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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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THE NEW TRIBE

Critical Perspectives and Practices in Aboriginal Contemporary Art

The new subject position of aboriginal contemporary artists is an engagement around and in-between multiple spatialities — reserve/urban, centre/periphery, museum/gallery — shifting control over cultural, social, political and artistic space. The Métis artist, Edward Poitras, once envisioned this group of unconnected, marginalized, and displaced individuals as a “new tribe,” a concept used here to describe this new cultural subject.

This dissertation is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework, integrating art and art history, anthropology, and literary, post-colonial, and post-structural theory, to interpret the idea of identity as mediated in the works and practices of aboriginal contemporary artists. Specifically, the focus is on the work of several artists, mostly Canadian, as key articulations: “work” is used to mean both practice and key pieces within the artist’s body of work. Practice signifies the “articulation” of living and working within the field of art, while the key pieces denote the objects produced and “living” within this shifting field.

