

Museums & Sustainability

Decolonizing the Museum

Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre
Decolonizing Art Galleries
We are All Treaty People
Curator Carmen Robertson

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) is a non-profit, collective organization with more than 400 members, including 200 member museums and galleries. MAS is governed by an elected Board of Directors that develops policy and provides direction for programs and services to benefit all Saskatchewan museums.

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Message from MAS

In this issue of *Museums & Sustainability*, we're looking at a complicated and challenging subject: decolonizing the museum.

Museums are a colonial institution, and we have a lot to answer for. Around the world, museums have a history of housing stolen objects and even human remains. Museums' relationship with Indigenous peoples has been particularly troubling, and in many cases museums have acted as an arm of government, creating a sense of legitimacy and authority around a particular way of organizing society.

Whether we tell the story of an empire, a nation, a region, a small settlement or a particular social group, we have to be more attentive to whose perspective is represented in our museums. We need to remember that we are repositories for many people's stories and forums for discussion. We don't have authority over the meanings of stories and artifacts we work to preserve. We serve communities by helping amplify many voices and by sharing information.

In this publication, you'll see many examples of this kind of activity. Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre works to preserve evidence and interpretation that shows the depth and complexity of First Nations' long and ongoing relationship with the land we inhabit. The MacKenzie Art Gallery and the Remai Modern are working to include more Indigenous experience and perspectives in their staff and programming. The connected stories, artifacts, and history preserved and displayed at the Poundmaker Interpretive Centre and the Clayton McLain Museum show the richness and complexity of the relationships between settlers and Indigenous people. The Royal Saskatchewan Museum's evolving history of involving Indigenous experts and artists is a great example of the way museums have begun making room for Indigenous expertise, voices, and perspectives. And our interview with Dr. Carmen Robertson outlines some important next steps in the process of decolonizing our museums and galleries.

We've done a lot of talking about museum ethics and, recently, about reconciliation and decolonization. As we continue the discussion together, let's also remember to leave space for listening, and for action. Decolonizing our organizations, our work, and ourselves will be a long and difficult journey, but we believe that we, and Saskatchewan museums, are up to the task.

Museums & Sustainability

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Contributors:

Andréa Ledding, MFA, MA, is a Saskatoon-based communications, content, creative, editing, and photo-journalism specialist with a strong grounding in Indigenous-settler relations and Métis history and culture. Nominations, shortlists, and awards include Saskatchewan Arts Board, Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, and CBC Literary Awards for creative non-fiction, fiction, scripts, plays, and poetry.

Jeanelle Mandes from the Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation is the News Editor of Eagle Feather News. She holds certificates in Intercultural Leadership and Indian Communication Arts; undergraduate degrees in Indigenous Studies and Journalism; and a master's degree in Journalism. She has worked for more than ten years in a variety of mediums including; radio broadcast, print newspaper, magazine, communications, and publishing.

Wanda Schmöckel is a freelance writer, editor, and journalist based in Regina.

Above: A view of Eagle Creek Valley from Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre.
Cover: Ancient Echoes Intepretive Centre. Photos: Andréa Ledding.



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Museums Association of Saskatchewan
424 McDonald Street
Regina, Saskatchewan S4N 6E1
phone: (306) 780-9279
or toll free in SK (866) 568-7386

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Drawing Connections at Ancient Echoes

Story and photography by Andréa Ledding

In June of 2017, Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre celebrated Canada 150 with the Shared Land Celebration, where representatives of local Blackfoot, Cree, Gros Ventre and Lakota Nations discussed ideas around the future of the Centre and its programming within the context of Truth and Reconciliation.

“I think what we have out here, in terms of Indigenous content is extremely important and valuable,” says Brittany Gilchrist, Executive Director. “The fact that we, as such a small community, have come together to preserve this place brings attention to all the incredible things we can learn. It’s a fantastic opportunity.”

The Interpretive Centre is located at the top of a hill in the village of Herschel, about an hour and half drive southwest of Saskatoon, overlooking the junction of the Coal Ravine and Eagle Creek, and is surrounded by rolling mixed pasture lands. Inside the Centre are several rooms open to the public, including galleries featuring a variety of local artifacts, and a permanent installation of paintings by Métis artist Jo Cooper, depicting the disappearance and resurgence of the buffalo in the area. “Materials like Jo Cooper’s art make it easier to tell a story of what happened to the Indigenous people both pre-and-post-colonization,” Gilchrist says.

While the Centre itself is rich in display and lore, the main draw for many visitors is located a short drive up the road; Petroglyphs, rock formations, tipi rings, a medicine wheel, buffalo jump, and an active archeological dig are some of the features that testify to centuries of Indigenous presence. Gilchrist says the staff and board of the centre have made a concerted effort to work authentically and collaboratively with local Indigenous people, and to reflect their land-based ties to the area over the centuries, with First Nations gatherings and activities focusing on site-specific activities, storytelling, and guided tours. “We can go out there and have one idea about what these features mean, and then we can talk to an Elder, and they may have a different idea,” Gilchrist says. “It creates conversations that can help foster relationships and

bridge that cultural gap, which I think we need to focus more energy on, especially in this day and age.”

The virgin prairie surrounding the centre, made up of glacial ravines, alkali soil, and freshwater springs, contains medicine and food plants, many species of grasses and flowers, birds, animals, and big game. It remains an important gathering site for many Indigenous people; Elders and their helpers can be found performing protocol at various sites at different times of the year. The petroglyphs, carved in limestone more than 1,500 years ago, are not only beautiful to look upon for visitors to the ravine, but retain spiritual significance and relevance for local First Nations. The Biggar-area farmer Henry Kosloski, who first came upon a petroglyph in 1960, kept it a secret for nearly 20 years before seeking protection, and in 1988, the petroglyphs were the first rock art site to be designated a Municipal Heritage Site in the province of Saskatchewan.

Various programming and interpretive activities at the Centre focus around local Indigenous storytelling, recreations of authentic activities, and full moon walks with legends – all serving to highlight the long history of the First Peoples of the Plains in this area. Whether visitors are of colonial or First Nations descent themselves, Gilchrist says a variety of perspectives are offered.

“We try to accommodate all kinds of ideas and beliefs in our tours so we can include a Cree interpretation or a Blackfoot interpretation, and it makes everyone understand there are different ideas and cultural systems between each tribe,” Gilchrist says. “It’s not easy to make it all sort of mesh together in a way that is coherent to the average visitor, but being able to work together with different Indigenous peoples from across Canada really gives us something that is very special – and we try hard to promote that because we want to foster those discussions that aren’t easy to have, and to have people open themselves to different beliefs and experiences. I personally am really honoured to play a role in that.” **M+S**

“It creates conversations that can help foster relationships and bridge that cultural gap, which I think we need to focus more energy on.”

Left: A view of Ancient Echoes Interpretive Centre.



Top: Buffalo Boy Productions performing at opening ceremony for Rемаi Modern October 2017. Photo courtesy of Rемаi Modern. Bottom: Installation view of Dana Claxton: *The Sioux Project – Tatanka Oyate*, MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2017. Photo: Don Hall. Courtesy of MacKenzie Art Gallery.

The MacKenzie Art Gallery and Rемаi Modern Reflecting the diversity of their communities

By Wanda Schmöckel

As public art galleries throughout North America evolve to function as vital community hubs, they are charged with the task of keeping a finger on the pulse of global culture, while simultaneously celebrating that of the local. In Saskatchewan, two public institutions – the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, and the Rемаi Modern in Saskatoon – are working towards better incorporating Indigenous experience and perspectives on their collections, exhibitions, and programming.

“It’s about bringing voices of Indigenous people to the table to help develop and deliver programs,” says Janine Windolph, a Cree filmmaker and storyteller from Northern Saskatchewan. Windolph first started working with the MacKenzie in 2015, when she was hired to act as an on-site story keeper for *Moving Forward, Never Forgetting*, a group exhibition that reflected on Canada’s legacy of residential schools through the work of contemporary Indigenous artists. Windolph was made Curator of Public Programs in 2017 and has been instrumental in presenting a number of the MacKenzie’s recent public programs, including the *Sioux Symposium*, which celebrated contemporary Nakota, Lakota, and Dakota artmaking and culture, and *Transformative Landscapes*, a year-long series of exhibitions and programming held during Canada’s 150th anniversary of Confederation. The series culminated with the installation of *Kákiké/Forever* by Omaskêko Cree artist Duane Linklater. Unveiled in 2018, the artwork is permanently fixed to the gallery’s facade, and is comprised of glowing green text panels that form the phrase ‘as long as the sun shines the river flows and the grass grows’ – drawing from the words spoken at the signing of Treaty 4. It’s regarded as the most significant work of public art the city has seen in decades.

“We’re looking at how the diversity of the community we represent is reflected in the exhibitions and the programs at the Gallery, but also, while bringing in International voices, understanding how those voices can be received in Treaty 4 territory,” Windolph says. “What makes the MacKenzie unique is that that we have so many Indigenous cultures – from around Saskatchewan, Canada, and internationally – calling Regina home and I think that reflects a lot in the community, and the type of work that has to be done to help us all understand the diversity here.”

The MacKenzie has a relatively long history of working with Indigenous curators. In 1999, the gallery was the first to hire an Indigenous Head Curator, Lee-Ann Martin, whose tenure at the MacKenzie included curating *Bob Boyer: His Life’s Work*, a retrospective of the esteemed Saskatchewan-based Métis

artist. Curator Patricia Deadman (Mohawk) joined the MacKenzie in 2003, and in 2007, Ojibway curator Michelle LaVallee was hired by the gallery, where she helmed the ground-breaking exhibition 7: *Professional Native Indian Artist Inc.*, which toured nationally to critical acclaim. In the summer of 2018, the MacKenzie hired artist and curator John Hampton (Chickasaw) as Director of Programs – a new position that bridges the gallery’s education and curatorial departments.

In 2017, the MacKenzie presented *The Sioux Project – Tatanka Oyate* by Hunkapapa Lakota artist Dana Claxton – an installation focused on a series of video panels presented in-the-round featuring intersecting conversations with members of the region’s Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota communities. Over the opening weekend, the accompanying *Sioux Symposium* was admission-free and open to the public, hosting artists, curators, and academics from across Turtle Island/North America. As Windolph points out, this programming reflected the gallery’s capacity to address a cross-section of communities.

“We have a lot of programming in Regina that reflects Cree culture, and a lot of people say that what’s being represented as Indigenous plains culture is very Cree-centric,” Windolph says. “So, we wanted to highlight that there is a unique Saskatchewan identity and this exhibition really brought communities together in the video – you got to see a lot of key figures here in Regina, but also in Whitecap (Dakota First Nation). The part of this program that I was most proud of was bringing the students from Whitecap to participate in the symposium and meet the artist – because they truly inspired the work in the video. Bringing the community into the gallery makes it real for them, and makes it a better experience. It also brings more authentic culture to our audiences, so it was interesting to see how they responded. Because, even as Indigenous people, we’re relearning who we are.”

In the year since the Rемаi Modern’s opening in October 2017, the Saskatoon gallery has presented a variety of Indigenous-focused programming including panel discussions, workshops, readings, and ongoing educational partnerships with community schools throughout the region. The gallery’s inaugural exhibitions featured an installation titled *Determined by the River*, organized and designed by artists Duane Linklater and Tanya Lukin Linklater, and featured a selection of works by contemporary Indigenous artists, alongside works from the gallery’s permanent collection, and was complemented by a speaker series in conversation with Indigenous writers, filmmakers, artists, and curators.



Installation view of Brett Graham: *Pioneer*, from *Transformative Landscapes*. MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2017. Photo: Don Hall. Courtesy of MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In early 2018, the Rемаi's installation of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn's *What Can I Learn from You. What Can You Learn from Me* created opportunities for communities to intersect and interact through a workshop space where participants were invited to exchange knowledge with others, and presenters were paid a \$100 honorarium to share their stories. These workshops were another opportunity to engage Saskatoon's communities through outreach, and Lyndon J. Linklater, the Rемаi's Indigenous Relations Advisor, says Hirschhorn was especially excited about the possibilities this presented. "Thomas was very set (on) going into the community to meet people and tell them what he was doing," Linklater says. "So, they went out and met with Elders and different organizations." Linklater was among the first to present at the workshops. "At first, (the response) was slow, but then word started getting out into the community, and people started coming in. There were times when they would be lined up outside before the gallery opened. We got such a spectrum of people from different social classes. They'd come and listen and it created an incredible atmosphere. The workshop created a very safe environment and it was such an incredible feeling to be part of that."

Though the Rемаi doesn't currently have any Indigenous curators on staff, in February 2018, it announced the appointment of Gerald McMaster, an Ontario-based curator and educator of Plains Cree and Blackfoot descent, to the role of Adjunct Curator. McMaster brings this considerable perspective to the position following a long curatorial career that has included prominent positions at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

"I think the baseline of it is you need to have Indigenous perspectives on staff," says Rемаi Curator Rose Bouthillier, who organized the gallery's 2019 presentation of *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental* – a touring retrospective of the Anishinaabe artist's work, curated by the Art Gallery of Ontario's Wanda Nanabush. "We do endeavor to include Indigenous perspectives on all our programming – exhibitions, live programs, and education – and we're very conscious of being inclusive in our offerings. But it really does come back to (a need for) people that are on staff to shift the perspective and structures of the institution from within." **M+S**



Duane Linklater, *Kâkikê/Forever*. 2018 Acrylic, aluminum and LEDs, Photo: MacKenzie Art Gallery.



Thomas Hirschhorn leads workshop in *What Can I Learn from You. What Can You Learn from Me*. Rемаi Modern, 2018.



Clayton McLain Museum

A collector’s legacy

Story and photography by Andréa Ledding

For almost 20 years, retired school teacher Lucille Bullerwell has been involved with the Clayton McLain Memorial Museum in Cut Knife; a vast collection of artifacts, many of which were originally acquired by the museum’s namesake, a local farmer and history buff who believed in preserving the area’s rich heritage – and complicated history. “The story we’re trying to tell here is the whole area’s story,” Bullerwell says. “How the local cultures have interacted, and what has happened in those years – that is our story.”

McLain was born in the United States in 1913, and moved to Canada with his family in 1917. At age 23, McLain met Flying Eagle, who had been a warrior in the North-West Resistance of 1885. This meeting sparked a lifelong interest in Indigenous culture – and a collection that would eventually grow to include more than 20,000 artifacts. Over the years, McLain would meet others involved in the North-West Resistance and recorded their stories – along with those of local homesteaders – for posterity, forming the basis of what would become an impressive archive.

Following McLain’s death in 1968, the local community helped raise funds to establish a museum to house his collection. McLain’s wife, Elizabeth, and other volunteers worked to catalogue Clayton’s collection along with other items that were subsequently donated to the new Clayton McLain Memorial Museum, which opened in 1971. Bullerwell became involved in 2001, initially volunteering to the records digitally for Elizabeth, who served as the museum’s curator until her death the following year.

“After Elizabeth passed away, the board asked if I would take on the position of curator,” Bullerwell recalls. “I had begun taking classes to familiarize myself with museum work. Utilizing the resources of the Museums Association of Saskatchewan has helped our museum grow in our knowledge of handling the diverse items of which we are caretakers. This includes sacred First Nations items. We are a small museum of community volunteers who have enlisted several local First Nations people in the past to guide us in their special handling.” Elders affiliated with the centre include Walter Bonaise, the resident Elder and cultural advisor at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. Bullerwell notes she is trying to ease herself out of the decision-making at the museum, but plans to help as much as possible with the ongoing digitization process. “My husband and I are retired and are trying to travel as our health allows,” she explains.

The museum itself is uniquely housed by a grouping of heritage buildings at the western edge of town. These buildings, which include a log cabin, a former church, a railway station, and a schoolhouse, contain a vast collection of artifacts – both from McLain’s original collection and others that have been added over the years. Most items are from the area, but some come from further afield, including beading and baskets from northern Manitoba. The collection is as eclectic as the history of the region.

“The sacred items are in a full walk-in safe where they’re looked after, while the less vulnerable objects are left on display,” Bullerwell explains. Highlights from the collection include the original Tootoosis’s backrest – which belonged to the man from whom the Tootoosis family is descended – pipes, sun dance whistles, medicine bags, intact spears, war bonnets, and Chief Poundmaker’s medicine bundle. “We’re hoping to get a new building to house our best items,” Bullerwell says.

At the museum vault and office a few blocks away, Bullerwell notes that she would love to raise enough funds to expand the storage building and have a facility that can showcase some of the more sensitive artifacts that are currently in storage. The sacred items cannot be photographed due to Indigenous protocol, but are carefully described, catalogued, and cared for according to protocol, which may include regular feasting and smudging; the museum consults with Elders, and follows their directives. Besides physical artifacts, the museum’s audio collection contains recorded interviews such as that of Solomon Pritchard, a Métis man who, as a young boy, accompanied the women captured at Frog Lake in 1885 – a conflict involving starved band members who confronted and ultimately killed a notoriously corrupt Indian Agent, around the same time as the Riel-led Resistance at Batoche. “We do tell the story of 1885 because we have a lot of artifacts that tell that story,” Bullerwell says. “But you can also go up to the hill in Poundmaker and hear that story.”

Poundmaker Cree Nation, just a few kilometres north of the town, has an interpretive centre on a hill overlooking the reserve, not far past Cut Knife Hill for which the town was named – though even the name marking this currently peaceful vista has a complicated history.

The Battle of Cut Knife Hill – or Broken Knife – as Poundmaker Cree Nation Headman Milton Tootoosis explains, was

between local Cree and raiding Tsuu T’ina (formerly called Sarcee in the 1830’s and 40’s), who were resoundingly defeated by the locals, but the Tsuu T’ina leader – whose name, Broken Knife, was incorrectly translated to Cut Knife – proved such a formidable opponent, the local Cree named the hill for him, and Poundmaker Cree Nation has since renamed it Broken Knife Lookout Hill.

The Poundmaker interpretive centre is located near Broken Knife Lookout Hill, on a second battle site hill where the battle of Cut Knife Creek took place in 1885 – when Chief Poundmaker’s sleeping camp was attacked by 300 hundred soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Otter. The Canadian Militia was roundly defeated, retreating in such haste that they would have been decimated had Poundmaker not ordered his men to let them live. Poundmaker First Nations is currently in the process of reviving their Interpretive Centre. Milton Tootoosis explains that they have hopes to repatriate sacred items to the Centre from across the globe as well as locally, and showcase the history of Chief Poundmaker, whose body is interred on the battle site hill of 1885. In early 2018, the Canadian federal government announced initial support for exonerating Chief Poundmaker of his wrongful charge, conviction, and imprisonment for treason. Talks continue between the First Nations and the government, and Tootoosis and others hope to share their perspectives on this history with items showcased in a planned museum.

For her part, Bullerwell has dreams of a facility that can accommodate rotating exhibitions of their collection, as well as a digital archive that can be made accessible online to researchers around the world. While there are no formal conversations happening between these two groups, it does seem like an opportunity for reconciliation which, Tootoosis points out, Indigenous peoples have a long history with. “The Cree and Tsuu T’ina reconciled their warfare in the summer of 2016 through ceremony, which is an act of reconciliation,” he says.

“What’s unique is our history and our relationship with the First Nations,” Bullerwell says. “And what’s really important is the stories that go with each object. Maybe someday that object will no longer exist, but hopefully the stories will still exist.”

Tootoosis agrees there are many stories to be told, and he hopes that First Nations people will have the opportunity to share their perspectives on their history as well, and protect sacred or ceremonial items. “There are certain items that are still honoured and there is a deep spiritual connection to those items,” he says. “They aren’t just on show or display in any kind of museum...you have to earn the right to see them, have total respect, and go in with a different mindset.” **M+S**



Installation view of diorama in First Nations Gallery, Royal Saskatchewan Museum

Royal Saskatchewan Museum

A commitment to honouring the treaties

Story and photography by Jeanelle Mandes

One of my favorite hobbies is exploring museums. Whenever I visit a new town or city, I always do some research to see if there are any interesting museums to scope out. In the years since I moved to Regina, I have made a point of making regular visits to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. I’m from the Beardy’s and Okemasis First Nation in Treaty 6 territory. Whenever I’m in the RSM’s First Nations gallery, specifically viewing the sweat lodge diorama, I feel like I’m back at home. After my first visit to the RSM, I was amazed by these galleries, and upon seeing the wonderful installations and absorbing the didactic information, I felt a sense of pride and gratitude for being an Indigenous person.

Long before recommendations were made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the RSM had a head start including Indigenous perspectives on its collections through the organization’s practice of hiring Indigenous employees, researchers, and artists.

Evelyn Siegfried has served as curator of the RSM’s Aboriginal Studies program since 2008. Growing up in the Bigstone Cree Nation on Treaty 8 territory, Siegfried recalls hearing stories of Wesakechak – a Cree trickster figure – in school,

but she says the history of Indigenous peoples was completely absent from her school’s curriculum. Today, Siegfried is optimistic as she notes a growing awareness of the need to include Indigenous history and culture in schools and other institutions.

“Everybody is working to correct the lack of education around the history of Indigenous peoples,” she says. “The Saskatchewan education system is (now) providing treaty education. There has been a lot more work done, and that includes telling the stories of Indigenous people, and what has happened to them throughout the history of Canada.”

The impetus to make changes to the RSM’s galleries began in the mid-1980s when the museum first presented an idea to install a permanent First Nations Gallery. But, as Siegfried points out, they were missing a key ingredient.

“Dr. Gerry Conaty [then Curator of Ethnology] was the person who first said ‘Wait a minute, we’re working on a First Nations gallery and there are no First Nations people working at the museum,’” she recalls. “The call was put out to the Indigenous community to be a part of the First Nations

Below: A backrest belonging to the original Tootoosis.

Previous page: Top: Clayton McLain Museum. Bottom: Traditional beadwork on child’s moccasins, All collection of Clayton McLain Museum.



When I first came upon the pictograph, I was astonished – knowing that this document is one-of-a-kind and has been preserved over these many years.

Gallery’s development, so that it could be done in collaboration with the community, and not just a white man’s presentation.”

The First Nations Gallery opened in 1992 with contributions from local Indigenous artists, including Bob Boyer’s mural *Aurora Borealis*, and sculptor Lloyd Pinay’s alabaster statue of the infamous trickster Wesakechak, which currently greets visitors at the Gallery’s entrance. Interpretations of life on the plains are illustrated with various artifacts including clothing, beadwork, and regalia dating back to the 1750s – all incorporated into dioramas depicting the time around first contact with European settlers.

These timelines segue in to the RSM’s landmark exhibition *We Are All Treaty People*, which first opened in the summer of 2017. The exhibition features the preserved pictograph authored by Chief Paskwa – and is Canada’s only known written record of Treaty promises from the viewpoint of Indigenous

people. This extraordinary document dates to 1883 and was repatriated from Ontario to Saskatchewan in 2007 where it languished until the opening of the exhibition ten years later.

When I first came upon the pictograph, I was astonished – knowing that this document is one-of-a-kind and has been preserved over these many years. The exhibition also explains what the treaties are and what promises were made during their negotiations. Visitors to the exhibition can see, firsthand, what was promised in the treaties, and the document can be understood in almost any language.

“I think most Canadians have forgotten that we are all treaty people and it’s not just the Indigenous populations that signed the treaties,” Siegfried says. “It’s a two-sided process completely. People who are non-Indigenous need to know, learn, and honour that in collaboration with the community, and not just a white man’s presentation.” **M+S**



Installation view, *We Are All Treaty People* at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum.

Curator in Conversation Carmen Robertson

Dr. Carmen Robertson is a Scots-Lakota independent curator and a professor of art history at Carleton University, specializing in Indigenous Art History and Curatorial Studies. Formerly a professor at the University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada, her research focusses on contemporary Indigenous arts and constructions of Indigeneity in popular culture.

Museums + Sustainability: What does it mean to Indigenize a museum and how does this relate to the recommendations that came out of the Truth and Reconciliation commission?

Carmen Robertson: The TRC recommendations opened the door to embark on this work, but from my perspective, the recommendations are less important to Indigenizing as they are an invitation to bring Indigenous perspectives, stories, and voices into the museum. It’s long overdue. It took the TRC’s recommendations for a number of museums to find the funding and energy to do this, but to me, that’s a small part of what needs to be done.

M+S: In terms of nomenclature, what is the difference between Indigenization and decolonization?

CR: I think they’re very different. Indigenizing is a really problematic term – it can mean something different to a lot of people. Sadly, so does decolonization. Indigenization can be something as minor as just having some Indigenous content on display – in the case of a museum or an art gallery – but to decolonize, that’s the work of both allies and Indigenous people. Decolonizing is really the work of Indigenous curators and museum personnel – to rethink the way institutions connect with communities and how they have been telling the stories of Indigenous people.

M+S: How do you think Canadian museums are doing in their work to bring Indigenous perspectives to their collections?

CR: Well, I don’t think there’s any one way to do that. I could point my finger at some success stories, and I think one of them is the National Gallery of Canada, when it realized it was far behind in what it needed to do. It has now hired Indigenous curators, which has made Indigenous art more visible, but I also think there are a lot of really good smaller examples. I would point to the MacKenzie Art Gallery as one of those institutions that has, in the last ten to fifteen years, really made a concerted effort to work with Indigenous curators, and bring contemporary Indigenous shows to communities that would not otherwise see that work.



M+S: How do you think it’s going, overall?

CR: On the surface, at larger institutions, it’s going well, but one of the keys is to hire more Indigenous people. And we know, right across Canada, that there are very few Indigenous curators working at public institutions, so that really needs to change. With that change comes a change in the way that people think about their collections, and the connections, the stories, ways to display – so that there’s a richness for everyone. But expecting a few people to carry the load for the entire nation of what Indigenous curation is, is pretty frustrating.

M+S: From your perspective, looking ahead, what are the key issues and challenges around decolonizing museums and their collections?

CR: It’s a daunting task. However, I think the first step in that healing is to change that colonial process – to hire and engage with Indigenous peoples and communities related to the collections, or to the art that they’re connected with. And in addition to presenting the work is the programming that goes along with it, and that, I think, is key. It’s difficult for smaller institutions to decolonize because of the funding issues that they’re dealing with and also the availability of staff. So, I feel for smaller institutions, but I do believe that they can – and need to – begin this process, and find ways to work with communities. I’ve seen the shoestring budgets some of these museums operate on. The reality is it’s difficult for many of them to even keep their doors open, let alone re-vamp their way of curating and thinking. But there are more and more resources out there and more opportunities to connect with communities. So, it’s encouraging when you see it happening at a smaller museum – and it usually has to do with people working at those institutions pushing that agenda. It’ll definitely take a lot of time, but it’s so important. **M+S**

Museums & Sustainability is an annual look at sustainability issues affecting Saskatchewan's museums.

Decolonizing Museums, the eighth publication in the series, looks at what museums are doing to better incorporate Indigenous experiences and perspectives in their collections and programming.

Inside, you'll find thought-provoking essays and interviews, as well as stories and photos showcasing work in Saskatchewan museums.

The Museums Association of Saskatchewan is a non-profit member group for Saskatchewan's museums and museum workers.

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(306) 780-9279 or toll free in SK 1-866-568-7386
email: mas@saskmuseums.org
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