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The new tribe: Critical perspectives and practices in Aboriginal contemporary art

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Publication date
1999

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Citation for published version (APA):

McMaster, G. R. (1999). *The new tribe: Critical perspectives and practices in Aboriginal contemporary art*.

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Supplement III

Acknowledgments

As a narrative, life is a series of chapters; some are more interesting than others. This chapter in my life is not so much the culmination of the work done to date. Rather it is a chapter about those whom I have met along the way, the stories they have told me, the search for ideas I have come to understand, the accidental discoveries, the humour shared with friends and family, and the long walks with the family dog to work out difficult ideas. The most significant person in this chapter is Mieke Bal, whom I first met when she came to Ottawa in 1994, where she delivered several lectures at Carleton University. I was a graduate student at the time. I had never heard of her before then, but I attended all her lectures. Listening to her changed my life. The excitement she instilled in me influenced the direction of my work. Since my enrollment at ASCA, the association with Professor Bal has resulted in some important realizations for my analysis of art. In a way, I like to think of it as her way of making me see (reaffirm) how people of long ago understood things (objects) not as separate and objectified, but as real, living and dynamic. While I see this as a concept useful for understanding the relation aboriginal people have with “culturally sensitive” objects, I also see it having substantial room for our comprehension and analysis of contemporary work. Professor Bal has profoundly encouraged me in my analysis of the object. Her response to my analysis in turn made me realize the challenge of cultural analysis as a powerful tool in understanding the art and artifice of everyday life.

Along the way, the process of my thinking and writing drew inspiration from a dedicated group of other young scholars, affectionately known as ASCA’s “Ottawa Beavers.” They are Susan Close, Melissa Rombout, Brenda Lafleur, and Petra Halkes. I have known Susan since our pre-teens in North Battleford, where we began our life in painting class under the tutelage of a local artist and Catholic priest, Father Jourdain. Our lives remain interwoven. The Beavers inspired each other with stimulating, lively conversation and new ideas. Each month, we managed to share our stories, our successes and frustrations, over good wine and food. I will miss these times.

This dissertation owes a great deal to the inspiration of the many aboriginal contemporary artists, and their work. I honour them as the “new tribe.” Their work continues to surprise, and challenge the way that they articulate a multitude of ideas. They include: Edward Poitras,

Jane Ash Poitras, Carl Beam, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Jimmie Durham, James Luna, Mary Longman, Nora Naranjo-Morse, Marianne Nicolson, Mateo Romero, C. Maxx Stevens, Jolene Rickard, Shelley Niro, Rebecca Belmore, Robert Houle, Alex Janvier, Lance Belanger, and Jeffrey Thomas. I know all of them personally, having worked with each of them in one way or another. Although there are many other artists I know personally and professionally, and who are important constituents of my arguments, I chose specific pieces as my focus because they were appropriate to my thesis. It is always difficult deciding which pieces work. I have learned so much from each one of these artists that I hope the reader will come away understanding the importance of their contributions to this burgeoning field.

Another group I met along the way were scholars, who gave me the benefit of important insights, and their wisdom and encouragement. I would like to thank JoAllyn Archambault, Lakota and anthropologist, of the Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., for information on U.S. Legislation and the current situation regarding the issues of Indian identity in the United States. Professors Valda Blundell and Rob Shields at Carleton University, inspired me as a graduate student; as well, Ruth Philips, now Director of the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, gave me tremendous encouragement and was also responsible for bringing Mieke Bal to Carleton. Tony Bennett, formerly of Griffiths University, gave me insightful comments into museum issues. Dr. Olive Dickason, a scholar I greatly admire, read and provided an exacting review of the first chapter. I would like to thank Antonio Gualtieri, of the Religious Studies Department, Carleton University, for his kindness, friendship, and knowledge. And, Sherry Brydon, Curator at the Fenimore Art Museum, who offered a close and critical reading of the first two chapters, also gave me considerable encouragement.

Some of the greatest storytellers and scholars are tribal elders. I would be remiss not to acknowledge them for they are the foundation to understanding the complexities of any culture. I would like to thank the ones who have contributed to my work over the years: the late Assiniboine elder, Solomon Mosquito; the late Cree elders, Ed Thunder Child, Ernest Bonaise, and Isabelle Wuttunee; Cree elder, Joe Roane; Red Lake Chippewa elder, Frank Dickenson; Santa Clara Pueblo elder and scholar, Dr. David Warren; and more recently Bernard Assiniwi at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. But there is one person in particular whom I came to appreciate and speak with regularly over the years. He is

Walter Bonaise of the Poundmaker Reserve, Saskatchewan. He gave his time and effort in helping me understand the complexities of Plains Cree thought. It is through his teaching that I have come to realize the tremendous potential implicit in the ancient epistemologies. And it is with his guidance and teachings that I can now translate this into my work.

My mother, Mrs. Lena (Wuttunee) McMaster, assisted me in translating some Cree terminology so that we could all get a better idea of its complexities. More importantly, she has always encouraged me to do my best, as have my brothers, Howard and David. They all know and appreciate the importance of perseverance and dreams.

I would like to thank Amelia (Crowfoot) Clark and the Old Sun College, Blackfoot Band Tribal Administration, Siksika Band, Alberta, for the tribal scholarship fund that helped me realize this dissertation. Since I was unable to be at the Blackfoot Powwow a few years ago when they honoured graduate students, I hope to be at the next one.

Wendy MacIntyre helped me polish this manuscript with her editing skills. I am indebted to her eye for detail when my own eyes could no longer do the job. Thanks also go to Ottawa Beaver, Petra Halkes, for helping me with the Dutch translation of the abstract. And, I am grateful for the support of Terri-Lyn Findlay who assisted me in the final design of this manuscript.

Some friends have travelled along the way with me; I have truly enjoyed the many hours spent exchanging ideas about aboriginal contemporary art. Arthur Renwick is a friend whom I worked with on the exhibition *Reservation X*. Together we travelled in time and in space for the entire project. To him, I would like to say thank you and good luck at White Mountain Academy. Other helpful friends include a young scholar, Andrea Walsh, who is also completing her dissertation, and has been particularly inspiring; William Kingfisher, a surprise friend, now a graduate student at Carleton; Allan Ryan, whom I once tagged as my "personal anthropologist," and who recently published his inspiring dissertation, the *Trickster Shift*; a great writer and scholar whose works I admire, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, who never tired of my teasing; Alfred Young Man, who now has his Ph.D. and is using it well; Aldona Jonaitas and Janet Berlo, who have always been great scholars to emulate, and whom I wish to acknowledge for their motivation; and lastly, Craig Howe, for his humour, friendship and philosophical points of view.

My work on this dissertation for the past three years has posed difficulties for a young family. The many late-night hours and weekends when I should have been taking part in day-to-day activities with my family,

have taken their toll, although most nights we all shared the same working table, doing office work or homework. I most sincerely want to thank my wife Lynn, and my daughter Meryl, for their love, encouragement and understanding of how important this chapter is in my life. They are both significant to my story. It is to them that I dedicate this work.

Megwitch!