug - In Gallery, the Glenbow Museum, and the Mendel Art Gallery.<sup>158</sup> Some of his pieces can be found in the collections of the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Canada Council Art Bank.

A successful professor and artist, Jeff Funnell has created politically - charged art that challenges mainstream thought. Donald Goodes suggests that "His relation to art production and the social privilege which comes with being an artist and professor are not taken as givens, but instead undergo relentless scrutiny."<sup>159</sup> Funnell fosters an anti - establishment morality which, according to Goodes, erupted in the late - Modernist period, coming out of the practices of conceptual art.

Funnell has exhibited an interest in understanding the community he lives in, and a concern for what happens there. An example is the 1991 exhibition Notes From the Inquest, a collection of eighty - four sketches Funnell made while attending the two- week inquest into the fatal shooting of John Joseph Harper. In 1988 John Joseph Harper, an innocent First Nations man who was walking home, was shot by Winnipeg Police Constable Robert Andre Cross. Cross mistook Harper for a thief the police were tracking on foot. Funnell went to the hearings because he was concerned about this local event. He made various sketches, not to create an artwork, but as notes to himself, and as a way to

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<sup>158</sup>Winnipeg,Notes From the Inquest,Plug-In Gallery,1989:Calgary,Suzanne & Jeff Funnell, Glenbow Museum,1973:Saskatoon, Another Prairies, Mendel Art Gallery,1987.

<sup>159</sup>Donald Goodes, "Looking for Justice: Not Lying, Speaking the Truth" in Notes from the Inquest (Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, March 22-April 21, 1991),p.10.

keep himself interested in the legal procedures. When Cross was exonerated, the sketches took on the role of a social documentary artwork, revealing the prejudices of the Canadian legal system. Alfred YoungMan asserts that "if there is a common perception among North American original people, it is that "justice" in their homeland is reserved for the invading whites (justice=just us)."<sup>160</sup> As new evidence is being found about Riel's execution being illegal and predetermined<sup>161</sup>, Alfred Young Man's point is now being reiterated in the context of Riel.

Funnell created the Riel Series in 1985 for the same reasons as Notes From the Inquest; because he wanted to have a better understanding of the local history of where he has lived for most of his life: the city of Winnipeg. As Lemay, Nugent, Joyal and Boyle all did, Funnell conducted extensive research for his artwork. He read well-known texts such as Sylvia Van Kirk's Many Tender Ties - Women and the Fur Trade (1993), and Joseph Kinsey Howard's Strange Empire (1954). The Riel Series was a reaction to what he read in the literature surrounding Louis Riel and the Métis. Even though Funnell did extensive literary research, he did not seek any accuracy in his depictions. The people and events are shown as he imagined them.

The series consists of forty - nine cartoon drawings on large sheets of inexpensive ruled paper that one would find in a kindergarten classroom. The drawings were initially done as storyboards, the images created with oils, pastels, and water - based paints, which

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<sup>160</sup> Alfred YoungMan, "Banana Republic North" in Notes From the Inquest (Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, March 22-April 21, 1991),p.23.

<sup>161</sup> Stevens Wild, "Riel Review Puts Scrutiny on Judge's Decision" in Winnipeg Free Press May 24, 1998.

would assure the eventual self - destruction of the art. The inexpensive paper would eventually yellow, making the images look like historical remnants, perhaps from the time of Louis Riel. Funnell's act of using ledger paper to create images about history is reminiscent of First Nations people in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century using ledger paper, which was given to them by Indian agents, to create drawings about historical events.<sup>162</sup>

Funnell's attempt was to "provide a human side too often missing in the concentration on the more sensational aspects of Riel's character".<sup>163</sup> In one drawing Riel is portrayed eating an orange. At the top of the page in simple English is the phrase "Louis Riel ate his first orange at the age of 14", a point that would be irrelevant to many people who are interested in the story of Riel (Figure 13). Another drawing depicts an occurrence that happened to Riel while studying in Montreal. The drawing portrays Riel, his first love ( Marie Julie Guernon), and her parents. Across the drawing are the words, "Riel fell in love with Marie Julie Guernon. But her parents broke off the engagement because he was a Métis" (Figure 14). This occurrence crushed Riel, and perhaps encouraged his nationalistic feelings about being Métis. In this drawing, Riel's face is darker than the other three figures', to differentiate between him and the non-Métis family that was discriminating against him. However, my examination of photos of Riel indicate he would have probably looked very similar to the Guernon family.

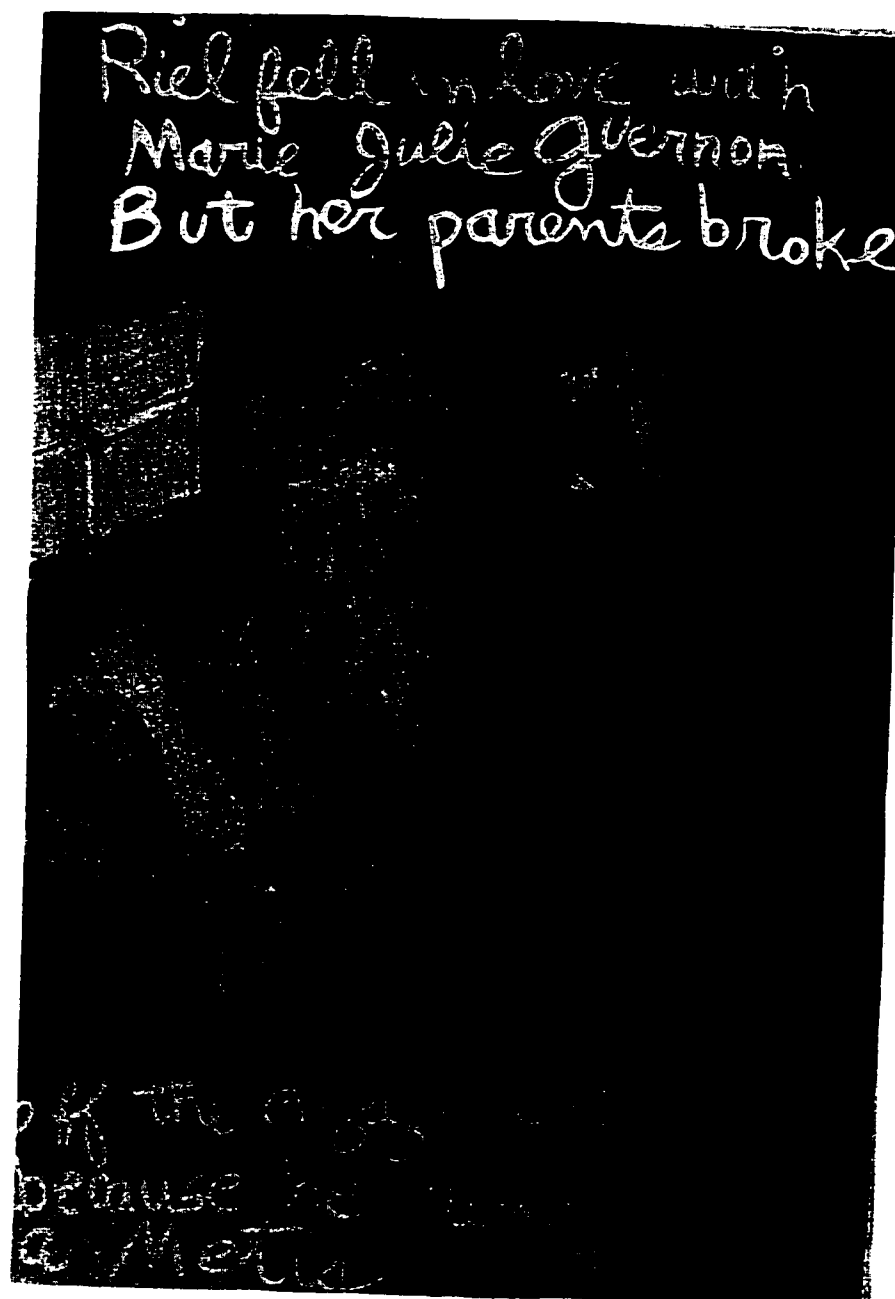
In one piece, Funnell challenges the established colonial story of Norbert Parisien.

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<sup>162</sup>See Valerie Robertson, Reclaiming History: Ledger Drawings by the Assiniboine Artist Hoŋgeeyesa, (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993).

<sup>163</sup>Peter White, essay for exhibition The Riel Series (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1985), p.2.

**Figure 14.** "Riel fell in love with Marie Julie Guernon. But her parents broke off the engagement because he was a Metis." Jeff Funnell (1985)





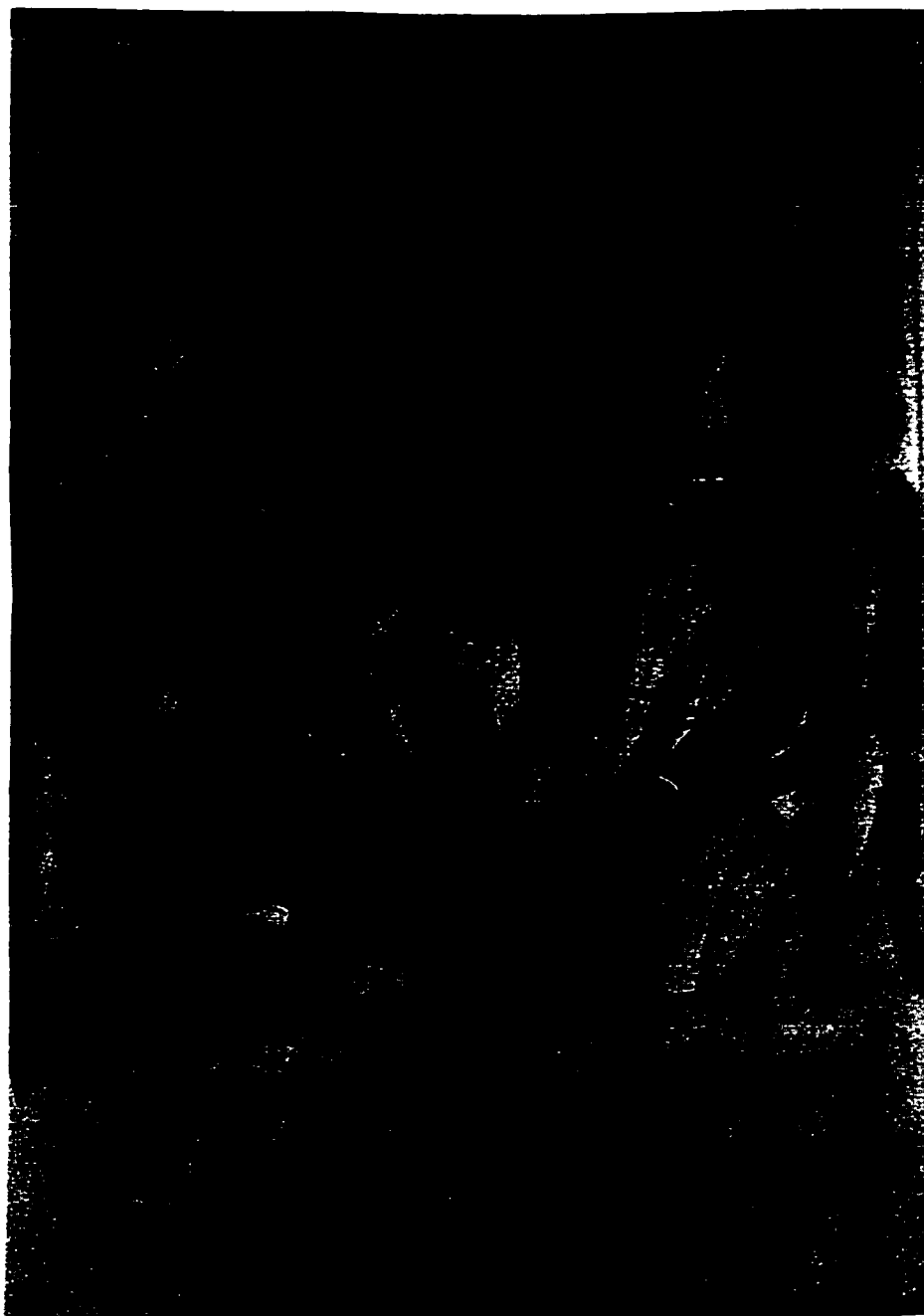
Parisien was a mentally ill Métis boy who in 1869, on his way home from his job as a wood - cutter, was seized by Canadian soldiers. He was imprisoned, and according to Howard stole a rifle and escaped. A Scottish settler, John Hugh Sutherland, encountered Parisien, who mistook him for one of his captors, and shot him fatally. According to Howard, Sutherland's last words were, "The poor simple fellow was too frightened to know what he was doing!"<sup>164</sup>, which implies that Sutherland was an understanding and compassionate person, even in his final moments. Funnell states in his drawing about this event, "On February 15, Boulton's men abducted Norbert Parisien, a retarded Métis boy. He was imprisoned underneath the pulpit of the unheated Kildonan church. He did not freeze to death." In another drawing Funnell continues his statement: "Norbert Parisien was shot by his captors and wounded by an axe wielded by Thomas Scott. Norbert died"(Figure 15). This image shows Scott with an axe in his hand, ready to wound Parisien, who is lying face down with two soldiers behind him. Funnell's interpretation is very matter - of - fact, his sympathies clearly with the Métis.

Another drawing reiterates Funnell's sympathies with the Métis. The image is of a Métis man, probably Riel, holding a cross with people at his knees. At the top of the drawing are the words, "The Métis Fought Against Racist Exploitation"(Figure 16). Another drawing shows the complexities of the histories written about Louis Riel and the Métis. With an image of a First Nations man, and the words "The fur traders did not come to Christianize or to civilize the Indian" (Figure 17), Funnell attempts to give an

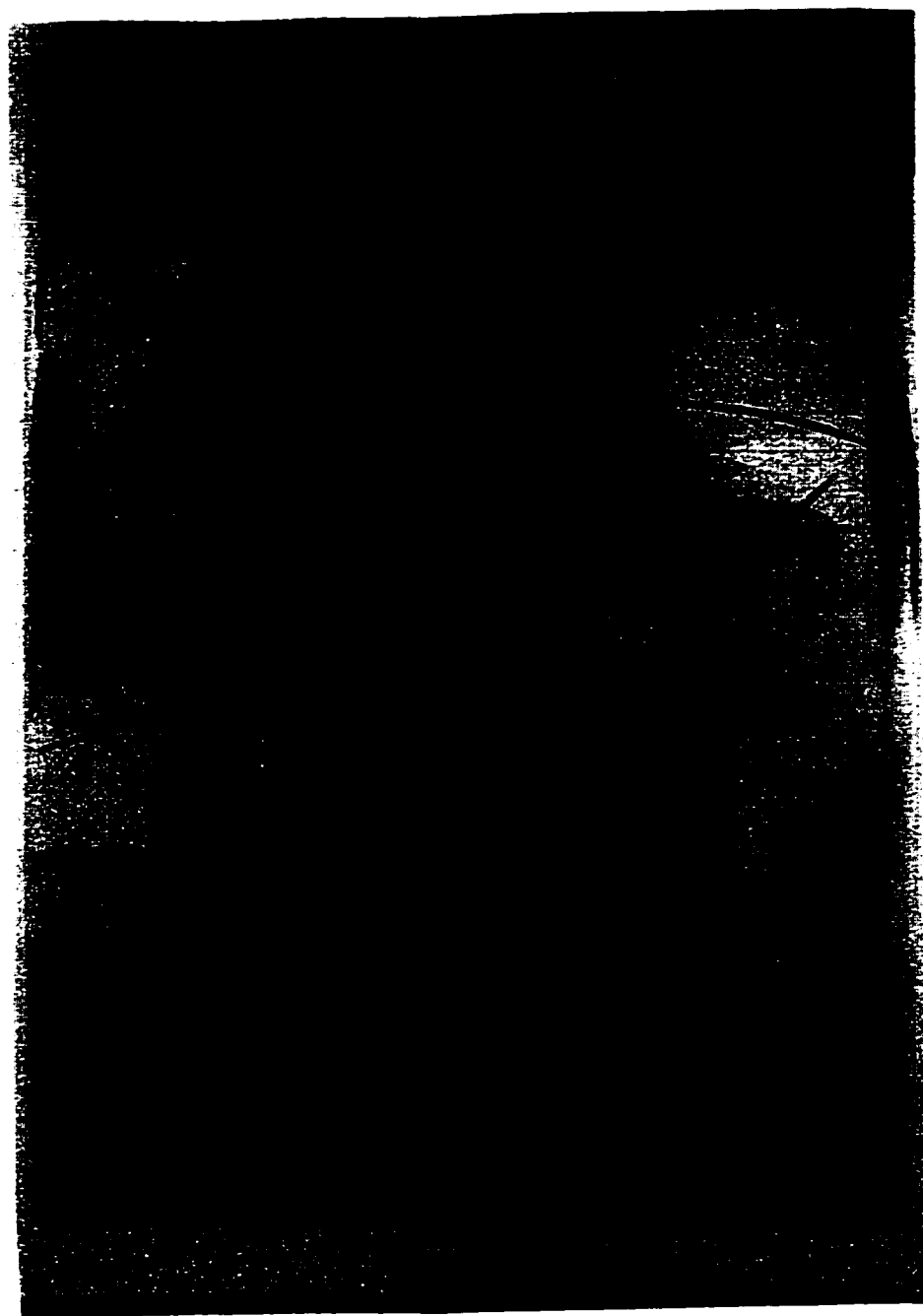
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<sup>164</sup>Joseph Kinsey Howard, Strange Empire, (St.Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1954),p.179.

**Figure 15.** "Norbert Parisien was shot by his captors and wounded by an axe wielded by Thomas Scott. Norbert Died." Jeff Funnell (1985)



**Figure 16.** "The Métis Fought Against Racist Exploitation" Jeff Funnell (1985)



**Figure 17.** "The fur traders did not come to christianize or to civilize the Indian" Jeff Funnell (1985)



explanation for the fur traders' presence. Another drawing depicts a fur trader sitting under a tree eating food, and below him it is written that "Fur traders were not colonists. They arrived with the intention of returning to their homeland"(Figure 18). Whether intentional or not, the fur traders' entry into the West drastically altered the lives of First Peoples, and Christianity, colonization, and attempted cultural obliteration were some of the results.

Funnell took liberties with how he depicted the figures in his drawings. Peter White suggests that "liberties taken are occasionally of such an obvious and wonderfully ludicrous sort that any lingering aura of meaningful historical objectivity is completely undermined."<sup>165</sup> According to Daniel Francis, how First Peoples are depicted in literature, film, history and art can greatly affect the lives of contemporary Aboriginals. First Peoples are constantly having to challenge racial stereotypes that are placed on them in mainstream societies. An example are sports teams who use stereotypical images of Native men as their mascots, or Disney's cartoon version of Pocahontas, which depicts Pocahontas as a beautiful, half - naked, well - endowed woman.

In Funnell's drawing depicting a First Nations woman sporting braids, a head-band and dress, the stereotyping Francis discusses in his book is seen. The title of the drawing is "In the days of the fur trade, women were sometimes bought and sold"(Figure 19). This disturbing statement contradicts the Hollywood image of the woman. Valaskakis writes, "From about 1915 through the 1940's, the dominant representation of the Indian princess was the 'red tunic lady', maidens draped in red tunics, wearing the

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<sup>165</sup>Peter White, The Riel Series, 1985,p.2.

requisite headband and feather, and posed with mountains, waterfalls and moonlit lakes."<sup>166</sup> Funnell, who admits to having grown up watching Hollywood Cowboy and Indian shows, would be familiar with the stereotypical images of Indian princesses in the dominant society. In the catalogue for the exhibition Fluffs and Feathers (1992), Deborah Doxtator suggests, "The image of the 'romantic Indian princess' was created for the benefit and imagination of the Euro - Canadian, not for the benefit of Indian people."<sup>167</sup> Funnell suggested in an interview that with Riel Series, he is regurgitating what mainstream society has filtered through his imagination. Valaskakis states, "First Nations identity and cultural struggle are grounded in representation and appropriation--in how they are represented and how these representations are appropriated by Others in a political process which confines their past as it constructs their future."<sup>168</sup> It is thus that Funnell's act of simply regurgitating the images that he has been most exposed to throughout his life becomes problematic for First Nations people who are struggling for control in how they are represented.

Funnell challenges the myths of Riel by not approaching the popular issue of whether Riel was a "traitor or patriot". In that sense, Funnell is demystifying the icon of Riel, because it is this argument that makes many people interested and intrigued with

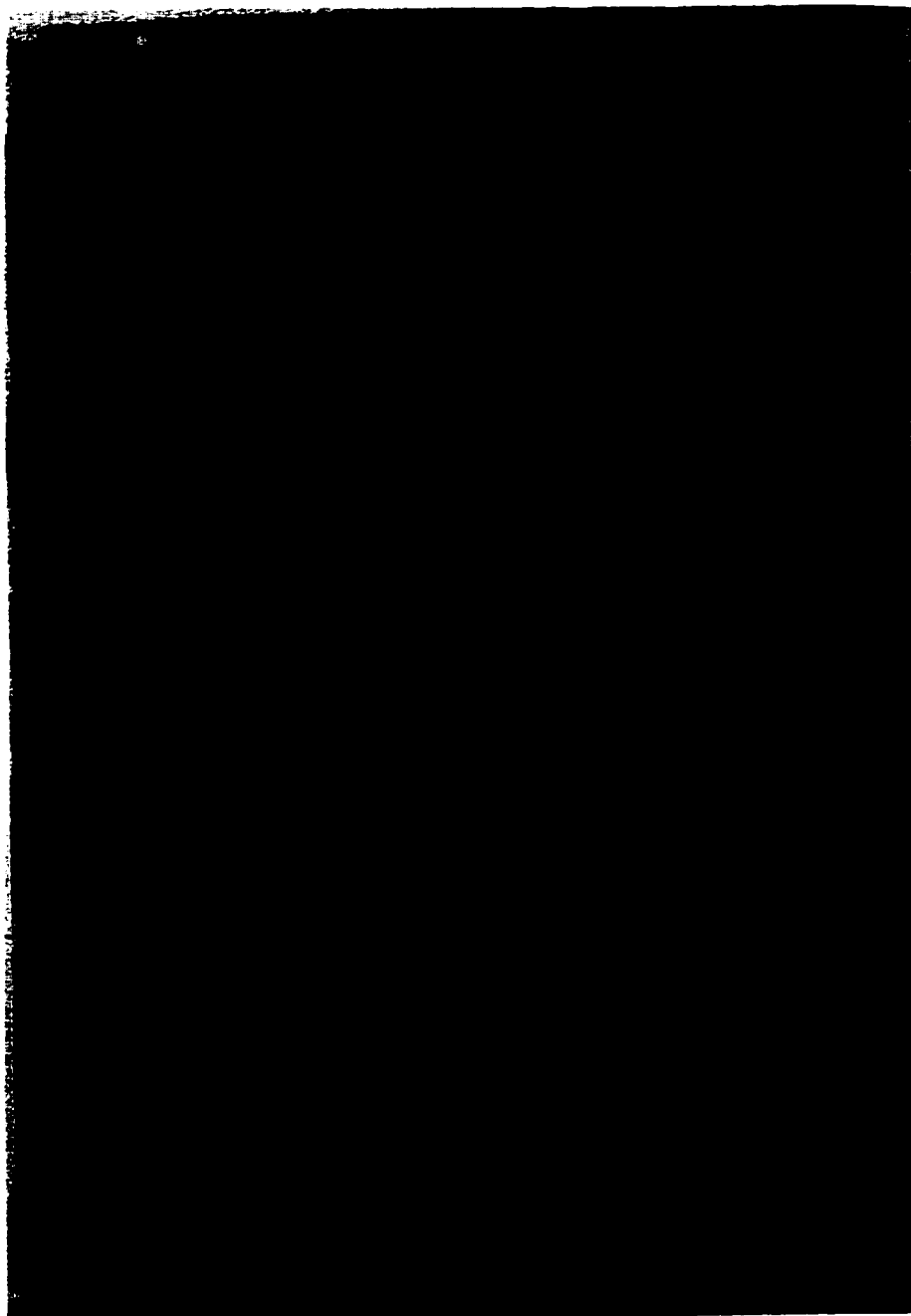
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<sup>166</sup>Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Sacajewea and Her Sisters: Indians and Images", 1995, p.7.

<sup>167</sup>Deborah Doxtator, Fluffs and Feathers - An Exhibit on the Symbols of Indianness, (Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1992), p.14.

<sup>168</sup>Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Sacajewea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians", 1995, p.3.

**Figure 18.** "Fur traders were not colonists. They arrived with the intention of returning to their Homeland" Jeff Funnell (1985)



**Figure 19.** "In the days of the fur trade women were sometimes bought and sold" Jeff Funnell (1985)





him. White suggests that "Not only has Funnell told the story well, but in his concern with those that made that history, he has challenged our perception and understanding of one of the most fascinating and difficult periods of our past." White also states, "If the series is political, it is in the sense that it is implicitly critical of the objective authority imputed to history, which is treated instead as a social and cultural condition made, experienced and interpreted by people."<sup>169</sup>

What becomes obvious when viewing Funnell's the Riel Series, is that the history around Louis Riel and the Métis is confusing and contradictory: contradictory because people have written about Riel on their own terms, and without the voice of the Métis, and confusing because there are so many versions of the story of Riel. Although Funnell did not attempt to make a political statement with the Riel Series, one is made, even though aspects of the series are problematic for First Peoples trying to be culturally autonomous. As Alfred YoungMan asserts,

Funnell's reconsideration of the life of a Métis leader in his Riel Series(1985) was a portent of what has become, in 1991, Aboriginal people's long-simmering, distinct realization that Louis Riel's so - called 'insanity' - enthusiastically certified at the time by a feudal Victorian Prime Minister - today finds its nemesis in the actions of the Oka Warriors in Quebec, in Elijah Harper's voting down of the Meech Lake Accord at the Eleventh Hour, in the Lubicon Cree's fight for survival and in Aboriginal Rights struggles all across the land.<sup>170</sup>

It is in this sense that Riel becomes an important figure for First Peoples. How he is portrayed thus greatly affects the Métis, and other Indigenous Nations across the land.

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<sup>169</sup>Peter White, The Riel Series, 1985,p.2.

<sup>170</sup>Alfred YoungMan, "Banana Republic North" in Notes from the Inquest, (Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, March 22-April 21, 1991),p.23.

This is why it is important to acknowledge the good intentions of Nugent, Boyle, and Funnell, but also constructively critique their positions and reasons for creating images of Riel. By doing so, I am not attempting to suggest that these images should not exist. In fact, I appreciate all three artists and their artistic talent. However, discussing Métis politics, history, and how Métis respond to images of Riel is my attempt to situate who I am as a Métis, and better understand the struggles that contemporary Métis are having in establishing their identities, and our nation, in Canada.

## CONCLUSION

The actions taken and the words spoken by Louis Riel over one hundred years ago still stir emotions in the hearts of many Métis and non - Métis people. The interest in Riel has made him an icon for various individuals, cultures, and political parties throughout Canada. Wolfgang Kloos suggests that images of Riel are not only seen as reflections of historical myth - making, but also as forces that create historical mythology themselves.<sup>171</sup> This is evident in portrayals of Riel created by Marcien Lemay, Miguel Joyal, John Nugent, John Boyle, and Jeff Funnell.

The purpose of Chapter One was to examine the controversy that occurred over Marcien Lemay's abstracted sculpture of Louis Riel, which stood at the Manitoba Legislature for almost twenty - five years (1971-1994). The request made by the Manitoba Métis Federation in 1991 to have it removed was exemplary of the Métis' search for respect, rights and identity, under the term "nation". By having his voice heard by the Canadian government, Louis Riel had an integral part in facilitating nationalistic ideals among the Métis in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century. In contemporary times, he is still a source for Métis national empowerment, albeit in a symbolic manner. In the setting up of the provisional government in 1869, the Métis Resistance of 1884, the creation of the Métis Association of Alberta in 1929, the creation of the Manitoba Métis Federation in

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<sup>171</sup>Wolfgang Kloos, "Stereotyping in Canadian Literature: the Metis in Anglo and Francophone Writing" in Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture (Hathorn/Holland: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p.132.

1969, and the MMF's request to have Lemay's sculpture of Louis Riel removed from the Legislative grounds, nationhood has prevailed as a source of identity . Therefore, the MMF's request for the removal of Lemay's request can be viewed as a symbolic gesture, based upon the respect for the past struggles of Riel and the Métis nation.

The Manitoba Métis Federation's request for the removal of Lemay's sculpture exposed the positive and negative implications of the changing image of Louis Riel in the Canadian context, and the divisions that exist within Métis communities. As well, the demand exposed the differences of opinions that exist over Métis nationhood, and the perceived role and rights of the Métis in Canada. The request to have a statesman - like sculpture replace Lemay's abstracted one, was viewed as a source of empowerment for the Métis nation. Although the Métis' concern about Lemay's portrayal created an ongoing controversy between the artist, the public, and government officials, the MMF was successful in having the sculpture removed. This demand was not solely about Lemay's abstracted sculpture, but also about making the public aware that in Manitoba, the Métis people - Riel's people, still exist, and are attempting to work together and have our voices heard as a nation in Canada.

My intent in Chapter Two was to examine how John Nugent, John Boyle, and Jeff Funnell have used the image of Riel in their artwork. When addressing John Nugent's half - nude sculpture of Riel which was erected in 1968, it becomes apparent that the decision to have a commemorative sculpture erected on the Saskatchewan Legislative grounds was a symbol of Liberal Premier Ross Thatcher's political position. Thatcher's hope was to gain First Peoples votes, when Canada was celebrating its Centennial, and Aboriginal people

were becoming more vocal about the injustices that were occurring to them. Thatcher did not consult Aboriginals about what kind of Riel portrayal they wanted, or who they would want commemorated. This lack of consultation was indicative of how Thatcher would deal with First Peoples: marginalizing their voices, and speaking for them. Thus in 1991, after extensive lobbying on the part of the Métis, the sculpture was removed. As with Lemay's sculpture, the removal was symbolic of Métis nationhood and empowerment.

John Boyle's Rebel Series (1967) and Batoche Series (1975) show the negative and positive implications of using Riel and the Métis as a symbol for Canadian nationalist ideology. With his artwork, Boyle plays the role of national myth - maker, attempting to find Canadian heroes. The images he creates, and the stories he tells, are his own opinion, stemming from his position as a successful, Euro-Canadian, male artist. A positive aspect of Boyle's search for Canadian heroes is that in the late 1960s and early 1970s Boyle exposed gallery visitors to the Métis and Louis Riel. Also, his portrayals of Riel are statesman-like, which many Métis (particularly those who demanded that Lemay's and Nugent's abstracted sculptures be removed), would appreciate. However, his artwork is also problematic because he uses the struggles of Riel and the Métis as a symbol for his own beliefs and struggles, without acknowledging his position as part of the colonizing cultures. As can be seen in his artwork, Boyle's beliefs that Canadians are "one people", can be both flattering and silencing to marginalised people.

The last artist discussed, Jeff Funnell, created the Riel Series (1985) in an attempt to better understand the local history of the city of Winnipeg, where he resides. Feeling compassion for Riel and the Métis, Funnell created art that attempted to humanize and

demystify the Métis leader. Although Funnell's artwork is sympathetic to the struggles of Riel and First Peoples, some of his images are reminiscent of Hollywood movies. These images pose problems for First Peoples who are struggling against the disempowering affects of stereotypes. However, Funnell's attempt to portray Riel as a human and not an icon should be appreciated, because the myths of Riel are what mainstream Canadian society often concentrate on. Funnell's artwork reminds us that Riel was a living, thinking, breathing man, and the Métis were the people he represented.

In Arresting Images, Steven Dubin suggests:

Once again we understand that the generation of meaning is a continual and conflictual process. It comes from within artistic work as from without. And artists are simply one part of a cast of players who construct what their creations mean. No one, it seems, provides the definitive interpretation.<sup>172</sup>

The talent and good intentions of the artists discussed in this thesis should be appreciated. With thoughtful hearts and artistic minds, they created art about Louis Riel and the Métis. These artists did not want to undermine or question the experiences and concerns of Riel and the Métis, but use their art to show the struggles of First Peoples, and give their personal impressions about history. It is therefore important to acknowledge the positive implications of their artwork in reference to the Métis. Despite this, it was necessary to give a constructive and challenging critique of their portrayals, because Riel is such an important symbol for Métis nationhood. Constructively critiquing their art allowed me to address some historical and contemporary concerns that exist for

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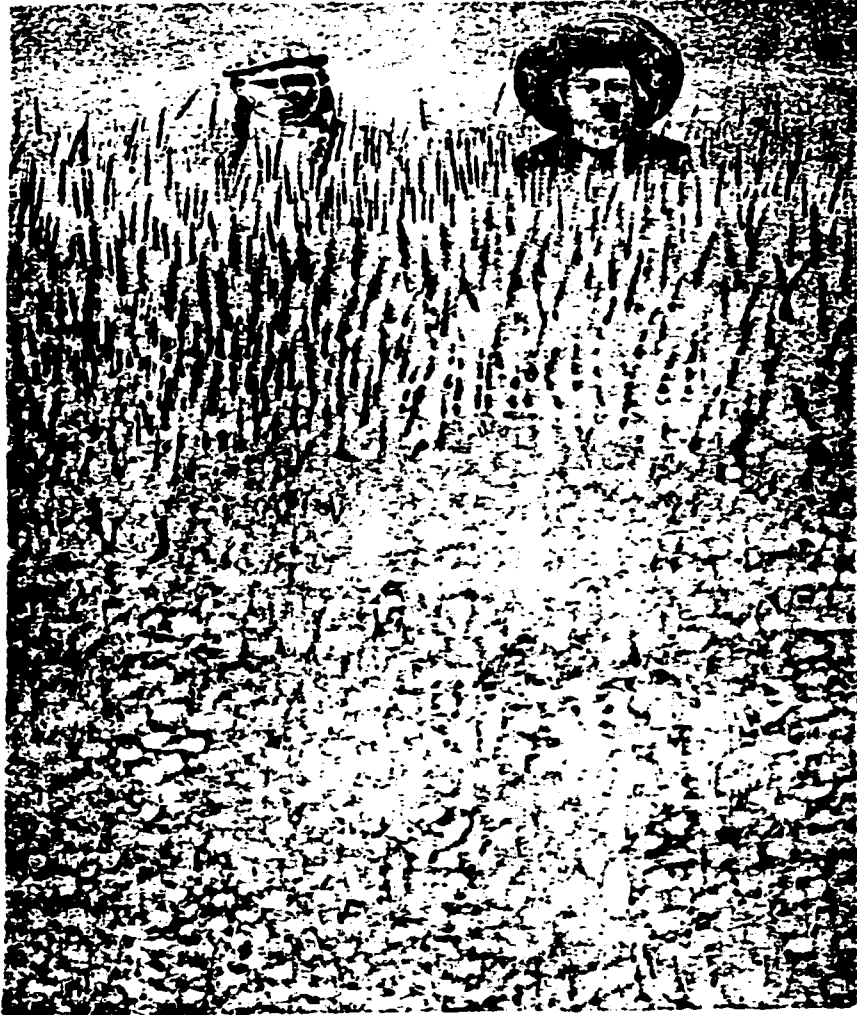
<sup>172</sup>Steven C.Dubin, Arresting Images (New York: Routledge Publishers, 1992),p.311.

Métis people. Perhaps the most important issue that needed to be addressed was that it is the Métis nation which is most affected by images of Riel.

The purpose of this thesis was to concentrate on portrayals and perceptions of Louis Riel in mainstream Canadian society. Therefore, all the artists discussed were non - Métis, and of Euro - Canadian heritage. It is important to note however, that there are Aboriginal artists who have also created art about Louis Riel. Cree artist/curator Gerald McMaster reinforces that the image of Riel is a powerful one for the Métis, in his 1985 exhibition Riel Remembered. McMaster created drawings that attempted to give a Métis viewpoint about Métis historical experiences with colonization. This exhibition contained drawings that are not so much about Riel the man, as they are about remembering his people: the Métis. An example is his piece Lost in a Wheatfield, which depicts a Métis man and a First Nations man lost in a field of wheat. In between the two men is Riel's shadow. This drawing is a commentary on the difficulties First Peoples experienced when forced to take up an agricultural way of life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century (Figure 20). As an Aboriginal artist McMaster reclaimed the image of Riel from Euro - Canadian artists, and created politically - charged art that many Métis could presumably identify with. McMaster's art shows that First Peoples are not only vocally challenging mainstream portrayals concerning Louis Riel, but are also creating art to express their concerns.

As the Métis continue to make attempts at being culturally autonomous through land claims and self - government, Riel remains an important figure. He is an assurance that the Métis nation exists, and that over one hundred years ago, one vocal and articulate Métis had his voice heard by the Canadian government. The Canadian government paid

**Figure 20. Lost in a Wheatfield, Gerald McMaster (1985)**





attention to Riel then, and they are noticing him today. Presently Manitoba Liberal MP Reg Alcock and Quebec Bloc MP Denis Coderre are attempting to pass a bill to exonerate Riel, and prove he was wrongly hanged.<sup>173</sup> There are some who believe that if he is exonerated, the door for Métis land claims will be closed. However, for many Métis there is hope: hope that if Riel is acknowledged as an important historical Canadian hero, so will the experiences, concerns, claims, needs, and aspirations of the Metis. His exoneration could mean the door for Metis land claims would open, and that respect for the Metis nation is possible.

As Métis continue to use visual images of Riel as a tool to express our cultural concerns, the spirit of Riel lives on. Over one hundred years later, he still gives hope to the Métis that our history, culture, and struggles will be known and appreciated. To many Métis, Riel is a reminder of the injustices that occurred to our ancestors. The stories about Riel, whether they be told in literature, the media, or art, tell Métis that it is necessary to never forget the past. Remembering the past, helps us understand the present, and prepare for the future. As we continue to move forward, Riel remains a symbol of strength for the Métis nation.

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<sup>173</sup>Paul Samyn, "Federal Mps Unite on Bill to Clear Riel of Treason", the Winnipeg Free Press, May 15, 1998.

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