



Temporal Re-Imaginings

Curator
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“Resurgence is dancing on our turtle’s back; it is visioning and dancing new realities and worlds into existence.”

Leanne Simpson, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer

photo credit: Rosalie Favell



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Temporal Re-Imaginings retraces the tracks artists have left behind as they **traverse temporal territories** and other worlds. Their works shift **across histories, memory and myth**, inviting us to **question boundaries** where moments in time exist in **constant dialogue**. How we, as Indigenous people, understand time, how we remember the past and tell stories about it are all highly contested and cultural acts.

Temporal territories

In Carl Beam's *Burying the Ruler*, the artist stands in the sands of the Dominican Republic – near the site of first European arrival in 1492 – and buries a school ruler, a Western and linear tool of measurement to highlight the potential limitations of linear thinking, and perhaps encourages us to critically address the imposition of systems of thought and conceptions of self-rule.

Beam's *Sitting Bull and Einstein* parallels the lives of two individuals who enacted revolutionary shifts in thinking and in history: Sitting Bull, the Lakota chief who led the resistance against the United States government; and Albert Einstein, the physicist who challenged established understandings of time as an absolute, and theorized rather, that time is instead variable and relative.¹

Across history

Meryl McMaster's *Victoria* explores the artist's bi-cultural heritage (Indigenous/European) by engaging in an extraordinary liminal reality. Rather than viewing her identity as two opposing cultures in historical conflict, she fearlessly transforms it into a site of synergistic strength.ⁱⁱ

Mary Longman's *Hills Never Lie* makes visible the layering of inherited difficult histories. Viewers witness the transformation of the Lebret cemetery site in Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, by shifting photographically from the past to the present; yet two visual elements remain powerfully consistent – the hills and the persons standing wrapped blankets – the active and ongoing Indigenous presence on the land.

Across memory

Many artists access and journey the past through family memory and intergenerational relationships that span across time. In each case, familial roots provide a means by which the artists understand their current positions as Indigenous peoples and artmakers.

Marianne Nicolson's *Portrait of Am'yaxid* evokes images of a Northwest Coast Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial house and central beaded/button work dancing apron to memorialize the life of her younger brother. In place of a central family crest, Nicholson includes another significant marker of identity, a family photograph. Third generation artist Goota Ashoona echoes the renowned skills of her father in *Kiawak Ashoona, Inuit Carver, My Father*, and Rosalie Favell likewise includes portraits of family members in her work, *Navigating By Our Grandmothers*, and pays tribute to the guidance of the older generations.

Across myth

Telling Creation Stories is an empowering act that mirrors our own self re-creation and resurgence. In different versions of the story, a powerful being or person – Nanabozho (Ojibway), Weesahkay Jack (Cree), and Sky Woman (Iroquois), among others – envisions a mediatory terrestrial world of land between the realms of sky and water for humans, animals and other beings to call home. A small handful of earth was gathered from the bottom of the world of water, placed on the canoe, raft, or back of the Great Turtle, and in moving around that small bit of earth, the animals and beings “dance[d] a new world into existence.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Both Roy Kakegamic's *Weesahkay Jack and the Great Flood*, and Hannah Claus' *clouds* return to the ongoing creation and re-creation of the world. The dreamlike quality of *clouds* invites us to imagine what Sky Woman saw as she fell from the Sky World to create the world in which we now live.

In Alex Janvier's *Other Worlds*, painted forms fluidly stretch and pull beyond the frame, reaching out for other realms that escape temporal or spatial measurement. In the mythic worlds of Jesse Oonark's *The World of Sun and Moon* and *The Fishmaker Made Kiviuk a Fish to Ride*, characters move freely across physical and conceptual boundaries. The natural and fantastic beings surrounding the woman in Françoise Oglaka's *Thinking of Things* have been conjured up through the power of her imagination, bringing them from the mythic to the physical world.

A constant dialogue

Joi T. Arcand's *Here on Future Earth* series presents snapshots of Saskatchewan towns, cities and First Nation reserves in an alternate futuristic reality where Cree is the dominant language. The dreamlike quality of the images evokes nostalgia, while also offering a radical imagining^{iv} of imminent empowerment.

Caroline Monnet's *Alice* (from the *Modern Tipi* series) examines Western pop culture's stereotypical association of all Native people with tipis – a false perception that relegates Indigenous groups in a distant and romantic past. In her modern or futuristic representation of the tipi, Monnet invites us to revisit personal concepts of home and contemporary Indigenous realities.

Questioning boundaries

In a chronological mash-up of visual forms that make permeable the fixed boundaries between the 'traditional' and the 'contemporary,' Barry Ace fuses glass bead work with a modern painted aesthetic, innovatively transforming and creating new translations of Anishinaabe visual language. In the same vein, Lance Belanger juxtaposes media from the natural and technological worlds, drawing complementary visual parallels between the intricate metal computer chips and shimmering sealskin.

Re-imagining time through Indigenous art is a call to action, a radical and regenerative act that asks each of us to set into motion a genuine re-thinking of the status quo. It allows us to transmit memory and concerns of the past and present to a resurgence – a creative visioning of a future that is healthy, empowered and Indigenous.

ⁱ Jane Horner, *Revolving Sequential: Concepts of Time in the Art of Carl Beam (1943-2005)*, M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Meryl McMaster, Artist Statement on *In-Between Worlds*, merylmcmaster.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Leanne Simpson, *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbiter Ring Publishing), 2011.

^{iv} Taiiike Alfred, "What is Radical Imagination? Indigenous Struggles in Canada," *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4.2 (Fall 2010).