

“Steeling the Gaze: Collaborative curatorial practices and Aboriginal art”

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A Thesis

In

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree Master of the Arts (Art History) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

September 2014

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Entitled: "Steeling the Gaze: Collaborative curatorial practices and Aboriginal art"

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (Art History)

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Abstract

“*Steeling the Gaze: Collaborative curatorial practices and Aboriginal art.*”

Zofia Krivdova

This thesis studies the exhibition *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists* that ran from Fall 2008 to Spring 2009 at the National Gallery of Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography. Curated by Steven Loft, a Mohawk-Jewish curator in his second year of a two-year curator-in-residence program at the National Gallery, and Andrea Kunard, a non-Native curator at the CMCP, the exhibition featured portraits by twelve First Nations and Métis artists.

Steeling the Gaze challenged curatorial and institutional authority at the National Gallery of Canada. The exhibition was a collaborative project on many levels, and was a major advance on the part of the CMCP and the NGC, and the curators working there, because it challenged conventional modes of display of work by Indigenous artists. The exhibition shifted several protocols about curatorial and institutional authority. One of the main contributions of *Steeling the Gaze* was its exploration of collaboration across many different realms – curatorial, institutional, curator-artist relations, and artist-artist relations. My thesis will examine the collaborative practices employed in *Steeling the Gaze* and will consider how this approach could be a useful model for exhibitions of Aboriginal art in mainstream art institutions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Anne Whitelaw, whose expertise, guidance and patience added considerably to my graduate experience. I appreciate her vast knowledge in many areas, which has motivated me to work hard on my own research and writing. Her support, from helping me shape my thesis topic along the way to final edits, helped me keep going. I would also like to thank Loren Lerner for taking me on as a second reader of my thesis and her valuable feedback and suggestions.

A very special thanks to Professor Richard Hill without whose encouragement and motivation I would not have considered graduate studies. It was under his tutelage that I developed a focus and became interested in issues in contemporary Indigenous art.

I thank Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft for their time to meet with me and discuss my research, which helped immensely in formulating my thoughts and ideas. I also thank the National Gallery of Canada's staff for providing material for my research.

I am also thankful to the entire art history department of Concordia University, from administrative staff to professors and fellow graduate students, for the debates, exchanges of knowledge, skills, and great graduate experience.

Last but not least, I need to thank my family who have supported me and believed in my entire life, and without whom none of this could have been possible.

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Introduction

Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists ran from October 31, 2008 to March 22, 2009, at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP). Curated by Steven Loft, a Mohawk-Jewish curator in his second year of a two-year curator-in-residence program at the NGC, and Andrea Kunard, a non-Native curator at the CMCP, the exhibition featured portraits by twelve First Nations and Métis artists, namely KC Adams, Carl Beam, Dana Claxton, Thirza Cuthand, Rosalie Favell, Kent Monkman, David Neel, Shelley Niro, Arthur Renwick, Greg Staats, Jeff Thomas, and Bear Witness. The artists in *Steeling the Gaze* deconstruct the representations of Indigenous peoples by responding to and challenging the long-established constructs of stereotyped images that have been recognized as part of an ongoing colonial gaze. In the past, Aboriginal people were presented in portraits as anonymous types and subjects of ethnographic portraits. The contemporary artists in this exhibition subvert such noble and stoic responses to the camera, and undermine the reduction of the individual by stereotyping. Their works engage with conventional ideas of the portrait by alluding to the history of portrayal as well as reclaiming their own images.

While some of the artists in this exhibition focused on representation in the present by creating portraits of members of their communities, others responded to outsider historical representations of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal photographers. From the early days of photography, Aboriginal people were in front of the camera, their images controlled and manipulated.¹ The works in *Steeling the Gaze* are a way of commenting on the romantic depictions of the “vanishing race,” including the sepia tones and soft focus of the camera that

¹ Sherry Farrell Racette, “Returning Fire, Pointing the Canon: Aboriginal Photography as Resistance.” *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada* ed. Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard. (Montreal, McGill University Press, 2011) 70.

were used to emphasize the otherness of the sitters.² In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, photographers like Edward Curtis constructed passive, manipulated images of Aboriginal people, because they were interested in presenting an image of the exotic ‘other’ rather than making visible the lives of contemporary people. Although it was not just nineteenth century photographs that produced these stereotypes, in the context of this exhibition the discussion of the production of stereotypes in photography needs to be highlighted. Except for the five video works by three artists, *Stealing the Gaze* was a photography show, but both media were used to redress the long history of controlled and manipulated images of Indigenous peoples through a reclaiming of the modes of representation.

The question I am exploring in this thesis is how *Stealing the Gaze* fits into the larger context of the presentation of both Aboriginal art and images of Aboriginal peoples at the NGC. Through a consideration of the NGC’s history of exhibiting and acquiring works by Aboriginal artists, I will argue that *Stealing the Gaze* challenged curatorial and institutional authority at that institution. *Stealing the Gaze* was a collaborative project on many levels, and was a major advance on the part of the CMCP and the NGC, and the curators working there, because it questioned conventional modes of display of work by Indigenous artists. The exhibition shifted several protocols about curatorial and institutional authority. Collaboration was a vital part of the process in the exhibition – between the artists themselves, between the artists and the curators, and between the two institutions, the NGC and the CMCP. One of the main contributions of *Stealing the Gaze* was its exploration of collaboration across many different realms – curatorial, institutional, curator-artist relations, and artist-artist relations. My thesis will examine the

² Kathleen Ash-Milby, “Hide.” *HIDE: Skin as material and metaphor*. Exhibition Catalogue. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2010) 31.

collaborative practices employed in *Steeling the Gaze* and will consider how this approach could be a useful model for exhibitions of Aboriginal art in mainstream art institutions.

Aboriginal Art at the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

Steeling the Gaze was jointly organized by the CMCP and the NGC. An examination of the histories of both institutions – particularly their record of presenting work by Indigenous artists – will help situate the exhibition under consideration here. The CMCP was founded in 1984 when an institutional reorganization brought an end to the Still Photography Division of the NFB and a repository was needed for the still images in its collection. The CMCP's stated mandate was to promote contemporary Canadian photography both as a documentary and an artistic medium. As a result, it built up a broad collection of photographs that illustrate both changes in the medium and practice of photography, and the increasingly diverse subject matter that has preoccupied artists working in Canada.

Interest in historical and media representations of previously marginalized groups was an important area of concern at the CMCP; for example the representation of women has been examined in the images of Shari Hatt and Nicole Jolicoeur, of the children of Canadian immigrants in the photo-installations of Vid Ingelevics and Jin-me Yoon, and of First Nations peoples in the work of Shelly Niro, Arthur Renwick and others. The CMCP has been actively collecting the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists since the late 1980s and early 1990s; in the works of Carl Beam acquired in 1991, David Neel acquired in 1992, Greg Staats acquired in 1996, and many other works acquired since 2000. The CMCP had a large collection of photo-based works by contemporary Aboriginal artists, which shows that the exhibition *Steeling the Gaze* was not a one-off idea. Furthermore, there has been many exhibitions organized by the

CMCP that included the works of contemporary Indigenous artists, such as the 1992 exhibition *Alternative: Contemporary Photo Compositions*, curated by Lynn Hill that included works by Mary Anne Barkhouse, Patricia Deadman, Marianne Nicolson, Shelly Niro, Arthur Renwick, Greg Staats and Jeff Thomas; *Back to the Land* from 2012 that included work by Shelley Niro; a Peter Pitseolak solo exhibition from 2002; and *Shifting Sites* from 2000 that included work by Greg Staats. In 1985, the collection of the CMCP was affiliated with the NGC. The CMCP officially opened its specially designed building on Rideau Street in 1992, making its collection much more accessible to the public. With the opening of the building, in addition to its regular purchases, the CMCP started to receive gifts in significant numbers.³

Due to major construction work scheduled to increase during 2007 the CMCP closed its doors in 2006. As a precaution against construction-related damage, the CMCP collections were moved to the NGC. The entire collection was relocated to a gallery especially arranged to house the collection. In 2009 it was announced that the CMCP would be permanently closed for conversion to government committee rooms. Its collections and program of exhibitions have since been absorbed by the NGC. This closure was seen as a huge loss to Canadian culture in the eyes of thousands of Canadians, and a campaign was launched to try to preserve the CMCP. Before its closure, the CMCP was considering new technologies and was starting to do more to break out of the Eurocentric mould by featuring the work of First Nations and Inuit artists. Many artists believed that the closing of CMCP was just a publicity stunt and that the NGC's hidden agenda was its expansion to the Sussex Drive Building.⁴ Martha Langford, the founding director of the CMCP, expressed her outrage at the loss of this significant Canadian institution. As she

³ Martha Langford, "The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography." *History of Photography* 20. 2 (Summer 1996) 175.

⁴ Martha Langford, "In Defense of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography." *Save the CMCP*, April 2009. Web. Accessed June 2013.

speculated, after being shrunk to several rooms at the NGC, the CMCP has disappeared completely, its web presence deleted from the Gallery's website.

Like many Canadian art galleries, the NGC does not have a long history of collecting or exhibiting work by Aboriginal artists, since it was the official mandate of the Canadian Museum Civilization to collect Indigenous art, and the NGC's mandate was to collect Western and Asian arts.⁵ The NGC was founded in 1880 and first started collecting works by European and Canadian artists who were trained in the European style of painting. Like most art museums in Europe and North America, the NGC considered the artistic traditions of Native peoples as primitive and for Canadian artists to appropriate in their works. Any exhibitions that included works by Aboriginal artists assumed the Western-influenced formal vocabulary that marginalized the art of First Nations peoples as primitive.⁶

The first exhibition at the NGC that included Aboriginal art was the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* which resulted in the purchase of an argillite Haida crest pole. (fig. 1) *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art* opened in December of 1927, and placed objects of the 'Canadian West Coast tribes' such as masks, rattles, spoons and blankets next to paintings by prominent Euro-Canadian artists like Emily Carr, Edwin Holgate, and A. Y. Jackson. *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art* positioned Native art as a source of inspiration for Canadian artists by authenticating their romantic depictions of a 'vanishing race'.

⁵ Ruth B. Phillips, "Modes of Inclusion: Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario." *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011) 260.

⁶ Carol Podedworny, "First Nations Art and the Canadian Mainstream." *C 31* (January 1991) 26.

Furthermore, the exhibition was based on Western values of art, focusing on the aestheticism of the presentation rather than cultural context and appropriateness of display.⁷

The next major exhibition that exhibited the cultural production of Canada's Indigenous peoples was the 1969 exhibition *Masterpieces of Indian and Eskimo Art from Canada*. Between 1927 and 1969, there were four exhibitions at the NGC that included Aboriginal art. *A Century of Fine Crafts* in 1957 and *Canadian Fine Crafts* in 1963 both appropriated Indigenous art forms into the hierarchical Western classification of fine and decorative arts, implicitly identifying them with the lower category of "applied" art.⁸ The other two exhibitions, *Arts of French Canada* in 1947 and *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art* in 1967 were broad chronological surveys of painting, sculpture, graphic and decorative arts in which Indigenous art was presented as precursors of the more highly evolved settler traditions.⁹ Even though these early exhibitions included examples of the artistic production of Aboriginal peoples, they reinforced an image of the Aboriginal artists as the exotic 'other' because the objects were set up in a romanticized context, with dramatic lighting and set behind glass on shelves; such portrayal removed any cultural significance of the process and usage of these objects.

Other than the argillite Haida crest pole that the NGC bought in 1927, no object made by an Aboriginal artist was purchased by the Gallery until the 1950s. In 1956, the NGC acquired its first sculptures by Arctic artists, including *Mother and Child* (c. 1955) by Charlie Sivuarapik, (fig. 2) the first Inuit member of the Sculpture Society of Canada. In the 1960s, important early prints, such as the *Enchanted Owl* (1960) by Kenojuak Ashevak (fig. 3) were purchased from the

⁷ Diana Nemiroff, "Modernism, Nationalism and Beyond: A Critical History of Exhibitions of First Nations Art." *Land Spirit Power* ed. Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 25.

⁸ Phillips (2011), 254.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

first Arctic printmaking studio established by the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative in Cape Dorset. In 1979 a major donation of silver from the family of Henry Birks also included several works by First Nations artists, some of which are currently on view in the NGC's Galleries of Canadian and Aboriginal Art. The NGC purchased several works as contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s from artists such as Rita Letendre, Robert Markle, and Inuit artist Kenojuak Ashevak. In the 1980s, major donations received from the Friends of the National Gallery, Dorothy M. Stillwell, and M.F. Feheley increased the Inuit holdings to over 350 works.¹⁰ In 1989 and 1992, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development transferred a further 570 works by Inuit artists to the Gallery. With these and other gifts as well as continuing annual purchases, the National Gallery's collection of Inuit art has grown significantly.

Although the CMCP had a good record of collecting and exhibiting works by contemporary Indigenous artists, the NGC has been slower at including contemporary Indigenous artists in exhibitions and acquisitions. Several documents, written in the 1980s and 1990s started addressing problems with the lack of representation of Indigenous arts and cultures in museums generally, and raised concerns regarding the mode of display of objects and peoples. Three reports are important to mention here because they shaped the way the NGC dealt with Indigenous art: Jean Blodgett's 1983 "Report on Indian and Inuit Art at the National Gallery of Canada," Lee-Ann Martin's "The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contemporary Native Art and Public Art Museums in Canada" from 1991, and the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples* from 1992. These three reports outlined similar problems with representation of Native arts and cultures in institutions like the NGC, and provided recommendations on how to better represent contemporary Indigenous art and artists.

¹⁰ "Inuit Art." *National Gallery of Canada*, n. d. Web. Accessed March 2013.

The *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples* grew out of public debate surrounding the controversial exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* that took place at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988, coinciding with the winter Olympics. The exhibition was controversial because the main corporate sponsor was Shell Oil who was deemed responsible by the Lubicon Cree for the destruction of their lifestyle by drilling for oil on their lands. The Lubicon Cree called for a boycott of the exhibit, creating a well-publicized debate about Canada's simultaneous affirmation, appropriation, and exploitation of its First Peoples. Later that year, in the aftermath of the exhibition's controversy, a conference organized by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations was held to establish a relationship between museums and Aboriginal communities, and to discuss how objects from Aboriginal cultures were displayed and presented to others. The conference led to the establishment of a Task Force to "develop an ethical framework and strategies for Aboriginal Nations to represent their history and culture in concert with cultural institutions."¹¹ Following hearings and discussions the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples* was published in 1992. The areas identified by the Task Force as needing the most improvement were the increased involvement of Aboriginal people in the interpretation of their cultures and histories by public institutions; the repatriation of artefacts and human remains; and improved access to museum collections by Aboriginal people. The report focused on the importance of increasing the agency and voice of Native people in institutions in which their cultures are represented. The Task Force was more successful in advising museums on more culturally sensitive methods for presenting and collecting historic objects; it was less able to address the needs of contemporary artists and create opportunities to broaden the field. As a result, funding priorities are still a source of frustration for Aboriginal cultural workers, because there is never enough money to

¹¹ "Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples." *Museum Anthropology* 16. 2 (June 1992) 12.

train Aboriginal curators or educators, or purchase works by Aboriginal artists.¹² Despite several weaknesses, the Task Force changed the relationship of Aboriginal peoples and museums, and its recommendations are slowly taking place.

The Task Force report examined the structural factors affecting the relationship between First Nations and museums; two other reports looked more closely at museums' acquisition of works by Indigenous artists. In 1983 Jean Blodgett, Inuit art specialist, wrote a report for the NGC recommending that it pursue a more active role in collecting and exhibiting the art of Canadian artists of Native ancestry and put an end to the policy of exclusion.¹³ Blodgett commented that galleries, especially the NGC, should contribute to the collection and exhibition of Aboriginal art. The report led to several changes at the NGC, including revising its collections policy, creating an Inuit art section, transferring a curator from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and taking the initiative to consult the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA) regarding an approach to acquiring and exhibiting the work of contemporary First Nations artists.¹⁴

Lee-Ann Martin addressed the issue of the silencing of Native voices in the museum in her 1991 report "The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contemporary Native Art and Public Art Museums in Canada." She calls the act of absolving the institutions from a long-term commitment to Native art and artists "soft inclusion,"¹⁵ arguing that occasional temporary exhibitions dedicated to work by Indigenous artists does little to challenge systemic

¹² Stephanie Bolton, "Museums Taken to Task: Representing First Peoples at the McCord Museum of Canadian History." *First Nations, First Thoughts: The Impact of Indigenous Thought in Canada* ed. Annis May Timpson (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) 151.

¹³ Nemiroff, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ Lee-Ann Martin, "The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contemporary Native Art and Public Art Museums in Canada". *A Report submitted to the Canada Council*. (Ottawa: The Canada Council for the Arts, 1991) 25.

discrimination. Instead Martin argues for “hard inclusion” by which she means acquisition of work by Indigenous artists for permanent collections and increased involvement by Aboriginal curators and writers in the process of exhibiting their cultures. She noted that most Canadian art galleries have broadly worded exhibition policies which do not specifically state that works by Native artists will be included. However, directors and curators quickly point out that their policies and practices do not specifically exclude these works from their collections and exhibitions mandates; in practice however, this creates a situation in which Native artists are usually excluded. Martin calls this periodic or “soft” inclusion, either by way of a group or small solo exhibition, and it absolves the institution from a long-term commitment to the serious treatment of works by Native artists.¹⁶

At the same time these reports were being written, Native activism was growing across North America and specifically in Canada; indeed, the two are closely related as it was Native activism that supported the Lubicon’s boycott and created a context for exhibitions, and artwork, that looked critically at the Columbus anniversary. A shift began occurring in the 1980s due to increased Native activism. One of the key organizations that started to bring out real changes in political, educational and economic development of First Nations peoples was the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). They held their first assembly in 1982 but the organization had been in existence since the 1960s as the National Indian Brotherhood. The AFN pursued changes in government policies with respect to Aboriginal Rights, economic development, education and many other fields, and intervened in the repatriation of the Canadian constitution to ensure legal enshrinement of Aboriginal rights. The political activism has afforded Indigenous peoples increasingly greater access to various levels of political decision making and has substantially

¹⁶ Martin, 25.

altered some aspects of Aboriginal communities.¹⁷ For example, Elijah Harper, an Ojibwa member of the Manitoba Legislature, played a key role in preventing the adoption of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990. This act resulted in an increased politicization of Indigenous peoples and greater attention being paid to their cultural contributions now and in the past. Protests across the country alongside certain exhibitions started to examine the place of Indigenous culture and artists.

The Lubicon Cree's boycott of the exhibition *The Spirit Sings* due to its sponsorship by Shell oil galvanized Aboriginal artists and political activists to question not only the ethics of sponsorship but also the lack of contemporary representation of Aboriginal arts in the exhibition. The exhibition was a staged celebration of First Nations artistic traditions, romanticizing the past and through the omission of any objects produced in present, denying the existence of a contemporary Aboriginal culture. The movement against the exhibition set in motion the formation of the Task Force, as discussed earlier, which was an alliance between the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association.

The rise of Indigenous activism is important not only because it spurred so much questioning and critique of mainstream museums, but also led to a "blossoming of cultural expression, growing awareness of the cultural heritage and the desire for free expression and civil rights."¹⁸ In art galleries and museums, there was an increased need for a reassessment of the universal Euro-centric art history, not only concerning the representation of Aboriginal arts, artists and cultures, but also for the composition of the institutions' professional staff. Museums and galleries were critiqued for serving a cultural elite, being staffed primarily by whites, and

¹⁷ Noel Dyck and Tonio Sadik, "Political Organization and Activism of Aboriginal People." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, June 2011. Web. Accessed June 2014.

¹⁸ Moira G. Simpson, "Cultural Reflections." *Making Representations: Museums on the Post-Colonial Era*. (New York: Routledge, 1996) 7.

reflecting dominant Euro-Canadian values.¹⁹ Plains Cree and Blackfoot Curator of Canadian art at the Art Gallery of Ontario Gerald McMaster refers to the universalism of art history as an “uninterrupted narrative” and “dominant fiction.” He argues that our understanding of the contested histories has been reinforced by feminist, post-colonial and post-modern critiques, which reveal fields of knowledge as bound up in colonial domination in places where dominant cultures seek to tell the story.²⁰ Similarly, Alfred Young Man points out that it has always been a problem for Euro-American societies to accept other realities and worldviews.²¹ The resistance to the universal ideology of the West by Aboriginal peoples has been a serious issue increasingly addressed by writers and critics.

The three afore-mentioned reports recommended that more space be made for Aboriginal artists, curators and educators, and that institutions make more of an effort to include Aboriginal voices and people in the presentation of Aboriginal culture. One very important development that emerged from the reports’ findings, and was supported by the growing activism within Native groups, was the changing response to the question of expertise. Where previously it was the ethnologist or collector who claimed to be the expert in Aboriginal art, more voices started emerging from Aboriginal communities, and a discourse began to take shape in which First Nations individuals were telling the stories from their own perspective.²² Aboriginal artists, curators, writers, and other individuals aimed to repossess history, to tell the stories anew, and to challenge the colonial discourse.

¹⁹ Simpson, 9.

²⁰ Gerald McMaster, “Towards an Aboriginal Art History.” *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century* ed. Jackson W. Rushing. (London: Routledge Press, 1999) 82.

²¹ Alfred Young Man, “Towards a Political History of Native Art.” *Visions of Power: Contemporary art by First Nations, Inuit and Japanese Canadians*. (Toronto: Earth Spirit Festival, 1991) 33.

²² Nemiroff, 38.

The first significant exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art at the NGC, which signalled a step towards providing Aboriginal artists with a voice, was *Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* in 1992. This exhibition was first approved in 1988, in the same year of the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples. Motivated in large part by the Columbus quincentenary in 1992, the resulting exhibition underwent several changes following the first approval. The curators of the exhibition were Diana Nemiroff, the Curator of Contemporary Art at the NGC; Robert Houle, a Saulteaux artist and the former Curator of Contemporary Indian Art at the National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of History); and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, a scholar whose work has considered both traditional native arts and contemporary First Nations artists. The curators were part of a shift of priorities in Canadian curatorial practice that resonates to this day. The most important contributions of *Land Spirit Power* were the inclusion of an Aboriginal curator, which was a first for the NGC; the extensive interview process between the artists and the curators; and the engagement in a dialogue about questions of identity that emerged from the consideration of authenticity and the Indigenous aesthetic. In these curatorial decisions, *Land Spirit Power* was a precursor to future exhibitions that focus on collaboration such as *Steeling the Gaze*.

The works of the artists included in *Land Spirit Power* reflected the dilemma of contemporary art by Native artists at the time, and the tension between a Native traditionalism and a modern or post-modern aesthetic practice.²³ The artists also focused on the sacredness of the land, and the fact that modern society has lost the sense of sacred. As Anne Whitelaw remarked in her analysis of the exhibition, the aesthetic diversity of the artists reveals the complex ways in which the two traditions, Native and non-Native, intersect in the lives of

²³ Anne Whitelaw, “*Land Spirit Power: First Nations Cultural Production and Canadian Nationhood.*” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 12 (Fall 1995) 33.

Aboriginal people today, emphasizing the heterogeneous experiences of Native peoples.²⁴ *Land Spirit Power* was the first international survey of contemporary Aboriginal art at the National Gallery, having included artists from Canada and the United States, and it symbolized the first steps of the Canadian museums' movement towards recognizing and acknowledging the contemporary artistic traditions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It was also an important exhibition because it marked the larger criticism by Indigenous groups of the celebrations of the Columbus Quincentenary.

Following the exhibition and the recommendations of the reports mentioned earlier, Aboriginal art was chronologically integrated throughout the Canadian galleries for the first time in the 2000s. In 2003, the NGC opened its new galleries of Canadian and Aboriginal art. The re-hanging of the Canadian and Aboriginal galleries was titled *Art of this Land*, and was the first time since 1927 that the NGC had displayed historical Aboriginal objects alongside works by Euro-Canadian artists. *Art of This Land* was curated by Denise Leclerc, at the time the Associate Curator of Canadian Art at the NGC, and assisted by Mohawk curator Greg Hill, at the time the Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art. It is important to note that the objects were all borrowed given the NGC's lack of collection. In August 2007, The Audain Curator of Indigenous Art Endowment was created through a \$2-million gift from the Audain Foundation. Greg A. Hill was appointed as the first Curator of Indigenous Art and the head of the newly created department, and was responsible for exhibitions, acquisitions, loans, research, and publishing in relation to the care and the promotion of the Gallery's growing collection of Indigenous art. This appointment is a great example of 'hard inclusion' because it puts an Indigenous curator in charge of exhibition, research and acquisition of works by Indigenous artists.

²⁴ Whitelaw, 34.

Before Hill's appointment, artworks by First Nations and Métis artists were collected by the NGC within other areas of historical and contemporary Canadian art. Carl Beam's *The North American Iceberg* (1985) (fig. 4) was purchased by the NGC in 1986 and was the first work by a contemporary Native artist acquired, and it would take several years for other works by contemporary Native artists to enter the collection. This acquisition marked a real change in the way the NGC has dealt with Aboriginal art and artists. The NGC's collection of Aboriginal contemporary art started noticeably increasing in the 2000s with the acquisitions of works by KC Adams, Mary Anne Barkhouse, Brian Jungen, Shelley Niro, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, and other contemporary Indigenous artists. The collection that had begun in 1950 of sculptures, prints and textiles by Inuit artists had followed a separate path and was placed within the department of prints and drawings; the Indigenous Art department brought all these artworks together with a specific focus on works by Canadian Indigenous artists.²⁵

In 2007, the Canada Council for the Arts and the National Gallery of Canada announced that Mohawk curator Steven Loft would be the first Aboriginal curator-in-residence at the NGC, benefiting from the pilot project that provided the NGC with funding for two-year residencies for Aboriginal curators. In addition to research and assistance on the collections, during his stay at the NGC, Loft helped organize two new and challenging exhibits that exemplify his willingness to push boundaries and break with preconceived notions and stereotypes about Aboriginal art and peoples. As well as *Stealing the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, Loft curated *Back to the Beginning: Rethinking Abstraction from an Indigenous Perspective* for the Gallery's On Tour program, an exhibition that was a key reframing of abstraction through the unique perspective of contemporary Aboriginal aesthetics. Steven Loft's work at the NGC focused on how Aboriginal

²⁵ Christine Lalonde, "Introduction: At the Crossroads of Indigeneity, Globalization and Contemporary Art." *Sakahàn*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013) 14.

people and their artistic production fit into the NGC's mandate of collecting Canadian art. His appointment was a significant step in the NGC's commitment to Indigenous art, after instituting the Indigenous Art department with Greg Hill as its head, and recognizing the need for more curatorial support in that area. Loft's appointment followed with more exhibitions and acquisitions of contemporary Indigenous art. One of Loft's goals as the first Indigenous curator-in-residence was to bring in a new method for curating and researching Indigenous art, and to work towards the gallery as an integrated place where Indigenous artists are included in group exhibitions as well as have more opportunities for Indigenous-only or solo shows.

Framing the exhibition as a platform for dialogue

Before *Stealing the Gaze* took place, it is evident that the NGC recognized some of its weaknesses in its commitment to Aboriginal art. Unlike the NGC, the CMCP had purposefully collected photographs by First Nations artists. Andrea Kunard, the Associate Curator at the CMCP, initiated the idea for an exhibition of contemporary Indigenous photo-based artists after the appointment of Steven Loft as the first Indigenous curator-in-residence at the NGC. The CMCP has a large collection of photo-based works by contemporary Indigenous artists, and after going through the collection the two curators chose portraiture as the theme for the exhibition because it allowed for an exploration of First Nations and Métis identity as well as struggles with modes of representation. *Stealing the Gaze* was the culmination of the institutional shifts and changes at the NGC mentioned earlier, most importantly the developments that emerged from the Task Force report as well as Blodgett's and Martin's reports, the inclusion of Aboriginal art in the Canadian galleries, and the creation of the department of Indigenous art and the hiring of Greg Hill as its head.

The curatorial process of the exhibition *Steeling the Gaze* shifted curatorial and institutional authority by giving more voice to the artists. It is important to recognize that an exhibition in general is a carefully organized narrative, a medium used by a specific institution to represent its identity. To use the terms of Bruce Ferguson's analysis, exhibitions are the speech of institutions, and the central speaking subjects in the standard stories about art told to the audiences by the institutions and the curators.²⁶ Ferguson speaks of exhibitions as strategic systems of representation and the main agency of communication for museums. All exhibitionary procedures combine as aspects of the exhibition's active recitation, such as labels, didactic panels, catalogues, hanging systems, lighting, wall colours, and handouts.

The narrative of *Steeling the Gaze* is the acknowledgement of Aboriginal art history as being different from Euro-Canadian art history. The exhibition shed a light on the history of stereotyped representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures by involving artists who counter this history by taking the camera into their own hands and looking at themselves and their communities. The Aboriginal artists were educated at Canadian art schools and as such, they are keenly aware of contemporary western art and are in a strong position to manipulate recent theories and practices in order to "talk back." The NGC and other mainstream institutions were for the longest time organizing exhibitions *about* Native people. So even though work was being made, it was still being filtered through the Western curatorial eye, which always meant it was viewed from an intellectual and art historical tradition that was not in keeping with that of the artists involved. The curators in *Steeling the Gaze* actively questioned in their research and display process the tradition of the NGC and other institutions and their exhibition of Indigenous art and peoples. In my analysis, I will show how *Steeling the Gaze* challenged the traditional

²⁶ Bruce Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense." *Thinking About Exhibitions* ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996) 176.

authority of the institution by undertaking a thorough analysis of its exhibitionary narrative. As I will argue, the curators sought to apply a decolonizing lens to Indigenous art by thinking critically about display and by using text within the galleries to enable the multiple voices of the artists to engage in a form of conversation. The exhibition is a narrative through which the curators actively structure and order the artworks. Loft and Kunard chose artists for the exhibition that explored the notion of identity on various levels, challenging traditional portraiture and stereotypes of the past.

A portrait is an artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. Portrait can also refer to a written description or analysis of a person or thing that offers deep insight. A portrait is a reference to the original which is captured by the artist, but it can be perceived by the viewer not as an object but a living being. As Ernst van Alphen notes in his essay on contemporary portraiture, the portrait refers to a human being which is (or was) present outside of the portrait, and thus invokes absence because it remembers not the real person but their memory.²⁷ Alphen also notes the traditional portrait is a politically invested genre, cherishing the cornerstone of bourgeois western society in capturing the uniqueness of an individual and his or her accomplishments.²⁸ This notion is important in terms of looking at portraiture by Indigenous artists because they challenge conceptions of subjectivity and authenticity in their art by asserting that identity is socially constructed and not authentic. The portrait artist may omit important characteristics of the sitter in order to portray a stereotype of a person or even a culture. The concept of portraiture is dealt with on many levels in *Steeling the*

²⁷ Ernst van Alphen, "The Portrait's Dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Portraiture." *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* ed. Joanna Woodall. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 248-249.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

Gaze. Since First Nations people have been controlled by the lens in the past, portraiture and self portraiture for First Nations artists is very important. The notion of the gaze is also very important when discussing portraiture of, and by, Indigenous peoples because in the past, Indigenous peoples were subjects of the Western gaze on the ‘other’. In this case, the Indigenous artists are reclaiming the gaze by taking cameras into their own hands, and creating images of themselves and of their communities. It is a different kind of gaze from the Western gaze on Aboriginal people due to the shift in power. While the Western gaze on Aboriginal peoples involved an assumed superiority of the white photographer over the Aboriginal subject, in the hands of Aboriginal photographers there is conversation on all levels – between the sitters and the photographers by creating dialogue and close relationships, and between the sitters and the viewer by creating works that are on many levels uncomfortable, especially for non-Indigenous viewers.

Portraiture can be also discussed in terms of looking at the way the exhibition was curated. An exhibition is a portrait of a community of artists, created by the curators, but it could be also seen as a portrait of the NGC’s treatment of, or commitment to, Aboriginal art. In the exhibition *Steeling the Gaze* the works on the walls were set in a dialogue with quotes by the artists on the walls. There were no text panels, which broke with the norm at the NGC, and created an opportunity for viewers to think about the implications of these works on their own terms. Previously, most exhibitions of Indigenous art were presented with lengthy text panels laying out the curators’ ideas about the works, excluding the viewpoint of Indigenous artists and ignoring cultural significance or context. This is a colonizing act of trying to contain and explain the culture, and prescribing specific identities as seen fit by the colonizers. On the contrary, in *Steeling the Gaze*, the use of the artists’ voices allowed for sharing the authority and this is an

example of how *Stealing the Gaze* was a decolonizing exhibition, and a portrait of a new way of exhibiting contemporary Aboriginal art. The curators also asked the artists how they wanted to be designated on the labels, which is another important notion of portraiture because it acknowledges an Aboriginal identity and a different tradition in which ways of looking at oneself include nationhood, and thus recognizes a more expansive nature of Aboriginal history.

The curatorial statement, positioned at the entrance to the exhibition and signed by the two curators, Kunard and Loft, is useful as it draws on issues of identity and community brought up by the artists and their artworks.

This exhibition draws attention to the idea that the portrait is a construct in which the subject's individuality is captured. Yet, it is also a cultural construct that, for Aboriginal people, has a long and problematic history. The portrait is a European convention. Often the photographer controlled the portrait session, representing Native peoples as stereotypes because that is what would sell and that is how they were seen. In depictions of Aboriginal people, it is important to examine the power relationship inherent in the process, how much control the subject has over the resulting image, and who controls where it goes. The artists in this exhibition challenge preconceived notions of Aboriginal people. Beyond the simplistic notions of the coffee table book in which Indigenous peoples have so often figured, these artists mine what it is to be Aboriginal, giving agency to their ancestors, to their communities and to themselves. They are defining Aboriginal identity, collapsing perceptual barriers established by decades of misrepresentation, defiantly stating, —This is who we are.²⁹

The statement functioned not only as an introduction to the exhibition and to photographic portraiture, but it started the conversation between the artists and it showed the thought process of the curators. It also signalled the reclamation, by the Indigenous artists, of their own images, by posing questions about identity. The curatorial statement, as a signed document, introduced the themes of the exhibition and established a conversation with the artists and the viewers. The

²⁹ Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft, *Stealing the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, Curatorial Statement. (Ottawa: NGC, 2008).

curatorial statement refers to the central issue addressed by many of the artists in their works: that identity is not authentic but socially constructed. This means that these artists are going against constructed, stereotyped images from the past in order to create a new identity.

The portrait functions as a mask. In historical representations of Aboriginal people, the sitters were posed into portraits that were not a true reflection of themselves or their cultures. In the work of contemporary Aboriginal artists, the concept of the mask in their portraits is dual: to conceal and to reveal. As Richard Brilliant notes, masks seem to be self-imposed disguises allowing the wearer to impersonate someone, even himself, in a favourable guise.³⁰ Kathleen Ash-Milby notes that a mask is generally an object that can be worn or removed at will; it invests a complex register of identity because it conceals one identity at the same time that it reveals another.³¹ The metaphor of the mask in these artists' works plays with the notion of object, and of portraits as humanizing masks. For example, in Arthur Renwick's *Masks*, the sitters have chosen to "wear" masks for these portraits that express both humour and hostility and a desire to be seen.³² The prints document First Nations people who have come up against cultural assumptions about their heritage throughout their careers. In KC Adams' works, the sitters also put on masks for the portraits as each sitter is photographed in a stoic pose, mocking the traditional portraits of Aboriginal people. This notion is emphasized by the sitters' wearing of chokers and T-shirts with slogans such as "NOBLE SAVAGE," "ASK ME ABOUT MY SWEETGRASS" or "INDIAN PRINCESS." In other artists' works, the notion of a mask as a portrait is evident in different ways by dealing with identity issues, such as in Kent Monkman's works by taking on a different persona – Miss Chief Eagle Testickle – to pose as the exotic and

³⁰ Richard Brilliant, "Fabricated Identities: Placements." *Portraiture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991) 113.

³¹ Ash-Milby, 31.

³² *Ibid.*, 31.

alluring “Trapper’s Bride” in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, or Rosalie Favell’s triple portrait of her sister in which she is dressed like a cowboy.

The Narrative of *Steeling the Gaze*

At the National Gallery, *Steeling the Gaze* was held in two of the smaller rooms of the Gallery’s permanent collection of contemporary art. The first gallery had larger works and fewer artists represented; the second gallery featured smaller works that dealt with more specific questions of identity. The curators organized most walls by artist. As can be seen in the layout of the exhibition (fig. 5), the artists were not divided evenly between the two galleries. The first gallery had works by only three artists, while the second gallery had more works in less gallery space including three video monitors in the corners.

The first gallery functioned as a way in for the viewers, to set up the context of the exhibition and get the viewers grounded. The first works seen were Jeff Thomas’ dialogue with nineteenth century photographer Edward Curtis, and that functioned as an introduction to the exhibition as a whole because Curtis’ works are familiar to many people. (fig. 6) Curtis was arguably the best known of the photographers who aspired to capture the ‘noble Indians’ before they all vanished. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anthropology and photography functioned to represent the ‘other’, what European scientists believed to be inferior races. This representation was based on a hierarchical model of evolution that sustained European colonization. Most intently in the period from the 1830s to the mid-1900s, serious scientific attempts were made to define the biological races, in thinking that human character and intelligence can be judged from facial features, and that each race exhibits either inferior (black,

“Indian”) and superior (White) facial characteristics.³³ Anatomists of the period established physical anthropology as the dominant authority on race. Observations were made from the human form, and especially skull proportions, through theories of race definition, formation, migration, inheritance, interaction and mixture. Many stereotypes of Indigenous peoples arose from these images, and still persist today, such as the noble savage or the warrior. However, in spite of Aboriginal peoples’ exclusion from institutions, many Aboriginal artists have been engaging with the camera. Sherry Farrell Racette argues that photography functions as a practice of resistance and claiming control over how Aboriginal people are being represented.³⁴ The power relationships within photography are the key to the struggle, such as considering who stands in front of the camera and who presses the shutter. Perhaps the most damaging effect of what Racette describes as photo-colonialism has been its nostalgic celebration of the “vanishing race,” because its authority continues to have power despite rigorous critiques of its inaccuracy and artificiality.

In the first gallery, works by Jeff Thomas, Dana Claxton and Arthur Renwick were juxtaposed with quotes by other artists in the exhibition, producing a dialogue about stereotyped images of Aboriginal people. These works confront a heritage of discrimination and appropriation, and comment on the historical and continuing impact of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples and their cultures in North America. Furthermore, these large-scale images, especially in the case of Arthur Renwick’s *Masks*, (fig. 7) evoke a certain level of discomfort for the viewers, due in part to the size of the works, but also because people are not used to seeing

³³ See, for example: *Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London: 1863-64*. (London: Anthropological Society of London, 1865).

³⁴ Racette, 70.

such confrontational images of Indigenous peoples. As the quote by Shelly Niro on the wall next to Renwick's images states:

Some people think that to be Indian, you have to do certain things, but I'm saying that you're Indian no matter what you do, but you have to decide what you want to do and you have to ask questions, like, am I doing something because it's expected of me to do, or I am doing it because I really believe this and it's really a part of me. So I'm always questioning that, saying 'Am I being truthful to myself? How much a part of what I do is a part of my psychology?

Niro's quote is full of questions and self-exploration, much like the works in the exhibition. Her question about being truthful to herself is mirrored in the distorted faces of the sitters in Renwick's *Masks* because perhaps they were motioning towards the stereotyped representations from the past. The sitters in Renwick's photographs chose to create their own image, and not let it be dictated by others (including the artist himself). The portraits document First Nations people who have come up against cultural assumptions about their heritage throughout their careers. Niro alludes to the stereotype of the 'Indian', or the 'warrior', a prevalent image that generalizes Indigenous peoples as the exotic 'other'. Niro, and the other artists in the exhibition, with their works and their quotes, are reclaiming their own images by posing these questions, and creating new images. Jeff Thomas redefines the contemporary urban warrior in his *Four Indian Kings* by juxtaposing the four Mohawk chiefs of the original nineteenth-century paintings to modern-day Iroquois people, including Joe David, Arnold Boyer, Thomas himself, and his brother Steve Thomas. (fig. 8)

Thomas, Claxton and Renwick deal with the historical and continuing impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples and their cultures in North America. In her *Mustang series*, (fig. 9) Dana Claxton deconstructs the commodification of images and philosophies of First Nations peoples and cultures. These portraits reference the stereotyped representation of

Aboriginal peoples. For example, none of the subjects smile or are named in Claxton's work, so even though they are individuals, they are anonymous, like the subjects of nineteenth-century photographers like Curtis. The clean background of the portraits is also a comment on the traditional studio portraits of Aboriginal peoples. Renwick uses a similar technique in his photographs where the lighting is similar to how a West coast mask would be photographed – from both sides. Renwick's sitters independently chose to alter their faces, resulting in their faces appearing quite literally as masks.

Another quote that engages with all the works and speaks to the artists' reclaiming their own images by taking the camera into their own hands is by David Neel:

We live in a time of the created image – if you do not create your own, someone will create it for you.

This quote speaks to the premise of this exhibition – the motion of these artists to take the camera into their own hands and re-write the stories and narratives in order to create their own images. It also comments on the questions raised in Shelley Niro's quote mentioned earlier, and can be seen not only in the actions of the photographers but the sitters as well – for example Catherine Adams in two photographs by David Neel (fig. 10) – actively breaking down the stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal peoples from the past. Similarly, this desire to create their own image and not let it be dictated by others is answered in the sitters for Renwick's photographs. Renwick initiated a dialogue with his subjects, seeking their thoughts on identity in order to undermine stereotyped portraits of Indigenous peoples.

On the long wall that connected the two galleries were works by David Neel, Carl Beam, Jeff Thomas and Rosalie Favell, grouped together due to the common focus on contemporary Indigenous 'warriors' and heroes. This was a major theme in the exhibition, dealt with in order to

bring attention to and undermine the myth of the ‘Indian warrior’ common in historical representations of Aboriginal peoples, and still prevalent in popular culture. In these works, the curators acknowledge that “the warrior is no longer a tired trope, but a metaphor, and a harbinger of changing reality for Aboriginal people. In the hands of these artists, the warrior takes on nuanced and contextualized personae.”³⁵ A well-known photograph was featured here of Elijah Harper (1949-2013) who was a Cree/Canadian politician and chief. In this portrait by David Neel, (fig. 11) Harper is portrayed with an eagle feather in his hand, dressed in a suit, rising in the Manitoba legislature to oppose the Meech Lake Accord.

The second gallery featured works by KC Adams, Rosalie Favell and Thirza Cuthand. Here, the curators organized the artists and their works so they engaged in a dialogue across the room, between the works and with the quotes on the walls. A number of the artists deal with the struggles of Aboriginal people of mixed ancestry who strive to find a balance between the legacies of two distinct cultures. For example, KC Adams’ works challenge the stereotypical and often racist views towards mixed race classifications by using humorous text and imagery from the two cultures. The portraits from her *Cyborg Hybrids* (fig. 12) series are digital prints of Euro-Aboriginal artists who are forward thinkers and plugged in with technology. Similar to the clear backgrounds in Dana Claxton works, Adams uses the clean background in her portraits as well to comment on the traditional portraits, by photographing her sitters with expressionless faces. Rosalie Favell revisits the “imaginary museum” in a surrealist mode by portraying such icons as Emily Carr and the Virgin Mary with an embroidered Kateri Tekakiwita on her heart in her works. She symbolically inserts Aboriginal people “into the picture” and into mainstream society by juxtaposing her grandmother and herself among Carr’s images.

³⁵ Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft, *Stealing the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2011).

Thirza Cuthand deals not only with issues of racial identity, but sexual identity as well. Her video *Through the Looking Glass* explored the struggle of a young Métis lesbian woman torn between the influences of the “white” queen and the “red” queen. Kent Monkman also deals with sexual identity; in a series of photographs, Monkman’s alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, performs several roles in order to address the history of Aboriginal people who performed stereotypes of “Indianness,” mostly for white audiences. For example, Miss Chief appears (fig. 13) as “The Hunter” in George Catlin’s Indian Gallery of the 1830s in which Catlin assembled the paintings and numerous artifacts of the American Indians,³⁶ or as the silent film star Cindy Silverscreen, robed in a luxurious floor-length fur.³⁷ Kent Monkman’s work was grouped with Shelley Niro’s and Carl Beam’s, due to an emphasis on materiality in the artists’ works – the box in Carl Beam’s work, the frames in Monkman’s, and the cotton and beaded mat in the case of Shelley Niro’s work. Shelley Niro’s *Overweight with Crooked Teeth*, produced in 1997, aims to dismantle stereotypical assumptions about Indigenous people which are still prevalent in mainstream North America. The video, based on a poem of the same name by Michael Doxtater, blatantly attacks these clichés, parodying them with macabre humour and a large portion of self-irony.³⁸ Similarly, *Bear Witness* reflects on the symbols of “Indian-ness” and interrogates the image of the warrior that Hollywood has constructed and questions its effect on Aboriginal identity.³⁹ His video *BrokeDickDog* examines not only his own history but the way in which popular culture and art history leave their mark on a broader Indigenous identity. On the wall next to the video by *Bear Witness*, there are two photographs by Greg Staats, *Accept*

³⁶ Kate Morris, “Making Miss Chief: Kent Monkman takes on the West.” *The National Museum of American Indian*, May 23, 2011. Web. Accessed May 2013.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kerstin Knopf, “Short Films.” *Decolonizing the Lens of Power: Indigenous Films in North America*. (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV., 2008) 192.

³⁹ Kunard and Loft.

Loss and Breathe. These works, similarly to Shelley Niro's, Jeff Thomas' and Rosalie Favell's, confirm the strength and resilience of Aboriginal culture and its connection to the land, community and family. Making references to family, tradition, and community, and thus asserting contemporary presence for Aboriginal people challenges the stereotypical portrayal of Aboriginal people developed through colonization and assimilation. Loft and Kunard stress that it is important to emphasize the importance of family and remembering traditions, and link them with contemporary practices and peoples to suggest continuity of cultures. According to the curators, the works of these artists are a statement on Aboriginal people claiming the right to express their own culture and history.⁴⁰

The exhibition catalogue for *Steeling the Gaze* and the exhibition display combine in creating the narrative of the exhibition. The structure of the catalogue differs slightly from the physical organization of the exhibition, but they are similar in that the same quotes from the exhibition display are also used in the booklet, in order to create further conversations between the artists within the booklet. The catalogue to *Steeling the Gaze* is quite small; it is more of a booklet, ten folded pages, about twenty by twenty centimetres in size. Text is important in the booklet in which Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft looked at larger themes that emerge from the work of the artists as a group. The text is organized into sections, each discussing a theme, with a quote by an artist at the beginning of each section, as compared to the physical display in which most of the walls are organized by single artist. One of those themes is the stereotypical representations of Aboriginal peoples from the past by non-Aboriginals that created "symbols of Indianness" that have nothing to do with the contemporary lives of Aboriginal people today. Specifically, curators discussed artists that address the most often represented stereotype of the

⁴⁰ Kunard and Loft.

“warrior.” Kunard and Loft also discuss the theme of historical representations of Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal photographers. By creating dialogue in their images, the artists are described as representing identity as changing and complex rather than as a singular and essential state.

Decolonizing the Museum

Steeling the Gaze was a significant exhibition because it represented an opposing voice within the walls of the NGC. The NGC, just like many galleries and museums, is a product of colonialism; it symbolically represents, especially as a national institution, the values and the beliefs of the nation. It also reinforces or asserts these values through the exhibition of works by Canadian artists who were not only trained in a European style of painting but are depicting a particular image of the nation – a colonial image. Settler colonialism is a specific colonial formation in which a foreign unit – a colonial power – moves into a region in order to mine its resources, especially land. The main goal of settler colonialism in Canada was to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands, to bury their cultures and their relationships to their lands and, ultimately, eliminate Indigenous societies so that settlers could establish themselves. The primary motive for elimination is not race, religion, ethnicity, or the grade of civilization, but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.⁴¹ Settler colonialism destroys – Indigenous peoples, traditions, and languages – in order to replace – with traditions and cultures of the settlers that are deemed superior. Taiaiake Alfred, a Kahnawake Mohawk educator and writer, says that we create our present based on our understanding of the past.⁴² Knowing that history is important for understanding the present and reclaiming history is

⁴¹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8. 4 (2006) 388.

⁴² Taiaiake Alfred, “Canadian Colonialism.” *Aboriginal Perspectives*. National Film Board of Canada, n. d. Web. Accessed January 2014.

a critical and essential aspect in the critique of colonialism. Settler colonialism never really ends, but by thinking critically about the repercussions of colonialism we can aim towards acknowledging the history of colonialism and making alliances that are more inclusive to different traditions, research methodologies and knowledge systems.

Museums and galleries present the cultural production of Indigenous peoples from a colonial perspective. In Canada's long struggle to define its own image, controversies over certain exhibitions and acquisitions of works of art revolve around issues of identity, diversity and public representation. Museums and galleries in North America are the product of colonialism, their presentation of art the result of entrenched aesthetic and ideological values that date from the Enlightenment. The art historical canon that forms the basis of the art museum is a product of those aesthetic and ideological values. It has been criticized by feminists and art historians of colour alike for its linear progression of white male geniuses, based on a hierarchy of art that is still embodied in many art history textbooks. Feminist scholars such as Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews argue that feminist art history has evolved beyond the attention to identifying women artists. Rather, the field must embrace a totally new consideration of the production and evaluation of art and the role of the artist by critiquing the aesthetic values and criteria that have structured the writing of art history to exclude women artists. Similarly, Keith Moxey observes that the art historical canon conserves the same values for art as it had since its construction in the eighteenth century, and does not engage in changing cultural and social circumstances. For the most part, art historical work has been produced without a second look at the social function the art is supposed to serve. In criticizing the traditional canon, various critics have claimed that the very idea of a canon is problematic, due to the fact that it is a historical product of patriarchy. Gerald McMaster also critiques the universalism that underlies

the idea of a canon – a homogeneous group of artists, denying Indigenous art’s uniqueness and originality. The art historical canon is the backbone for the discipline of art history that is a celebratory chronology of what are believed to be the most valuable and beautiful art works commissioned by public, religious bodies or wealthy individuals. Such a canon remains prominent, which is indicated by the selection of works and artists in art history textbooks. Nonetheless, since the twentieth century there has been an effort to re-define the discipline to be more inclusive of non-Western art, art made by women, and vernacular creativity through an anti-colonial critique of standard museum narratives. McMaster argues for the need to recognize other histories, and other ways of writing histories.⁴³ Indigenous art cannot be viewed through the lens of the Western art historical canon because the Western classifications of art and craft, contemporary and traditional, distort Indigenous ideas about the significance of made objects.⁴⁴ Alfred Young Man, in an essay for the catalogue of the 1992 exhibition *Indigena*, questions the practice of studying and exhibiting contemporary Native art in relation to the dominant Western frameworks of anthropology and art history, arguing that what he calls the “Native perspective” must be an integral part of any critical analysis within these disciplines. McMaster and Young Man are critiquing the way that Indigenous art is presented in museums – that it reinforces a colonial viewpoint. Building on that critique, *Stealing the Gaze* attempts an alternative presentation of Indigenous art, one that works towards a decolonization of the museum. *Stealing the Gaze* constituted an opposing voice within the colonial institution, thus representing the “other” version of Canada – the decolonized.

⁴³ McMaster (1999). 83.

⁴⁴ Ruth B. Phillips, “Art History and the Native-made object: New Discourses, Old Differences?” *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories* ed. Jackson W. Rushing. (London: Routledge Press, 1999) 98.

Decolonizing, in the most basic terms, means acknowledging the history of colonialism, working to undo its effects, and challenging and transforming institutional manifestations of colonialism.⁴⁵ Decolonization as a research methodology functions as resistance, to put Indigenous researchers in charge of their own stories. Decolonization is a process of relearning the history of colonialism and of Indigenous peoples, but not dismissing colonialism as having occurred in the past because such a dismissal both downplays the fact that it happened and ignores its effect in the present. Some writers invoke the hyphenated form “post-colonialism” as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonizing process, but others note that the term post-colonialism refers to the end of the colonial occupation – an “end” that Indigenous peoples do not believe has taken place.

As mentioned earlier, art galleries and museums are powerful ideological spaces dominated by Western aesthetics that are ripe for decolonization. In the past, museums stored and displayed the cultural production of Indigenous peoples and presented edited versions of history told from one side – the Euro-Western. The history they presented was a partial story about the West’s progress and development as if Indigenous peoples played no role in shaping Canadian identity. Indigenous peoples were merely reminders of a bygone era, and museums displayed their cultures and traditions as primitive and exotic. Thus, museums were rhetorical devices that reinforced stereotypes until Indigenous communities used their own cultural practices to curate exhibits or to create their own museums. Deborah Doxtator points out that the history of Canada remains firmly based in European, not Indigenous, ways of seeing the past. The main error, she argues, is that a European notion of history is based on difference and

⁴⁵ Laura Reinsborough and Deborah Barndt, “Decolonizing Art, Education, and Research in the VIVA Project.” *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous – non-Indigenous Relationships* ed. Lynne Davis. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 161.

exclusion, rather than interconnection and inclusion, which would require an incorporation of all these histories into a whole. European conceptions of history differ in that they are based on a linear, chronological sequence of events, a temporal organization that is inappropriate in Indigenous thought where there is no gulf between different segments of time.⁴⁶ Further, Western thought focuses on dichotomies such as civilized versus ‘savage’, or art versus craft, where these two sides are mutually exclusive and do not allow for any middle ground or the possibility of overlapping. The interrelationships between Native and European histories need to be more closely examined, rather than trying to fit Native information into Euro-based structures of history. Doxtator points out the mistake of treating of Native history as a separate or ‘parallel’ version of history, and as a source of information relevant to Western ideals of history. We should re-evaluate the history we think we know, and look at different perspectives and worldviews. Similarly, Gerald McMaster points out that there is a need to consider how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people exchanged, struggled and looked at each other because these relationships shaped the history of Canada and an interrelated history that is fundamental to Canadian identity.⁴⁷

Aboriginal art has been represented for so long from the “objective,” Eurocentric point of view of trained museum professionals, and presented from a clearly defined curatorial perspective where Aboriginal art is positioned as ‘other’, exotic, primitive, and cast in the past. This is still the case in many institutions such as galleries and museums, and the process of the production of knowledge has been widely questioned and challenged. In the context of art galleries and museums, there is an urgent need to work towards new paradigms of inclusion by

⁴⁶ Deborah Doxtator, “The Implications of Canadian Nationalism for Aboriginal Cultural Autonomy.” *Curatorship: Indigenous Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies*. (Hull, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996) 37.

⁴⁷ Gerald McMaster, “Our (Inter) Related History.” *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery* ed. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg. (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002) 3.

Aboriginal curators in order to shift the curatorial authority imposed by those institutions. For example Moira G. Simpson notes that “control over the exhibition process enables Indigenous curators to present the native view in the public arena,”⁴⁸ referring to the need for exhibitions that question the traditional authority of the institution in order to bring out the voices of the Indigenous peoples. However, as Lee-Ann Martin, the curator of Contemporary Aboriginal Art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, points out, it is difficult in many situations when Eurocentric scholars and curators continue to be recognized as the authoritative voices; and when exhibitions of Indigenous art, even contemporary Indigenous art, are done from the Western point of view Aboriginal artists and curators and writers need to be able to speak loudly and have their authority recognized, and Indigenous systems of knowledge need to be respected.⁴⁹

One of the key elements of the decolonizing process is to question and rethink how knowledge is produced and transmitted. In the past, research has been done on Indigenous peoples by Western scientists, and this research has been done from the Eurocentric point of view. The long history of this research has also led to the subjugation and discrediting of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the silencing of Indigenous voices. This remains a problem today for many Indigenous scholars who are struggling to have Indigenous methodologies recognized as legitimate research. Writers like Margaret Kovach and Linda Tuhiwai Smith point out that the problem with research on Aboriginal cultures is that researchers, or in the context of museums and galleries, curators, assume control over the subject of their study, silencing Indigenous voices in the process. The knowledge that First Nations peoples hold about themselves and their cultures has been obscured for too long by another kind of knowledge

⁴⁸ Moira G. Simpson, “Voices of Authorship.” *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*. (New York: Routledge, 1996) 58.

⁴⁹ Lee-Ann Martin, “Wordplay: Issues of Authority and Territory.” *Making a Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*. Ed. Lee-Ann Martin. (Banff: Banff Centre, 2004) 104.

constructed about Indigenous people by others.⁵⁰ Currently, one of the problems lies within the vocabulary of research. The word research has a negative connotation because Indigenous peoples have been researched by Western scientists as an exotic subject of study for the purpose of classification and assimilation.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that to decolonize knowledge, the power to tell the stories of Indigenous peoples needs to be taken away from Western researchers. Decolonized knowledge can be produced when the assumptions of Eurocentric scholarship and knowledge systems are critiqued and set aside to privilege and work with the knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples. Similarly, Margaret Kovach stresses the need to decolonize the self and the institution: by exploring values of knowledge and how it shapes practice and creates power; by knowing the history – of colonization and of Indigenous people within the academy; by moving beyond the Indigenous exotic – avoiding the ‘Curtis lens’; by supporting and growing Indigenous scholarship; by valuing Indigenous research and scholarship and not conforming to Western academic customs; by redefining roles and questioning the place of non-Indigenous scholars within Indigenous scholarship; and most importantly by engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems and with Indigenous peoples, communities and cultures.⁵¹ Smith and Kovach outline the importance of decolonizing methodologies that demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research. Indigenous knowledges can never be standardized because they are in relation to specific places or persons. It is important to focus on the decolonization of research methodologies, meaning rejecting the

⁵⁰ Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “Kinds of Knowing.” *Land Spirit Power*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 80.

⁵¹ Margaret Kovach, “Situating Indigenous Research in the Academy.” *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) 169-172.

singular ‘history’ told from the perspective of the colonizers that creates stereotypes about the colonized, and aims towards understanding and acceptance of multiple histories.

The NGC has in the past two decades, but mainly since the creation of a Department of Indigenous Art, made efforts to include various worldviews in their presentation of contemporary Indigenous art and made a strong commitment to contemporary Indigenous art. This is exemplified in the exhibition *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, and the Gallery’s continuing dedication to promoting contemporary Indigenous arts and artists. Before *Steeling the Gaze*, there was one exhibition at the NGC that challenged the way contemporary Aboriginal art has been presented in the past; *Land Spirit Power* was influenced by, and influenced, some important developments at the NGC, such as the formation of the Task Force, the report that followed, and the formation of the Indigenous art department. *Land Spirit Power* was a temporary exhibition, which resulted in the purchase of several works for the NGC’s permanent collection. Similarly, several works by the artists in *Steeling the Gaze* were purchased for the permanent collection. Another important step in the NGC’s continuing commitment to Aboriginal art is the Gallery’s plan for quinquennial exhibitions of transnational contemporary Indigenous art, the first of which was 2013’s *Sakahàn*. One of the NGC’s most ambitious exhibitions, *Sakahàn* brought together more than 150 works of recent Indigenous art by over 80 artists from 16 countries, signifying the Gallery’s ongoing commitment to the study and appreciation of Indigenous art.

At the NGC, the attempt to decolonize the museum was undertaken by curators who decided to put together a decolonizing exhibition in an institution that had not been very successful in the exhibition of Aboriginal art in the past. Using Lee-Ann Martin’s analysis of hard and soft inclusion, the creation of the Indigenous art curatorial department, the creation of

the two-year curatorial internships for Indigenous curators and the increased number of acquisitions and exhibitions of works by contemporary Indigenous artists are clear examples of hard inclusion. However, this does not make the NGC decolonized – in fact there is still much more progress to be done in that area. Returning to *Steeling the Gaze*, the exhibition constituted an advance on the part of the curators by challenging curatorial authority and institutional authority, and shifting the institution's control over the definition and creation of knowledge. Charlotte Townsend-Gault notes that “The construction of knowledge of and about Indigenous peoples is the history of the exercise of power.”⁵² The language of research is powerful, and Indigenous curators and writers strive to raise their voices so they are no longer silenced. In museums, this language applies to curatorial methods and to the way art is exhibited. The process of the creation of knowledge, in the case of art galleries and museums by organizing exhibitions of Aboriginal art and cultures, usually fails to consider Aboriginal ways of knowing. Writers stress the dire need for anti-oppressive research focused on collaboration, on asking questions and on building relationships. It is also important, in the process of decolonization, to address the problems with the mainstream in the art world and accept that there are many truths, each socially constructed. As Abelardo Ramos notes, difference is not necessarily negative, nor is it something that must be transcended.⁵³ The acceptance of difference creates space for dialogue and mutual respect between cultures with different histories, languages and traditions. This in turn encourages collaboration because it shifts traditional modes of curatorial practice. For Loft, as an Indigenous curator, collaboration happens naturally, while working with other

⁵² Townsend-Gault, 82.

⁵³ Joanne Rappaport and Abelardo Ramos Pacho, “Collaboration and Historical Writing: Challenges for the Indigenous – Academic Dialogue.” *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, Knowledge and Language in the Americas*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) 133.

Aboriginal artists and scholars, but it was a strength that he brought to the NGC and developed through his collaboration with Andrea Kunard.

Steeling the Gaze was a decolonizing exhibition in the way in which the curators researched, organized and displayed the exhibition. The curators of the exhibition were engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems and with Indigenous peoples by not entirely adhering to Western systems of presentation of art such as avoiding textual interpretation of the works shown. The curators framed the works differently than what might be found in traditional exhibitions by not making the displays didactic; this is especially notable because the NGC tends to be very didactic in its presentation of works. The curators limited the information given about the works in order to allow the objects to speak for themselves, and to engage in a dialogue with the other works to open up meaning. Not fixing the information for the viewers was an important curatorial strategy because it had the potential to make viewers uncomfortable by presenting images that are confrontational. The photographs in *Steeling the Gaze* presented images that the viewers were not used to, a positive strategy of defamiliarization based on the premise that the familiar is the colonial. Here, familiar images of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous artists, accompanied by lengthy text ‘explaining’ their culture, were rejected in favour of more reflexive self-representations. Steven Loft notes: “One of the ways to make people think about how they see the Aboriginal people is to confuse them, and not give it to them on a platter. You’ve got to work with it, and the more you get used to seeing this kind of work, the more that will become apparent for people.”⁵⁴ His remark was pointed specifically towards Arthur Renwick’s *Masks* – large-scale close-up portraits of Indigenous peoples contorting their faces. Rather than explaining

⁵⁴ Steven Loft. Personal interview. April 22, 2013.

the premise of this work, the curators left it to the viewers to think about what the expressions of the sitters mean.

One of Loft and Kunard's aims in *Steeling the Gaze* was to de-centre institutional and curatorial authority in the exhibition. They also sought to encourage multi-vocality in the exhibition by collaborating with the artists and encouraging the public to actively question what they were being shown. The de-centering of institutional authority was exemplified in the curatorial statement that was presented at the entrance of the exhibition and signed by the two co-curators. This practice of curatorial acknowledgement is unusual for the NGC, which traditionally presents the institution as 'author' of the exhibition. In this instance, the curators were named, authoring the exhibition, and their voices were placed at the forefront of the exhibition and functioned as an introduction to the works shown. Thus, the curators were being explicit about their role in the organization of the exhibition. They showed their author function so that it was more evident to the viewers, to show that the exhibition is a narrative being "spoken" by named curators.

In addition to the opening statement, the curatorial choices in *Steeling the Gaze* show that Loft and Kunard aimed to privilege the voices of the artists over the authority of the curators or the institution. Decolonization as a research methodology functions as resistance, to put Indigenous people in charge of their own stories. History is often told from the perspective of the colonizers as the story of a specific form of domination and this approach has been applied in many exhibitions of Aboriginal art. The collaboration between a Native and a non-Native curator in *Steeling the Gaze* was a step in the NGC's effort to engage with and validate new ways of knowing. An important part of Indigenous knowledge is being involved in an active dialogue with the people and this is visible on many levels in *Steeling the Gaze*. The two curators from

two distinct backgrounds – culturally and professionally – collaborated together, by bringing the collections of the NGC and the CMCP together as well. More importantly, the curators created dialogue between the artists themselves through the curatorial choices, and maintained collaboration between the curators and the artists. As an important methodological strategy of decolonization, collaboration transforms research because it leads to questions being asked differently, and people participating on different terms.

The privileging of Aboriginal voices is perhaps the most important decolonizing strategy. The dialogue between the artists is visible in the way of organizing the works in connection to the quotes on the walls, what they say about each other and how they relate to each other. Quotes by the artists accompanied the works rather than curators' input, which created dialogue between the artists about identity, tradition, history and the importance of reclaiming stereotyped images from historic depictions of Aboriginal peoples. The lack of curatorial text in the exhibition illustrated the changing role of the curator as sharing, rather than representing, authority. Works by different generations of artists was included to generate a connection between the past and the present, and to assert the continuity of culture, history and tradition for Aboriginal peoples. As mentioned earlier, in Indigenous thought there is no gulf between different segments of time in history, as opposed to the European conception of history based on a linear, chronological sequence of events. The dialogue between the artists and the curators is exemplified in the numerous emails discussing details about organizing the exhibition, explaining the layout, collaborating with the artists on ideas concerning which works to display together and getting the artists' statements that were incorporated on the walls of the exhibit. Most importantly, the curators asked the artists to decide how they want to be designated on the labels and in the catalogue, transferring the authority to the artists and moving away from the colonizing act of

prescribing identities to these artists. Most writers on decolonization argue that in order to decolonize institutions, it takes more than just mutual respect or “tolerance” – it requires a profound revisioning of values and methods.

Stealing the Gaze was a significant exhibition that attempted the decolonization of the museum and of curatorial practices. Steven Loft notes that the process of decolonization takes place at all levels of Indigenous interaction: between Indigenous peoples, and between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous communities and institutions. A decolonizing exhibition demands a level of commitment on the part of viewers to “re-understand” Canada’s colonial history and to allow themselves to begin the process of decolonization.⁵⁵ However, the exhibition could have been taken further to indigenize the Western institutional framework of the exhibition by incorporating other media such as song, movement, and performance; encouraging participation and interactivity; and expanding beyond the gallery walls, spilling into the halls, the streets and cyberspace.⁵⁶ As Heather Igloliorte notes in her essay “‘No History of Colonialism’: Decolonizing Practices in Indigenous Arts” for the exhibition *Decolonize Me*, it is important to reframe knowledge through the reclamation of offensive images that portray stereotypical and formulaic Aboriginal people, in order to Indigenize the existing but unsuitable and fabricated media representations of Aboriginal peoples.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that *Stealing the Gaze* was a significant exhibition that pushed the idea of collaboration beyond anything that had been done previously at the National Gallery. The exhibition’s important precursor was *Land Spirit Power* from 1992 that

⁵⁵ Steven Loft, “Who, me? Decolonization as Control.” *Decolonize Me*. (Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012) 82.

⁵⁶ Heather Igloliorte, “‘No History of Colonialism’: Decolonizing Practices in Indigenous Arts.” *Decolonize Me*. (Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012) 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

was developed amid institutional changes at the NGC, and at a time when it, along with other institutions, were rethinking their treatment of Indigenous art. This led to the building of a collection of Aboriginal art at the NGC, regular display of works within the galleries, establishment of curatorial positions to care for and expand this collection, and broadening of the mandate beyond Aboriginal art of North America. Therefore, an exhibition like *Stealing the Gaze* was made possible. The artists and curators involved in *Stealing the Gaze* brought a new approach to displaying contemporary Indigenous art by focusing on collaboration.

The curators had decided to organize the exhibition around the issues of portraiture because it becomes a cultural signifier and shared expression of both communal and individual identity.⁵⁸ Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft recognized the need to apply a specific decolonizing analysis that reveals the degree to which Indigenous knowledges have been marginalized within Western research processes, and this is visible in the organization of *Stealing the Gaze*. The long-term strengths of the exhibition include it leading to the National Gallery's further acquisitions of works of contemporary Indigenous artists, some of which were included in *Stealing the Gaze*. Furthermore, in 2009, the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective's (ACC) curator camp, co-organized by the Canada Council for the Arts, included presentations by Greg Hill, the Audain Curator of Indigenous Art; Linda Grussani, the curatorial assistant; Steve Loft, the Aboriginal curator-in-residence; and a keynote address by Barry Ace, the co-founder of ACC. The camp was a collaborative exchange of mentoring, curatorial practices and strategies, round table discussions and networking opportunities. The fourth annual gathering coincided with the opening of the Daphne Odjig exhibition at the NGC, allowing the participants to meet the artist and view some of her work.

⁵⁸ Steven Loft, "Looking Out, Looking In." *Vernissage*. (Winter 2009) 23.

In the summer of 2013, the NGC hosted the biggest exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art yet. *Sakahàn* included more than 150 works of recent Indigenous art by over 80 artists from 16 countries around the world. The artworks in *Sakahàn* provide diverse responses to what it means to be Indigenous today. The exhibition was curated by Greg Hill, the National Gallery's Audain Curator of Indigenous Art; Christine Lalonde, the Associate Curator of Indigenous Art; and Candice Hopkins, the Elizabeth Simonfay Guest Curator. Other than presenting works on two levels in the NGC and on its outdoor premises, several artists were represented in numerous art galleries across Ottawa. In addition, the website created a good occasion for dialogue, presenting interviews by several artists, background on the exhibition, and numerous activities. *Sakahàn* marked the first in a series of quinquennial exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art at the National Gallery. The exhibition catalogue is also an excellent collection of essays on contemporary Indigenous art around the world.

Sakahàn marks real progress made by the NGC because it was its biggest accomplishment in terms of channelling communication about issues in contemporary Indigenous art. It was a decolonizing exhibition, much like *Steeling the Gaze* that happened at the NGC five years earlier. It is important to also note that *Steeling the Gaze* has been travelling across Canada since its origin at the NGC, the most recent venue being the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon in 2013. In the way it was curated and the lessons learned from it, *Steeling the Gaze* can be looked at as a model of a decolonizing exhibition. It was the first exhibition of its kind at the NGC and was successful in its goals. Although it was a small exhibition, it opened up new ways of thinking about, researching and presenting Indigenous art. *Sakahàn* took up the idea of continuing dialogue in the exhibition of Indigenous art on a much larger scale, and this

exhibition went even further in decolonizing the gallery space by including media such as dance and song, and spilling outside of the gallery spaces to create an all-inclusive environment.

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⁵⁹ The article is no longer available on this website. Another version of Langford's article, in French, is "Pour la défense du Musée Canadien de la Photographie Canadienne." *Ciel Variable* 82 (June-September 2009) 69-70.

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Figures



Figure 1: Unknown Artist, *Model Crest Pole*, c. 1885.



Figure 2: Charlie Sivuarapik, *Mother and Child*, c. 1955.



Figure 3: Kenojuak Ashevak, *Enchanted Owl*, 1960.



Figure 4: Carl Beam, *The North American Iceberg*, 1985.

	Dana Claxton	Shelley Niro (video)	Rosalie Favell	
Jeff Thomas	Arthur Renwick	KC Adams	K. Monkman, C. Beam, S. Niro	Thirza Cuthand (video)
			Greg Staats	Bear Witness (video)
Rosalie Favell, Jeff Thomas, Carl Beam, David Neel				

Figure 5: *Stealing the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, layout of the exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 6: Edward S. Curtis, *Kikisoblu ("Princess Angeline") of the Duwamish*, 1896.



Figure 7: Arthur Renwick, *Monique*, from the series “Masks”, 2006.



Figure 8: Jeff Thomas, 1710-1990 / *Sa Ga Yeath Pieth Tow - Mohawk (Christianized Brant)*, 1710/1998 / Steve Thomas - *Onondaga, Six Nations Reserve (Smoothtown)* 1990, 1998.



Figure 9: Dana Claxton, *Family Portrait (Indians on a Blanket)*, from “Mustang Series”, 2008.



Figure 10: David Neel, *Catherine Adams / Born 1903. Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw, Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw Reserve, British Columbia, 1990.* / *Catherine Adams / Born 1903. Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw, Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw Reserve, British Columbia, 1991.*



Figure 11: David Neel, *Chief Elijah Harper / Born 1947. Red Sucker Lake, Manitoba, 1992.*



Figure 12: KC Adams, *Cyborg Hybrid Roger* (visual artist): "SNIFFER", from the "Cyborg Hybrids" series, 2006.



Figure 13: Kent Monkman, *The Emergence of a Legend*, 2006.

Appendix A

The following is a list of the works shown in *Stealing the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists at the National Gallery of Canada*. The works are listed in the hanging order.

Jeff Thomas	<i>The Delegate Visits London England, King Street</i>	2006, printed 2008	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2009
Jeff Thomas	<i>The Delegate at the Highway 17 Hiawatha Wampum Belt, Arnprior, Ontario</i>	2006, printed 2008	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2009
Jeff Thomas	<i>Bear at Champlain Monument, Ottawa Ontario</i>	1996	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>Shoe Shine "Parlour", Buffalo, New York</i>	1982	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>Car Wash, Buffalo, New York</i>	1983	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>Kam Lee Laundry, Buffalo, New York</i>	1982	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>Culture Revolution, Toronto, Ontario/ Two Moons – Cheyenne, 1910</i>	1984	Gelatin silver diptych	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>1710-1998/Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row – Mohawk (Christianized Hendrick), Emperor of the Six Nations, 1710/1998 / Self-portrait – Onondage, Champlain Monument, Ottawa, Ontario 1998</i>	1998	Chromogenic prints	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>1710/1990/Sa Ga Yeath Pieth Tow – Mohawk (Christianized Brant), 1710/1998 / Steve Thomas – Onondaga, Six Nations Reserve (Smoothtown) 1990</i>	1998	Chromogenic print and gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>1997-1710/Joe David – Mohawk, Kanasatake, Quebec 1997 / Etow Oh Koam – Mohawk (Christianized Nicholas), 1710/1998</i>	1998	Gelatin silver print and chromogenic print	CMCP Purchased 2001

Jeff Thomas	<i>1710-1998/Ho Nee Yeath Taw No Row – Mohawk (Christianized John), 1710/1998 / Arnold Boyer – Mohawk, Department of Indian Affairs Building, Hull, Quebec 1998</i>	1998	Chromogenic prints (ektacolor)	CMCP Purchased 2001
Jeff Thomas	<i>Dream/Escape/Alberta First Nations Warriors on Horseback 1901 / Bear Thomas at the General Store, Toronto, Ontario 1994</i>	1998 1998	Gelatin silver diptych	CMCP Purchased 2001
Dana Claxton	<i>Mama Has a Pony (Girl Named History and Sets Her Free)</i>	2008	Dye coupler print	NGC Purchased 2009
Dana Claxton	<i>Family Portrait (Indians on a Blanket)</i>	2008	Dye coupler print	NGC Purchased 2009
Dana Claxton	<i>Baby Girlz Gotta Mustang</i>	2008	Dye coupler print	NGC Purchased 2009
Dana Claxton	<i>Baby Boyz Gotta Indian Horse</i>	2008	Dye coupler print	NGC Purchased 2009
Dana Claxton	<i>Daddy's Gotta New Ride</i>	2008	Dye coupler print	NGC Purchased 2009
Arthur Renwick	<i>Michael</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
Arthur Renwick	<i>Tom</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
Arthur Renwick	<i>Jani</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
Arthur Renwick	<i>Eden</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
Arthur Renwick	<i>Monique</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid Cathy (curator/writer): "TOKEN INDIAN"</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2007
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid Tim (visual</i>	2006	Ink jet print	NGC

	<i>artist): "NOBLE SAVAGE"</i>			Purchased 2007
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid Jen</i> (filmmaker): "AKS ME ABOUT MY SWEETHGRASS"	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2007
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid Roger</i> (visual artist): "SNIFFER"	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2007
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid Niki</i> (visual artist/videographer): "GANG MEMBER"	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2007
KC Adams	<i>Cyborg Hybrid KC</i> (visual artist): "INDIAN PRINCESS"	2006	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2007
Shelley Niro	<i>The Shirt</i>	2003	Digital video disk (DVD), 5:55 minutes	NGC Purchased 2007
Shelley Niro	<i>Overweight with Crooked Teeth</i>	1997	Digital video disk (DVD), 5:00 minutes	NGC Purchased 2008
Rosalie Favell	<i>Ann E. Visits Emily</i>	2007	Ink jet print	Collection of the artist
Rosalie Favell	<i>The Artist in Her Museum</i>	2005	Ink jet print on rag paper	NGC Purchased 2008
Rosalie Favell	<i>Searching For My Mother</i>	2003	Ink jet print	NGC Purchased 2008
Thirza Cuthand	<i>Through the Looking Glass</i>	1999	Videotape transferred to DVD, 13:54 minutes	NGC Purchased 2008
Thirza Cuthand	<i>Working Baby Dyke Theory: The Diasporic Impact of Cross Generational Barriers</i>	1999	Videotape transferred to DVD, 4:00 minutes	NGC Purchased 2008
Shelley Niro	<i>Time Travels Through Us</i>	1999	Gelatin silver print, cotton and beaded mat work, silver painted wood frame	CMCP Purchased 2002
Carl Beam	<i>Gan Dancers</i>	1991	Photo emulsion transfer on plexi mounted in wood cabinet	CMCP Purchased 1991
Kent Monkman	<i>The Emergence of a Legend</i>	2006	Portfolio containing 5 chromogenic prints on metallic	CMCP Purchased 2008

			paper, fabric, frames	
Greg Staats	<i>Accept Loss</i>	1995, printed 1996	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 1996
Greg Staats	<i>Breathe</i>	1995	Gelatin silver print with collage	CMCP Purchased 1996
Ehren Thomas (aka Bear Witness)	<i>Broke Dick Dog</i>	2008	Videotape transferred to DVD, 4:30 minutes	Collection of the artist
David Neel	<i>Bill Reid/Born 1920. Haida, Vancouver, British Columbia</i>	1991	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 1992
David Neel	<i>Catherine Adams/Born 1903. Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw, Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw Reserve, British Columbia</i>	1991	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 1992
David Neel	<i>Catherine Adams/Born 1903. Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw, Gwa'sala'Nakwaxda'xw Reserve, British Columbia</i>	1991	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 1992
David Neel	<i>Chief Elijah Harper/Born 1947. Red Sucker Lake, Manitoba</i>	1992	Gelatin silver print	CMCP Purchased 1992
Carl Beam	<i>Z</i>	1991	Photo emulsion on paper with coloured crayon and coloured ink	CMCP Purchased 1991
Carl Beam	<i>Originator No. 2</i>	1991	Photo emulsion on paper with coloured crayon and coloured ink	CMCP Purchased 1991
Jeff Thomas	<i>Warriors Rule</i>	2008	Chromogenic print	Collection of the artist
David Neel	<i>Heroes #1 – Sitting Bull</i>	1992	Etching, photo- etching and aquatint	CMCP Purchased 1992
David Neel	<i>A Strong Law Bids Us Dance</i>	1992	Etching, photo- etching and aquatint	CMCP Purchased 1992
Rosalie Favell	<i>Sherry I / From the Series Plain(s)</i>	2009	Ink jet print	Collection of the artist