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LAWRENCE PAUL YUXWELUPTUN, PAINTER
Cowichan / Quw'utsun and Okanagan / Syilx



Christy Clark and the Kinder Morgan Go-Go Girls by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 243.8 x 201.7 cm. Private collection. Photograph by Ken Mayer, courtesy of UBC MOA.

Excerpt from “Artist’s Statement,” in Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, editors, *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, 5–18. Vancouver: Figure 1 and MOA at the University of British Columbia, 2016.

“THE HISTORY OF CONTACT for Native people has been a big disappointment. British Columbia joined the Dominion of Canada without the written consent of Aboriginal people. This is a non-treaty province. Your back rent is due, British Columbia!

... It’s time to call for a referendum to change the name of this province. I suggest that we call this province what it truly is: the Northwest Coast

Territory, or NWCT. My other title proposal is the Traditional Native Territories, or TNT. And residents of the TNT need to wake up and realize they are living in unceded territory. Right now, they are only guests on our land. The lease is up. Suitable repayment would be resource sharing, land forfeiture, and the true willingness to make appropriate land claims resolutions, which have failed miserably so far.

I don't want to sell the land. That's my position. If we have to sell British Columbia, then I'm going to sell you every snowflake – I'll take a square foot and measure how many snowflakes drop in that space. If you're going to make me sell everything, I'm going to make you buy every season for one year. What price do I put on a rainbow? They are not free. Why should I give you even one of them, British Columbia? If I have to extinguish my rights, these are my rainbows, these are sovereign rainbows. If they want to go the distance on land claims, then I'm claiming the sky. I'm going to count every cloud of the day and you can buy those clouds. They're not free. I'm going to count every tree, I'm going to count every bird, I'm going to count every worm, I'm going to count every raindrop. We're going to count how many raindrops fall per square inch, and you can buy the rain – you can have the rain then, but it's not going to be free.

My ancestors, my spirits of this land, have to be looked after. I am the caretaker. I'm not here to rob my ancestors of their graves, to give them up. It's not mine to do. I can't sell my ancestors. I can't be asked to do that. But this is still a British colony. Why should we have the title of British Columbia here? These are traditional Native territories that have never been surrendered.

I've lived all my life off-reservation, but I've lived all my life in my traditional territory on Indian land. I am in my traditional territory right now. I never really went abroad to work – my battle has always been here, for the Aboriginal people, and to help myself understand these things. I'm not a traditionalist, though I did my Black Face dancing, I did my masked dancing, and I have traditional philosophy. But my work is for the world. Natives already know what it feels like having a bad colonial day. We wake up to it. Reading the paper again, reading about some Indian woman being killed or some Indian man being slashed up and beat up – there's always something there. And they're not always good Indian men: Indian men killing Indian women, brown on brown. It's disheartening. Where does that violence come from? There's this whole world of clashes of culture and time, and it's not something you see on a totem pole.

I have been an artist all my life. It's been my life's goal to portray the negative and positive realities of this world. I'm interested in recording history: residential schools; global warming, deforestation, and pollution; worldwide concerns such as the hole in the ozone layer; environmentalism, humanities, humour, and existentialism. I'm involved in history painting in a way that is dealing with these issues, because they were born before my time. I'm grateful that I had parents who were involved in politics and taught me about the history of British Columbia. I think that we have to record this history. If you allow only the colonialists to record history, they record it to their own glorification. I wanted to take that position of power, of historical painting, and put it into my own hands – take possession of history. I'm just an Indian trying to emancipate myself, but I still will look at these things. I may be under colonial occupation, but I will think about these things...

I want to be happy and I want Native people to be happy. I want to leave this world knowing that there's some direction for Aboriginal people, that there is a future for them, not just to sit forever on reservations. That's not what we were brought here for. I can look after this area and speak for where I'm from. Other Natives can speak for themselves and their territories and do the things that they have to do. But we all have the same dream and the same vision.

I'm not always dealing with Indian issues. I'm looking at global issues as well. My Super Predator series is dealing with the one percent of the planet that tells the rest of the world what to do – the new world order that is in a position to say, 'Well, we just want to get richer and you're going to get poorer, and we want to destroy whatever we want and take whatever we want and do whatever we want, because there are no rules.' ...

Some Indians are very poor, and I don't blame them for wanting money right now. But in the meantime, why don't we just go after back rent rather than land claims? We have to negotiate. When somebody wants a mine, the Natives have to say, fine, give us a percentage. It's our land: this is traditional Okanagan territory, this is traditional Shuswap territory, this is traditional Carrier territory. Canadians all benefit from all the resources they use, all the electricity they take, all the oil they take out. People will be thinking, you want me to pay you? And I say, well, you put me into your bill of human rights, I'm no longer your prisoner – or am I your prisoner? Do you believe in my rights? Do you think that I'm a free human being? If you want to rectify these things, there's a price that has to go with this equality. These are our lands, so

honour them and respect them, don't steal them. We have a belief system in this country: thou shall not steal. It's against the law for any person to steal. So I'm saying to this province, stop stealing – you don't have to treat people like that ...

In 2007, Canada refused to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to recognize Indigenous peoples from around the world. The United States refused because of their Aboriginal people. Australia refused because of their Aboriginal people. New Zealand refused because of their Aboriginal people. All of these countries refused because they have Aboriginal people. The rest of the world waited, and the countries have since signed, with Canada being the last one, in 2010. And then in 2014 Canada objected to the document again – the only country to do that. So the world is still waiting.

You can't oppress Aboriginal people forever. Are we going to contain colonial reservations for another hundred years, two hundred years, four hundred years? Are we going to go down this road of having a higher death rate for the next five hundred years? ... Let me go. I want to be free. I want to be a free Indian, like every other human being. That's a lot to ask, for the white man to walk up to me and take these little colonial shackles off and say yes, Mr. Paul Yuxweluptun, I think that you're right, that we can't treat you this way ..."

The exhibition *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, curated by Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, is at the Museum of Anthropology, UBC until 16 October 2016.