

MAKE YOURSELF (UN)COMFORTABLE: *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun at the Museum*

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MOA is a publicly funded institution and should not be promoting controversial, political movements like renaming British Columbia. This is reprehensible and insulting to the pioneers and settlers of this country. You can't rewrite history. We have enough problems without you agitating your political beliefs.

MOA visitor, in email to museum administration, 2016

I have never been more uncomfortable. That's a good thing.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

IT'S TIME TO CALL FOR A referendum to change the name of this province," declared Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun in 2016. The artist was being featured in a solo exhibition, *Unceded Territories*, at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA).¹ "Let us formally change the name of British Columbia," he continued, "because this land is not your land, BC. This is Indian land that belongs to all of the Native people who reside within their territories."² Prompted by the artist's call, MOA did just that, staging not an official referendum but a contest aimed at engaging its public in Yuxweluptun's artistic and discursive provocations. Visitors to the museum or its website were invited to reflect on the colonial nomenclature of "British Columbia" and to propose a new provincial name. Entries could be submitted at an iPad station in the exhibition or online. The prize? A t-shirt signed by Yuxweluptun, and assorted bumper stickers and badges, all boldly proclaiming the artist's catchphrase, "BC your back rent is due." The contest received hundreds of entries as well as much media at-

¹ Curated by Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* was held at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology from 10 May to 16 October 2016. The exhibition was designed by Skooker Broome; public programs, including "Rename BC," were organized by Jill Baird.

² Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, "Artist's Statement," in *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, ed. Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, 5-17 (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2016), 5.

tention, involving a range of participants from youths to elders, from locals to tourists from around the world, in thinking about how names matter – that is, how geographical place names can speak to the history of colonization, staking new claims on lands largely unceded, and to the layered, ongoing legacies of colonial processes. Selecting from such suggestions as “Indiglandia,” “Salmontopia,” “Hyas Illahee” (Chinook Jargon for “Great Land”), and “The Province Formerly Known as BC,” the artist himself chose the winner: “Land of Many Nations.”

The name that Yuxweluptun selected may seem surprisingly inclusive. Fusing art with political action, Yuxweluptun is passionately committed to advancing First Nations rights to the land. He is well known for his polemical approach and characteristically untempered, anti-colonial discourse, expressing through oratory as well as painting his visualizations of colonial histories and Indigenous futures that cannot be disentangled from one another or from global environmental crises. Perhaps equally surprising for some was the site not only for the Rename BC contest but also for the *Unceded Territories* exhibition itself: a museum. Could this place of cultural artefacts, “The Morgue” as Yuxweluptun has often called it, also effectively be a place of writing some of those possible futures – rather than only, to quote the MOA visitor cited above, “rewriting history”? “I’ve been watching our plight in this country,” Yuxweluptun stated in the exhibition’s introductory panel,

and what I want to do is talk to the 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. I may be under colonial occupation, but I will think about these things.

Art making is the strategy Yuxweluptun has chosen to both witness history and confront complacency. And the public platform of MOA – a museum of anthropology that has long challenged the art/artefact binary as part of its institutional practice – was just as strategic a choice for ensuring that his audience, and the institution itself, would not only be included in his purview but also implicated in his call to action.

For Yuxweluptun, the term “unceded territories” refers to land and governance as much as to his right to paint how and what he sees. He calls himself a history painter, a monumentalist, a modernist. Replacing the colonial trope of empty Canadian wilderness with landscape as contested territory, he records on canvas what he feels are the real issues

facing First Nations people today: land rights, environmental destruction, systemic racism, and the globalized control of resources – products of the continuing force of colonization. In his colour-rich paintings of colonized and suffering landscapes, floating ovoid abstractions, and neoliberal corporate predators, with titles like *Caution! You Are Now Entering a Free State of Mind Zone*, his rule breaking and his interventions in Western and Northwest Coast art genres are acts of artistic and Indigenous liberty. An artist of Cowichan (Hul'q'umi'num Coast Salish) and Okanagan (Syilx) descent, he lives and works in Vancouver – a city that, like most of British Columbia, is situated on traditional Indigenous territories unceded through treaty, war, or surrender. As the co-curators of *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, we worked with the artist and museum staff to create a solo exhibition with a difference: a retrospective presenting thirty years of Yuxweluptun's painterly and polemical practice that would help to shift all of our perspectives – that is, not only to engage visitors in the power of one individual's art and voice but also to reach beyond the canvas towards greater awareness of our shared history and future. The project drew together art, activism, history, Indigenous youth, and the wider public at the site of the museum to amplify the artist's insistence that all of us consider our collective responsibilities to this earth. While Yuxweluptun's practice is well known locally and internationally and has been widely exhibited,³ the exhibition served to introduce thousands of people to his art, many of whom may have unexpectedly encountered it as part of their summer museum visit. Moreover, in placing this contemporary work at MOA – itself on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam First Nation – the exhibition aimed to address the relationships, dissonances, and feelings of discomfort this juxtaposition might raise.

Go forward and don't wait for others to help. Become more aggressive in a mindful way. Clear vision and deep contemplation will be the way forward. Abolish the Indian Act.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

³ Among Yuxweluptun's previous solo exhibitions are *Neo-Native Drawings and Other Works* (Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2010); *A Bad Colonial Day* (Two Rivers Gallery, Prince George, British Columbia, 2005); and *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations* (Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1995). His many group exhibitions include *RED: The Eiteljorg Contemporary Art Fellowship* (Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2013); *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years* (Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2011); and *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, 1992).

Aloha pumehana. From a Native Hawaiian – your images speak strongly to the struggle of Indigenous peoples to self-identify, profess their unique sovereignty both personal and tribal, and our continuing responsibility to protect, care for and heal the earth. Mahalo piha.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

In what ways might we measure this project's impact? The exhibition attracted over 112,000 visitors from around the world in its five-month run (10 May to 16 October 2016), and it broke MOA's previous records with over two thousand people attending the opening celebration. It won two "best exhibition" awards in its category from the Canadian Museums Association; the sold-out accompanying publication, moreover, won the City of Vancouver Book Award for its timely challenge to the notion of what Vancouver is – specifically, for how it framed the fractious intersection of colonial suppression, politics, environmentalism, Indigeneity, and activism in this particular place, and with global implications. Indeed, in 2016 the climate for public reception of Yuxweluptun's art was changing – literally. Audiences in British Columbia were approaching the artist's work with a stronger personal connection to the issues he paints than they likely would have done two decades ago, when Yuxweluptun's first major solo show, *Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations*, brought his work to wide public attention.⁴ Public debates around oil pipelines, liquefied natural gas, and fracking were no longer somewhere else but here, in our backyard. Landmark decisions on Indigenous land rights were making "unceded territories" more than an abstract idea. "Reconciliation," moreover, had become a topic of much discussion and debate in Canada, especially since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) set out in 2010 to begin publicly and nationally addressing the cumulative impact of Indian residential schools – that is, the legacy of unresolved trauma that is passed from generation to generation – with the goal of ultimately revitalizing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society.⁵ Also increasing were discussions in the Canadian museum community about the advocacy role of museums and art galleries, and whether they should take positions on such critical matters as the rights of Indigenous

⁴ *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations* was the inaugural exhibition of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, in 1995. See the catalogue publication of the same title, edited by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Charlotte Townsend-Gault, and Scott Watson (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1995).

⁵ See the TRC's "Executive Summary" and "Calls to Action" under "TRC Findings" at www.trc.ca.

peoples and global warming – as though cultural institutions were not already implicated in these concerns.⁶ But we might also return to the idea of art and exhibitions as calls to action. Less measurable through statistics and awards is the longer-term impact of *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* for its audiences and its host institution.

In this article we have quoted a number of visitor responses to the exhibition as provocations for the dialogue that follows, in which we reflect on the making of *Unceded Territories*, its reception, and questions raised through the process. The quotes are drawn from three comment books that were placed on benches in the gallery throughout the run of the show, inviting immediate reflection. Each book's blank pages came to be filled with often thoughtful, critical, and occasionally self-questioning remarks and points of debate (as well as the ubiquitous happy faces, rude drawings, and "I'm from Korea!!!" messages). Of course, our dialogue as the exhibition curators is informed by our respective positions inside the project: Karen Duffek as a non-Indigenous MOA staff curator and Tania Willard of the Secwépemc Nation as guest co-curator. We acknowledge, as well, that there are also voices less present in the structural power imbalance that still characterizes many museums and other cultural institutions – too few Indigenous voices belonging to those with permanent museum positions and directorships, and essential to realizing the potential of museums becoming sites of renewal instead of memorials to dead cultures and ideas. The purpose and impact of this exhibition, and its relationship to other current initiatives at MOA and beyond, need to be assessed not only for the numbers of visitors drawn in and catalogues sold but also for whether steps were taken towards transforming the systems that the art so forcefully targets.

In considering how museums should deal with overtly political art provocations, we attend to Ruth B. Phillips's caveat: "When museums decide to play it safe, they risk losing their efficacy as actors in the social worlds within which they function."⁷ Ensuring increased access for contemporary artists, like Yuxweluptun, to work and act within museums

⁶ See, for example, Ruth B. Phillips, "Learning to Feed off Controversies: Meeting the Challenges of Translation and Recovery in Canadian Museums," in *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips, 297–316 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); also Robert R. Janes, *Museums without Borders: Selected Writings of Robert R. Janes* (London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2016). In addition, the Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice is an online forum formed in 2017 that aims to mobilize and support Canadian museum workers and their organizations in building public awareness, mitigation, and resilience in the face of climate change (<https://coalitionofmuseumsforclimatejustice.wordpress.com/>).

⁷ Phillips, "Learning to Feed off Controversies," 297.

and institutions is one way to invite layered readings of histories, collections, and displays. Our format in the ensuing pages is intentional in this regard. Part reflection, part critical discussion, and part platform for advocacy, it represents an attempt to address systemic inequities in museum structures. The methodology we chose to curate the exhibition and to write our catalogue essay as well as this article draws on the forms of knowledge and training we each carry. Together with the artist, we set out to actively engage in the messiness of anti-colonial work and, in the process, worked to upend the ordered and predictable space of museum encounters. As active participants with the artist in “The Land of Many Nations,” we invited decolonizing methods into our individual practices to allow for a diversity of experiential, community-based, and institutional knowledge. The result is a dialogical text meant to challenge any singular reading of the Yuxweluptun exhibition.

LP Yuxweluptun – You are MAD! Of course. Your rage is fuming off the walls and makes me gasp. Can there ever be a “setting right”? You make me wonder if “Reconciliation” is really possible. Thank you for your truthfulness.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

Disquieting! Impressive! Thought provoking! How can we create change and bring forth a better future?

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

Tania Willard (TW): In the *Unceded Territories* exhibition, one particularly small etching, *Little Reservations in BC* (1997), sums up some fairly significant politics and Indigenous land-rights struggles (see Figure 1). It is a compelling image of a figure articulated through stacked ovoids and formline elements, standing atop a denuded tree and surveying the landscape from above. A languid shape lies at the base of the pole like a pool of amorphous cultural forms, delineating the bit of land set aside as the Indian reserve. This work is very loose and I would say more like a preliminary sketch that falls into the artist’s drawing practice; but, as always in Yuxweluptun’s art, it is the provocative title in relation to the image that generates a space of questioning, conversation, and knowledge. Yuxweluptun’s artistic practice manages to open up such spaces for dialogue outside those of electoral politics where, even though it is engaged and informed by the political, it simultaneously claims space for artistic inquiry and licence. He challenges the boundaries of

the reserve as symbolically implicated in the boundaries imposed on Indigenous artists and bodies and freedom of thought. Here I think the context for Yuxweluptun's art in his early career is important to consider: the dominance of "Northwest Coast art" in Canadian ideas of what a BC Native artist could be was, and still is, sharply defined. His rejection of this expectation and his inversion of the ideals of carving and monumentality through painting on canvas challenge the colonial desire to consume culture as artefact, or culture as something to be salvaged – which of course are precepts underlying many museum collections. This was clear at the opening of the exhibition in MOA's Great Hall. Amid the artefacts, the ancestors, the totem poles and artworks of previous generations, and surrounded by a throng of people, Lawrence Paul stood as a contemporary artist. He claimed a validity that had been denied many contemporary Indigenous artists over previous decades, when they were seen as inauthentic if they adopted new methods, imagery, ideas, or politics into their work.



Figure 1. *Little Reservations in BC*, 1997, etching, 35 x 30 cm. Collection of Ken and Lorraine Stephens. Photo by SITE Photography, courtesy of Petra Watson and the Contemporary Art Gallery.

Karen Duffek (KD): Your description of Yuxweluptun brings to mind a photograph documenting the Kwakwaka'wakw artist Ellen Neel publicly carving a totem pole at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver in 1953. She too was surrounded by a crowd of onlookers, though more likely as an object of curiosity than the provocative artist and activist she was. The late Gitksan scholar Doreen Jensen pointed out that, during the 1950s and 1960s, "First Nations artists took the contemporary practice of traditional Northwest Coast art out of hiding and began a dialogue with non-Native culture."⁸ This was also when museums and anthropologists began to intensify the shift in their categorization of Northwest Coast works from ethnological artefacts to fine art, already set in motion a few decades earlier – a shift that assumed the separation of Indigenous art not only from its originating communities but also from Indigenous cultural and political sovereignty. Much has been written on the continuing debates about the terms and classifications by which Northwest Coast art is valued, digging deeply into the diverse intellectual traditions that have staked territories but also intersected in this unsettled field.⁹ Led by Indigenous and postcolonial critiques, we are still weighing the consequences of the power that resides in naming, in renaming. Yuxweluptun complicates the terms of inclusion and exclusion that prevail for Native art and artists, whether at the site of the carving shed or the longhouse, the market or the museum, when he refuses their constraints by claiming his own position as a modernist, not a traditionalist.¹⁰ At the same time, fully aware of modernism's search for the non-referential subject and for the rupture from tradition, he points to his responsibility as a caretaker of his ancestors and the spirits of the land, and describes even his abstract Ovoidism paintings as a way of asking, "In what part of the Indian Act can you not define and regulate me?"¹¹

I think of MOA's Great Hall as an artefact of its time. Its modernist architecture frames the Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw totem poles that were salvaged in the mid 1950s as remnants of what their collectors assumed to be dying cultures; in 1976, they were positioned in this new concrete-and-glass space as sculpture, as fine art. And yet, probably the majority of MOA's large collection of Northwest Coast masks, regalia, and other cultural belongings are works made and used during the

⁸ Doreen Jensen, "Metamorphosis," in *Topographies: Aspects of Recent BC Art*, ed. Grant Arnold, Monika Kin Gagnon, and Doreen Jensen (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996), 97.

⁹ For related discussions by a range of authors, see Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-ke-in, eds., *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Yuxweluptun, "Artist's Statement," 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

prohibition of the potlatch,¹² between 1885 and 1951; they represent a formidable, modern history of perseverance and survival that never relinquished the living connections between museumized artefacts, people, and the land. In taking up his own space on this unsettled ground, Yuxweluptun – who remarked to an art critic: “I never needed to be validated by the institution; if I do show there, they’re just validating themselves”¹³ – ensures that this place is also continually transformed through dialogue and contestation. At MOA, Lawrence Paul’s work stands on unceded Musqueam territory in relation to the museum’s institutional history, its Northwest Coast and worldwide collections, its role in the growth of Indigenous art markets and values, and its challenged and changing discourses.

TW: Even in the context of shifting parameters and relationships there exists the fundamental reality that museums are born from a colonial impulse and construct. The set of restrictions and requirements for what is considered museum-quality work that we see played out in the Northwest Coast art market were and are part of this tension and limitation between contemporary practice and museum objects. So, what does it mean when we as Indigenous people work within or collaborate with museums? Are we strengthening our position or are we complicit in the ongoing colonial project? Can the disbursement of ideas at the site of museums and art galleries affect these institutions’ transformation? Do we even need the museum? In *Unceded Territories* these questions fuelled public interest; the criticality of Yuxweluptun’s work and the expectations brought to the museum space created enough of a contrast to draw in audiences and to demonstrate the possibility of integrated or dialogical approaches. What gets taken up by audiences is, of course, not the responsibility of the artist. I am hopeful for the subtle ways that ideas percolate and proliferate and affect the world around us, but it is only in the experiential or relational context that ideas affect and shape our lives. In the context of displaced objects – which is the space of the

¹² The term “belongings” is increasingly adopted at MOA and elsewhere as a corrective to words like “artefacts” and “objects.” The term was brought into practice by Musqueam community members as they developed the multi-sited exhibition *čəsnəʔəm, the city before the city* (2015), in order to convey Musqueam values around the relational connection between the tangible and intangible qualities of heritage objects. See Jordan Wilson, “Belongings’ in ‘čəsnəʔəm, the city before the city,’” in *IPinch: Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage: Theory, Practice, Policy, Ethics*, <https://www.sfu.ca/ipinch/outputs/blog/citybeforecitybelongings/>.

¹³ Robin Laurence, “Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: *Unceded Territories* by Karen Duffek and Tania Willard,” *Border Crossings* 142, 32, 2 (May 2017): 96.

museum and the space of art in a gallery – can the objects ever be more than symbols?

I'm not even halfway through this gallery, but already I feel ... I feel!
As an Indigenous person, as a Syilx, as a St'at'imc, I feel that this work is powerful.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

This morning I handed in my doctoral dissertation and I came here with my son who is 8. I wanted to mark the occasion with him at MOA to remember where we are and focus our consideration of what to do next. Thank you for sharing your vision and your work.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

Kukwstum kacw. Kukwstum kacw. Tsal'alhmec.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

KD: In MOA's collection there are many historical and contemporary works from the Pacific Northwest that express, through formalized stylistic traditions, the truth that all living things are connected. Lawrence Paul has chosen a more direct approach to reinforce this now globally urgent understanding. Stating that immigrants are his "hobby," he explains his artistic strategy: "Somebody has to translate the world we live in from our Native perspective to a European one, and so I embarked on this modern journey. It was the only way to get a message out."¹⁴ While he subversively draws on and appropriates symbolic imagery and elements from Northwest Coast traditions not his own, and overlays these with references both to surrealism and to his inherited Coast Salish forms and spiritual practices,¹⁵ his work depends on getting his intended message through to viewers. Yuxweluptun seemingly translates that which other artists and cultural practitioners may choose to protect by keeping untranslatable. In offering up scenes of ceremony inside the longhouse, however, his point is not to reveal the sacred but to proclaim its existence – indeed, its survival – on the land and in the sites of Indigenous sovereignty that were once criminalized

¹⁴ Yuxweluptun, "Artist's Statement," II.

¹⁵ The extensive literature on Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun unpacks these factors. In addition to Karen Duffek and Tania Willard, eds., *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2016), see especially Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "The Salvation Art of Yuxweluptun," in *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1995), 7–19; and Petra Watson, "Seeing One Thing through Another: The Art of Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun," in *Colour Zone: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun* (Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2003), 21–27.

through federal law. Many of the works read as Indigenous while not relying on typical, recognizable Northwest Coast formalism; the images are bold, colourful, in-your-face, and defiantly unsettling. Works with titles like *Red Man Watching White Man Trying to Fix Hole in the Sky* are meant to help generate public awareness of the crises affecting the earth's future. Their masked fish farmers and toxified landscapes are all part of Yuxweluptun's "history painting," through which he reminds us that human beings are part of the natural systems and therefore the survival of this earth – but also, crucially, that this awareness has to be complicated when issues of colonization, inequality, and the control of access to resources are taken into account. And we have seen from audience responses that, indeed, this message is getting through. But does it change how people experience the less translatable Indigenous expressions they see at MOA? Do the frictions it generates at the site of MOA "speak to the world" differently than they would outside its walls?

TW: Also, does the museum as a site for Lawrence Paul's work simply continue the practice of containing culture, trading in the ideas of decolonizing and reconciling as a way of placating institutional critique? Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang discuss this question in their important text, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." They pose a deep challenge, saying: "As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization. Because settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism."¹⁶ Until we see the return of our lands in British Columbia, and the return of our cultures and languages, we are always contained: on our reserves, in our labour, in our outrage, but – and this is where I think Yuxweluptun is onto something – not in our minds, not in the infinite possibility of story. So we might celebrate a moment of a significant receptivity to Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's art practice at the MOA exhibition in 2016, but I certainly am aware that the mining executives do not care how transformative the thoughts of an audience member at this show might be. The bottom line is that the environmental degradation these paintings cry out against still happens and will continue to happen until

¹⁶ Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

more than our minds change. Our bodies have to follow, and that is much harder, but it might start with the idea that our minds *can* change.

In his statement for *Unceded Territories*, Yuxweluptun says:

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 one of them, British Columbia? If I have to extinguish my rights, these are my rights, these are sovereign rainbows.¹⁷

What do sovereign rainbows have to do with museum practices? A rainbow is in charge of itself; it is the outcome of an interconnected relationship to the water, the atmosphere, and the ecology of the entire planet. When we experience a rainbow it sensorially fulfills our own interconnected moment with the sky. So there can't ever be a museum of rainbows as they cannot be disconnected or displaced from their interrelated contexts; the moment the conditions change, the rainbow disappears. Similarly, an artefact ceases to be activated by the alchemy of its origin when it leaves or is taken from its ecology: the context of language, people, and place of creation. With this logic the museum is always a simulacrum, or a "morgue," as Yuxweluptun refers to it. However, the museum can also function as a mnemonic device. Like the memory of a rainbow, the data stored in cultural belongings can contribute to revitalizing our relationships to the land, the sky, and each other. These are the rights I interpret from Yuxweluptun's rainbow methodology. The rights to our belongings held at museums and the rights we hold to our languages and cultures are embedded in the land. It is in their relationship with the land that artefacts are awakened and that rainbows have the conditions to manifest. A sovereign rainbow is therefore an artist's declaration issued from within the museum/gallery; but, significantly, this declaration cannot be contained by the institution. It is the ecology of Indigeneity that is always shifting, with the land and sky as a continuum.

James Luna, the late, iconic Indigenous performance artist, talks about the number of invitations he received in 1992 to exhibit in museums and galleries, the year commemorating Columbus's voyage in 1492. He says,

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

“You’re calling me now, but will you call me in ’93?”¹⁸ That remains the poignant and resonant question. Will this newly taken-up interest in reconciliation and Indigenous rights last in the institutional environment and maintain its public platform? Will it smoulder away, igniting when symbols and ideas spark it? Or will it erupt into flames that will fan the winds of change? I agreed to co-curate Lawrence Paul’s exhibition at MOA not because I thought the moment was ripe or the reception would be great or even because his work needed to be seen. I wanted to curate this exhibition because his work contributed to my spark, to my shift in consciousness, to the possibility of transformation in a constellation of Indigenous ideas.

It is powerful to see this work in what in essence is a colonial institution (MOA) of “dead cultures.” How were the objects acquired here? If objects could only speak ...

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

I find most of these works very disturbing. If created by a Caucasian artist, depicting other races, we would call them racist and hateful. Not sure they should be put in a museum.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

I just went on a tour of this gallery with a First Nations youth group. It was incredibly powerful, progressive, and radical! I am so thankful that I was here at this moment. It was important to hear the voices of young Aboriginal women.

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

TW: I think objects do speak. There are so many layered stories to the museum, and all are tinged with the violence of colonization. But I still want to come and see baskets made by great-grandmothers – baskets that rest here, that sleep and wait here. My great-great-grandfather uncovered an important archaeological find in our area, on my reserve, and when his children and grandchildren would question why he handed some of these things over to a museum, he would say, “For safekeeping, until we can take care of them again and have our own museums.” I think there are lots of ways I can unpack this statement and this family story, but inevitably he valued this find. We value the knowledge of our ancestors

¹⁸ Steven Durland, “Call Me in ’93: An Interview with James Luna,” *High Performance* 14, 4 (1991): 34–39.

and we are curious and loving in our attention to these objects – and we want them back. Having them back takes many forms: gaining access to and researching collections, asserting Indigenous copyright, repatriating/rematriating, visiting, learning and teaching, and being part of and determining for ourselves – without interference – the ways these objects should be treated. Another part of the continuum of care for these objects is in resurgent practices, in reinterpreting and postulating and reconfiguring the aesthetics of our ancestors, the aesthetics of land-rights struggles, and the aesthetics of our future. I reflect on this within the context of the (slowly changing) reality of the rarity of living Indigenous bodies in museums who are paid for their work. We need artists in museums for this work, we need women’s intuition in the archive, we need dreaming and ceremony in methodology because that is what can shift our symbols into experience and our aesthetics into action. It is in the deeply relational spirit of collaboration as interconnected with Indigenous ways of making that I connect art and curatorial work, historical research, and learning and living an Indigenous life within a community and an ecology. So, in thinking curatorially about the act of placing Yuxweluptun’s work in the context of the museum, what was successful about the show was the possibility of artists destroying the expectations and lineage of museums – and letting the objects speak anew through art, translating the past into the present and igniting the sleeping spirits there.

KD: I notice that the Indian Act is not an artefact currently in MOA’s collection – it is completely missing even though it has affected all Indigenous lives, and Native/non-Native relations, since it was created in 1876. What belongs in a museum? *Who* belongs in a museum? And what happens if the museum is allowed to act something like an open-weave basket that can hold and support and breathe, that can be porous and flexible, helping to connect people, objects, knowledge, politics, new songs – inside and outside its walls? During Yuxweluptun’s exhibition, five urban high school students taking part in MOA’s annual Native Youth Program studied the artist’s work, visited him in his studio, met with the curators, and selected one artwork each about which they shared their responses with the public over the course of the summer. The students spoke not only about what the artist had intended but also about how they had wrestled with the work for themselves and related it to their own young lives. The experience these presentations offered the public was rare and memorable. We all learned from the youths and

the insights they could bring to such challenging subjects as environmental crisis, urban Indigenous society, what it means to sing in ceremony, and the legacy of Indian residential schools for families. With increasingly confident voices, they articulated different pathways through one artist's vision, and one particular museum, that embodied ways of taking back – and taking forward – the potential of this place as a site of renewal.

I think the painting are interesting and I drew my own. I think a lot of 10 year olds would like this exebet and older pepeol and younger pepeol [*sic*].

MOA visitor (child), in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

I really enjoyed looking at his art and I like the idea of putting dark ideas with bright colours. My favourite was “Fish Farmers They Have Sea Lice.” P.S. For all the people who have written “I can do that too,” no you can't. Ever heard of abstract art? Because you need to soon...

MOA visitor (eleven-year-old girl), in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016

TW and KD: In closing, we found that the above comments are our favourite responses from the ten- and eleven-year-old audience out there. Yes, draw your own! Of course, this idea can be problematized if it is a non-Native person drawing Northwest Coast art. But there is also an honest articulation of the future: we make it ourselves, for the “pepeol.” It is a privilege and a challenge for us to think back on this exhibition, reflecting on how its provocations, its discomforts, and yes, its optimism affected audiences and contributed meaningfully to conversations about, and action on, changing museums.

Is Canada waking up?

MOA visitor, in *Unceded Territories* comment book, 2016