



Our women
Are the backbone
That has morphed
Into wings

[Res]idual

Audie Murray, KC Adams, Thirza Jean Cuthand,
Tania Willard, and tunchai redvers

Curated by Chelsea Brant

This catalogue is published on the occasion of the group exhibition, *[Res]idual* on view June 16 - August 11, 2018 at Hamilton Artists Inc.

Writing:
Chelsea Brant, Shelley Niro, and tunchai redvers

Copy Editing:
Abedar Kamgari, Bojana Videkanic,
and Julia Prudhomme

Photography & Design:
Abedar Kamgari

© 2018 Hamilton Artists Inc.
ISBN 978-1-894861-92-2

Cover: tunchai redvers, *ts'ékui*, 2016. Installation view.
This page: Tania Willard, *The Combo*, 2012. Installation view.
Page 4: Audie Murray, *Can I Squish Your Face?*, 2015. Image courtesy the artist.



Our women
Sew families with
Their tanned hands
Bind communities with
Their ribboned braids

They press forgiveness
Onto our souls with
Each new life that
They create

Our women
Are the backbone
That has morphed
Into wings

Without them we
Cannot fly

– *ts'ékui*
tunchai redvers



Grilled Cheese

Shelley Niro

When I view art, a barrage of thoughts stream through my brain. Not in straight lines but in streaks, smears and sparkles of light. If the work is interesting it leaves a trace of tactile remnant I can relate to, tapping into my memory and making me want to stay in front of it for a longer period of time. The residue remains strong and will feed me for a long time.

Memory is important here. I use memory a lot in my own work, in fact I use it almost exclusively. Recently I was on a film set. I was handed a grilled cheese sandwich burnt on one side. The person sitting next to me said, “Your sandwich is burnt. Would you like another one?” I said “No thanks. It reminds me of my mother.” We both gave a snicker, but it really did remind me of my mother. When I was growing up on the Six Nations Reserve our home was heated by a wood stove. My mother would clean the top of the stove and proceed to put slices of bread on it. It was toasted in seconds and often the bread would burn slightly, while at other times it would burn badly. Tasting the burnt grilled cheese sandwich became a blessing that day. I felt my mother’s presence with every bite.

Similarly to this embodied memory of my mother, when viewing work by Indigenous female artists I am often reminded of the centuries of development that took place for this work to come to fruition. I am also reminded of the fact that our art-making and culture is tied to the fact that the Indigenous population was placed on reservations where we could be ignored and left to our own devices. How many years did it take for beadwork to be acknowledged as an art form? For decades, it was given the place of tourist art. If you practiced beadwork and then sold it to tourists you were given the title of sellout. Making things for the consumer

was not seen as resistance to poverty, rather it was perceived as buying into the market — supplying consumers with knick-knacks and whimsies. In most cases the practice of making objects for sale was the only way in which families could be in a position of supporting themselves economically. At the time of young Canada, it supported a specific group of the population to progress their own agenda.

The use of design is a strategy I commend in the work. We recognize it as being from us. There are variations of course from different parts of Turtle Island. Traditional materials and traditional methods are so exciting in this day and age. Maybe the end result isn’t something your grandmother made but her encouragement is sensed and its presence in the work gives an atmosphere of ancient knowledge.

Contemporary Indigenous art in most cases brings happiness into the space on which it stands, hangs or lies. Opportunities have increased over the years. The dialogue between the pieces of work creates energy and acts like a stairway to the next plane of thought. It can only expand the discourse. I see this as exciting, exhilarating, I see it as taking the cosmos on for more information, imagination and explosions of creativity.

Often as I stand in front of a painting or am composing a photograph on my computer, my mind goes to a place I would not visit if it were not for the opportunity to be in this position. I’m not driving, watching television or working on budgets, etc. I am given a small window to let my brain have freedom to investigate and ask questions I have not thought about in a long time.

These questions aren’t as articulate now as I lay these thoughts down. They are like a wave that often slip slides, crashing into other whispers. This process results in harmonies and choruses of voices. This is the real joy of making art.

As I lower my feet into
Moccasins
That were made by
An auntie who was
Not my own

My feet
Re-root in home
Territory
Where I feel
Nourished
By generations of
Aunties who
Were

– *ts'ékui*
tunchai redvers



Left to right: KC Adams, 'SCALPING IS IN MY BLOOD' Cyborg Hybrid Candice (curator), 2005. 'FORMER LAND OWNER' Cyborg Hybrid Adam (visual artist), 2005. 'INDIAN PRINCESS' Cyborg Hybrid KC (visual artist), 2005. Installation view.



Left to right: Audie Murray, *Can I Squish Your Face?*, 2015. KC Adams, *Cyborg Hybrid Accesories*, 2009-10. KC Adams, *Cyborg Hybrids*, 2005. Tania Willard, *The Combo*, 2012. Installation view.



Left to right: Thirza Jean Cuthand, *Just Dandy*, 2013. Audie Murray, *Can I Squish Your Face?*, 2015. KC Adams, *Cyborg Hybrid Accesories*, 2009-10. Installation view.



Thirza Jean Cuthand, *Just Dandy*, 2013. Video still. Image courtesy the artist.

Like Mother Earth
I am done staying quiet

This body wasn't created
For exploitation
To be assaulted
And used for your pleasure

I will raise tides
I will flood cities
I will throw flames

Until this body
Can be used as intended
Free from constraint

To love unconditionally
To hold others up
To be beautiful
To be tender
To give life

For generations after me
To know hands
Only where they have consent to be

– *ts'ékui*
tunchai redvers

[Res]ponding

Chelsea Brant

“Five hundred years of colonialism has severely affected a group of people who previously had their own government, laws, economy, religion, and language.”¹

There’s something about the skin we’re living in, the bodies we are born into, and the residual effects of blood-knowledge and stories that form the identities we attach to our flesh and bones.

Colonialism is greatly influenced by the act of *othering*, the sense of superiority one group of people feel they have over another.² Colonial tendencies of othering often justify categorizations of people of a different race, culture, sexual orientation or religion as somehow less human, less dignified, and therefore less deserving of connection, understanding, warmth, and respect.

1 Shepard, Blythe and Linda O’Neill, Francis Guenette. “Counselling with First Nations Women: Considerations of Oppression and Renewal.” *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. Vol. 28, No. 3, September 2006 (C 2006) Published Online 26 September 2006.

2 The American Heritage® Idioms Dictionary. Copyright © 2002, 2001, 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. URL: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/other?s=t>

[Res]idual – a group exhibition curated within the Cannon Gallery at Hamilton Artists Inc. – has transformed the exhibition space into a platform for Indigenous female voices. Five artists from culturally diverse nations address elements of Indigenous identities and confront relationships to colonization. Using the themes of land, loss, love and language as a conceptual starting point, each artwork contributes to shared storytelling and collective experience.

Uniquely chosen, works by **Audie Murray, KC Adams, Tania Willard, Thirza Cuthand** and **tunchai redvers** come together to challenge understandings of Indigenous art and critically question human connections. Using culturally-taught techniques such as beadwork and basketry in conjunction with photography, text, and video, the artworks speak to interwoven histories and contemporary experiences of colonization. Each story is told through tropes of humour, satire, or appropriation to create an accessible language that fosters understanding and empathy for deeply seeded traumas.

Historically, Indigenous women’s artwork has been plagued by anonymity and often found in the shadows of the Eurocentric male figure. Many mainstream galleries and influential museums have positioned these works in the “museological context of imagined ‘authentic’ past, or relegated them to the role of contemporary art’s ‘other’.”³ Ethnological positioning, false descriptions and titles, inaccurate artist information, and overall misguided representations of artworks by institutions are all too common for Indigenous artists. Consequently, there has been a historical absence of Indigenous presence in fine art contexts, often confining these works to the realm of craft. While Canada 150 brought long-awaited opportunities to Indigenous artists, curators, writers, critics, filmmakers, and actors, the continuity of opportunities is yet to be determined.

3 Rice, Ryan. “Presence and Absence Redux: Indian Art in the 1990s.” *Continuities Between Eras: Indigenous Art Histories*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2017. DOI : 10.7202/1042945ar

Audie Murray delves into the psychology behind human connections, but more pointedly, our loss of intimate interaction in a disconnected digital age. Using humour, Murray initiates conversations about connectedness and relationships between people – from fleeting interactions with strangers to intimate exchanges. In her photo series, *Can I Squish Your Face?* Murray engages with her subjects in a performative act of seeking consent as she, quite literally, asks people if she may squish their face. Murray’s work brings into question the nature of physical manipulation and the lasting impressions tied to invasion of personal space.

In her expansive series, *Cyborg Hybrids*, **KC Adams** uses a strong sense of irony to challenge perceptions of mixed-race Euro-Aboriginal peoples and simultaneously questions classifications of gender identity in relation to physical appearance. The captured strength of Adams’ glamour headshots is juxtaposed with common racial slurs beaded onto t-shirts worn by each model to emphasize absurdities in stereotyping. The technology-based fashion accessories, such as a delicately beaded iPad case and laptop charger, as well as digitally altered portraits allow new narratives to form around ever-evolving, plugged-in Indigenous populations.

The Combo, created by **Tania Willard** in 2012 during her time mentoring with Secwépemc basketry artist and Elder Delores Purdaby, uses traditional materials such as birch bark and quill. Using learned basketry skills, Willard appropriates the iconic McDonald’s combo-meal tray and adapts the material’s natural form to produce tension between capitalist consumerism and Indigenous teachings of land and food consumption. Willard’s work also confronts Western society’s environmental footprint, specifically the ways in which commodification has changed how we learn from the land, use the land, and respect the land. The manufacturing mania that has gradually taken the human out of the product is inversely reflected in Willard’s delicate artistry and her respect for the material’s

treatment. Her quirky replication of fast-food packaging is served with a side of reflection on consumption and the land on which we live.

Utilizing digital techniques, **Thirza Jean Cuthand** revives oral storytelling in a performative video. Her work humorously describes colonization and impactful relationships between colonizers and Indigenous peoples by reliving an erotic love story with the Evil Queen. As a result of their relationship, Turtle Island contracts an evasive European flora – the dandelion. In *Just Dandy*, Cuthand unearths systemic issues through a heartfelt diary entry declaring a love affair and tapping into feelings associated with colonialism on a personal level.

The front-facing windows of the Inc. are home to the soft, yet poignant words of **tunchai redvers**. Her words, derived from a set of poems, are an extension of the exhibition and the crux of themes found within. Writing to reclaim, resist, and heal, redvers’ words encompass the indigenization of identity and in this particular poem, of female identity. redvers, a spoken word artist, embraces a different kind of sharing space than the oral roots of spoken word art, with this printed version of her poem *ts’ékui* – meaning “woman” in Chipewyan. Creating an outward facing presence, her words both introduce the exhibition and ask for contemplation upon exit.

[Res]idual – derived from the residual effects felt from greater economical, political and social inequalities affecting individual identities — intentionally focuses on the stories of five Indigenous female artists. It is an exhibition centered on the themes of land, love, loss, and language. Through Western categorizations of art and culture, we ask for these stories to not only be heard but felt, for the words to not just linger but to move, and for learning and unlearning to push the boundaries of growth and commitment.



Tania Willard, *The Combo*, 2012. Installation view.

ISBN 978-1-894861-92-2



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC.

155 James St N
Hamilton, Ontario
L8R 2K9
<http://theinc.ca>

Hamilton Artists Inc. would like to acknowledge the support of its funders, and generous contributions from Inc. members, donors and partners.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

**HAMILTON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO**
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



For more information, exhibition documentation, and extended biographical notes on the artists, please visit theinc.ca/exhibitions/

Without them we
Cannot fly

- *ts'ékui*