

Sincere Irony and Crafting Critique:
Institutional Memory in Ursula Johnson's *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the exhibition by contemporary artist Ursula Johnson entitled *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* (2014-2018), through three sets of sometimes conflicting forces: history and memory, nostalgia and irony, and active and passive viewer participation. The exhibition is analyzed through Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall's philosophy of two eyed seeing, which seeks to blend together Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems in a way that benefits both ways of thinking. This thesis begins by exploring the historical evolution of museums as sites which reinforce colonialism, and how Johnson utilizes public familiarity with these institutions through mimicry in order to draw attention to this aspect of institutional spaces. From there, I analyze Johnson's use of parodic irony and reflective nostalgia through the embodiment of the Indigenous figure of the Trickster both as a form of healing from colonial violence, and looking toward a future of Indigenous cultural resurgence. The final section of this thesis examines the role of the Mi'kmaq worldview of Netukulimk in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, examining how the focus on connection in Netukulimk is utilized through viewer participation throughout the exhibition. This thesis ultimately concludes that Ursula Johnson's *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* functions as a site of imagining ways in which the colonial institutions of museums can instead be used as a tool for decolonization.

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Introduction: “Regimes of Memory” in *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*

Upon introduction to contemporary artist Ursula Johnson’s traveling exhibition *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* (2014-2018), the audience is presented with double layers of meaning. The Mi’kmaq word which makes up the main part of the title, ‘mi’kwite’tmn,’ holds two possible meanings. It can be used as a question or a statement, which translates to English as “do you remember?” or “you do remember.” This two-fold meaning carries throughout the exhibition which enacts what Eskasoni Mi’kmaq elder Albert Marshall refers to as ‘two eyed seeing.’ Marshall’s philosophy aims to blend together the best principles of Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems for the betterment of all.¹ *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* is framed through the Western museum, using the institutional legacy and familiar structure as a site from which to critically examine the fraught relationship between Mi’kmaq artistic cultural production and colonial institutions. While the principles of two eyed seeing are not explicitly stated by Johnson as a component of her work, I argue this is a fruitful framing device with which to explore *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*. This thesis will explore the ways in which Johnson blends together the contradictory dynamics of personal memory and public history, irony and nostalgia, as well as active and passive audience participation, in order to critically engage with the past while looking towards the future.

Ursula Johnson (b. 1980) is a Mi’kmaw interdisciplinary artist, originally from Eskasoni First Nation on Unama’ki, more commonly known to settler-Canadians as Cape Breton Island. Johnson completed her BFA at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 2008 and currently resides in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Prior to the exhibition *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* Johnson’s artistic practice had been primarily performance-based. Even though she has also previously created objects for her work, these have usually been ephemeral pieces related to specific performances rather than finished or stand-alone artworks. One such example can be found in Johnson’s series *Basket Weaving (Cultural Cocoon)* (2003-2015), where during the performance she weaves a basket around her body, which is then partially destroyed as she emerges. *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* thus marks a departure for Johnson, drawing together her previous engagements with performance with the addition of new practices

¹ “Guiding Principles (Two Eyed Seeing),” *Institute for Integrative Science Cape Breton University*. (n.d) <http://www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/>.

including the creation of permanent objects and installation work. The non-ephemeral works that Johnson has created for this exhibition include the fabrication of glass cases which mimic museological displays and a body of contemporary experimental Mi'kmaq baskets made of ash wood.

Johnson's exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* serves as a nuanced reflection on the relationships between identity, cultural survival, and colonial museum practices. This thesis examines how Johnson uses the exhibition to question the ways in which institutions, such as museums, aid in the formation of both public and private memory.² Throughout this thesis, I consider museums according to what authors Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone refer to as "regimes of memory," where our understanding of collective memory can be placed in a framework of power relations linked to political and social ideology. Speaking to these regimes, Hodgkin and Radstone state:

[H]istory and memory [are] produced by historically specific and contestable systems of knowledge and power and that what history and memory produce as knowledge is also contingent upon the (contestable) systems of knowledge and power that produce them. This is of course not to deny that memory may contest history, but it is to insist that neither memory nor history is 'outside' systems of knowledge and power.³

To consider museums as "regimes of memory" is to think of such institutions as sites that hold positions of influence and power within the general public and particularly over the marginalized populations represented within. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century* (1997) cultural anthropologist James Clifford discusses this power dynamic between colonial museums and Indigenous populations, referring to the spaces in which Indigenous communities and museums encounter each other as "contact zones."⁴ This is a term that he borrows from Mary Louise Pratt, who describes contact zones as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and

² In this thesis, the term 'colonial museum' is used to refer to museums that are historically based in colonial ideology. This term is used in this thesis, instead of simply saying 'museum,' in order to indicate that there are many types of museums, some of which have been created within the latter half of the past century with a curatorial aim of working against issues related to colonialist structures.

³ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, Introduction to *Regimes of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 11.

⁴ James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones" in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192.

intractable conflict.”⁵ Much the same way as a museum, even when attempting to address its own history of colonialism, still maintains its authority and position of power within these spaces of encounter, I am aware that my own position as a settler researcher writing on Indigenous art is also situated within the same ongoing and sometimes problematic history. I have therefore attempted to approach this work with an understanding of the biases that may come with my privileged position, reminding me to put Johnson’s voice and other intellectual and artistic contributions at the centre of this thesis.

Exhibition Structure

The exhibition *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* features three main spaces, respectively titled ‘The Museological Grand Hall,’ ‘The Archive Room,’ and the ‘Performative Space.’ In each of these spaces, Johnson utilizes aspects of museum display; she subverts, questions, and highlights the white cube’s presumed neutrality through her mimicry of its forms and conventions. At the exhibition’s entrance a fourteen-minute video, which plays on a loop, is available for visitors to listen to through a set of headphones (Fig. 1). This video serves as the only didactic information for the exhibition. There is no written information explaining the intent of the exhibition. In the first section of *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*, the ‘Museological Grand Hall,’ the viewer is presented with a room of empty Plexiglas vitrines on wooden plinths (Fig. 2). Etched into each vitrine’s side is a drawing by Johnson of baskets created by her great-grandmother, master basket maker Caroline Gould. The drawings have been executed in the style of anthro-scientific diagrams; each basket is labeled with the Mi’kmaq words for each section of the basket (Fig. 3). In the second section, the ‘Archival Room,’ the viewer finds a collection of basket forms on steel shelves lining the room (Fig. 4). In the centre of this space there are two computer stations, each with a barcode scanner and a set of white gloves. Each basket has a small tag with a barcode, and a serial number with the Mi’kmaq word ‘O’pltek’ – meaning, in English, ‘not quite right’ (Fig. 5). The computer screen prompts the viewer to don the white gloves, and scan the barcode on each basket, which then retrieves information on the object including title, description, material, and collection (Fig. 6). In the third and final section, the ‘Performative Space,’ the visitor encounters Johnson performing a preparation of an ash-wood log for making a basket (Fig. 7).

⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6-7.

Rather than preparing the log properly, Johnson uses this multi-day endurance performance to intentionally act as someone without the knowledge to properly undertake the complex process. During this time, Johnson interacts with viewers, and invites them into the space to discuss the work in the exhibition and her performance process (Fig. 8). By the performance's end, Johnson has sacrificed the entire log into scraps on the floor. These scraps, her tools, and her clothing are left in the space for the remainder of the exhibition (Fig. 9). There is also a fourth aspect to the exhibition, where the host gallery organizes a talk, either by Johnson or facilitated by Johnson, which addresses the topics in the exhibition that local communities wish to discuss further. For example, the discussion that took place at the Grenfell Campus Art Gallery at Memorial University in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, addressed issues of Mi'kmaq language revival specific to the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq communities.

Chapter Organization

This thesis is organized into three chapters, many of which may have overlapping themes or arguments that address specific aspects of *Mi'kiwte'tmn (Do You Remember)*. Each chapter explores different relationships between two seemingly oppositional forces, and addresses the ways in which Johnson utilizes these tensions throughout the exhibition. The first chapter, "Institutions of Memory: Between Public and Personal Histories," discusses the evolution of the colonial museum's collection and display practices, as well as the professions associated with the creation and maintenance of museums, such as archivists and curators. This chapter explores the formal approaches used in colonial museums to build collective memory, and the techniques utilized by Johnson to disrupt the presumed neutrality of these spaces. I provide a brief overview of ethnographic museum display paradigms, and how museums have (in the past and in many ways, still today) functioned to reinforce harmful stereotypes and perceptions of Indigenous peoples, especially in regard to the troubling tendency of ethnographic institutions to relegate Indigenous peoples to the past. I explore some of the ways that museums function as institutions of memory, how they work to shape perceptions of one's own memory, and how they can be implicated in the construction of memory.

In "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Trickster: Envisioning Indigenous Futures," I address Johnson's use of parody, irony, and nostalgia in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* as tools to critically examine the colonial museum. In this chapter, I discuss parody as a subversive and

empowering technique for speaking back to the museum. Furthermore, I examine how Johnson uses parody and irony in combination with nostalgia to honour the importance of personal memory in shaping identity, and acknowledge the role that museums can play in this process. This chapter explores the ways in which parody and irony, specifically through Indigenous Trickster mythologies, can be used to recall memory and create healing in an indirect manner. I examine the relationship between the parodic humour found in Indigenous Trickster mythology and its relationship with nostalgia. I explain how Johnson utilizes irony and nostalgia together to address active involvement with institutional critique.

The final chapter, “Netukulimk and Two eyed Seeing: Enacting Resistance,” examines the significance of performance and collective action in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*. I look at the audience's role in the activation of the work, as well as the role of outside sources used by Johnson in the design and naming of the baskets in the archive. I discuss how collective action can be used to disrupt the colonial museum's grand narratives that favour the settler gaze. As well, I speak to the ways in which Johnson implicates the viewer within this exhibition through her performance not only in the 'Performative Space,' but throughout the exhibition. This chapter explores the position of the viewer through the framework of Netukulimk or “Two Eyed Seeing,” the Mi'kmaq worldview which creates a space to consider and reconcile settler and Indigenous ways of seeing, thinking about, and connecting to the work. I address the position of the viewer within the exhibition through active participation and viewer passivity, and how these roles can shift meaning throughout the exhibition.

Drawing on Johnson's own framing of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, which emerged from my conversations with the artists and from the exhibition itself, this thesis examines the key dualities that the artist has engaged in throughout the exhibition. Johnson employs these themes to critique, and to draw our attention to, colonial practices within institutions and broader society. While this thesis is framed in terms of dualities, it also must be acknowledged that although this is a concise framing device for discussing the research, no one viewer will fit neatly into one category or another. Each viewer will come to the exhibition with their own experiences and expectations that will inform their interpretations of Johnson's work, including differing types of critical engagement with museums, contemporary art galleries, and Indigenous art. Through my discussion of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* and Johnson's interaction and relationship with viewers through it, I am highlighting only some of the themes

addressed by Johnson, and only some of the possible interpretations and enactments that viewers may experience within the exhibition. Focusing on Johnson's important work, this thesis thus aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on the representation and display of Indigenous art objects in museum spaces, as well as the critical role that contemporary Indigenous artists can play in these decolonializing efforts.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

My research is centered on and informed by Johnson's own words on her work, and supported by the work of Indigenous and settler scholars whose writing focuses on the relationships between colonialism and museum histories, craft practices and nostalgia, Indigenous storytelling and healing, and the performative nature of the Mi'kmaq worldview of Netukulimk. Early in my research for this thesis I attended the opening week of events of Johnson's *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* exhibition at the Grenfell Campus University Gallery at Memorial University in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, which was installed in the gallery from September 24 to December 12, 2015. While there I attended the community workshop on language held in conjunction with the exhibition at Memorial University. I also attended Johnson's performance, and visited with the artist. Later that fall I conducted an interview with Johnson in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The information gathered from this interview as well as my own experience of visiting the exhibition significantly informed my subsequent research into the writings of Indigenous and settler scholars whose work engages in such topics as critical museology, settler-colonial art histories and decolonial practices, including Tony Bennett, Gerald Vizenor, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Kristina Fagan and others. I have attempted to approach all of this research under the principles of what Mi'kmaq elder Albert Marshall refers to as 'two eyed-seeing,' a philosophy which aims to combine Western and Indigenous thought for the advancement of both knowledge systems.⁶ Although Johnson does not refer to this philosophy when speaking on the exhibition, it is in keeping with Johnson's own perspective on museums as institutions that have been significant in upholding the colonial project, yet which can also act as potentially powerful sites of decolonization. In *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* Johnson does not simply critique or dismiss these institutions, but rather uses the exhibition as an point of entry to begin a critical

⁶ "Guiding Principles (Two Eyed Seeing),"

conversation on past practices while subtly pointing to ways in which museums could do better by Indigenous peoples in the future.

Chapter 1. Institutions of Memory: Between Public and Personal Histories

Ursula Johnson's *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* critically examines the museum's historical and contemporary roles, including the roles of the professions associated with arts and ethnographic institutions. To do so, the artist holds a mirror up to the museum, both challenging and addressing its colonial history through her employment of longstanding museological conventions, while also suggesting that the museum holds potential as a site of decolonization through her subtle subversion of those same classification and display paradigms. This chapter addresses the museum histories that Johnson is examining through her exhibition and explores how she weaves together these complicated institutional histories with personal memories and Mi'kmaq cultural practices. I argue that Johnson utilizes these histories as a way to speak to complex underlying power structures existing throughout society, as well as a way to address the relationships between different types of memory, both personal and collective.

When the viewer enters *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, the initial space they experience is the 'Museological Grand Hall.' The vitrines are well lit and spaced evenly throughout the room. While the vitrines are empty, the viewer soon realizes that these display cases are themselves the objects presented within the space. The 'Museological Grand Hall' is reminiscent of museum spaces, and the images etched on the Plexiglas surface of the cases resembles the anthro-scientific diagrams and fieldwork drawings that were popular in both nineteenth-century museums and ethnographic publications. As museum studies scholar Eileen Hooper-Greenhill indicates, this category of display – that is, using plinths and vitrines to hold objects – is a calculated choice in museums and has a history in their nineteenth-century formation. The display controls how the viewer's body moves through the space; they foreground observation, forbid touch, and force a clear path throughout the room.⁷ It is because these kinds of displays are so common in museums that the differences created by Johnson's intervention becomes apparent. Once the viewer is aware that the cases in the room are empty, they become cognizant of the fact that there is a shifted context for the objects that they are encountering.

⁷ Eileen Hooper-Greenhill. "Exhibitions and Interpretation: Museum Pedagogy and Cultural Change" in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge 2000), 129.

Johnson creates this shift in a way that moves her work out of the neutrality that is often associated with museums. While it has been argued that museums are not, in fact, neutral spaces, they are designed to be perceived as such. Hooper-Greenhill indicates that this neutrality was the goal of many early museum curators, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She states, “The ideal gaze of the visitor had certain characteristics in common with the gaze of the curator who has generated the display. It was calm and measured, as neutral as possible.”⁸ Yet, by the very nature of the spaces being fashioned after the curator’s gaze, with similar people in mind, these spaces lacked any neutrality from the very beginning. Instead, these spaces were focused on the ideological desires of the curator, who were mostly highly educated, upper class, white men.⁹ The ‘Museological Grand Hall’ signifies to the viewer that there is a paradigm shift within this space. In this way, a viewer who may typically be privileged in many spaces is not considered neutral within Johnson’s exhibition.

Neutrality is important when discussing the museum’s contested contact zones that Johnson is drawing from in *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*. In part, this neutrality stems from what scholar Thomas McEvelley refers to as an ‘emic worldview.’¹⁰ He borrows the term ‘emic’ from the field of anthropology, which originally referred to writing about or observing one’s own culture.¹¹ The opposite is ‘etic,’ which is to write about or observe a culture not of one’s own. However, McEvelley does not use these concepts to refer to one’s participation in a culture, but rather, in terms of understanding cultural hierarchy. For McEvelley, those with an emic worldview see their own culture as the most important. In turn, different cultures are judged and compared based on their likeness to the central culture. An etic worldview, however, looks at cultural differences without ascribing a hierarchical relationship between cultures with a single culture as the point of comparison. During the foundation of museums in nineteenth-century Britain, cultures were studied and presented in a way that adheres to McEvelley’s idea of an emic worldview. White European museum professionals favoured their own cultural

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Margaret Conrad, “A Brief Survey of Canadian Historiography” in *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, Penney Clark, ed. (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press. 2011). 34.

¹⁰ Thomas McEvelley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, NY: Documentext/McPherson, 1992), 89.

¹¹ James L. Olive, “Reflecting on the Tensions Between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History research: Lessons Learned,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 15, no. 2 (2014). <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs140268>.

experiences, placing other cultures from around the world in a hierarchy based on their likeness to European-created universal standards.

The universalist neutral viewpoint that museums attempted to achieve was centred on European desires for power and colonial expansion. This viewpoint promoted Western notions of time and space, which divided the world along racialized hierarchies. Citing nineteenth-century anthropologist and cultural evolutionist Edward Tylor, Bennett indicates that this Euro-centric organization of time and place located the Western construct of the Other along a stratification of time based on geographical location. In a sense, this was used to indicate a belief that, almost literally, the further one travelled from Europe, the further one travelled backward in the progress of time, and thus the progression of humanity. He states,

The transformation of peoples distant from Europe into primitives representing moments of prehistory relocated them as ancestors evoking – in a new and distinctive mnemonics – memories of the long distant past but one which still survived as the bottom-most layer in the archaeological make-up of modern man.¹²

This belief in the relationship of time and space effectively removed non-Europeans from a European conception of time altogether, where they were believed to exist outside of time – in a sense, static, or without history – as living relics of the past. This false and damaging viewpoint was reinforced in the general public by museum displays. This is exemplified, for example, in the Pitt Rivers Museum, founded in 1884 when General Pitt Rivers donated his collection of over 26,000 weapons and art objects from various Indigenous cultures to Oxford University.¹³ While Pitt Rivers had initially become interested in collecting firearms, his collecting practices had quickly grown in scope, in large part due to his belief that Indigenous cultures were dead or dying and that Indigenous peoples could not or would not preserve their own objects. Scholar William R. Chapman cites Pitt Rivers directly, “As [Pitt Rivers] explained in his first lecture on primitive warfare, ‘There can be little doubt that in a few years all the most barbarous races will have disappeared from the earth, or will have ceased to preserve their native crafts,’ and reiterating in a subsequent lecture, ‘The time is fast approaching when this class of prehistoric

¹² Tony Bennett, “The Archaeological Gaze” in *Past Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 63.

¹³ “History of the Museum and Its Display,” *Pitt Rivers Museum*, Oxford University. (n.d.) <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/pittrivers>.

evidence will no longer be forthcoming.”¹⁴ By positioning North America’s Indigenous peoples as outside of space and outside of time, this viewpoint aided in the public justification of acts of colonial violence, because it positioned Indigenous peoples as outside the European conception of humanity.¹⁵ It should be noted that although the remnants of Pitt Rivers’ collecting motivations and the Victorian style of scientifically minded ethnological display can still be seen presently within the Museum (Fig. 10), in recent years the Pitt Rivers Museum has undertaken work with the global Indigenous nations and communities it represents in its collections .

Returning to Hooper-Greenhill, she outlines the differing roles between knowledge production and knowledge consumption, and how these were distinguished through the public and private museum spaces.¹⁶ These two spaces, she argues, were controlled at three different levels. The first was in regard to subject matter, which was limited to ‘fact’ that spoke to rational thought, and controlled the type of information available to the public. The second is the organization of the information in a measured way physically throughout the space, which controlled the way the information was presented to the public. The third is the way that the information was used to control the public, “to instill better behaviour, to create model citizens, to enable self-improvement within the rigidly demarcated social structures of the Victorian age.”¹⁷ This relationship between the public and private spaces of a museum is best reflected in *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* through the ‘Archive Room.’ Most museum visitors will never have the opportunity to experience a museum’s vault, and while many museums offer open storage exhibitions, few are offered the opportunity to interact with the objects .¹⁸ In *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*, however, the viewer is encouraged, via the computer screen, to inspect, hold, and scan the objects in the archive; thereby, the viewer embodies both the positions of museumgoer and researcher. Nevertheless, the viewer is asked to wear white gloves, keeping a slight though obvious physical distance from truly experiencing the objects through

¹⁴ William R. Chapman, “The Evolution of Culture” in *Ethnology in the Museum: A.H.L.F. Pitt Rivers (1827–1900) and the Institutional Foundations of British Anthropology* (London: Pitt Rivers Museum, 1981), <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/ethnology-in-the-museum.html> .

¹⁵ For more on these notions, see Ruth B Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Hooper-Greenhill, *Exhibitions and Interpretation*, 126.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The Pitt Rivers Museum offers a good example of this. The vast majority of their collection is on display, with their display also functioning as storage for the objects. At the same time, viewers cannot open up these displays and interact with the objects with the same authority that curators and archivists would have.

touch. The gloves also act as a prop, allowing for the viewer to further enact the role of researcher or conservator.

The museums that we have come to be familiar with in Western society stem from the nineteenth-century museum, along with the formation of associated professions that emerge from studies in anthropology, natural history, and archaeology. In the introductory video at the exhibition's entrance, Johnson mentions the role of professions within the institutions as those which she is specifically questioning in the 'Archive Room.' When describing her method for titling and describing the baskets she states,

I needed to take it to a group of 'ologists' – anthropologists, archaeologists, museologists – but instead of going to those cultural institutions where there's the qualified 'ologists,' I decided to think that this whole idea of speculative 'ology,' because all of those 'ologies,' all bring in their opinion, their expertise, then they speculate and they come to consensus about what it is. I wanted to further explore and challenge, a bit, who has the authority to determine what the basket should be.¹⁹

Bennett explains that these professions, rooted in what he describes as “historical sciences,” developed from amateur to professional pursuits at the same time as the principles of evolutionary classification were being applied to museum collecting and display practices.²⁰ He argues that during the late nineteenth-century a significant shift occurred within museums, which contributed to the reorganization of society's perception of time. He outlines the two primary roles that the historical science professions played in this reorganization and how they worked to make the linear understanding of time visible to the public. Bennett suggests that this occurred through treating museums as ‘laboratories’ for these professions, which allowed for a physical space to be created in order to re-articulate how time is understood, and through this, the role that museums played in creating and shaping public knowledge and ‘cultural governance.’²¹ He states, “In both regards these museums served as the incubators for broader developments affecting the very grammar of the artefactual field by providing new rules for the classification and the combination of objects.”²² Reorganizing time created new organizational systems and classifications. These systems, alongside museums being used as a form of public education

¹⁹ Ursula Johnson, *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Exhibition video (Originally released 2014; Halifax, Nova Scotia), Digital video.

²⁰ Bennett, Introduction to *Past Beyond Memory*, 2.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

practices, affected public policy, which then created spaces that showed the general public both the justification for and spoils of colonial exploits.

Museums are sites of both history and memory, which are two forces often seen as very similar. Yet history and memory often conflict. History, when simply understood as the study of the past, is often framed as a neutral and official narrative based primarily in factual evidence. Through the research, writing, and teaching of history, historians help to form collective memory, but this is informed through personal, cultural, and societal biases.²³ To shape a collective memory, it requires all those within the collective to learn and understand in a similar manner – using similar resources, studying similar information, and having this information presented to them in a similar structure.²⁴ To shape public memory, then, requires the standardization and hierarchical structuring of knowledge, which has the effect of also undermining or ignoring other perspectives and approaches to that public history. This leads to the belief that the collective memory being constructed is both verifiable and objective.²⁵ Meanwhile, individual memory is seen as complex, personal, and subjective. Individual memories may not fit easily within overarching linear histories, thus standing in conflict with collective memory.²⁶ Therefore, to say that museums are institutions of history and memory is to say that museums continuously grapple with these often-competing notions of collective and individual memory. Oral histories, familial histories and written accounts that differed from the presumed objective history of the museum were deemed incomplete and unverifiable, and thus, were excluded.²⁷

In *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson examines the tension between public and private memory, and how these connect to notions of history and memory more broadly. She critically examines how these 'scientific' methodologies have functioned to erase, ignore or undermine Indigenous perspectives and knowledge about objects of Indigenous manufacture held in ethnographic institutions. The exhibition encourages the museumgoers to consider their own implication within these systems by taking on various roles as viewer, participant, and

²³ Margaret Conrad, *A Brief Survey of Canadian Historiography*, 33.

²⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, *Exhibitions and Interpretation*, 128.

²⁵ Jens Brockmeier, "Dissolving the Time of Memory: The Autobiographical Process as Temporal Self-localization," in *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 263.

²⁶ Hodgkin and Radstone, Introduction to *Regimes of Memory*, 14-15.

²⁷ Tony Bennett, Introduction in *Past Beyond Memory*, 3-4.

professional. Within the 'Archive Room', when the viewer partakes in the prompts provided on the computer screen, the viewer is acting in the role of the professional within the public institutions that aid in the creation of public memory. At the same time, the viewer is not necessarily aware that the basket forms presented in the 'Archival Room' are not representative of traditional Mi'kmaq basketry, but are actually new forms created by Johnson. For example, the basket form titled, *Spider Stool* (Fig. 11), is described as, "Placed in the corners of houses to offer spaces for spiders to house their nests." Moreover, the small basket titled, *Cook Pot* (Fig. 12), is described as, "Sometimes used as a replacement for Jukike's Birch Pot when cooking bear meat." While not her original intention, Johnson indicated that many people have assumed that these are historically accurate descriptions of traditional forms. During a 2014 presentation by the artist at the Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre in Halifax where I was first introduced to the exhibition, Johnson specifically mentioned that several people approached her regarding the form *Spider Stool* and expressed their excitement in learning about that part of Mi'kmaq history. Johnson did not originally intend for such a large number of viewers to take these descriptions as fact, I argue that this occurrence actually makes for a strength in Johnson's overall intent of the exhibition, and creates space for a larger conversation about the role of museums in the overall interpretative experience of viewers within *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*.

There are multiple types of viewers that enter into the exhibition, and while many more were tricked by the content of the 'Archive Room' than Johnson may have anticipated, many still understood Johnson's play within the 'Archive Room.' Johnson suggests, however, that for those who do interpret the descriptions as factual may be due in large part to the exhibition drawing in a crowd that may otherwise not regularly attend contemporary art galleries. Speaking to this, Johnson states,

There's a lot of people, I remember this specifically about PEI and Newfoundland, where people came specifically to see Mi'kmaq baskets. They came in, they saw the cases, but were like, 'where's the baskets? This is a *micmac* basket show, I wanted some *micmac* baskets.' Then they'd go into the ['Archive Room'] and they were happy they got to see the baskets because that's what they came for. You know that these are people that don't normally visit public galleries and they might make me an offer about wanting to buy one of the baskets off the shelf. So I know that's a very different audience. It might be their first time stepping into the Confederation Centre, but what brought them in is the promotional material that says it's a Mi'kmaq artist doing baskets, and some news

publications will say ‘Mi’kmaq basketmaker’ or ‘Mi’kmaq baskets’ so there’s a tagline that brings people in.²⁸

As Johnson suggests, there are viewers entering *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* who may not be coming to the exhibition understanding it as a contemporary art, and instead may have expectations of a craft sale or ethnological display. Given of these different expectations and the context of Johnson's mimicry and viewers awareness of the authority of museum spaces, some will implicitly trust these descriptions based on their trust of institutional knowledge.

Additionally, More so, however, viewers are trusting the role of Johnson as a Mi’kmaq cultural authority. Viewers may anticipate the exhibition to be presenting direct insight into Mi’kmaq basketry due to Johnson being Mi’kmaq, and because the exhibition is presented as a museum exhibition instead of a strictly contemporary art exhibition. By providing this information in the formal setting of the archive, Johnson draws on the perceptions of institutional authority to then underscore the fact that many Indigenous objects in museum archives are associated with false, incomplete, or problematic information.

In the exhibition description, it is stated that, “Johnson explores the impact of colonialism on Aboriginal material and linguistic culture, and challenges the museological and ethnographic frame imposed upon it.”²⁹ This can be seen in the way Indigenous objects are selected and displayed in museums spaces. In early museum practices, Indigenous objects were removed from their use and cultural context and reorganized into ethnographic museum determined categories. Through this act, the authority of the historical science professional is asserted. Scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states,

Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. [...] [N]ot because [of where] they were found [...] but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects in the process of making themselves.³⁰

Indigenous cultural materials have often been pushed to the margins in museum displays and exhibit spaces. While many museums have made drastic efforts to rectify this in their collections,

²⁸ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

²⁹ “Mi’kwite’tmn,” *Saint Mary’s University Art Gallery*, (n.d), <http://www.mikwitetmn.ca>

³⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnology,” in Karp and Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures*, 387, cited in Ruth B. Phillips, “How Museums Marginalize: Naming Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion,” in *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 100.

evidence of this marginalization can still be seen in many instances.³¹ One enduring example of this can be found in institutions where concurrent and even intertwined settler and Indigenous histories, are given separate displays, even separate museum sections, where the objects' timelines do not indicate or link these connected histories, either visually or didactically. For Johnson, the separation of Indigenous cultural objects from settler collections is not only apparent in the historical narratives created around their displays, but also through the displays themselves, as items which can only be viewed behind glass. Speaking to this, with regards to the 'Museological Grand Hall,' Johnson states, "in the museum a lot of times there's an object in [the display cases], a lot of times there's Indigenous objects, and the Indigenous objects are trapped in time and not activated. But with Indigenous culture, it's so important that those objects are constantly activated, because that's why they were created."³² As Johnson notes, an important way of knowing and learning from Indigenous objects is through interaction, and yet most museums prevent exactly this kind of engagement with objects. This alienation of objects from their intended use is a byproduct of museum displays for all types of art that also has a functional use. This is further problematized, however, within the context of the colonial representation of Indigenous cultures being trapped in time. The objects are not only removed from their functional context, but are also used as artefacts to reference a Western concept of Indigenous authenticity. This is an important aspect to consider in critiquing Western museums, particularly because one of the primary functions of museums since the professionalization of these institutions in the nineteenth-century has been public pedagogy.

As a major component of public education is to shape public knowledge and collective memory, the separation of Indigenous objects from the Western narrative of time reinforces a public understanding of Indigenous culture as inferior. Though museums inform public knowledge, they have also had to appeal to public desires for entertainment in order to appeal to a wider audience and attract more visitors. So, while museums have power over their publics, the dynamic is affected by the museum's reliance on public attendees. Thus, it is not a one-way relationship. The need to balance education and entertainment is certainly informed by public

³¹ Phillips, "How Museums Marginalize," 96.

³² Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

desires.³³ Because museums are informed by public desires, they are also informed by other cultural institutions, such as popular culture, which affect the way the public sees the world. In terms of Indigenous arts and histories, this dynamic creates a complicated situation where the public has expectations of their museums to create displays that reinforce public preconceptions of Indigenous cultures that were previously formed in part by the influence of museums. As Margaret Dubin states,

The ways in which museum visitors encounter Native American objects are shaped as much by the collective imagination of Indians and Western notions of value as by the nature of the encounter itself. Visitors enter the modern museum with certain needs and expectations: museums are expected to be simultaneously entertaining and educational, aesthetically pleasing and authoritative. Visitors need museums to validate their own experiences, to fill in the gaps on their knowledge of the world, and demonstrate the proper ways of appreciating and understanding objects and events.³⁴

Because of this, and despite the efforts that many museums have recently made to include Indigenous voices and experiences in exhibitions, many major institutions are slow to adapt to new paradigms of display and public discourse, and visitors are likewise slow to recognize new frameworks. For example, a 2002 study conducted at the Canadian Museum of History indicated that less than two per cent of museum visitors were able to identify colonialism as a theme of the Canadian Hall exhibition, despite that being specifically stated in the exhibition's mandate.³⁵ This was due, in large part, to the colonial effects being significantly downplayed throughout the exhibition - comparative to other pedagogical mandates elsewhere in the museum - such as through the sanitized historical information about the fur trade and other forms of early European contact. Moreover, Indigenous voices remained absent.³⁶ The exhibition context and much of that audience of the Canadian Museum of History is certainly different than *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*. A critical difference is that Johnson maintains authorship and agency over her exhibition, where in the Canadian Museum of History, even if Indigenous nations were consulted, they do not hold authorship over their representation in the displays. Nevertheless, this

³³ Mallory Allyson Richard, "The Colonial Past as 'Usable History'," in *Beyond Pedagogy: Reconsidering the Public Purpose of Museums*, Brenda Trofanenko and Avner Segall, eds., (Rotterdam and Boston: Sense Publishers, 2014), 37.

³⁴ Margaret Dubin, "Museums and the Politics of Cultural Authority" in *Native America Collected: The Culture of an Art World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 85.

³⁵ Graham, K., and H. Nickisher. *A Summative Evaluation of the "Canadian Hall" Exhibition* (Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003), cited in Richard, *The Colonial Past as 'Usable History'*, 37.

³⁶ Richard, *The Colonial Past as 'Usable History'*, 37-56.

remains a pertinent example of how viewers experience displays of Indigenous art work and history.

One factor that informs public misperceptions of Indigenous representation in museums is that the professionals that shape the museum still largely go unquestioned; as such, museums' visitors still interpret museums as the singular authority on information.³⁷ As Margaret Dubin indicates, the museum professionals who shaped Western institutions during the nineteenth-century are often forgiven due to their time period. She states,

While it is widely acknowledged that museums contributed to the colonial climate that encouraged the systematic removal of objects from Indian communities, the individual collectors, anthropologist, and curators involved tend to be viewed not as willful collaborators in the colonial project but as dedicated, although unfortunately interpellated, scientists of culture. This works to indemnify the museum but fails to address the more important issues of state sponsored violence.³⁸

It is important, however, to acknowledge the implication of the museum's colonial past in the present, as this legacy continues to inform institutions today. Johnson's *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* not only examines these histories, but actively pushes back against them, subverting colonial narratives and disrupting the museological control over these narratives. One such disruption can be seen in the 'Performative Space,' which allows for viewers to take on an active role in shaping their experience of the exhibition.³⁹ When Johnson occupies the Performative Space, a relationship develops between Johnson and her viewers through their conversations and interactions. By engaging with her visitors, Johnson acts both as the exhibition and the didactic – the observed and the interpreter of observation – again, disrupting the museum space. Through Johnson's direct engagement with the exhibition's visitors, the viewers become participants. This active participation allows the viewers to ask questions in order to further understand the role of the descriptions in the 'Archive Room.' Johnson is also able to discuss issues that relate to her practice, which may not be otherwise directly addressed in the exhibition. For example, during my visit to the exhibition at the Grenfell Campus Art Gallery at Memorial University in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Johnson was able to have several conversations about the ecological

³⁷ Ibid. 39-40.

³⁸ Dubin, *Museums and the Politics of Cultural Authority*, 86.

³⁹ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

issues of the black ash tree used in Mi'kmaw basketry, and its imminent destruction by the invasion of the emerald ash borer.

The 'Performative Space' is a site of exchange. When she interacts with viewers during the performance, the viewers are given the opportunity to have input and affect the exhibition by sharing their knowledge and experiences with Johnson. This not only breaks down the barriers between the public and private, but also ensures that the exhibition is not static, but instead something which is continuously changing and alive. The shifting and transformative aspect of the 'Performative Space' is a consistent feature in Johnson's performance work and its relationship to ephemerality. This is seen in her sacrifice of the log, which turns it into unusable pieces instead of a finished basket, and also in the discussions that happen with viewers. To a lesser extent, this also is echoed in the 'Archive Room,' as Johnson is regularly making and adding new forms to the archive, assuring that the exhibition is slightly different with each new iteration.

Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember) is a multilayered exhibition which functions to subtly examine the complicated and painful history of the relationship between museums, Indigenous peoples, and the public's understandings of different cultures. Johnson's mimicry of museological aspects of display techniques and archival documentation in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* holds a mirror to both the museum and the viewer, encouraging the viewer to question these spaces themselves, rather than relying on didactic information. This allows the viewer to actively question how these preconceptions shape their understanding of Indigenous cultures. This lack of clarity and information is further exacerbated through Johnson's use of a mixture of irony and nostalgia in what she refers to as a "Trickster Mentality" throughout the exhibition.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2. Irony, Nostalgia, and the Trickster: Envisioning Indigenous Futures

Through the mimicking of museum displays, Johnson also parodies emotional devices utilized by museums to reinforce the concept of museum neutrality. Of these emotional devices, the most significant is nostalgia. Nostalgia was a preoccupation of Johnson's since the exhibition's early stages, explaining that it was her driving force behind selecting the title of the exhibition,

The working title [during the proposal] was *Mi'kwite'tmn*, and the reason I chose that title was because of the double meaning. It could be posed as a question of 'do you remember' or as a statement of 'you do remember,' and the reason I chose that was because I was thinking so much about nostalgia and what nostalgia does. Nostalgia can either trigger a memory to try to remember something in memorializing, or making you happy, but it can also trigger the memory in regard to loss. I feel like nostalgia has that gift, where you can go either way, a good thing or a bad thing.⁴¹

Within *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson effectively connects nostalgia with irony to create a counter-narrative to the institutional museum space. Johnson's blending of nostalgia and irony can be seen as a powerful action, as theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon has often described nostalgia and irony as oppositional forces.⁴² In this chapter, I explore Western and Indigenous understandings of irony and nostalgia through scholarship and Johnson's work and words, in order to understand the ways in which irony and nostalgia may be generated in opposition to this Western framework. To do this, I will examine three main relationships: the pastoral association of nostalgia with craft; the use of irony and nostalgia in Indigenous Trickster oral histories and understandings; and the contemporary use of irony and nostalgia as tools of decolonial critique.

To articulate the relationship between irony and nostalgia in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, it is important to first understand what these two terms mean in Western culture. In the essay, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," Hutcheon tackles the shifting definition of nostalgia from a medical term to a psychological term. Drawing on Susan Stewart's writing, Hutcheon states, "[N]ostalgia makes the idealized (and therefore always absent) past into the site of immediacy, presence, and authenticity."⁴³ Furthermore, Hutcheon writes, "Unlike the

⁴¹ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

⁴² For more on this topic, see Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), and, Linda Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," *University of Toronto English Library*, last modified: January 19, 1998. <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>.

⁴³ Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern."

knowingness of irony—a mark of the fall from innocence, if ever there was one—nostalgia is, in this way, ‘prelapsarian’ and indeed utopian.”⁴⁴ For Hutcheon, nostalgia is inherently conservative and utopian; it is a backward looking form of memorialization that views the past in a way that ignores negative realities and creates a utopian longing for a past that never truly existed.

According to Hutcheon’s writing on both irony and nostalgia, it is when irony is combined with nostalgia that it gains the possibility to move away from the problematic backward looking. While irony is typically defined as presenting a meaning opposite of a literal meaning, it is in fact much more complicated. In her book, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Hutcheon states, “Irony is a ‘weighted’ mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favour of the silent and the unsaid.”⁴⁵ Between nostalgia and irony, nostalgia is positioned as the emotional, while irony is positioned as the intellectual. However, Hutcheon argues that nostalgia and irony can in fact be both. She states,

What irony and nostalgia share, therefore, is a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics. [...] Irony is not something *in* an object that you either ‘get’ or fail to ‘get’: irony “happens” for you (or, better, you *make* it “happen”) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge. Likewise, nostalgia is not something you “perceive” *in* an object; it is what you “feel” when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight. In both cases, it is the element of response—of active participation, both intellectual and affective—that makes for the power.⁴⁶

In presenting and collecting Indigenous works, the colonial museum exclusively uses nostalgia as an emotional device for an idealization of authenticity. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the museum presented Indigenous objects as a way to reinforce the perception of Indigenous peoples as outside of time.⁴⁷ As a result, Indigenous peoples and their cultures were seen as either dead or dying. Indigenous scholar Marcia Crosby expresses this notion in her essay, “Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” where she examines how museums participate in a salvage paradigm in attempt to preserve remnants from an “authentic” past.⁴⁸ This relies on a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 37.

⁴⁶ Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,”

⁴⁷ Marcia Crosby, “Constructing the Imaginary Indian,” in *Beyond Wilderness* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2007), 218.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

“produced authenticity” or stereotypical understanding, where Indigenous cultures are perceived not as living or evolving, but as having ended with colonial contact.⁴⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, it is in this way that Indigenous objects on display in many colonial museums today still reinforce a Western framework that locates Indigenous authenticity in the past.⁵⁰ Nostalgia is utilized in these contexts to idealize that past while simultaneously overlooking colonialism’s violence, suggesting that a singular, “authentic” Indigenous culture has been preserved in the museum.⁵¹ While many Western objects in museums may be seen as part of a living and continuing history, nostalgia functions as a form of colonial violence that treats the museum as a mausoleum for Indigenous culture.

Craft historian Glenn Adamson investigates a similar issue in regard to craft in his text, *Thinking Through Craft* (2007). In the chapter on the pastoral, Adamson discusses how craft is often associated with a utopian vision of the past. He argues that the pastoral is seen in literature, art, and craft, stating that “in many cases, pastoral craft has been part of a purposeful invention of an ‘authentic’ past,” with a conservative, utopian, backwards look as “a sentimental escapism.”⁵² The nostalgic association with craft can be used as another negative implementation of nostalgia against Indigenous work, as Indigenous cultural production would often be, and still often is, labeled as craft by a colonial standard. In this context it is placed lower in status comparatively to fine art, and lower yet again than Western traditional craft and folk art. Indigenous arts scholars Carmen Robertson and Sherry Ferrell Racette discuss the relationship between art and craft in a Western and Indigenous crafts context in their co-authored text, *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art* (2009). They point to the divide between what is labeled ‘fine art’ and what is labeled ‘craft,’ within the framework of Western art history, and how this is not generally applicable to the objects that Indigenous people create.⁵³ Furthermore, Robertson argues that the very word ‘craft’ is often used pejoratively, and has historically been applied to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁵⁰ Anecdotally, I witnessed this explicitly in a 2009 visit to the Glenbow Museum. A display of Indigenous objects included a 19th-century jingle from a jingle dress, yet the description of the object specifically described it as an inauthentic form of Indigenous art because jingles were only made after colonial contact with the introduction of tin.

⁵¹ For more on this topic, and for a case study of this occurring see: Brenda Trofanenko, “Displayed Objects, Indigenous Identity, and Public Pedagogy,” in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 37, No 4, (2006): 309-27.

⁵² Glenn Adamson, “Pastoral,” in *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishing, 2007), 103-138.

⁵³ Carmen Robertson, “Clearing Paths,” in *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*. Carmen Robertson and Sherry Farrell Racette, eds., (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 11.

Indigenous arts as a way to minimize their value and cultural meaning within the context of Western art history. Robertson states,

When [Indigenous artists] did create art using traditional media such as leather, beads, or quills, art historians, and the general public labeled it as ‘craft’ or ‘handicraft.’ These imposed designations do not relate to Indigenous ways of knowing or Indigenous aesthetics, and, in fact, such classifications have the effect of diminishing the artistic achievements of these artists and the calibre of their work.⁵⁴

Craft’s marginal status was imposed on Indigenous artists as a way to undermine their cultural traditions. As Farrell Racette has explained, Canadian federal and provincial governments were implicated in efforts to “modify traditional arts practice into craft production, and encouraged sewing, knitting and other skills associated with domestic service.”⁵⁵ However, she explains that for some Indigenous nations, maintaining and teaching traditional or customary arts from within families and communities was a form of subversive knowledge transfer. These subversive practices aided in resisting the imposed Western art and craft hierarchy, and consequently, some forms of colonialism and colonial paternalism.⁵⁶

For some contemporary craft scholars, craft’s marginal status has been viewed as a potentially powerful position, as a site of resistance to hierarchical relationship between art and craft. Thus, maintaining Indigenous and other longstanding craft practices pushes back against these hierarchies. In comparing art and craft, Adamson writes,

While art is a matter of nomination within an infinite field—that is, art is anything that is called art—craft involves self-imposed limits. Modern art is staked on the principle of freedom, its potential transcendence of all limits, including (even especially) those of craft. Yet in the very marginality that result from craft’s bounded character, craft finds its indispensability to the project of modern art. [...] Craft’s inferiority might be the most productive thing about it.⁵⁷

While Adamson argues for a subversive potential in craft’s marginality as that which forces modern art (and thus Modernism) to question itself, artist and scholar Lacey Jane Roberts argues for tactics of queer theory to be implemented in craft, stating,

⁵⁴ Sherry Farrell Racette, “Traditional Arts and Media: Resilience and Survivance,” in *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*, Carmen Robertson and Sherry Farrell Racette, eds., (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 21.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁷ Glenn Adamson, “Introduction,” to *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 4.

I maintain that by using the tactics and strategies of queer theory, craft could gain purchase by deliberately asserting an identity that defies fixed or historically prescribed boundaries in relation to its use of materials, processes, or formal vocabularies. This radical, critical position would relocate craft as an aesthetic category that embraces an enormous range of multiple and seemingly contradictory practices, as well as an agent to challenge existing systems that define materiality.⁵⁸

Adamson argues that pastoral work can be more complicated when it is self-reflective: “When it is occupied self-consciously, rather than in a celebratory or promotional manner – it can be a powerful way of envisioning social and artistic change.”⁵⁹ This self-reflectivity is present in Robert’s argument for queering craft, which aims to dispute boundaries that are imposed on marginal artistic practices and marginalized identities by outside forces. This can be seen in *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* where Johnson continues to practice a traditional art form, which in itself is subversive - as Sherry Farrell Racette suggests - but also breaks the boundaries of settler-preconceived notions of what traditional basketry is supposed to be. Johnson utilizes the marginal status of both craft and Indigenous traditional practices to examine the museum’s role in the perpetuation of these marginalities.

Hutcheon’s description of irony as that which favours the silent and unsaid is present throughout *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*. Although viewers have the opportunity to have a conversation with Johnson, the exhibition lacks didactics that would clarify its subversive tactics, and this is particularly potent in the ‘Archive Room.’ This space encourages practices of critical looking, leaving it up to the viewers to notice the subtleties in Johnson’s descriptions. It also encourages viewers to take this same critical looking with them in into museum spaces if this was not a practice with which they were previously engaged, and to move beyond expectations of nostalgic remembrance. This is not to imply that all museums enact nostalgia in this way, or that if they do that viewers are not aware and do not engage critically with these exhibitions. Rather, I am arguing that Johnson’s ironic humour, indirectly speaks to the possibility of multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations which Johnson is encouraging viewers to be vigilant for in all their viewing experiences. This is expressed by scholar Alan J. Ryan who refers

⁵⁸ Lacey Jane Roberts, “Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: Reimagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory,” in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, Maria Elena Buszek, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 248.

⁵⁹ Adamson, “Pastoral,” 105.

to this as, “irony’s peculiar double vision” where something can seemingly simultaneously express two sides of a dichotomy.⁶⁰ Anishanaabe artist Carl Beam also expressed the same ironic humour as Johnson in his discussion on how the Indigenous mythological figure of the Trickster is utilized in his own work. In *The Trickster Shift*, art historian Alan J. Ryan’s explains, “What Beam calls the ‘Trickster shift’ is perhaps best understood as serious play, the ultimate goal of which is a radical shift in viewer perspective and even political positioning by imagining and imaging alternative viewpoints.”⁶¹ This serious play points to a duality that many artists that Ryan interviewed point to as a distinctly “Native humour,” which he states, “is most often characterized by frequent teasing, outrageous punning, constant wordplay, surprising association, extreme subtlety, layered and serious reference, and considerable compassion.”⁶² Ursula Johnson is familiar with embodying the Trickster through her work, and she states that what she refers to as a “Trickster mentality” has been important in *Mi’kiwte’tmn (Do You Remember)*.

I think I always have a little bit of that edge that comes across in my work because it’s a large part of my personality where I like turning the tables, and flipping the mirror. It probably has a lot to do with all the different influences in my life. [...] My own interest in learning about Mi’kmaq mythology and legends and folklore has helped to influence a bit of that trickster mentality. I think it’s also a nice tool to be able to use if it’s used effectively, and efficiently.⁶³

Johnson’s Trickster embodiment through her work cannot simply be reduced to ironic humour alone. It is both an act of defiance, standing in opposition to colonialism, and a way of healing from that history of colonialism.

Nostalgia and irony can exist in multiple forms. Perceiving nostalgia as two separate time periods coming together, as Hutcheon suggests, is not necessarily an exclusively backward looking and revisionist impulse. As scholar Dennis Walder outlines, using Svetlana Boym’s words, nostalgia can be split into two categories: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia is described as a conservative, backward looking with an unironic desire to reconstruct home (or homeland). Reflective nostalgia, however, is inherently more self-aware, still with a longing or reference to time, but with the ironic knowledge to which Hutcheon refers, and the self-

⁶⁰ Allan J. Ryan, “Subverting the Systems of Representation,” in *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 1999), 101.

⁶¹ Allan J. Ryan, Introduction in *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 1999), 5.

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

conscious future imaginings Adamson suggests. As Boym states, restorative nostalgia does not acknowledge that it is nostalgic, “but rather [views itself] as truth and tradition.”⁶⁴ Restorative nostalgia is often employed in the colonial museum space. However, the dual possibility of nostalgia to also exist reflectively can question perceptions of truth, neutrality, and authenticity. Speaking to nostalgia’s dual nature Walder states, “Nostalgia is usually thought of in terms of longing and desire—for a lost home, place, and/or time. But it is also more than that: it is a longing for an experience—subjective in the first place, and yet, far from limited to the individual.”⁶⁵ He continues on to state, “*Reflective* nostalgias realize the partial, fragmentary nature of history or histories, and linger on ruins and loss.”⁶⁶ In *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson utilizes reflective nostalgia to counter restorative nostalgia. She combines past and present to suggest a longing for an experience of the future, based on her life experiences but that also speaks to a collective future for Mi’kmaq basket makers and Mi’kmaq people. The exhibition also often lingers on loss, as Johnson directly addresses loss of traditions and culture in her work while looking hopefully to the future. While Hutcheon suggest that the combination of irony and nostalgia is a postmodern phenomenon, reflective nostalgia is not inherently postmodern and has a long history in Indigenous traditions. As Hutcheon argues, irony and nostalgia are not fixed states of being, but rather, they occur through viewer interpretation. Irony and nostalgia are both active states. While an artist may have intentions of irony and/or nostalgia when creating a work, the work only becomes ironic or nostalgic when the viewer perceives it as such. This is to say that, in accordance with Hutcheon’s assertions, something cannot inherently be ironic or nostalgic, but rather takes on these roles through viewer interpretation. Dependent on the viewer’s own experiences, what one may interpret to be restorative nostalgia, another may interpret as ironic, and another still may interpret to be reflexively nostalgic. These too, are not fixed interpretations, and a viewer may change their interpretation of the work multiple times, framed through different experiences. These interpretations are not inherent to the being of the art object, but rather come to the object through the viewer. The viewer interpretation is informed not only by their own experiences, but also through the interpretive intent of the curator and artist, as well as the institutional context of

⁶⁴ Dennis Walder, “Introduction: The Persistence of Nostalgia,” in *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

the exhibition (such as if it is viewed in different types of museums, galleries, cultural centers, etc.)

The sentiment of meaning being perceived through active viewership can be seen through Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's writing on the Trickster. Trickster figures are important parts of storytelling and mythology in many Indigenous cultures. Speaking to the active nature of the Trickster, Vizenor states, "The Trickster is a 'doing' not a 'being.'"⁶⁷ Similarly to irony and nostalgia, the Trickster sentiment is not innate. Viewers and listeners perceive and enact the sentiment. According Vizenor, the Trickster can be expressed in understanding the difference between a tragic and comic worldview. A tragic worldview focusses on the individual's accomplishments and success in overcoming a situation, while a comic worldview acknowledges that there is an element of chance. In this case, humour can be found through the absurdity of events just occurring, even in terrible situations: "it's a positive, compassionate act of survival, it's getting along."⁶⁸ For Vizenor, then, the Trickster is not only a way of looking at the world with a critical sense of humour; it also stands in direct opposition to "Western patriarchal monotheistic manifest-destiny civilization," which focusses on overcoming adversity to the point where it is "almost always at odds with nature."⁶⁹ The Trickster is both an active state and an expression of a compassionate act of survival. Thus, the Trickster extends beyond Hutcheon's description of irony as humorous detachment as well as her description of nostalgia.

NunatuKavut scholar Kristina Fagan suggests that the Trickster has been used, and continues to be used, as an important figure in Indigenous storytelling to speak to trauma without having to partake in a distinctly Western form of healing. This form of Indigenous storytelling is what Fagan refers to as 'indirect discourse.'⁷⁰ As Vizenor, Beam, and Ryan suggest, a crucial aspect of Trickster-centred storytelling involves elaborate wordplay, a tool which allows for meaning to be inferred by the recipient versus being directly told by the storyteller. This can be seen directly in the baskets' titles and descriptions, as well as the plinths in the 'Museological Grand Hall.' In the 'Archive Room,' word play is present in the layers of humour in the

⁶⁷ Ryan, Introduction, 5.

⁶⁸ Gerald Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse," *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Native American Literatures (Spring, 1989), 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kristina Fagan, "Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson," *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne*, 34, no. 1, (2009): 5.

descriptions. While there is plenty of information available, the viewer can understand how these descriptions in museums are often incorrect through these layers. For example, the open-sided basket, titled *Day Before Welfare Purse* (2014-18) (Fig. 13), offers the description, “This purse-like object would be presented to the Indian Agents to show them that all monetary resources have been exhausted and yet the family’s welfare is not compromised.” These tongue-in-cheek descriptions run throughout the exhibition, however, many are able to trick the viewer. During my time in the ‘Archive Room,’ I spoke with a viewer who insisted that she remembered an object, titled *Awije’jk* (Fig. 14), from her childhood. This object’s description, “A memorial of a person’s ‘otherworldly’ encounter,” prompted a series of questions from Johnson when I relayed this moment to her: “Does she remember the form? Or does she remember the techniques? Or does she remember her otherworldly experience?”⁷¹ This last question is a poignant one, as it indirectly speaks to how some viewers are able to be tricked by Johnson’s archive, where many memories brought in by viewers are built around incomplete knowledge about an Indigenous ‘other.’

The plinths in the ‘Museological Grand Hall’ also play with language in a way that has layers of invisible inferred meaning. The language presented on the plinths is only truly accessible to those who not only speak Mi’kmaq, but know the language specific to the baskets. The baskets are presented in traditional anthro-scientific diagrams, which connotes the past. Their emptiness may initially suggest loss; however, Johnson views these plinths as not only a testament to the language’s history, but a representation of its potential ability to continue to thrive. While the plinths are technically empty, for Johnson, they are full of a living language, that which cannot necessarily be captured. On this, she states,

Once these cases were made, we felt like the information was held inside those cases, so to me it's a very full space. and it's almost as if I can imagine hearing the words inside that space, but they never leave that space [...] I felt like it was a way to capture the language within the space without oppressing it, because of the visual representation of the text within that space. Often we think of that container as an oppressive container, but it allows those terms to breath and to exist.⁷²

This type of wordplay and inferred meaning directly reflects Fagan’s writing on indirect discourse and its role as a tool of decolonial healing. Fagan cites scholar Kimberley Roppolo,

⁷¹ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

⁷² Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

who argues that indirect discourse is a common form of communication that allows speakers to imply meaning, and for listeners to infer.⁷³ Fagan states, “The direct communication encouraged by Western trauma theory often clashes with Aboriginal means of expression.”⁷⁴ As she points out, this type of direct discourse can be a significant cultural taboo in many Indigenous communities. Trickster-centred storytelling can speak to experience without violating taboos, and without having to participate in confrontational acts that can resemble negative experiences within colonial systems. Fagan uses the example of acting as a witness in court as a concrete example of direct discourse.⁷⁵ While humour and other forms of indirect discourse can be seen as a deflection, especially when viewed through Hutcheon’s understanding of irony, as Fagan states,

Humour and storytelling can provide a slow and controlled way of accessing deep-seated and even hidden thoughts and memories. A trauma involves, not only the violent event itself, but also the way that the experience is repeated again and again – through, for instance, flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitive, destructive actions.⁷⁶

The repetitive nature of trauma is drawn out in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, in the ‘Performative Space,’ where in each iteration Johnson destroys an ash wood log as an attempt to prepare it for basketry, instead producing no useable material. Her performance speaks indirectly to the trauma of cross-generational cultural loss due to the effects of colonial violence. Using fictional storytelling combined with real memories is a facet of both restorative and reflective nostalgia. However, I would argue that using storytelling as a tool for introspection and healing is only one aspect of reflective nostalgia. Rather than offering up digestible truths, reflective nostalgia, much like Trickster-centred storytelling, can offer more questions than answers. As Walder states, “Memory and fictional creation appear to be inextricably entwined; and somewhere in there lies nostalgia, with all the ambiguities and contradictions it brings in its wake.”⁷⁷ This can be seen directly in the ‘Archive Room’ of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, wherein the fictional creation of the descriptions and histories of the forms, combined with

⁷³ Fagan, Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo, 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁷ Walder, The Persistence of Nostalgia, 7.

Johnson's lived memories and the knowledge of basketry given to her by her great-grandmother, teach Johnson how to produce these new, but not quite right, forms.

Fagan outlines that repetition is also a function of storytelling that causes the listener to think through a story's implications. It can also be a useful tactic in healing through mimicry and humour. Much like Ryan, Fagan points to Carl Beam's work, where repetition and mimicry exist in his work as "a mixture of imitation of and resistance to trauma."⁷⁸ As well, Walder looks at the way that mimicry can be utilized in a decolonial context with reflective nostalgia, pointing to the writings of postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. Walder states, "[he] argued for a deconstructive reading of texts produced under colonization that, through a mimicry of the colonizer's voice, exposed and denied its authority. Either way, though, the colonized seem to remain prisoners of history."⁷⁹ The hybridity that emerges between imitation and resistance is present throughout *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, and embodies the tension between the ways in which Mi'kmaq objects are represented within institutions and the personal relationships of Mi'kmaq peoples, including Johnson, to basketry.

Johnson's decolonial work critiques museums and their affiliated institutions through the subtleties, tensions, and contradictions that are a necessary for reflective nostalgia. However, Johnson is not attempting to condemn these institutions or the professions that work within them. Her reflective nostalgia longs towards personal histories and a broader relation to Mi'kmaq traditions while simultaneously critiquing the past. Through her nostalgia, there is an awareness of these histories' connections. As well, there is a connection to the present and future. Johnson's work speaks to a need for museums to shift their function in order to facilitate cultural practices versus relegating them to a history that cannot be touched or felt.

Much like the blurred boundaries between memory and history that runs through *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, the relationship between nostalgia and irony is a central underlying theme of the exhibition. Coming together under the double-meaning title *Mi'kwite'tmn*, as either a question, "do you remember?" or a statement, "you do remember," Johnson's exhibition speaks to the word play present in Vizenor's Trickster. In her work, she blankets the entire exhibition in "the Trickster shift." With these dualities, Johnson works within and brings together new meaning. It is not only a clever way to tackle such difficult subject

⁷⁸ Fagan, Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo, 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

matter, but it also speaks to Mi'kmaq culture as a whole, whereby Johnson draws on philosophies of 'two eyed seeing' and the worldview of *Netukulimk*.

Chapter 3. Netukulimk and Two Eyed Seeing: Enacting Resistance

The connections between institutions and memory, as well as the blending of nostalgia and irony, present throughout *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* can be better understood through the Mi'kmaq concepts, *Netukulimk* and *Etuptmunk* (two eyed seeing). Johnson suggests, "In my language, *Netukulimk* encompasses not just fending for yourself, but your relationship to the land, the elements around you, everything that you understand; the greater picture of what is this world. It is what I like to refer to as the Mi'kmaq worldview."⁸⁰ As is clear in Johnson's statement, *Netukulimk* extends beyond a Western understanding of environmental sustainability. At its core, it is a deep expression of the interconnectedness of all things. In *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson implements *Netukulimk* primarily through the language in the 'Museological Grand Hall,' and the actions in the 'Performative Space.' In this chapter, I will argue that the principles of *Netukulimk* are present throughout the exhibition, not only in Johnson's work, but also in the viewer's participation.

Johnson's exhibition functions as a critique of museum history and practices, as well as a call for hybridity in museums so as to include more Indigenous knowledge systems alongside the Western systems presently exhibited. This hybridity can best be understood through the Mi'kmaq elder Albert Marshall's philosophy, *Etuptmunk*, or, "two eyed seeing."⁸¹ 'Two eyed seeing' refers to taking on and mixing together two perspectives. For example, it could be seen in utilizing Western knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge systems together for greater benefit.⁸² When discussing 'two eyed seeing,' Albert Marshall often relates it back to principles of *Netukulimk*. Speaking to the holistic connection between two worldviews, Marshall states, "This is what reinforces our spiritualities: that no one being is greater than the next, that we are part and parcel of the whole, we are equal, and that each one of us has a responsibility to the balance of the system."⁸³ This statement reinforces that both *Netukulimk* and 'two eyed seeing' are related to having a responsible connection to all things, including multiple ways of

⁸⁰ Ursula Johnson, "First Nations Cultural Preservation Through Art: Ursula Johnson at TEDxHalifax," *TEDxTalks*, youtube, 00:09:45, Posted by TEDxTalks, November 23, 2012. <https://youtu.be/-HHvaZKFgRA>.

⁸¹ "Guiding Principles (Two Eyed Seeing)"

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Albert Marshall and Cheryl Bartlett, "Two eyed Seeing for Environmental Sustainability," presented at the College of Sustainability, Dalhousie University, September 23, 2010 for the Environment, Sustainability and Society Lecture Series, *Institute for Integrative Science and Health*, [online.]

understanding the world. For Johnson, *Netukulimk*'s principles are crucial to her work in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, as well as her history with basket-making practices. While Johnson does not replicate her community's traditional basket forms, the language that her great-grandmother taught her allowed for an understanding of how these forms could be made. She suggests that knowing this language allows her to approach the forms much like following a recipe. This knowledge keeps the baskets connected to Johnson's cultural tradition and family history, and the language is integral to her work.

Sustainability and interconnectedness, two principles associated with *Netukulimk*, are seen in many aspects of Mi'kmaq culture, from the language's structure and even the concept of time. The relationship between language and time through *Netukulimk* is crucial with regards to *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, as the title itself expresses a connection with time and memory. The exhibition's theme of memory functions to unite generational knowledge from Johnson's family and community. As linguistic scholar Stephanie Inglis outlines, the structure of English differ dramatically from Mi'kmaq, especially when discussing memory, experience, and time. Where English is a tense-based language focused on time, "what semantically drives the Mi'kmaw verb is not the positioning of an event within time but the positioning of the Speech Act. Participants relative to how they came to 'know of' or 'experience' the event."⁸⁴ In this way, then, the language that Johnson is carrying forward through the exhibition, along with the basketry and the performance, is deeply connected to *Netukulimk*, where time and memory are something that is experience and enacted. Albert Marshall, Murdena Marshall, and Marilyn Iwama echo the notion that language is related to experience, with regards to *Netukulimk*:

What works differently in "connectiveness" are its last two syllables. The three letters, "-ive," introduce the idea of action. When something "-ives," it acts, it tends toward a state, especially in a regular or lasting way—the way an accusative look leans toward accusation. "Connective," then, speaks of the action essential to being connected. Or of some thing that participates in that action. [...] So, instead of just describing the state of *being* connected, "connectiveness" beautifully details the action of *becoming* connected. The difference between being and becoming is crucial for a language, like Mi'kmaq, that is verb-based.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Albert Marshall, Murdena Marshall, and Marilyn Iwama, "Approaching Mi'kmaq Teachings on the Connectiveness of Humans and Nature," *Ecosystem Based Management: Beyond Boundaries. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of Science and the Management of Protected Areas, 21–26 May 2007*, (Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia University, 2007), 176.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

As Inglis suggests, this is also expressed in language: Mi'kmaq is often discussed in terms of animate versus inanimate. However, she points to Marshall's assertion that this can be seen not as living or non-living, but rather, connected or disconnected. The words themselves reflect how much something is connected or disconnected to the larger whole.⁸⁶ For Marshall, Marshall, and Iwama, the difference between being and becoming is crucial. These notions are integral to understanding Johnson's relationship with memory in her exhibition. The title's dual meanings, the question, "Do you remember?" and statement, "you do remember," speak to the subtle differences between "connective" and "connectiveness." The question that Johnson uses in the title's translation can be read as a request to the viewer to insert their subjectivity into the exhibition and to experience a "connectedness" with work in the exhibition.

This active nature of language and the notion of *Netukulimk* is also related to Vizenor's arguments on the Trickster as a 'doing' instead of a 'being.' *Netukulimk* and the Trickster are expressed as active states, as things that must be performed. Johnson's actions in the 'Performative Space' directly addresses her great-grandmother Caroline Gould's fear for the loss *Netukulimk* and basketry – which she warned Johnson of during her research for this exhibition – by intentionally enacting a struggle with preparing the material. Through her talks with viewers during the performance in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson uses the opportunity to discuss *Netukulimk* and ecological sustainability. Throughout the performance, Johnson works vigorously for hours each day, for multiple days in a row; yet, by the end of her performance, she produces nothing but wood shavings, and ultimately, sacrifices the log. Johnson does not take this sacrifice lightly. Ash wood is required in basket making for the unique way that the wood separates into basketry splints. However, the Emerald Ash Borer beetle is currently threatening ecological disaster for ash wood. Apart from the ash wood's connection to traditional basket making, sacrificing this precious material during her performance is emotional for Johnson, in that the wood is a dwindling resource. Speaking to her experience, Johnson states,

When I first did the performance at St. Mary's University, it was for a nine-day period. And right around day 5, I felt like I was losing my mind. I couldn't continue the process, not because of the physical labour and how trying it was on my body, but more on my mind. I think I was feeling a lot of empathy for that tree, and I was losing hope about the survival of this practice, these knowledges, and these customary ways of working, so it

⁸⁶ Stephanie Inglis, "400 Years of Linguistic Contact Between the Mi'kmaq and the English and the Interchange of Two World Views," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 24, No. 2, (2004): 393.

really affected me emotionally. At about day seven I almost gave up, where I would go into the performance space and I would just sit.⁸⁷

During the first performance, Johnson was visited by both friends and strangers in the gallery space. She highlights three distinct conversations that helped her come to terms with the sacrifice she was making, which further signaled the importance of speaking to the issues that she was attempting to address:

The first was a woman from Zimbabwe, and she said, ‘Maybe what you need to do is renegotiate need. Because you’re saying that you need to cut down this tree to make a statement, or you need to process the tree to have something you can make, but what’s going to happen with something you make, it’s going to end up on one of these plinths, at some point it’s going to end up in the archive because that’s what happens.’ She said, ‘I think it’s really interesting the conversation you brought into play about customs, about resource responsibility, about trying to understand the role that the institution plays in trying to continue these traditional practices and ways of working.’ A lot of the information she shared with me really helped me to think about things in a different way. Then I also had the president of the Nova Scotia Basketry Guild come in and spend quite a lot of time with me sitting on the floor. We were playing with the shavings, and we talked about what my great grandmother would have thought, because she was a really close friend of hers. She said, ‘it’s kind of like the elephant in the room. Nobody really wants to talk about it but what you’re doing here is forcing people to talk about it.’ I thought that was interesting because it was a different understanding of responsibility than the one that was instilled in my head. Then another gentleman came in, and he kind of thought, ‘well what’s more important – the conversation, the debris on the floor, or the objects I created, things that end up in the archive?’⁸⁸

Johnson clarified that it was these conversations that shifted her perspective on the performance. Specifically, the head of the Nova Scotia Basketry Guild told her that, because of ecological destruction currently enacted by either through forestry or the beetle, it is like inevitable that the ash trees will cease to exist in the region. There are efforts to prevent the end of the ash trees which are so important to basketry and biodiversity. Johnson’s performance and discussion with the viewers brings to light the ecological destruction that viewers may not be aware of, and in part aims to bring a deeper sense of connection to this issue for the viewers, and perhaps a push towards advocating for and supporting efforts to combat this loss. In using them in her performance as a means to raise awareness of their destruction, Johnson believes that she is making a sacrifice for a greater good.

⁸⁷ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

These important ecological conversations highlight the necessity for viewer participation in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*. In fact, Johnson suggests that this exhibition would be impossible without viewer participation.⁸⁹ While this is true of every exhibition, as a necessary part of any exhibition is having an audience to view the work, this is expanded in Johnson's exhibition where audience members are not only viewers, but they activate the space through their interaction with the objects as well as with Johnson, which can be seen as a type of performance. This is furthered in the creation of the exhibition, in particular through the archive, where Johnson selects the design of her forms, titles, and descriptions from the suggestions of others. This is linked meaningfully to the concept of the active Trickster, where the exhibition is only completed when the viewer interacts with the work. The viewer works with Johnson and her art to activate the meaning. Without viewer participation, Johnson's act of sacrificing the log would become futile. Yet within a gallery space that intentionally mimics a museum, Johnson's presence also invokes the insidious practice of using live racialized peoples in museum and cultural fair displays. These types of exhibitions, often referred to as human zoos, have a long history, dating back at least as far as the early colonial endeavours in the Americas.⁹⁰ The height of human zoos was around the same time as the development of colonial natural history and science museums. They grew in the popularity throughout the nineteenth century, with their first major success in Germany, and they became a popular aspect of world's fairs.⁹¹ Scholar Anne Dreesbach writes that the success of these zoos required three main factors: the displays must "correspond to the public's expectation" by relying on clichés (which were likely reinforced by museums), the "stereotypes [were] connect[ed] to the public's everyday experience" (such as showing families), and that there was a unique aspect to each display.⁹² Displaying Indigenous peoples from around the globe in Europe, and creating objects that were already similar to those collected in the natural history museums, became a popular aspect of these types of displays.

Through interacting with Johnson during the performance, the viewer aids Johnson in subverting these histories. Rather than Johnson performing while the audience silently watches,

⁸⁹ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

⁹⁰ Anne Dreesbach, "Colonial Exhibitions, 'Völkerschauen' and the Display of the 'Other'," *European History Online (EGO)*, (Mainz: the Leibniz Institute of European History, 2012,) <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/dreesbacha-2012-en>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

the audience interacts with Johnson and become a part of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*. This participation switches the performance's context from the objectification of an Indigenous person in which the performer has no power, to one of subjectivity, where the performer has control over the narrative. However, in keeping with the active nature of *Netukulimk*, this shift requires the viewer to participate without being prompted to do so, and this shift only occurs through moments of interaction. This creates a dual state for the viewer to move between the positions of the observing colonial voyeur and that of an active participant which resists the other position. While this is likely not intended or even necessarily felt by the viewer, the context of Johnson's performance offers up the space for the viewer to embody, enact, and further nuance these positions and their relationships with them. This viewer participation is not only critical to the full function of the 'Performative Space,' but is also a necessary part of the 'Archive Room.' The 'Archive Room' is not completed until the viewer interacts with the works, however, much like the 'Performative Space,' it is up to the viewer to choose to participate. While the computer screens in the archive suggest the viewer pick up and scan the baskets, it is just as easy for the viewer to walk through the space without interacting with the objects at all.

As Johnson states, "Traditional Mi'kmaq basketry has made an extensive journey from Indian craft, to art, to collector's item, to artefact, and now on its way to the archive."⁹³ Here, she is speaking to the archive as a space where Mi'kmaq basketry becomes disconnected from fulfilling the maker's intended use. The archive is a space where items are meant to be preserved, making it a place intended for preserving time and memory. However, in consideration of how time and memory are expressed through *Netukulimk* and Mi'kmaq language structure, the archive cannot be considered as a space of memory because it opposes "connectiveness." In entering the archive and interacting with its objects, the viewer is encouraged by Johnson to activate the space, thus shifting it to a space of connection.

Viewer participation is also how the entire archive for *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* was made. The archive was created through several steps with many people's direct input. Johnson states that this archive would never have been able to be created without the valuable

⁹³ Ursula Johnson, "First Nations Cultural Preservation Through Art: Ursula Johnson at TEDxHalifax," *TEDxTalks*, youtube, 00:09:45, Posted by TEDxTalks, November 23, 2012, <https://youtu.be/-HHvaZKFgRA>.

input from that community engagement.⁹⁴ Johnson did not design many forms in the ‘Archive Room’ – instead, the designs came out of a residency that Johnson undertook in 2012 at Mount St. Vincent University. There, during a studio visit, students asked if they could draw in her sketchbook. This prompted Johnson to begin leaving out a sketchbook in which people could draw. She would ask them to draw whatever form they thought they would want from a basket. From these drawings, Johnson was able to utilize the language that her great-grandmother taught her, in order to make baskets selected from the drawings. Once the baskets are made, Johnson then holds, what she refers to as ‘cataloguing parties’ where people are invited to suggest names and descriptions for each basket. Later, Johnson selects a name and description from those suggested and the baskets are then officially entered into the archive.⁹⁵ The ‘Archive Room’ comes together, not as an expression of Johnson’s singular vision, but, rather, as an expression of active participation.

As much as the ‘Archive Room’ in *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* requires audience participation to be made whole and connected through *Netukulimk*, Johnson has made this participation tenuous. This echoes the dual nature of the viewer’s voyeur/participant experience in the ‘Performance Space.’ When entering the ‘Archive Room,’ the viewers have the rare opportunity to interact with the Indigenous objects. Keenly aware that most museumgoers would be settlers, who make feel a sense of security within museum spaces which often cater to settlers, Johnson’s archival mimicry creates a tension for the viewer of the exhibition by simultaneously mimicking the museum while also taking it out of a museum context and placing it in a gallery context in which an Indigenous artist (Ursula Johnson) has the primary agency over the narrative of the space. Those who encounter *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)* may feel like they are in a space they shouldn’t have access to, and interacting with objects that they normally shouldn’t touch. Johnson further exacerbates this tension; she includes highly visible security cameras throughout the space. Thus, this experience is specifically marked by an uneasiness for settler viewers through feelings of invading the space and being watched. While no experience is universal, and many settlers may already experience a sense of being watched in museum spaces, Johnson’s intention with this uneasiness speak not only to her personal experiences but also to a broader societal context of marginalized people experiencing being more closely

⁹⁴ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

monitored in public spaces where it is less likely for non-marginalized people to experience this same type of gaze on a regular basis. This is intended to invert the typical power imbalance in institutional settings.⁹⁶ In a 2014 interview discussing the exhibition, Johnson explained her intent for the security cameras,

If non-Indigenous viewers come into the space, I need to create a way of feeling that they're being watched. Because it's very different when your cultural context comes into play... For many of us who exist within marginalized groups in society, if someone is standing in the corner of the room, then you're being watched. But somebody else might be thinking, "Oh, this person [in the corner] is here to help me! They're not here to keep an eye on me and make sure I don't do anything wrong." So, I wanted to create that feeling of being watched and not being trusted by using digital media by having these surveillance cameras in the space.⁹⁷

The gloves provided for the viewers, which are located next to the computers, set up another layer of tension within the space. The viewers are purposefully told to wear the gloves while handling the baskets. They add to the seemingly official setting of the room, and create a physical barrier for the viewer from fully interacting with the basket forms. The gloves act as a type of uniform for the viewer. When wearing the gloves, the viewer is mimicking archival labour, causing the viewer to embody the role of the museum professional, which the archive simultaneously critiques. As many aspects of viewer interaction within the exhibition, this may not be immediately (or ever) understood or felt by the viewer. Given the directions on the computer, it is unlikely that viewers will suspect that not wearing the gloves is an option for interacting with the objects, and most likely wear the gloves out of respect for both Johnson and the baskets. I include myself within this category, as it wasn't until I was in conversation with Johnson and she asked if I had used the gloves while in the archive that I was able to parse the full intent of their inclusion. This conversation allowed me to reexamine my experience in the archive, and see one of the roles that Johnson is implicitly asking her viewers to enact. For settler viewers, such as myself, this may be perceived as reenacting a problematic position of authority. Alternatively, Indigenous viewers and other viewers who are more likely to be marginalized through the colonial museum may instead read this as a shift in authority where the

⁹⁶ Alison Cooley, "Ursula Johnson Q&A: Of Craft and Cultural Survival," in *Canadian Art*, 2014. Published online: canadianart.ca/features/ursula-johnson/, Accessed: January 2015.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

power is being transitioned to marginalized peoples. It is equally as likely that a viewer can experience both these readings simultaneously.

These points of tension in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* create interactions where the viewer enters into a relationship of negotiation with Johnson and her work. The viewer is asked to take on active role in acknowledging and working from within their own subjectivity. At the same time, much like the exhibition title's English translation suggests, this is a request, and not a demand. The interactions that Johnson facilitates in this work, and the spaces that she creates, allow for misinterpretations and passivity to also take place. Despite mimicking a museum, the exhibition does not mimic the didactic nature of a museum. The exhibition presents information critically in such a way that the viewer must be committed to the learning process, rather than having information directly handed to them. The indirect nature of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* allows space for some viewers to walk away without a full scope of the conceptual drive of the exhibition, which is always a possibility within all exhibitions because although this may be attempted to be mitigated through a variety of types of didactics, the individual viewer experience cannot be fully controlled by the artist or gallery or museum staff. I would argue, however, that this possibility is heightened within *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, however, because the information provided which speaks to the actual concept of the exhibition is limited to the video at the entrance of the exhibition and the brief curatorial statement. This is countered by the excess of didactic information presented as part of the 'Archive Room,' and it is only revealed through either the video or interactions with Johnson that this information is not factually describing objects within the exhibition, but is also a part of the exhibition. Nevertheless, the same indirect nature of the exhibition which allows for this possibility, also creates a space for the viewer, be they settler or Indigenous, to reexamine their own experiences within museums, and how they may be implicated more broadly in the implicitness of colonialism within museums.

Certainly, some visitors leave *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* without a complete sense of what they have witnessed. However, those who experience the full extent of the exhibition are given the opportunity to connect with their own knowledge systems and the role they play tacitly within museums. Johnson's exhibition provides many tools for visitors to consider and discuss these topics, but the visitor must still make their own decision to partake in processes of decolonization. Thus, a relationship is formed. As elder Albert Marshall suggests,

this type of relationship-based knowledge is a critical factor in ‘two eyed seeing.’ Marshall states, “I must bring relationships into my life. If a sense of relationship with the knowledge is not identified, then it becomes a duty and you memorize to appease someone. The understandings have not been assimilated; the head and heart have not been connected.”⁹⁸ This factor of the work aligns well with Johnson’s roles as both a teacher and a learner. Johnson states that she is willing to pass on the knowledge she has gained in basket-making to new generations, but those who she teaches must first be committed to the learning process.⁹⁹ This type of commitment is not something she demands from the viewer in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*. Rather, she invites the viewer to connect several histories, cultures, and life experiences together in order to form active, participatory, and engaged relationships.

⁹⁸ Albert Marshall and Cheryl Bartlett, “Two eyed Seeing for Environmental Sustainability,” 2010.

⁹⁹ Ursula Johnson in discussion with the author, November 9th, 2015.

Conclusion

Ursula Johnson's exhibition, *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, offers a nuanced examination of complicated and overlapping issues within museums, as well as the museum's effect on public consciousness in relation to Indigenous cultures. I argue that Johnson's work can be understood through Mi'kmaq elder Albert Marshall's philosophy on 'two eyed seeing.' Through Marshall's philosophy, Johnson draws on tensions between seemingly oppositional forces as powerful sites from which to express museological critiques, while also creatively reimagining museum roles within Indigenous futures. For many, Johnson's work provides a rich starting point in discussing the fraught relationships between official histories presented through institutions, and the personal and community memories that are possibly being (mis)represented within museums. The exhibition can also serve as a continuation and nuance of these discussions, and bring them to different contexts. *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* encourages the viewer not only to critically engage with her work, but to expand that criticality to their past and future experiences within museums, galleries, and also into the everyday. It also asks the viewer to thoughtfully reexamine, or remember, their own position within these spaces based both on their personal experiences and their broader position within society. Viewers are implicitly encouraged to engage with and question themes such as authority, authenticity, education, cultural survival, and representation, and to connect these together thoughtfully through their own experience.

While this study addressed several themes of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, primarily through the relationships created between Johnson, her work, and the actions of the audience, there is still much that can be studied with this exhibition that is beyond the scope of this paper. Given the fact that this is a travelling exhibition, there are several different locations that the exhibition has been shown that each provide a slight difference in context that could provide important comparative analysis. Additionally, this thesis has been written prior to the release of the exhibition catalogue for *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* which I was not able to gain early access to, and the website for the exhibition was launched only within the very final stages of the writing of this thesis. These sources, particularly the several essays within the exhibition catalogue, should provide significant additional scholarship and perspectives on the exhibition. This thesis has also been framed in large part around *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* as a stand-alone work, however, there is fruitful space for this writing to be

expanded to draw on the exhibition within an in-depth analysis of Johnson's larger body of work both leading up to the release of the exhibition in 2014 and the new works produced by Johnson throughout the years that *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* has been travelling. There is additional space, that is beyond the scope of this paper, to frame Johnson's exhibition within a history of many other artists who utilize their practice to address critiques of museums and their relationship with colonialism. The scholarship presented within this thesis has by no means been comprehensive, and it has been my aim with this research to contribute to scholarship both on contemporary Indigenous art and Ursula Johnson. It is my hope that this thesis can be a starting point for future scholars who wish to further explore all the research possibilities with *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*.

Within the scope of this thesis, I argue that Johnson's work, while critical of the role that museums have historically played, also looks to the museum as a space which has the possibility to aid in the revitalization and continuation of Indigenous cultural practices. She believes that this can be made possible through access. At the end of the video in *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Johnson states,

It's only relatively recently that there's a number of museums that are starting to open up the cases, or are starting to unlock the archives. They're starting to say, 'Let's see what happens when we give access.' [I]t's starting to incorporate this new type of relationship that the institution is having with all of the objects in their collection. Which I think is a really exciting time, because [...] Indigenous artists who have been researching and asking their families about [these] object[s], they're [...] wanting to learn more about it so they can help that continue to evolve, because that's what culture does, it continues to shift and evolve.¹⁰⁰

The 'Archive Room' speaks directly to the access that Johnson sees as a positive. This access provides the viewer with an immediate connection with the kinds of objects that are deliberately not present in the 'Museological Grand Hall.' The exhibition also draws on the museum as a space which can preserve and honour objects. For example, the vitrines in 'Museological Grand Hall' reference missing objects yet also work to preserve the language which is vital to the production on basketry. As Johnson states,

By having the case and not having the object there, you have the memory of the object, but it honours the language. There's no way to put the language inside of the case, and the most important thing in any culture is the language. If a language dies the culture dies with it, so

¹⁰⁰ Ursula Johnson, *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, Exhibition video (Originally released 2014; Halifax, Nova Scotia), Digital video.

I wanted to preserve the language and wanted to continue this art of Mi'kmaq basketry by practicing the language.¹⁰¹

For Johnson, it is this access that she sees as a necessity for Indigenous communities and museums to properly work together for both to benefit, as aligned with the concept, 'two eyed seeing.'

Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember) draws its strength and impact from the tensions between institution and memory, nostalgia and irony, and individual and collective. Through these tensions, Johnson brings Mi'kmaq worldview, philosophy, and knowledge systems into institutional spaces. Furthermore, she looks to museums as possible sites of renewal and continued practice of Indigenous culture. The exhibition speaks both to Indigenous and settler communities through the resistance of colonialism, activating museum spaces, and working together to create institutions which not only accurately represent but also benefit multiple communities. Johnson's work offers the space for the viewer to work through the gaps in their knowledge and their pre- or misconceptions, as well as their own experiences. This allows for the viewer to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of history and colonialism's long-term effects, specifically in relation to Mi'kmaq basketry. As well as Johnson's creative look forward, *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* ultimately stands as a testament to the importance of remembering and creating a lasting relationship to the past.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Figures



Figure 1. Ursula Johnson, *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)* (installation view from the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*), 2014-2018. Video. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by the author, 25 September 2015.



Figure 2. Ursula Johnson, installation view of the ‘Museological Grand Hall’ from the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

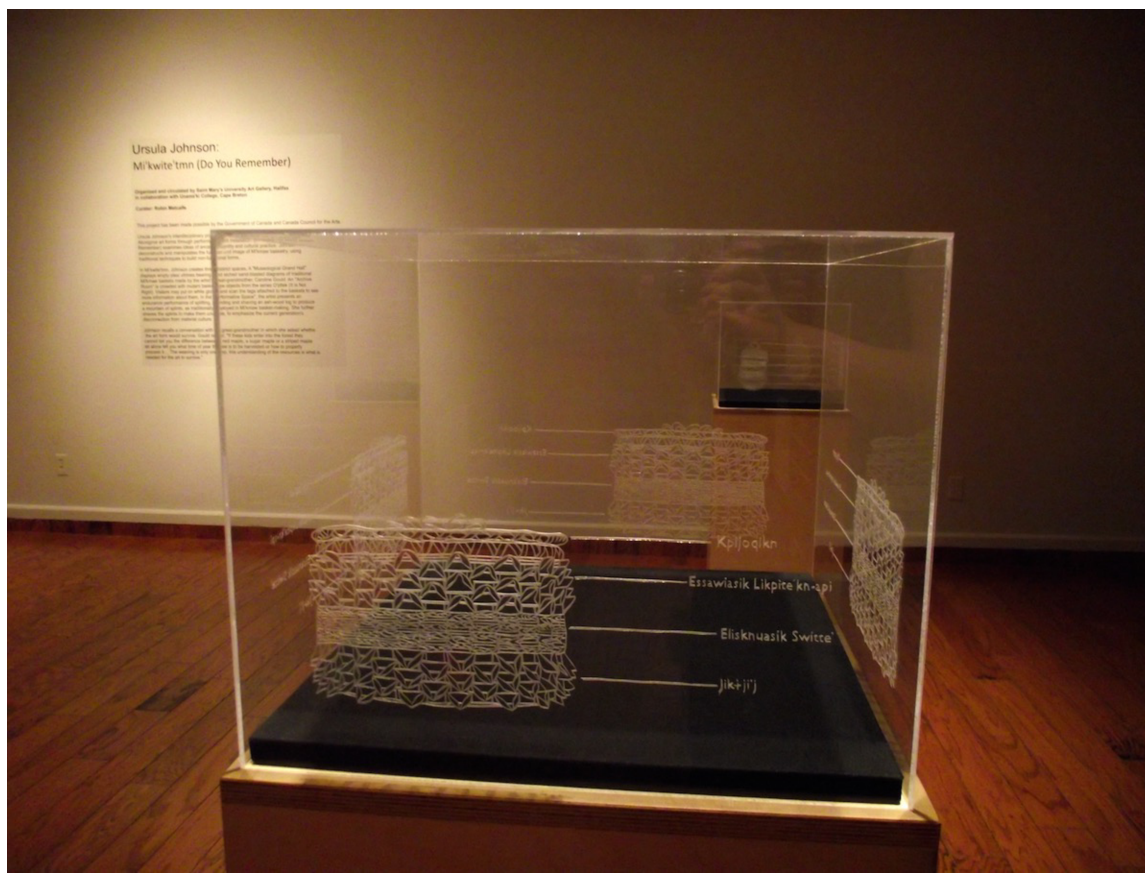


Figure 3. Ursula Johnson, detail of a vitrine in the ‘Museological Grand Hall,’ part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by author, September 25, 2015.



Figure 4. Ursula Johnson, installation view of the 'Archive Room,' part of *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

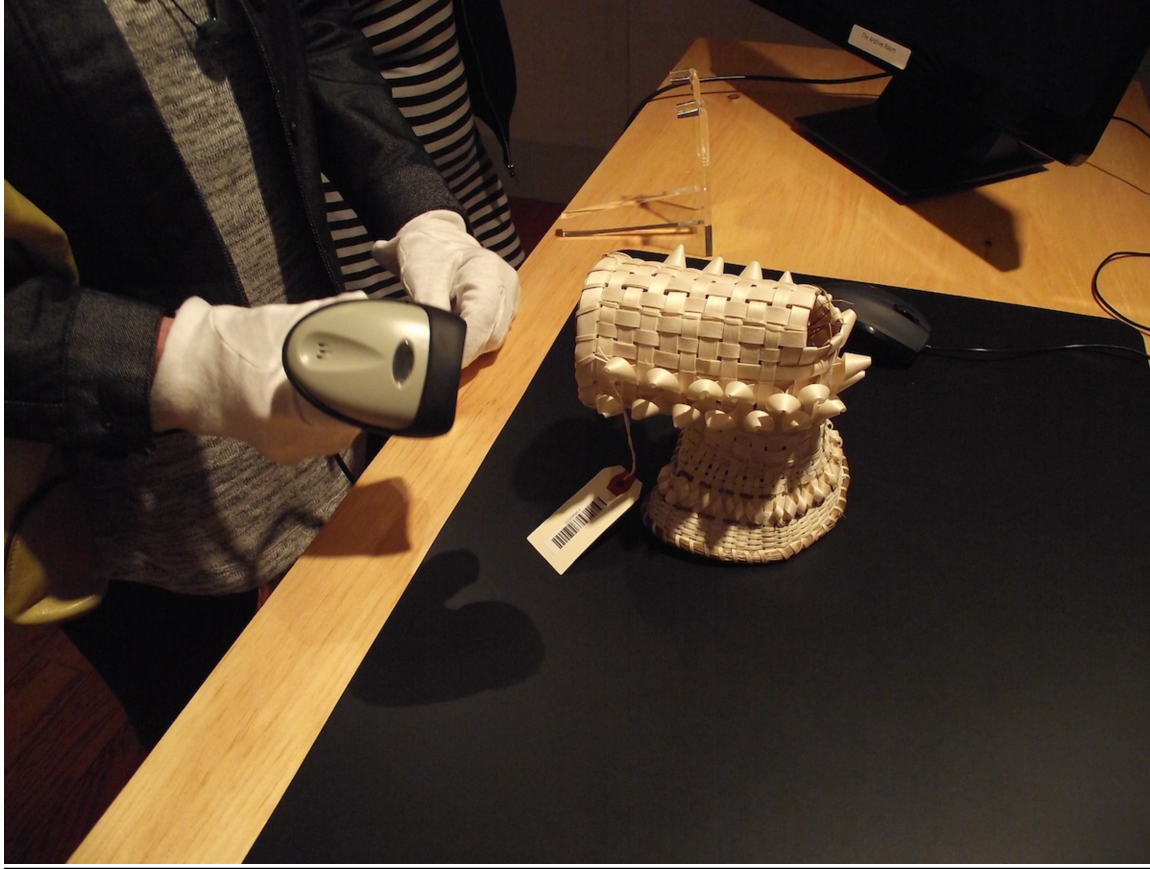


Figure 5. Ursula Johnson, detail of computer Station and barcode label in the 'Archive Room' part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

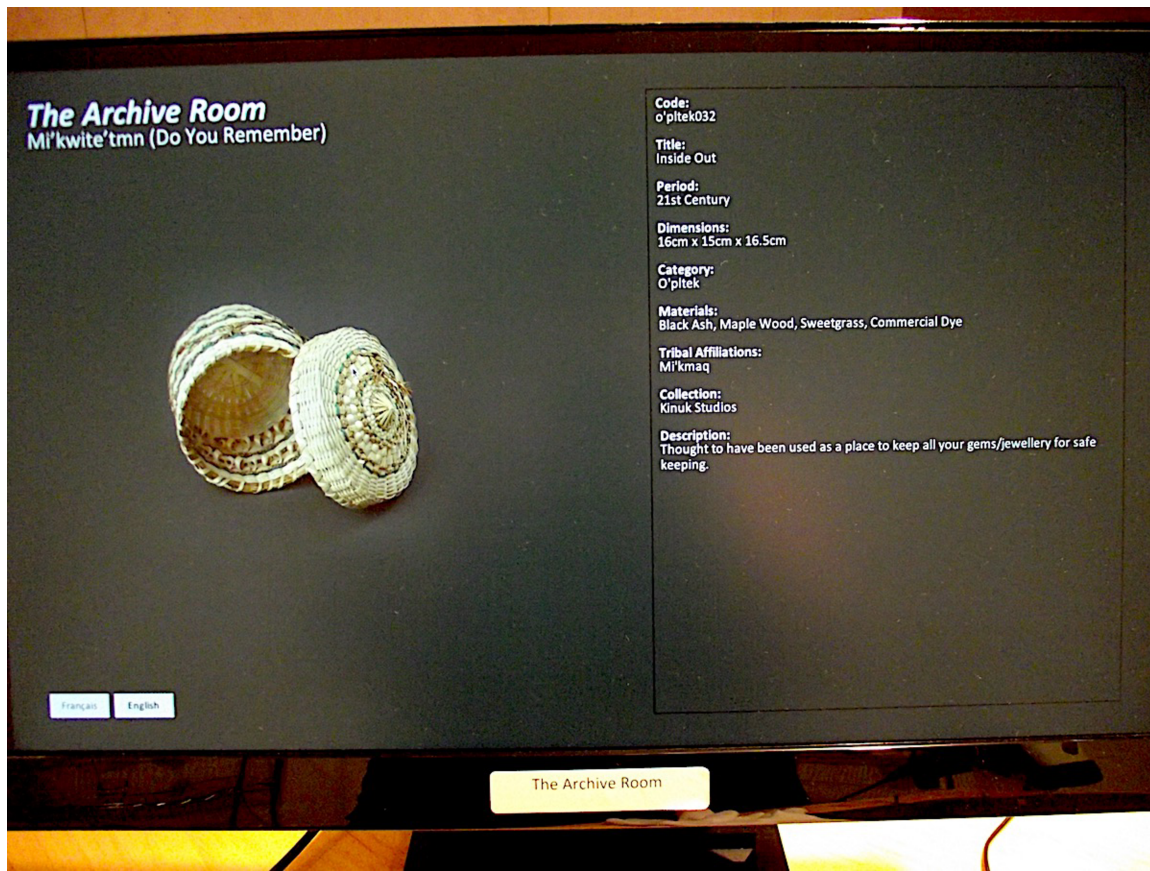


Figure 6. Ursula Johnson, computer station in the 'Archive Room' (detail) from the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by author, September 25, 2015.



Figure 7. Ursula Johnson during her performance in the ‘Performative Space,’ part of the exhibition *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by author, September 25, 2015.



Figure 8. Viewers watching Ursula Johnson during her performance in the 'Performative Space' as part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Photograph taken by author, September 25, 2015.



Figure 9. Tools used by Ursula Johnson during her performance in the ‘Performative Space’ as part of the exhibition *Mi’kwite’tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Photograph taken by the authour, September 25, 2015.



Figure 10. Image of the Pitt Rivers Museum current display, September 2018. "Pitt Rivers Museum Virtual Tour." <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/>. Accessed September 1, 2017.

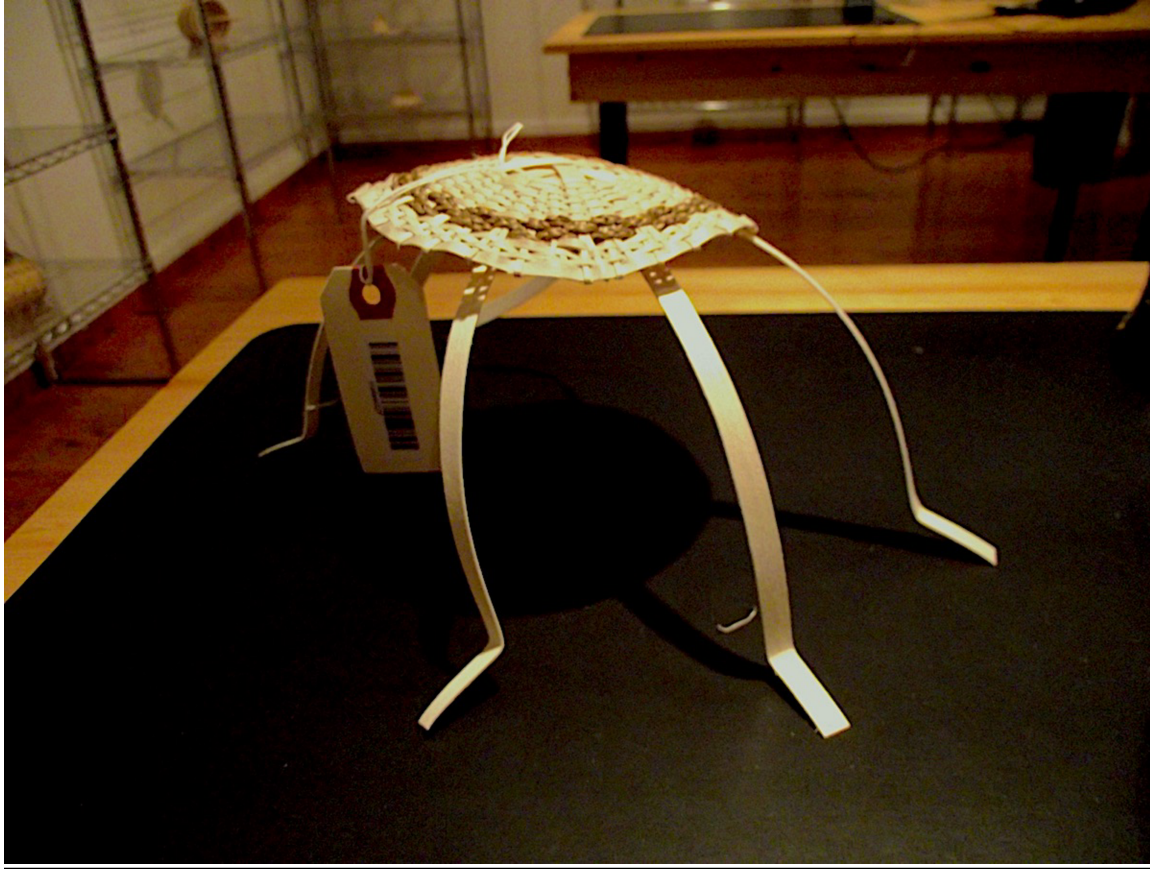


Figure 11. Ursula Johnson, *Spider Stool*, 2014-2018. White Ash and Sweetgrass, 25cm x 21cm x 11.5 cm. From the series *O'pltek*, as part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Grenfell Campus Art Gallery of Memorial University, Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

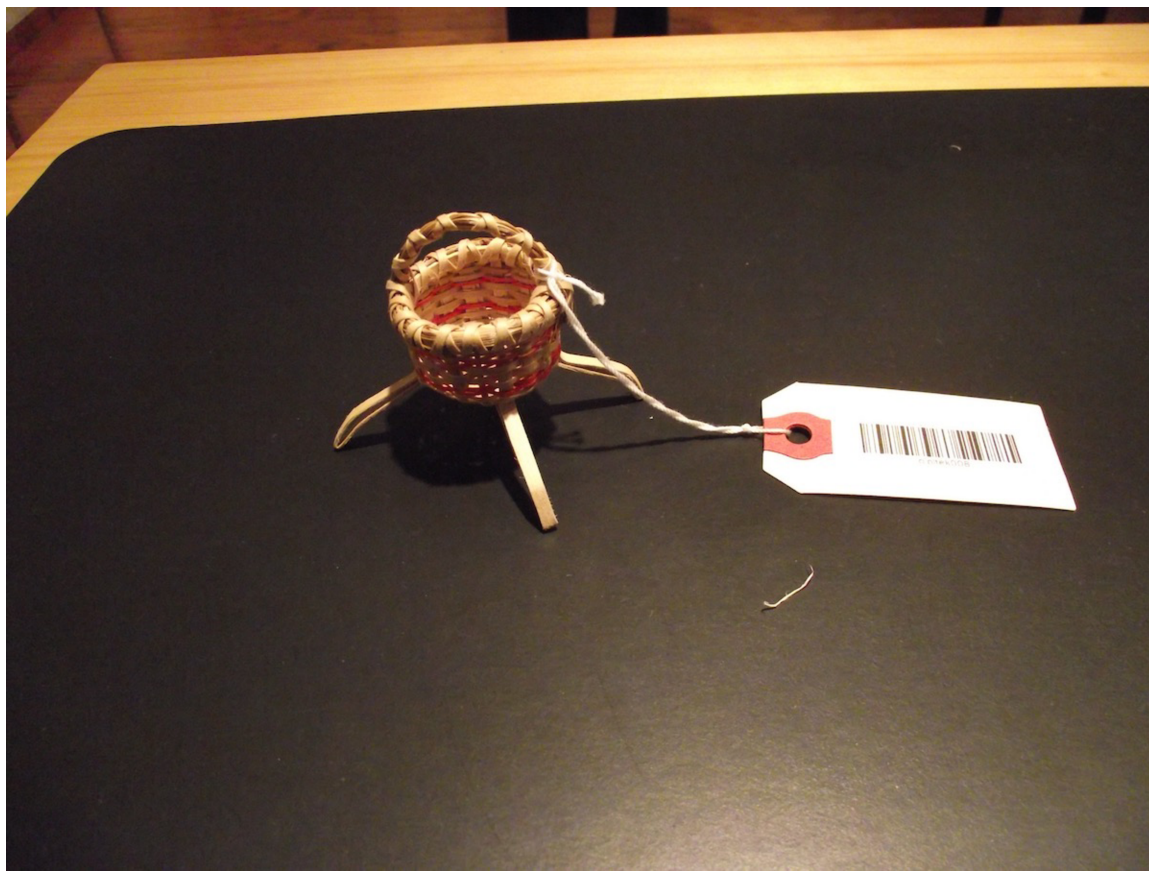


Figure 12. Ursula Johnson, *Cook Pot*, 2014-2018. Black Ash, Sweetgrass, and Commercial Dye, 7.5cm x 8cm x 5.5cm. From the series *O'pltek*, as part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Photo taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

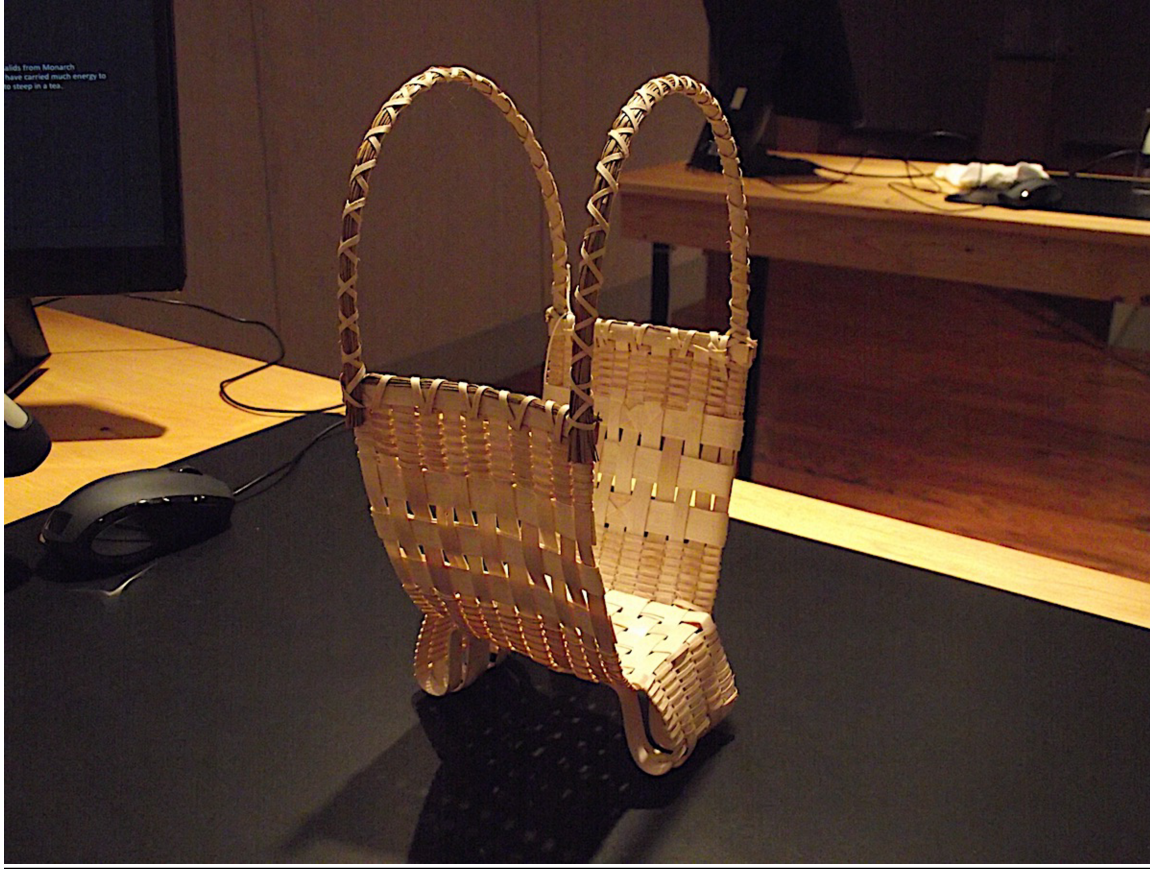


Figure 13. Ursula Johnson, *Day Before Welfare Purse*, 2014-2018. Black Ash, White Ash, and Sweetgrass, 13cm x 14cm x 25cm. From the series *O'pltek*, part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

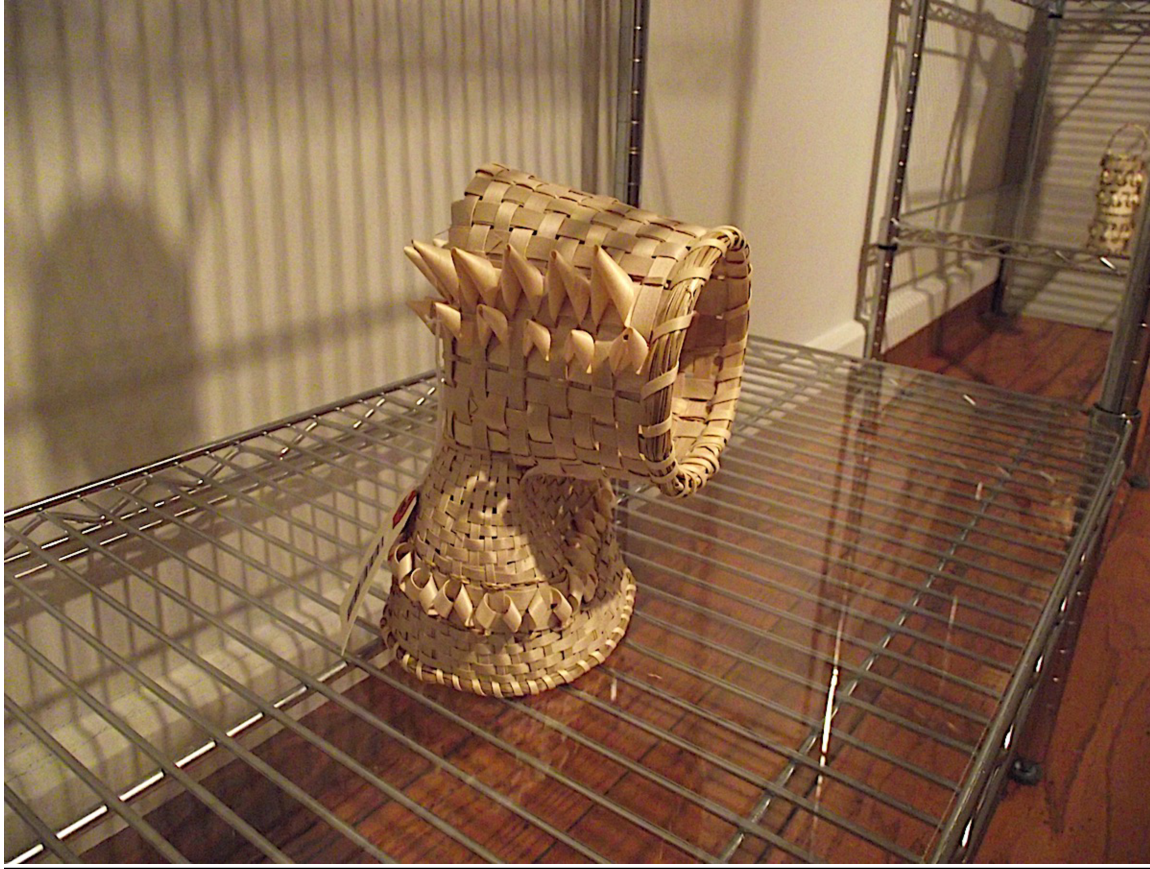


Figure 14. Ursula Johnson, *Awije'jk*, 2014-2018. Black Ash, Maple Wood, and Sweetgrass, 13cm x 13.5cm x 18cm. From the series *O'pltek*, part of the exhibition *Mi'kwite'tmn (Do You Remember)*, 2014-2018. Photograph taken by the author, September 25, 2015.

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Appendix A: Transcript of Interview with Ursula Johnson Conducted November 9th, 2015

Samantha Merritt (SM) 0:00:08-0:00:16

The first couple questions I have are mostly just to reconfirm things we already discussed when I was at your show [in Corner Brook, NL], just basic information.

SM 0:00:16-0:00:18

When did you start making baskets?

Ursula Johnson (UJ) 0:00:19-0:01:17

Ahh, when did I start making baskets? Well, in 2003 I wove a basket around myself, but it wasn't really a basket, I guess. It was a performance where I encased myself in materials that resembled a basket. And then it wasn't until 2008 that I got a research grant from Canada Council that I started really seriously looking at the customary art form that my family has been doing for generations. Then in 2010, when I was curating an exhibition of my great-grandmother's baskets, it was a retrospective of her work of just a 30 year span, that's when I started picking the materials and seriously started exploring and working with it and kind of figuring out the forms. So, it's only been close to five years.

SM 0:01:18 – 1:21

What was the research grant about?

UJ 1:21 – 2:03

The research grant was about try to understand the Mi'kmaw philosophical value of Netukulimk. Netukulimk is essentially a philosophical value in regards to self-sustainability from the land and the resources that the land provides, but through ecological kind of harvesting and being mindful of the ways that you harvest, so it's kind of understanding your ecological responsibility in regards to harvesting natural materials before you use them, so it's hunting and fishing as well.

SM 2:03 – 2:20

And then, um, okay, so if you could just speak briefly on what it means to you to um, to be a basketmaker and carrying that title. I know you don't use the title but just like about the idea behind it and why you prefer to not call yourself a basketmaker.

UJ 2:21- 3:40

Um, I don't call myself a basketmaker because I feel too young in the practice to have fully earned that title. I have great respect for people who have worked in any type of craft discipline for a long period of time. It takes a very long period of hours that are logged in for you to completely understand and comprehend the materials in which you are working with in order to be able to carry a title. Kind of thinking about apprenticeships, or people that are in craft guilds, you have to put in a lot of hours and study and practice and research before you can actually carry that title and I feel like basketry is in that same area. A lot of people don't take it as seriously as maybe ceramics, or glasswork and they would think, 'oh basketry, well you're just weaving things' but there's actually a very specific language you have to understand there's very

specific ways of working. A lot of, You know, kind of these rules that are imposed upon, and there's different families that work in specific ways. So when you look at a certain structure you know that family traditions and processes and methodologies that people have worked in. So, I don't use that title for myself.

SM 3:40-:41

Yeah

UJ 3:41-4:41

Kind of long story, but basically I hope that someday I can carry that title because it is something that I'm interested in and I'm always going to use these materials for the rest of my life. I'm also always going to be a performance artist, and I will find different ways of working with the materials to explore them. But also going back to really trying to master those traditional techniques, because I feel like it is important to learn the rules before you can break them, so that you're aware of what you're doing and the challenges that you're opposing. So I feel like there's something, I recently just received a research, another research and creation from, um, arts nova scotia, where I'm going to learn new kind of processes and methods of working which I'm quite excited about from some senior basket makers, so I'm excited about that, because then I can continue to develop my craft.

SM – 4:42 – :43

So when does that, that start?

UJ – 4:43 – 4:49

That is supposed to be starting just before the winter, so, soon.

SM 4:50

And then how long does it go for?

UJ 4:51 4:53

I think it's a 6 month project.

SM 4:53 4:58

That's exciting to have both of those things going on at the same time, you're still making stuff for your show too so..

UJ 4:58- 5:20

Yeah, and the drawings I am responding to in the Mi'kwite'tmn exhibition, all the works that are in the archive room, um, I think that there's going to be a slight shift. I don't want something to be an extremely drastic shift, but you can see an evolution of different methods and techniques that are introduced.

SM 5:26-:51

Okay, so, one of the things I've been looking at is Trickster mythology, and I know you've spoken about some of your previous performance work and said that you've kind of brought a trickster mentality into it, and I wonder if, um, in this series of works if you came to that with the same kind of idea - being a bit of a trickster, at all.

UJ 5:51-8:39

Yeah, I think I always kind of have a little bit of that edge that comes across in my work because it's a large part of my personality where I just kinda, you know, I like turning the tables, and flipping the mirror and things like that. But kinda thinking about things in a different way and reposing questions to people, because I feel like a lot of times I'm kind of thinking about things quite differently. It probably has a lot to do with all the different influences in my life. You know, I've been fortunate enough to grow up with so many people having really great conversations in my household when I was growing up, so it kind of informed different ways of thinking, but then once they're all in my head along with, um, my family being basket weavers and storytellers and musicians and kind of all these different things. And my own interest in learning about Mi'kmaq mythology and legends and folklore has helped to influence a bit of that trickster mentality. I think it's also very, it's it's, I don't want to say it's a gimmick, but it's a nice tool to be able to use if it's used effectively, and efficiently. Because it can come across as, what's the word I'm looking for, as kind of a jab, if it doesn't work properly. Then people will think that it's a bit snarky, so I really am careful to try to walk that line, if it's not going to work than I am not going to use it. But if it's going to work and it's going to work well, then I will implement it. I think that's something that was really successful with the archive room, because the illusion of the archive room was so great and as a society, as members of the western society, we don't enter into a cultural institution and question the information that is being presented to us. Because we just trust that one of the roles of that cultural institution is to educate, and to educate us on a fact based evidence that is provided to us, we don't question it. While using that space that has already existed and has a history, and then trying to implement something that changes things and makes people not question what's happening until they're in it and they're like 'oh no, what's going on here?'

SM 8:40 - 9:00

I know, I love the amount of people that were coming up to you, and just very very sure of themselves that everything that was in there was exactly as is. When I was in there, there was a woman who, like, picked up one of the little hooded figures and she was like, "I remember these from when I was a kid!"

UJ 9:04-9:13

But it's interesting, 'cause it's like well what does she remember? Does she remember the form? Or does she remember the techniques? Or does she remember her other worldly experience?

SM 9:15 - 9:34

Um, so I guess speaking about the archive, could you speak about just the process of creating it, especially with the accession parties and kind of the whole archive from like the drawings to the accession parties all being a collaborative process.

UJ 9:35- 10:00

Yeah, so, what happened is in 2010, so this a couple years after I had done the research project on Netukulimk, 2010 was the time that my great grandmother's exhibition took place, so I had all of her objects and I had been working towards and exhibition at the Thunder Bay art gallery for this new series which was called the O'pltek series.

UJ 10:15

So I started working on these pieces for this O'pltek series, and what happened was, um it kind of came out of frustration because I was making a basket one day in my studio and it wasn't working out and I was getting really frustrated with it, and I was thinking of my great grandmother in my head when she said "If it's not working, just put it down and walk away from it, and go back to it later." So I put it down, walked away from it, and I came back the next day after having a really intense dream. So my dream was me holding this basket, and I was trying to work with it and it wasn't working and I ended up getting so frustrated that I tried to rip it. But it was made so strong that it wouldn't rip, and I threw it across the room (this is all in my dream) and I threw it across the room, all the sudden it grew into two separate baskets. So when I woke up that morning I thought, 'what am I going to do with this basket?' and I went in there and I literally ripped this basket in my studio, and then I started to problem solve. 'how am I going to make this torn basket into something that is sprouting into two other baskets?' So it took me a while to figure it out but once I made that form I was quite pleased with it because I felt like it was a bit of a breakthrough on something that I was trying to scratch the surface of and didn't quite know what I was doing. When I took it home to my family and they looked at it and said [OH-GHEL-EEE]. Like, 'this is made completely wrong, this is strange looking.'

11:49 - 14:34

So I created the series based upon my family's reactions. And my great-grandmother looked at it and said, 'this is really inventive and it's something that's really interesting and I would like to see where you go if you continue to experiment in this way.' So it felt like that was permission for me to start to break some of these rules. So I started working with all these different forms, and then what happened is, originally I had made a couple sketches of some ideas I had, and then years later, the O'pltek exhibition happened at the Thunder Bay art gallery, then several years later - I believe it was 2006 at the Mount [referring to Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery] I could have the dates wrong, maybe it was 2012, I can't remember, 2012, yeah, not 2006. So in 2012 I had a residency at the Mount and I had continued to make all these strange looking forms, and I was starting to work towards the Mi'kwite'tmn exhibition, but at this point I didn't quite know where I was going with it. Then the students that were visiting and people that were coming to my studio saw my sketchbook and said 'well can I draw in your sketchbook?' and I said, "sure!" So people started drawing things and I'd look and I'd say, 'oh I wonder what would happen if I invited people to do the drawings of forms I'm trying to make.' So then I created a sketchbook that said 'please draw what you think a basket should be.' People came in, they made drawings, and then I would take these drawings and make them into 3D forms based upon the language that my great-grandmother gave me on the baskets. And the language is all, essentially text that tells you how to manipulate the materials with your body in order to achieve that desired look. So then I ended up with making all these different forms and then what happened is, um, I decided that we should host a cataloguing party, because I had to do some sort of public event as part of the exhibition, or the residency. And what we did was, we set a table with all these forms, and we asked people to come in and I spoke about the role of anthropologist, sociologist and about how they've kind of always authored these objects and

their history and stuff, and the public played all of those roles. And then from the information that was given to me at that cataloguing party, I basically took it home and edited it, and then I would come up with the information that was later put into the database for the archive room.

SM
14:35
Cool.

UJ
14:35
It's quite complicated, there's a lot of information.

UJ
14:55- 15:17
It's a very fun way of working when you kind of let go of that. In the end I still ultimately have a lot of power because I chose what goes in, the information, but to have people contribute what their ideas are and to have that type of community discussion and dialogue was very exciting.

SM
15:17- 15:45
Yeah, I see it as a way to, not only holding up a mirror and posing questions to, um, museums and archives, and those professional practices that go into creating facts, but also the idea, like, of the artistic single author genius kind of thing.

15:49- 15:56
Like, it is something that you could have done all by yourself, but at the same time it's much richer that it was part of other people as well.

UJ
15:56- 16:33
I don't think I could have done it all by myself. I think that's really the magic about community engagement and artistic practices, is that there's something that's achieved that would not otherwise be achieved if it was artist working in [INAUDIBLE]. And that's what I really enjoy about performance out, because there's nothing that you can plan out to try to figure out what it is.

SM
23:51-24:12
So, I guess I also kind of think of the archive as kind of almost a performance in and of itself. I was wondering what you think about that, because I think like, it's not really a full piece until people come in and activate it by using it, so I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about how the archive is used.

UJ

24:15 - 25:06

It's interesting that you think of it as a performance, because, the past couple years I've created performative kind of installations with delegated performers, where I've taken myself out and I'm no longer the performer. But I essentially set up a scene to invite a series of actions, or some type of engagement to take place, but where somebody else does it. So I wonder if that's something that maybe I was unaware of, but along the same lines of some of the other performances I've had. So it's something for me to think about. Thank you for that observation.

25:07- 28:29

Um, but in regards to the space, so what happens is because the illusion of an actual working archive room is created – and I keep saying illusion because it's kind of set up to look that way. Originally it was intended to be an illusion, I didn't realize until probably about a year ago this coming winter that I had actually set up a working archive. I was like, 'oh no, it's an installation' and then I think about it more and I'm like, no, it's an archive! Which is not what I intended to do, so it's kind of a happy accident – Or I guess, a curse, it depends on how you look at it, because the archive has to have a certain amount of upkeep that is necessary because that is what happens in archives. So what happens is when somebody comes in there's two computer terminals, two different tables, and the tables have been specifically designed to be 38 inches tall which is the perfect working height for the average person. So when you come in the table invites you at waist level to interact. Then what you do, the computer terminal prompts you, and in front of it is a pair of white gloves, a black mat, a barcode scanner, a mouse and then the computer terminal says 'please wear white gloves when handling artifacts' so then it's like 'oh I am allowed to handle these?' and I think it also says to scan the barcode too – 'to activate, please scan barcode.' So you walk in, put on the white gloves, take something off the shelves - these kind of stainless steel kind of chrome looking shelves that have acetate liners on them, so it's a very sterile looking environment. And then you take one of the objects and you notice it has a tag on it that has a little barcode and there's no other information except for a number. So when you go to the terminal and you scan the barcode scanner, then that action of scanning it initiates a program that's in the computer that retrieves all the the essentially tombstone information from the object you're inquiring about. And what happens is the image comes up on the screen with the tombstone information that has the barcode number, the century that the object has been made, the period that it's representing, the tribal affiliation, the materials, the dimensions, and the description. The description has a little bit of information about what the object could potentially be used for, what it is used for, where it may come from, um so it's kind of giving you the idea of what maybe a function is, or the history of that object. Yeah, so that's what happens when people enter the archive room. And then if you scan another barcode, then the page you had previously dissipates and the other one comes up. And then if people try to scan something from their clothes, or something from their phone a page will come up that will prompt you to say there's been an error because the only things that have been activated are the things that have been put into the archive.

SM

28:31 - 29:02

Um, so I'm wondering if you could just people's reactions, especially when they find out that these things aren't 'real' or that these descriptions aren't truthful the way that they assume they were. Or if people are understanding that there's a joke behind it a little bit. I think it's pretty obvious in a lot of the descriptions, but I know a lot of people have been taking them as fact.

UJ

29:16- 32:27

Um, there's been a lot of mixed reactions. There's some people who think it's great and love it, um, because they get kind of that joke or that trickster element to it very quickly - mostly because they're familiar with my work and kind of the approach and how I present information - so those people right away love it. The people that aren't familiar with my work and enter into the space, and maybe aren't so familiar with the way that Indigenous objects are typically presented, they kind of do a little bit of digging and then they might think, 'Oh isn't this interesting that we have an opportunity to glimpse into the past of Mi'kmaw people and learn about their history.' so they come at it from a very naive approach and they don't question the information that is presented, and they'll leave thinking they've just been educated about some type of historical context for these objects. There's also been people that will try to relate their own past to these objects, so some people who 'remember seeing them as a child,' or somebody saying, 'oh I remember my great grandmother had a basket like this one.' This happened in PEI where this woman argued with me that one of the forms in there her grandmother had it in her house growing up. I said, 'Oh no, not that one.' and she said, 'Oh yes it is, I remember it because I wasn't allowed to touch it.' And I told her that these forms have never existed before and she was very adamant to say no i've seen this. So I thought, well maybe it's possible, maybe someone has made something like this before, I don't know. She was talking specifically about the cylinder one, so I thought it was very strange. So I thought, well, what could it have been? Could it have been napkin rings that she saw where she was a child and when she looked at it it looked big at the time or something. I couldn't really know. And there's some people that come in, and they think it's all truth until they get to a certain point, and they're like 'wait a second, where's the trickster camera' and then they'll find me in the performance space and they'll ask. And I tell them. There's basically two different types of people, there's people who are very upset because they've been so called 'duped' with the information that was presented to them and there's other people that are very surprised, and they leave thinking 'well this is very interesting because now you're going to make me question the information that is being presented to me.' The later is what I'm hoping people will take from it. That they will start questioning information that's presented. Is that in fact the right century that it's presented as, is that the right tribal affiliation. So I'm hoping that people will take that approach more and question it, but it's just kind of a mix.

SM

32:28 - 32:54

Do you find that there's, um, a different audience now with this different type of work? Because it is presented as these actual physical objects, working within the traditional history of the way these things are made, that you're getting a different type of audience then the people that might come out for say performances or different things.

UJ

32:55

Absolutely.

SM

32:55

Yeah?

UJ

32:56 - 34:05

There's a lot of people, um, I remember this specifically about PEI and Newfoundland, where people came specifically to see Mi'kmaq baskets. They came in, they saw the cases, but were like, 'where's the baskets? This is a micmac basket show, I wanted some micmac baskets.' And then they'd go into the space and they were happy they got to see the baskets because that's what they came for, and there's people that have come in thinking that. You know that these are people that don't normally visit public galleries and they might make me an offer about wanting to buy one of the baskets off the shelf. So I know that's a very different audience. It might be their first time stepping into the Confederation Centre, but what brought them in is the promotional material that says it's a Mi'kmaq artist doing baskets, and some news publications will say 'Mi'kmaq basketmaker' or 'Mi'kmaq baskets' so there's a tagline that brings people in. It's very different than the standard person that comes in.

34:09 - 34:19

And sometimes those people who come up to me during the performance are the ones I end up having really good conversations with.

SM

34:19 - 34:36

Yeah, because they're coming to it complete fresh, right? Hopefully they're coming to it open minded, it's all new to them. So how has your family reacted to this series of work?

UJ

34:36 - 38:45

[Laughing] Well, depends on who in my family you ask. My mother, she think it's great because I'm doing what I love to do. She's always supported me in my art practice. Um, she's also really interested in how I'm exploring the materials and working with it. My great-grandmother who is passed away now, she was always very excited about the kinds of forms I am creating, she had said that if I continued working with these materials that by the time I was 50 or 60 years old I would be a master basket weaver, so she was very encouraging for me to continue to do the play before I became serious. My great aunt, who is also a master basket weaver, she thinks it's great. She goes to the place where she's like, 'well I could learn from you' and I keep telling her, 'well no you can't' because her skills are so much better than mine, and so we've come to this place where we've kind of agreed to disagree, and we also have an understanding with each other where I can learn fine techniques and skills from her and she can learn to think outside the box from me. So we're working together in that aspect. My grandmother thinks they're absolutely

hilarious and she doesn't know what to think. My grandfather thinks the baskets are great and hilarious but doesn't understand the performance aspect of it, and I think my grandmother is also in the same boat. They, I can't really speak for them, but what I understand from the interactions I've had from them is that it's very frustrating for them to see me going through these acts and these processes of disseminating an entire log and nothing is to be used. It's not more so being upset about the waste, but more about the amount of labour that I've put in and to have no result. So they go to this place of, 'why go through this labour and not have a result' and that's frustrating for them. So, like I said, it kind of depends on who you ask, because everyone has different ideas. My brother, he's hilarious. He hasn't seen the show, he's seen different images and photographs, but he's the one that usually helps me to go out into the woods and get the tree. And, um I think he's become really interested in learning more about his responsibility in regards to a Mi'kmaw person understanding natural resources, because he can't tell you the difference between tree to tree to tree but he's very quickly learning since 2008 because I've always involved him. He's six years younger than me so I've always had this kind of big sister role, but most recently we went out into the forest to harvest some tree and I could see in his eyes that there was an interest. And I said, 'what are you thinking?' and he said, 'I'm looking around this forest thinking how the hell can you tell what tree is what?' He said, 'the leaves are almost all gone, I can't even see them.' And when I explained the bark texture on the trees to him, I could see a light [snaps fingers] and it just shifted. And he looked around the forest and suddenly he was like, 'oh my goodness, there's so many of these trees that you're looking for. I know what I'm looking for now.' and I said, "Do you?" He said, 'yeah, I can tell which tree is which' and I said 'Okay now I need to tell you what type of tree we're looking for.' Not the species but what it needed to kind of compose itself of or to consist of. So I think that he might be able to get into kinda some of this of stuff, at least harvesting.

SM

38:46

That's exciting

UJ

38:47

Yeah, I am very excited about it.

[Laughter]

SM

38:50

Just keep dragging him out, tell him you can't help it.

UJ

38:56

And just call home, 'can you get me another tree, I'll be there in 2 days'

[Laughter]

SM

39:02-39:31

So, um, in the performance with the, the kind of destruction of the tree, was that like, a difficult process for you to think about doing? Because I think for me, coming at that those trees are so old they take such a long time to grow, and it's kind of this precious material. I'm hoping you could speak to your feelings of coming into that.

UJ

39:32 - 40:32

Yeah, it's changed a lot in the past couple of years. When I first did the performance at St. Mary's University it was for a nine day period. And right around day 5 I felt like I was losing my mind. I couldn't continue the process, not because of the physical labour and how trying it was on my body, but more on my mind. I think I was feeling a lot of empathy for that tree, and also I was losing hope about the survival of this practice and these knowledges, and these customary ways of working. So it really affected me emotionally. At about day seven I almost gave up, where I would go into the performance space and I would just sit.

UJ

42:32 - 46:48

Day seven I come in and I just sat there, I just sat in the space and I couldn't work with anything and people came in to visit. People that were close to me because they knew I was getting towards the end so they were checking on me and things like that. And, uh, as I was sitting there, I had really amazing conversations with people that helped me kind of process what was going on in my mind. And, um, helped to kind of reconsider what I was doing. Not reconsider to the point of changing it, but for me to be able to change my thinking. What happened was, in particular, there were three individuals who came into the gallery space. The first was a woman from Zimbabwe, and she said, 'Maybe what you need to do is renegotiate need. Because you're saying that you need to cut down this tree to make a statement, or you need to process the tree to have something you can make, but what's going to happen with something you make, it's going to end up on one of these plinths, at some point it's going to end up in the archive 'cause that's what happens.' and she said that in her time period you would never walk into a gallery and see baskets because it is considered such a low form. Baskets are what are sold on the side of the street by the women who are desperate for money - it's not something that's in an art gallery. She said, 'I think it's really interesting the conversation you've brought into play about customs, about resource responsibility, about trying to understand the role that the institution plays in trying to continue these traditional practices and ways of working.' So a lot of the information she shared with me really kind of helped me to think about things in a different way. And then I also had, um, the president of the Nova Scotia Basketry Guild come in and spend quite a lot of time with me sitting on the floor and we were playing with the shavings, and we talked about what my great grand-mother would've thought because she was a really close friend of hers, and about the role of Mi'kmaw basketry, and kind of in regards to the craft discipline. We just had really great conversations about all kinds of stuff, and she also said something to me where to think are these actions going to lead into the conversation that needs to be had. She said, 'it's kind of like the elephant in the room. Nobody really wants to talk about it but what you're doing here is forcing people to talk about it.' And I thought that was interesting because it was a

different responsibility or a different understanding of a responsibility than the one that was instilled in my head at some point. And then there's another gentleman that came in, and he kind of thought well what's more important – the conversation, the debris on the floor, or the objects I created, things that end up in the archive? So after nine days and all those people coming to chat with me about this stuff I said to myself, 'Okay, I can do this. I can kill nine more trees, and go through this process, because if I don't -' and Jolene had said this to me, 'If you don't cut this tree down and initiate these tools with this material in order to have these conversations then either natural fire is going to kill that tree, or it's going to be logged, or it's going to be used for firewood, or the emerald ash bore is going to destroy it. It's inevitable for this tree, and in fact for this species, to not be existing. So for you to cut down this one tree in order to have an important conversation and address the elephant in the room, I think is very important.' And that kind of shifted things for me.

SM

46:50 47:31

So with the performance, I can't help but come back to this history of craftspeople being on display and indigenous people being on display. Especially when you get, you know, a room full of white people coming in and watching you work without talking to you - were you intentionally trying to allude to that history, or is that something that just ended up coming up through the exhibition?

UJ

47:32-49:45

It's definitely something I wanted to have a part of it, in the performance space there's a couple different layer, a couple different things that are happening. One is the conversation about resource responsibility, about the preservation of customary knowledge, but also about restoration of kind of heritage artifacts, I'll use that term, in regards to like the tools, the work horse that I'm using, all these different things, I've had them all completely refinished and restored. As usually happens in institutions, so there's that conversation, but there's also the Indian on display. Typically the Indian doing some type of craftwork on display. So that's something that I was trying to make happen less and less in the [inaudible]. because what has happened in all these different places is there's a protective form. I'm working with sledgehammers and axes and I don't want to break people's tile, so I've asked them to put down protective flooring. What happens is when that protective flooring gets put into place it becomes a pedestal, so people don't enter into that space because I'm on a pedestal. I've tried to problem solve with different curators and preparators to try to figure out what can we do to make this not a pedestal. But people may also not be stepping into it because there's a bunch of dangerous tools and dangerous actions happening. So we couldn't really figure out what is preventing people from entering into that space. It could also be because the Indian was busy working so let's not bother them. I don't know there's lots of different things. But the Indian in the workshop is definitely one of the elements that has been very intentionally integrated into the performance.

Sm

49:47- 50:15

Yeah, It's always so difficult because people come into galleries and museum spaces with this idea of not touching anything, keeping this like really intense distance, it's like a hard issue to solve. Especially at Grenfell when you were in a complete different room and it was just the little door, it seemed like a lot of people were hesitant to go in - I was very hesitant to go in. It felt like I was not allowed to.

[Laughter]

UJ

50:17

'Oh I'll just stand outside the door'

SM

50:18- 50:23

'Oh I'll just sit here' and then every time it was quiet I was like, 'oh I'm totally just being the person that is watching someone work'

[Laughter]

50:26-51:11

Which I also thought of, as being kind of, like as a participant as a viewer I think I'm really interested in kind of this relationship of performance where performance is kind of doubled up, where there's your end of it but also the performance that gets taken on by the viewer. And it felt, like in those moments where I was just watching you work and wasn't saying anything, I was embodying and performing this colonial voyeur, of just watching you work. So I thought that was kind of an interesting aspect of it.

UJ

51:12

How did that make you feel?

SM

51:13 - 51:31

Uncomfortable, but pleasantly so. I felt like it was in a way that made me push at things and think about things. So I hope that other people felt the same way.

UJ

51:31- 51:35

Were you there the day the old man came in?

SM

51:35

Yeah.

UJ

51:36-52:03

Wasn't that great?

[Mutual laughter]

I will always remember that moment! Just like, 'I brought dad along because he makes primitive art too' just like, I love it!

[laughter] Tell me sir, what type of primitive art do you make?

SM

52:04 - 52:22

So, um, one of the other things I'm really interested in is this idea of double meaning. I think especially with the title, it's a word that can be used two ways, double meaning, statement or question, um you chose to go with the question, um but I think there was kind of a double meaning present.

UJ

52:23

Did I chose to go with the question?

SM

52:25

Well, in the translation, it's a question.

UJ

52:31

What Translation?

SM

52:32-52:39

The English that's next to it. Is that not part of the actual full title, or did they just do that?

UJ

52:40

Where it says do you Remember?

SM

52:43

Mmhmm

UJ

52:45-52:54

But there's no question mark. Because if anyone ever does any promo material and there's a question mark then I say take that question mark out.

SM

52:55-53:00

Okay, well then [mutual laughter] I must have seen something earlier that accidentally had a question mark.

UJ

53:03

Does it have to have a question mark in order to be a question?

SM

53:07- 53:21

No, I guess not. The punctuation is unnecessary. So yeah I guess I was just wondering if you could speak about double meaning, and if you think that that's present throughout the work.

UJ

53:23-56:05

I think one thing that's really important in regards specifically to that title, this was a working title kind of all secrets revealed. It was a working title in the very beginning when the proposal was initiated to St Mary's university, because it needed a title to go to kind of, you know, selections committee and stuff like that. So I was thinking and thinking and said, "okay well how about I give you a working title" the working title was Mi'kwhite'tmn, and the reason I chose that title was because of the double meaning because it could be posed as a question of 'do you remember' or as a statement of 'you do remember' and the reason I chose that was because I was thinking so much about nostalgia and what nostalgia does. Because nostalgia can either trigger a memory to try to remember something in memorializing, or making you happy, but it can also trigger the memory in regards to loss. So I feel like nostalgia has that gift where you can go either way, a good thing or a bad thing. So I felt like that title can do that or that word can do that, and um so, when the exhibition once was approved and the selection committee said it was going to happen then Robin Metcalf the curator had asked me, 'well do you want to continue with the working title or do you not want to?' and I told Robin, "I feel like this is the title, I know I initially proposed it as a working title but I can't think of any other title." because it has that double meaning. And I think that happens a lot with the forms that are being presented and the actions that are taking place. Because it is something that runs throughout the entire exhibition. These vitrines that are there, they're the things that are supposed to protect the important information inside yet there's nothing inside - or is there something inside. The case is a case, but it's also the object that is the prompter. With the objects in the archive room, they're the objects that are the artefacts, but they're also the art objects. So it's kind of like, I feel like the notion of the double meaning is kind of jumping around throughout the show, and also the performance.

SM

56:05 - 57:03

Yeah, it's interesting at the conference [in reference to UAAC conference] there was a woman talking about uh, irony and talking about how irony and nostalgia, and how a lot of people write about irony and nostalgia as polar opposites, that you can't ever have one without the other. And she's using a lot of examples of uh, like Carl Beam and other artists and their ironic work, and I just kept thinking about your work. It is sort of that parody that irony, but also is still very nostalgic - it's not this biting jabbing thing it is very sincere in a lot of ways.

UJ

57:05

I've smashed together nostalgia and irony

SM

57:07

Yeah! yeah! I think there's kind of a point in there.

UJ

57:16

They need to make a new word!

[mutual laughter]

SM

57:25-57:56

Yeah! I was thinking about your work in terms of paradoxes where it's kind of the one thing and kind of the seemingly opposite at the same time, so it's never one thing, it's this constant feedback loop and this spectrum of things. There's no like even sure kind of permanent fixed identity between any of the objects or any of the processes, everything's very fluid. Not that there's really a question there, that was just things I was thinking about.

UJ

57:57

Thank you, thank you, I like that.

SM

57:57-58:14

Um, so let's see what other questions I have here. Oh! I kind of wanted to talk about the kind of physical strenuousness of the performance, I was wondering if you could speak to some of the physical tolls it's taken on you.

UJ

58:14

Right. My injuries?

[mutual laughter]

SM

58:17

Yeah, tell me about your injuries.

[mutual laughter]

UJ

58:19

Well, at the last two I have to say I have had no physical injuries just a lot of fatigue, so I've learned my lesson. The first exhibition there was a hamstring issue, I pulled something there. And uh, the second one - so the first one was at st mary's university and there was also a lot of uh my forearms were very, I don't know if, I don't know what it's called but there's kind of a

muscle strain that you put on your arms, and the massage therapist said I had all kinds of adhesions from the constant reverb and also the pounding. At Saskatoon I tore a bicep so that was painful. I missed, so with the sledgehammer coming down I missed and it just fell straight through, so a six pound sledge hammer falling straight through so I hyper extended and tore the muscle. I was on day two, so I continued for the next two days, I iced it that night. Um, PEI I was recovering from a tattoo sitting so it wasn't too bad. A little bit itchy but no injuries. And uh, in newfoundland there was nothing it was good. I've learned what to do and to be mindful of my body and of the actions. I think also I've become stronger the more I've worked with these materials and what's involved.

SM

1:00:13

Kind of developed a different type of muscle memory almost?

UJ

1:00:16

Yeah

SM

1:00:20

The muscle memory of doing things wrong

UJ

1:00:22

The sledge hammer is very familiar to my body now, where as it was slightly awkward before.

SM

1:00:30

So what about endurance types of performance intrigue you, or make you keep coming back to it. Because most of your other performances are also these types of long endurance performances.

UJ

1:00:45 - 1:04:01

I think I'm just a sucker for punishment.

[mutual laughter]

No there's something I, personally for me I feel like I need to push my body to a certain physical limit before my brain kick in and help me to refocus or renegotiate some of the things that are happening in my mind. It's only for me personally when I am at that brink of exhaustion or that brink of about to give up where it helps me to push ahead. There's also a certain element of natural chemicals that kick in that help you kind of like marathon runners, right? They continue to engage in those activities because there's essentially a certain kind of chemical high that comes out of your body when you're engaging in that. But also there's such a sense of accomplishment at the end of it. I am not a runner so I can't speak to that sense of accomplishment but personally for myself there's you know an adrenaline and endorphin rush, but at the end of it there's a great sense of satisfaction. Not satisfaction in like, "oh wow wasn't

that great, I feel good,' but a sense of satisfaction in that I finished what I had set out to do. And it's not about whether I finished it in a certain way or certain time or anything, it's just that I was able to push my limits. And even though at the end of certain things, like recently at Cape Breton University I sang a song for a four hour period, and I remember getting very close to that two hour mark and thinking 'I can't do this anymore, I need to stop' and the audience or the participants that were viewing and engaging with the work saw that I was beginning to fade, and they started to sing with me. And when they started to sing with me it pushed me to the place where, I can do this, and not only can I do this but I can do it well. So it's something that's really important to me is that audience engagement. You know, if I had been doing an extremely physical and endurance performance and nobody is around I don't know if I would be able to finish it. Because I feed off that energy that is exchanged between participants, who I consider to be very active participants, even if it is through the act of viewing because there's an energy exchange that happens and it's something that's really important to me. I find that type of engagement between the person that's standing and participating in what the activator is doing is more important than what the activator is doing. Does that make sense?

SM

1:04:02-1:05:30

Yeah yeah yeah! Yeah, It's really interesting to me. My practice is weaving but I don't do any performance, but then I do weave I spend so much time in the studio and I view the act of making itself as a performance, but then in the actual act of making there is no audience so there's that kind of break from that. That's one of the big differences for me I guess between a studio practice and performance. Um, So, I want to talk about the Museological grand hall, so I was wondering if you could talk about trying to capture language, and i'm trying to make something that has no physical property into a physical form or encapsulate it in some way, and kind of your thought process behind making the vitrines.

[break]

1:06:22-1:06:32

So yeah, just talking about ,,,

UJ

The museological grandhall

SM

Trying to

UJ

Trying to capture something that is uncapturable

SM

Yeah

UJ

1:06:32-1:12:45

Well, it's interesting because when in 2009 when I was considering this project I had a lot of conversations with my wife Angela who is often the person who I do my studio crits with. A lot of conversations around the dinner table, or in the car driving somewhere. I told her, 'I want to do something and I don't know how I'm going to do it and this is what I want to do' and she suggested I contact a couple screen printers I know because I know that I wanted to use the vitrine as the object and that I wanted to put the language on the vitrine but in a way to actually capture it inside as opposed to physically printing it on there. So it wasn't until I went to the Banff center for a residency, and the residency and the faculty for the residence was Gregg Stats (sp??) and he's a Mohawk photographer and he was very helping in kind of helping me work through the idea of the container and what the container represents in indigenous culture and all these different things, and he connected me to a number of different departments at the Banff center where I was able to go through all these different processes. What ended up happening is I developed this kind of system of making these objects in a rather complicated but I felt like this was the only way I could capture it. The residency was a thematic residency on Indigenous languages, so everyone who was there was working with language in one way or another. there was video artists there was sound artists there was painters screen printers sculptors, a real mixture. and a lot of the conversation I had with those artists, and especially the more senior artists who kind of helped me to renegotiate how I was going to work with these. then once I ended up working with the techs from the different departments then I had developed this process. where I had a photograph of my great grandmother's basket, and the words she had presented to me which I had consulted with Bernie Frances, who is a Mi'kmaw linguist and scholar, and he helped me with the spelling of these words. and what I did is I took the photograph and made an acetate drawing, and from the acetate drawing I cut a rubylith film, a rubylith is an old way to make a negative for an emulsified silkscreen, so once I had the rubylith film I could burn it onto the silkscreen. once I had the silk screen I could use is as a stamp onto the masking on the Plexiglas, because there's a protective masking on it. then I would physically cut it with an xacto knife to remove the positive off the masking of the the Plexiglas, and then I sandblasted it in the sandblaster and then once I peel it away the image is on there. Then I had to, cast the first series of those that I made the image and the text was on the outside, but I wanted them on the inside, so I had to do the entire process again, but all completely in reverse. So that the texture would end up on the inside of the case. so, when I made that prototype at the Banff center then I invited a number of the artists and Greg as well, as well as our mentor Adrian Stimson, and we had a really great studio visit where we talked about the absence in the vitrine but the presence of the language. because language is something, you know, we record through text but text is a recipe for transferring information. so, once these cases were made, we felt like the information was held inside those cases, so to me it's a very full space. and it's almost as if I can imagine hearing the words inside that space, but they never leave that space, so it's kind of, I don't know, I felt like it was a way to capture the language within the space without oppressing it, because of the visual representation of the text within that space. because often we think of that container as an oppressive container, but it allows those terms to breath and to exist. And I very easily could have sent digital files to the plastics company, and they would have laser burned everything, and would have folded the cases and constructed them, but it was really important to me to honour these words and to honour the forms that were remembered. often times when somebody looks at something like um a fancy medium covered sewing basket, it's this awe. That 'wow I can't believe this has been created' so I really wanted that wow factor in there, and I felt like that had needed to be present in order for that wow factor to exist.

Appendix B. Transcript of Dialogue in Exhibition Video

0:00:17-0:00:57

“In 2008, I did a research project where I was kind of researching the self-sustainability of Mi’kmaw baskets, and I asked my great grand-mother a question: ‘Do you think that this art is going to survive?’ and she said, ‘I don’t think it’s going to survive,’ she said, ‘because the language is dying,’ she said, ‘so as soon as the art dies the language dies with it.’ She said, ‘and I think the art is going to die because kids these days, they don’t know how to make this, let alone how to process the materials. They can’t even go into the forest and tell you the difference between a red maple and a striped maple, a white ash and a black ash, let alone what time of year to harvest it, how to properly harvest it, how to process it. I don’t think there’s any hope for it to survive.”

0:01:16- 0:01:38

“At that point, I kind of realized that I was also one of these kids that she was referring to so I have kind of taken it upon myself to try to learn as much as I can, and to share any information that, you know, has come to me through speaking with different elders or different researchers and stuff like that. So, what I really wanted to focus on is trying to emphasize the preservation of this language.”

0:01:41-0:02:06

“My name is Ursula Johnson, I’m from Eskasoni First Nation, I’m Mi’kmaw, I come from the traditional district called Unama’ki ‘the land of fog’ otherwise known as Cape Breton Island, and my clan is the mouse clan, the clan of the wood spirits. The whole exhibition is called ‘Mi’kwite’tmn’, which is ‘do you remember?’ or it could also be composed of a statement of ‘you do remember.’

2:14- 4:21

I started the performance four hours before the space actually opened, so when they come in they’ll be like, “Oh my God, this is crazy! There’s axes flying around and knives. What is she doing? Should we talk to her? I don’t know, she’s sweating, she’s working really hard. I kind of just wanted to activate the space. So, these are all tools that were passed down to me in my family that my family had used for preparing materials for Mi’kmaq basketry. One day when I was in my studio and I was processing materials and I was shaving one of the ash splints with my knife, and I was shaving it and shaving it, and I saw all these curls all over the floor. I remembered all these curls which in my language are called ((phonetic: [boo-dah-lah-han])) that my entire life growing up I constantly had the ((phonetic: [boo-dah-lah-han])) all around me, these shavings you’re picking it off your clothes, you’re tracking it around everywhere you go, so I thought ‘What would happen if I had piles and piles of this ((phonetic: [boo-dah-lah-han])) to try to create this memory that I had of constantly having this debris that follows me around and unable to shake it off? And how does that relate to me as somebody from a young generation trying to do something but I don’t know how, and I keep trying and it’s almost haunting me like the ((phonetic: [boo-dah-lah-han])) that’s attached to my clothes. So, I really wanted to enter into this space of really challenging my body and my mind to see what it is that I could do with processing the materials until there’s nothing left. Because people from my generation, you know, we might know a couple of the steps because we’ve seen people do it and we say “oh

yeah, I could do that. I remember seeing my grandfather doing it so I'm going to try it out." But then there's a certain point you get to and you're like "now I don't know what I'm supposed to do and there's nobody else around that I could ask, so I'm just going to keep trying anyway." And I really wanted to create this urgency.

4:24-5:23

When somebody walks into this space they can see all these different cases in there and you always expect to see something in the case, because in the museum a lot of times there's object in there, a lot of times there's Indigenous objects, and the Indigenous objects are kind of trapped in time and not activated. But with Indigenous culture it's so important that those objects are constant activated, because that's why they were created. So, when you walk into this "Museological Grand Hall" with this white space and all these vitrines, but then you see there's nothing in there you kind of feel a bit robbed and it's kind of like, "well, where's my object that I'm supposed to see? Why is it just the memory? Why can't I access it?" So, it talks about access of those objects. Not just of the viewers but of the Indigenous community, of the cultural community, all these different communities that are prevented access within those museological institutions.

5:41-7:25

All of the baskets are images of my great grandmother Caroline Gould's baskets. Each of the words kind of reference the way the materials have been manipulated. So, you have the base, and then there's two weavers that secure the base so the spokes at the base can go upright. But then you have two wide weavers that are used for the decorative element which is called a jikiji'j and a jikiji'j actually means periwinkle so when you see a periwinkle it actually kind of has that curl on the outside of it. But then on the bottom here you can see this is woven in one direction the way it's twisted on, but then it's woven in opposite direction again so that means apitaqpa'tasik which means it's been woven and bound in one direction, but then you've reversed it and woven and bound it again to make it even more secure. And then the top of the lid of the basket is almost made exactly the same as the lid of the basket, so it emphasizes those two terms again and just repeats. Jikiji'j, apitaqpa'tasik, jikiji'j, apitaqpa'tasik. By having the case and not having the object there, you have the memory of the object, but it honours the language. Because there's no way to put the language inside of the case, and the most important thing in any culture is the language. If a language dies the culture dies with it. So, I wanted to preserve the language and wanted to continue this art of Mi'kmaw basketry by practicing the language.

7:33-8:23

So, what is going on in the archive room with the other forms, even though they're very different and some may be some semblances to the other forms in here, it's because I am utilizing that term. So that term that relates directly to how those materials are manipulated, all of those words are activated in the structures. So, then it continues the living of that language, but then it changes what we would think of as a traditional form. In this space, you're not allowed to touch

something, but it's not there, but then in the other space all the things that are there you're told "Touch them, smell them, look at them, investigate them."

8:29-9:14

Interviewer: "So I wonder which one is the black ash and which is the maple wood in this piece?"

Ursula Johnson: "Typically I use maple wood for a lot of the rims of the hoops, on the inside."

Interviewer: "So why did you decide to make an inside out basket?"

UJ: Especially in what's known as 'fancy ash basketry' now you always want to do decorative things to hide all the flaws. My great-grandmother who is an expert in hiding all the flaws in her work, people would look at it and they wouldn't know where the start or the finish was, so this kind of wanted to come out of exposing those flaws, and show structurally how something is created."

9:15-11:48

I: So, when we scan them and we see these titles and descriptions..."

UJ: Some of the titles, especially the first visitation of the O'pltek series I created the titles, but then everything after that was all public participation. So, What I did at the various residencies I would host a cataloguing party and everyone walked around the gallery space and looked at them, and talked about what it was made of, what it looked like, what it could be and then they would write down what they think the name should be of that form. Then out of the 10 names I would pick the one that I felt was the most suitable according to what was going through my head when constructing the form. And something very similar happened with the descriptions as well, because once they had a title they were measured, then I needed to take it to a group of ologists— anthropologists, archaeologists, museologists— but instead of going to those cultural institutions where there's the qualified "ologists" I decided to think that this whole idea of speculative "ology" because all of those 'ologies' all bring in their opinion, their expertise, then they speculate and they come to consensus about what it is. I wanted to further explore and challenge a bit who has the authority to determine what the basket should be. Then I kind of pushed it a step further where when I was invited to do residencies different places, I actually put out a sketch book that said "Please draw what you think a basket should be?" And then I entered into these conversations with the general public about what is a basket, why is it a basket, who determines that it is a basket. Let's talk about this form vs function, you know craft vs art, and all these really engaging chats I was able to enter into with visitors in these galleries. So, then the O'pltek series evolved into something completely different."

I: I'm wondering what the name O'pltek means?

UJ: O'pltek means 'It's not quite right.' Anything you see that's a little bit off you say, "O'pltek." Or if somebody is building a house or a deck for an instance and you stand back and you're like "O'pltek! There's something funky going on here. I'm not quite sure what it is, but it's definitely 'O'pltek."

11:50-12:30

It's only relatively recently that there's a number of museums that are starting to open up the cases, or are starting to unlock the archives and they're starting to say "Let's see what happens

when we give access.” so then it’s starting to incorporate this new type of relationship that the institution is having with all of the objects in their collection. Which I think is a really exciting time, because then, you know, Indigenous artists who have been researching and asking their families about this object, they’re kind of wanting to learn more about it so they can help that continue to evolve, because that’s what culture does it continues to shift and evolve.