

THE FRONT

TANIA WILLARD

“Free Your Mind,” from the series, *Crazymaking* (2007)

Artist’s Statement

IN THINKING ABOUT MY residency with Gallery Gachet and exploring mental health issues for First Nations people in my work and with a group I wanted to acknowledge the historical traumas that affect our people. The title grew out of thinking about these issues, the substance use, residential schools, colonization, abuse all of our “crazymaking” history. My approach was to reflect on these issues but also to celebrate the strength of Aboriginal people and the strength all marginalized people have to endure, and change their worlds. I am interested in telling stories that are hidden and erased, stories about Indian Insane Asylums, about Mohawk Saints and Native veterans, stories that are full of the paradoxical push and pull between our worlds. My grandfather was of mixed blood, Secwepemc and European roots, he said he lived in two worlds. I wanted to express this tension; this sacrifice and survival that we as Native people navigate and that sometimes (or always in some ways) drives us crazy.

Tania Willard, Secwepemc Nation, works within the shifting ideas of contemporary and traditional as it relates to cultural arts and production. Often working with bodies of knowledge and skills that are conceptually linked to her interest in intersections between Aboriginal and other cultures. Willard has worked as a curator in residence with grunt gallery and Kamloops Art Gallery. Willard’s curatorial work includes *Beat Nation: Art Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*, a national touring exhibition first presented at Vancouver Art Gallery in 2011. Recently Willard curated *CUSTOM MADE* at Kamloops Art Gallery and was selected as one of five national curators for a national scope exhibition in collaboration with Partners in Art and National Parks. She co-curated with Karen Duffek the exhibition *Unceded Territories: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun* at the Museum of Anthropology (May 10 – October 16, 2016). Willard’s personal curatorial projects include BUSH gallery, a conceptual space for land based art and action led by Indigenous artists.