

The Métis in the 21st Century Conference

June 18-20, 2003

Saskatoon

Day 1 – Tape 3

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Leanne L'Hirondelle: The interrelationship and interaction between art and cultures apparent in European landscape painting, in as well. The same chokes [?] were used in both forms of expression. These forms of cultural expression, depict the desires, dreams, and sometimes the realities of that culture. Truths that relied heavily on binary oppositions were also expressed in painting. Linear perspective was the grid on which three-dimensional space was defined on the two-dimensional surface of most European paintings. (And linear perspective is just a, a way artists use to make it look like buildings are disappearing—or just some things, and things like that, I guess, something that you learn in first year drawing class.) Okay, wilderness scenes that have been empty of any indigenous presence were common subjects. The strong light of God seems to shine through, lighting the landscape in brilliant clarity. And this is a work by Lorne Harris, who's a Canadian artist, I think around, early, early part of the century. The land has been emptied, made into the Garden of Eden, ripe for European settlement and expansion. And American painters around this time actually did use light as a, as a metaphor for God. So it was there, wasn't—it's not something that you look at and said, "Looks like God's in the painting." They did use it as a metaphor for God coming into the land. Much like the maps that disregarded Indigenous presence.

If Native people were presented, it was in terms of the buffalo hunt—and there's literally thousands of paintings and etchings and works like this of Native people at the buffalo hunt—at war, or to document dying cultures. In much of today's commercial art, the land, animals, and Indigenous people have turned into sentimental scenes that may not speak to past histories or

conflicts. Ideology has not shifted much in these forms of cultural expression, other than the landscape has now been made safe by European supervision.

And this is, I think it's an artist from, I think he's either from Manitoba or Saskatchewan. Contemporary Métis artists are challenging these ideas in their art. They're expressing a different experience with culture and land. Through many of the presentations, we will have heard, or will be hearing about how we as a people have lived on a land prior to the influx, later influx of European expansion. As a people with dual culture, so has been our relationship with this place, part nomadic hunter, part farmer. There is a link between these economic strategies in our worldview. This place has been the source of Métis identity in the form of medicines, food, clothing, religious belief, history, and artistic expression. Many Métis artists today tend to deal with the land from a different perspective. The word landscape does not seem to fit when discussing Métis art. The term landscape is defined as a natural or imaginary scenery, as scene in a broad view, of having a rectangular shape with the width greater than the height. It implies a sweeping panoramic view as seen through the eyes of conquest and ownership. Surveillance for the sake of order and control. This word does not seem to fit into the context of Métis identity. Place or location seems to be, seems to be more suitable. It implies an attachment, bonding in history. As with Western European cultural expression, Métis artistic expression reveals a unique cultural and ideological position.

Contemporary Métis artists are approaching the idea of land or placing it in unique ways. The works of Edward Poitras challenged the relationship between settler population in Indigenous communities through the questioning of history and propaganda. This is from an exhibition called "Homelands," and I think it was at Kamloops and the Confederation Art Gallery. His work uproots what we are taught and led to believe by mainstream society about the historical settlement of the land. There's one more of his, and there's an image of Riel, Louis Riel in there. (Last one. That one's sideways. Sorry.) Roger creates uncontrolled cityscapes, depict a

chaotic environment marked by catastrophe that reflects a present day global reality.

(One thing I'm gonna say about having slides for most of these artists, there's not a lot of—Christi said, touched on it—there's not a lot of study, there's not a lot of historical reference. When I go looking for slides for, of Métis, Métis artists, to show if I'm teaching or something, they're, they're just not available. And so these, I had to take from a book.)

Okay, so, we are a society in flux, affected by worldwide advance. He is aware of the racism and difference that he faces living in an urban environment. The photography of Duncan Murdoch shows the reality of inner-city life. Christi Belcourt's floral work reveals an attachment to the land and evolution beading on the painting surface. Her work speaks of a deep attachment to the land and living things. The works of David Hannan ties past generations with the present. He links his personal family history combined with historical images, showing that are all, all are connected future and past. My own work is influenced by land management as effects on our lived experiences.

All these artists speak from the Métis perspective, reflecting the position they take in their work, the work challenges, supports, and expresses a unique view of the land, identity, and experience. Moreover, the first step in the settlement process was to map region. Mapping was a means to grasp and to control. It acted as the means to an end. The belief in inevitable progress of civilization can now be understood as as carefully planned and executed as the maps that became the blueprints for European settlement on the prairies. Mapping was a vehicle to create a place where people of European descent could feel comfortable and at home. It was a method to gain control over populations and economies through territory. Location shapes one's identity in subtle yet consistent ways. Location is a key part of our history. It holds the bones and stories of past generations. It maintains a reality of our present through our homes, work, and communities. It is a promise of the future to the lives of next generations.

The pull and attachment to place is wrapped up in all these things and more. The way we explain and understand land, territory, and nation reflect our cultural beliefs and systems.

In summation, mapping and art are the external expressions of our eternal concept of place and how we inhabit the world. Moreover, mapping the division of land and nations has altered our existence worldwide. And this is just a photograph of lower Ontario and it's, it's from a satellite, and you can see how the land has been mapped. It is a system of control that has gained in global acceptance. It is a blueprint of our physical experience of the world. It has defined our experience as Native, as Métis people. Ours is a history of displacement, despite the fact that we still inhabit the place of our predecessors. Fortunately, mapping has not extinguished links to the places that we have occupied. Batoche, Lac Ste. Anne, St. Laurent are still places of significance. These places, though mapped, still provide a place for identity that maintain our attachment to this place. Thank you.

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