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Pawatamihk

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Introduction

Pawatamihk is a solo exhibition by Michif artist Audie Murray. *Pawatamihk* means dream in Michif, and the exhibition features artworks made in the last two years that address the revolutionary potential of dreaming.

While Murray works in beading, quillwork, video, sculpture, painting, and photography, dreaming is a key element in her creative process. In contemporary society making time to dream rather than constantly produce is often frowned upon. Dreaming is dangerous for colonial worldviews as it allows a window of time and space to listen to the earth and to ancestors, to imagine the world differently, and to prepare to enact change. In *Pawatamihk* Murray shares works that speak to the value of slowing down, taking care, and reflecting, considerations that resonate strongly in a year in which Nanaimo Art Gallery asks *What is Progress?*

Dream

—AUDIE MURRAY

The spider's web has infinite connections.

My body is floating in the darkness. I'm not alone. I'm surrounded by stars and others I cannot completely see.

Their hands are old and they mend my body.

They braid my hair.

They braid my hair so quickly that eventually I realize they are no longer old hands but the legs of a large spider weaving my hair.

Chi fii you are no longer a little girl

Chi fii, they tell me, you are no longer a little girl

Chi fii you are no longer a little girl

I am beading a long daisy chain to remind myself of what it was like to be a child; only to realize the daisy chain is me, or a representation of a past self. The daisy chain is chi fii.¹

As I wrap chi fii around hammer stone rocks, I am hugging the old ones. They work so hard, they are so old. They deserve to be cared for.

1 Chi fii is a Michif word that translates to 'little girl' and is a nickname of mine that I share with my great grandma, Agnes Fisher (née Amyotte).

Intergenerational acts of care remind us that love and laughter are available to balance our embodied trauma.

Intergenerational acts of care honour the multiplicities within ourselves. Intergenerational acts of care remind us that we will always bloom.

I am laying in the grass of the Qu'Appelle Valley. All I can see is the grey-blue sky. She is mirroring back to me the sensation that I am floating again.

floating in the water

floating with the stars

I am floating

I am being cared for

by Jessie

by Stacey²

I am being grounded

the hands of a friend intertwine my hair with the valley

I am her and she is me.

2 Marsii to Stacey Fayant and Jessie Ray Short for helping me with the performance piece 'I am you and you are me', which is being referred to here.

I am bundled in my parka, laying with the prairie grass, looking at Pakone-Kisik.³ I reflect on the Cree cosmogony that the hole in the sky is how we come to this earth and is where we go when we are done.⁴

spider helps us along these journeys, guiding us with their web
spider cares for us in all of our states
spider occupies both spaces
creating non-linear webs between dreams and realities.

I am in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, to visit an old pair of gauntlets made by my great great grandmother, Bernadette Murray.⁵ They are kept in a small prairie museum, donated by a settler woman who received the gloves as a gift from Bernadette in 1935. Bernadette helped birth this settler woman. I am happy these gloves have returned to Meadow Lake so that I could hold Bernadette's hands in mine even if I am now always missing them.

3 Pakone-Kisik is a Nêhiyawêwin name for the Seven Sisters/ Pleiades constellation which translates to 'hole in the sky'.

4 I first heard of this story from knowledge keeper Wilfred Buck.

5 Née Morin

I spill some beads on Bernadette's grave.

I visit a couple of grave sites that day, even though that was not the plan. One of the visited graves belongs to Yvonne Murray⁶, my Khokum.⁷

I pull a tobacco bundle out of my purse

I have been carrying around this bundle for weeks

I place the tobacco on her grave and say hello

I crack a Budweiser from the back of the truck and pour it out

spider crawls out from the grass

In this moment I feel like I could slip into another world

6 Née Kennedy

7 In the Nêhiyawêwin & Michif languages, Nokom would be the proper term to use in this instance. Because I grew up using the term Khokum to refer to my grandmothers, I have decided to continue to use it here.

Remembering Who We Are in Our Bodies: Object Relations, Art, and Métis Families

—JAS M. MORGAN

When I think about who Métis people are, I always think about art. In the 1800s, Métis women were badass. They were sewing clothing that their sons and husbands would wear into war, entrenched in Cree and Anishinabe kinship—the belief that sacred motifs and aesthetics could protect them in battle—and their ideologies of French Catholicism that posited *they* were His chosen peoples and so their clothing should represent and evoke all that is holy within Creation. Just over a century later, Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, and other Métis men are the only ancestors who seem to surface in retellings of what made Métis peoples. Métis women formed Métis communities through their kinships and objects relations, but where are they in our histories? Where are the Métis mothers and grandmothers who had Indigenous names, and the communities of Indigenous peoples who they loved and who loved them in return, that were erased in the archive when those women were supplanted with French and English names and the patriarchal lines of the men they loved?

In her paper “‘I Want to Call Their Names in Resistance:’ Writing Aboriginal Women into Canadian Art History, 1880–1970,” Métis scholar Sherry Farrell Racette argues that there are stories and names of Indigenous women we don’t know because they have been lost to patriarchal colonial histories, but ultimately that

Indigenous peoples can reanimate conversations with feminine ancestors through engagement with their material cultures. Farrell Racette wants us to say their names: “we should know these women, we should say their names.” In her Ph.D. dissertation, “Sewing Ourselves Together: Clothing, Decorative Arts, and the Expression of Métis and Half Breed Identity,” Farrell Racette seeks to counter that museological predicament by speaking about the stitches of women who lovingly adorned objects with quillwork and beading as a manifestation of the love that holds Métis families together. Farrell Racette is describing how it is Métis feminine communities that narrate the coming together of Métis peoples through kinship, through love, and not the archival, legal, and political frameworks that depend on forms of acknowledgment from the Canadian government. Métis women left marks of love on the beadwork they adorned on the shirts, though those names are often erased in museum collections: dancing shoes, and bags for the people they loved, that now sit deanimated and sterile in museum archives, not allowed to rest or find peace.

Métis artist Audie Murray (b. 1993) remembers in her body a different history of Métis peoples, one not often taught within the hallowed halls of the academy that holds Métis Studies and History. With artworks that harken back to an endless chain of connectivity and kinship that make up her ancestral lines, Murray exhibits a history of Métis peoples that came together through love, and not through legal documents and warfare (at least solely). Murray’s

work is a form of mutual recognition, kinship, and collaboration with her relatives and ancestors.

The title of Murray's exhibition, *Pawatamihk*, translates to “dream” from Michif and Plains Cree. Dreams are sacred to Plains Cree peoples. Dreams are visions that should guide the actions and intent of Plains Cree peoples in their everyday lives. Those Métis mothers, aunties, and grandmothers who anointed their loved ones' clothing in meticulous beadwork would often pull imagery directly from their dreams. A fitting title, considering that Murray's lovingly created objects are an exploration in dreams, the liminality between this world and other planes, and intergenerational care throughout the cosmos. All the works in the exhibition are embodied forms of experience, either lived or dreamt. Stitching and beading, for Murray, are resistance spaces and temporalities by and for Métis families, made through (what some might call) the method of love, if a method can simply be a way of living one's life in a world of relations and everyday interactions. Murray contends that dreaming is generative, as well. Dreaming is a form of prefigurative politics that extends from the caring acts that keep Métis peoples together and, in doing so, help Métis people imagine a future outside of a colonial order that subjugates Métis lifeways.

First and foremost, Murray's work is a collaboration with her relatives and ancestors. Murray's artwork *for hambone, métis billy stick* was made in collaboration with her late grandfather, who was

nicknamed Hambone. During his life, Hambone created a billy stick, a baton for fighting typically used against Métis peoples by police, and carved the handle with the words “metis billy stick.” Murray sewed and beaded a sheath to accompany the stick and, in doing so, reanimated the stories and knowledge of her Métis grandfather into a continuum of her material record for her descendants. In *Pawatamihk*, the billy stick only appears in photo format, as an act of artistic agency and control over what Murray is and is not willing to share with audiences. Murray is showing how some objects need to be displayed with care and reciprocity, and in the appropriate spaces that can contend with their histories. Kinship with objects doesn't end with their creation, it extends into their care and future interactions. In *Transportation & time, a collaboration of embodied memory*, Murray used beads to mend a blue painting that her mother made about twenty years ago. Each deliberate, loving stitch is an act of care that fixes the past to the future. This creates an alternative ordering of the world made in the image of Murray's mother, drawn from the knowledge given to her by her mothers, and continued by Murray herself, through her body.

In the video work *I am you and you are me*, Murray's hair is being braided into the grass in the Qu'Appelle Valley near Lebret by a person, perhaps a friend or relation, wearing a dress with floral print and ribbons often worn in ceremony or at community gatherings. Murray's hair slowly fades into an ombre effect with the grass, showing how Murray is a part of the grasslands and vice versa.

Lebret is a territory that the Métis road allowance communities called home. In a contemporary context, Métis families still live in the small urban centres within the Qu'Appelle Valley. Murray contends that Métis kinship is as much about the land as it is about Métis peoples. There is a cyclical relationship between Métis peoples and the lands they call home in Saskatchewan: the land defines them and, in doing so, Métis peoples and the First Nations relatives help define the lands in Saskatchewan ongoingly as Native Land. The connection between Métis homelands and Métis life is reaffirmed with Murray's daisy chain installation, *We are always love*, which Murray calls a self-portrait. In the absence of the signifiers of her own image, convoluted in colonial meaning, Murray uses a string of the wild daisies that grow in the fields of Saskatchewan, showing that her flower relatives are as much an evocation of who she is as her image itself.

At least some part of the story of Métis peoples is the grandmothers who were excluded from the Indian Act and white settler society. Through the creation and adornment of clothing Métis women were flagging, informing, and recording identities and kinship into the objects they were making. They were making relations with these objects, loving these objects, and giving these objects to others they loved, informing even further connectedness. Murray is in search of specific aesthetic references, voices from the past contained within the archive, to propel her work forward in the image of her kin, but also references acts of care and the gestures

of kinship, such as stitching, that make a people. The objects Métis ancestors left behind continue to inform Métis cultural identities today. The adoption of new technologies such as the pony bead and new aesthetics techniques represents technological ingenuity that continues in the spirit of the people of the Red River. The future is Métis dreaming, and exists somewhere in this breakdown of space and time that allows Métis peoples connection to their ancestors and future generations, through the knowledge systems left for them and that they will, in turn, leave behind. This is a Métis family, born from aunties, mothers, and grandmothers, and from generations of river-dwelling peoples who fought for their rights as distinct peoples and were all stitched together by love.

Biographies

Audie Murray is a multi-disciplinary Michif visual artist based in Otos-Kwunee (Calgary, Alberta; Treaty 7 territory). Her practice is informed by the process of making and visiting to explore themes of contemporary culture, embodied experiences and lived dualities. These modes of working assist with the recentering of our collective connection to body, ancestral knowledge systems, space and time. Murray holds a visual arts diploma from Camosun College (2016), a BFA from the University of Regina (2017) and is currently an MFA student at the University of Calgary. She has exhibited widely, including at the Independent Art Fair, NYC; The Vancouver Art Gallery; Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow; and the Anchorage Museum. Murray is represented by Fazakas Gallery.

Jas M. Morgan is a Toronto-based Cree-Métis-Saulteaux SSHRC doctoral scholarship recipient, a McGill University Art History Ph.D. candidate, and an assistant professor in Ryerson University's Department of English. They previously held the position of Editor-at-Large for *Canadian Art* and served as the Arts and Literary Summit programmer for MagNet 2019. Morgan's first book *nítisânak* (Metonymy Press, 2018) won the prestigious 2019 Dayne Ogilvie Prize and a 2019 Quebec Writer's Federation first book prize, and has been nominated for a Lambda Literary Award and an Indigenous Voices Literary Award. Morgan is the co-founder of gijiit: a curatorial collective that focuses on community-engaged Indigenous art curations, gatherings, and research dealing with themes of gender, sex, and sexuality. They are a REVEAL Indigenous

Art Award recipient, and have been awarded national Magazine Awards in the Essay category for "Stories Not Told" and in the Best-Editorial Package category for "#MeToo and the Secrets Indigenous Women Keep." For their work as lead editor for the summer 2017 issue of *Canadian Art*, an issue on the theme of "Kinship," they were also nominated for a National Magazine Award in the "Best Editorial Package" category. Morgan's writing has appeared in *The Walrus*, *Malabat Review*, *Room*, *GUTS, esse*, *Teen Vogue*, *CV2/Prairie Fire*, *The New Inquiry* and other publications.

What is progress?

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