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'Stories of Queer Native Survivance'
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ABSTRACT

On May 17, 2013, Sakabàn: International Indigenous Art opened at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The exhibition featured works by over 80 indigenous artists from across the globe. Their works certainly expressed what Gerald Vizenor calls native survivance. This article will explore how Sakabàn artist Kent Monkman embodies queer native survivance through his artistic practice whereby he unmasks, deconstructs and challenges the dominant and oppressive normative structures of power and knowledge that followed the arrival of settlers on Turtle Island (what is now known as North America). Through examining how Monkman challenges the concealment of indigenous genders and sexualities, and the proliferation of western created tropes and stereotypes of the “indian”, it becomes evident that in order to truly challenge the dominant and oppressive structures of power and knowledge that came with colonization, artists such as the ones who took part in Sakabàn, and others (scholars, activists, writers...) must include queer indigenous voices, perspectives and knowledge in their work.

KEYWORDS
Native survivance; Kent Monkman; Queer native survivance; Sakabàn
On May 17, 2013, *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* opened at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Sakahàn is an Algonquin word meaning "to light [a fire]", and this massive exhibition of 150 recent works by over 80 indigenous artists from 16 countries certainly attempted to ignite fires of discussion, dialogue, understanding and decolonization amongst viewers and participants.

Candice Hopkins (one of *Sakahàn*’s three curators) argues that:

> For the artists in *Sakahàn*, history is not a given but a site of contention—something to be questioned to expose its biases and reveal the ideologies from which it was scribed. In the artists' works, history is spliced open, reframed, amended, uncovered and questioned. That so many of the artworks in this exhibition mark a historical turn is neither an act of nostalgia—a romantic urge to return to the way that things once were—nor is it merely revisionist; rather, what is being presented is an attempt to counter master narratives and, in some cases, upturn them altogether.¹

The artworks in *Sakahàn* are therefore prime examples of what Gerald Vizenor calls "native survivance". Vizenor explains that:

> Survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence... The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry.²

In his understanding, "native survivance" is more than mere indigenous survival, as it embodies an *active* sense of indigenous presence that rails against the forces and consequences of colonization. Furthermore, Vizenor asserts that "survivance stories honor the humour and tragic wisdom of the situation, not the market value of victimry...Stories of survivance are a sure sense of presence."³ Through their range of works, visual artists present powerful examples of global native survivance as they embody an active presence of indigenous experiences, stories and cultures that contradict and dismantle the dominant structure of knowledge and power of colonization.

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At the exhibition opening, I was intrigued by the unique perspectives, forms, and embodiments of native survivance that I witnessed from global indigenous artists. Moving through the exhibition space, I noticed that while all of the artists expressed a sense of native survivance in their work, Kent Monkman (of Cree ancestry who is currently based in Toronto, Ontario) and Samoan Shigeyuki Kihara (currently residing and working in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand) were arguably the only two artists in the exhibition that incorporated non-normative sexuality in their pieces.

Since I plan to focus my PhD dissertation on humour and sexuality in Canadian indigenous art, I felt compelled to investigate how Monkman was using sexuality to engage with native survivance. Monkman's alter-ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, is featured in Sakahàn; her name is a play on the words "mischief" and "egotistical". She is a cheeky, sexy, provocative, playful and colourful character who is sometimes referred to as a "postindian diva warrior". I became fascinated with how Monkman (through Miss Chief) critiques and exposes dominant western discourses of sexuality, power, knowledge and gender, as well as misrepresentations and mythologies of indigenous people by colonizing forces.

This paper argues that Sakahàn artist Kent Monkman not only enacts "native survivance" in his work, but also creates a space for queer native survivance. In other words, Monkman embodies a queer indigenous presence, resilience, strength, power, and world view in his art.

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5 This idea was fully realized in conversations with Dr. Eva Mackey in November 2013. Furthermore, I recognize that scholar Brian Joseph Gilley has distinguished a "two-spirit men's sexual survivance" (see his chapter, "Two-Spirit Men's Sexual Survivance against the Inequality of Desire", in *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics and Literature*, ed. Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian JosephGilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011, 123-131). Gilley argues that "Sexual survivance among the contemporary Two-Spirit social movement challenges the separation between sexual desire and gender that masks the power relations surrounding sexual practice and the social impact of homophobia." (page 124). While I see merit in Gilley's use of survivance, I have instead adopted "queer native survivance" as a term because I feel that it extends past the North American indigenous community to other global queer indigenous peoples. Furthermore I feel there are multiple ways to engage in "queer native survivance", which will be explored throughout this paper. I therefore use this term for its broad, inclusive definition.
Monkman not only maintains an active native presence, but also acts out a queer native presence that works to deconstruct and resist dominant forms and structures of western knowledge and power. Furthermore, it can be argued that a fundamental element of native survivance is decolonization. Scholar Chris Finley believes that Native Studies students should actively include queer theory and understandings in their work, since “...heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity should be interpreted as logics of colonialism”. Thus, in order to decolonize and to deconstruct the dominant structures of power and knowledge, we must include queer voices and perceptions in our work. In other words, a queering of native survivance must take place in order to produce successful global decolonization. This paper illustrates how Monkman enacts queer indigenous survivance in his paintings and performance art by challenging and unmasking the silencing and conscious oppression of indigenous sexualities and the long history of western-created tropes and understandings of indigenous peoples. This analysis will be exacted through an examination of selected artworks.

**Queer Survivance versus Concealment of Indigenous Sexualities and Genders**

Traditionally, indigenous peoples across the world have had complex and dynamic understandings of sexualities and genders that differed from those of the colonizing forces. From contact onwards, colonizers recognized that these indigenous ways of understanding sexualities and genders vastly contradicted their own cut-and-dry, heteronormative understandings. For instance, Rebecca Tsosie argues that "in most tribes, gender roles were perceived as complementary and not as dichotomous" and that Native cultures were often

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tolerant of individual women shifting gender roles. There is also a great deal of evidence pointing toward indigenous peoples in North America holding alternative sexualities, such as the "berdache". In fact, Tomson Highway explains that indigenous individuals who fell outside the western gender binary were influential and central characters in their societies. Highway says that

On the vertical STRAIGHT LINE of monotheism...there is room for two genders only, male and female, with the former having complete power over the latter. On the CIRCLE of pantheism, on the other hand, there is room for many genders. In the traditional Native sense that goes back eons---and to put it in too-simplistic terms--the man hunted, the woman gave birth and nurtured. And the people who were physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually equipped for neither role--that is, the people who were both male and female, who were spiritual hermaphrodites--they took care of the emotional and spiritual life of the family, the community. In the boring, and very violent, black-and-white world of the two-gender system, that is to say, they injected all the colours of the rainbow. Where would Cher be without them? Who would make her dress, do her hair, her makeup? That's our job. These "spiritual hermaphrodites," that is to say, were the artists, the priests, the visionaries. They had, that is to say, not only a sacred but essential role in the community. Because, for instance, the male and female heterosexual were way too busy raising six, eight, ten children--in my family there were twelve, of which I am the eleventh--it fell into the hands of the "two spirits" to take care of the elders. That is our job.

Christian European settlers were scandalized, intrigued and openly hostile towards these indigenous individuals who did not fit in the western gender binary. For instance, in reaction to encountering a "berdache", George Catlin referred to this form of sexuality as: "one of the most unaccountable and disgusting customs that I have ever met in the Indian country... I should wish that it might be extinguished before it might be more fully recorded."
Pierette Désy explains that "the term berdache...has often been used indiscriminately to refer to homosexuals, bisexuals, androgynes, transvestites, hermaphrodites and eunuchs." In other words, this term encompassed a wide variety of alternative genders and sexualities. Thus, from the moment of contact, European, Christian colonizers were shocked, appalled and fascinated by the alternative forms of sexuality and gender that indigenous peoples presented.

The reaction of colonizers to these indigenous non-heteronormative genders and sexualities was to subjugate, oppress and assimilate. One of the reasons for this reaction was their broadly held Christian, heteronormative world view, while a second was their agenda for colonization through cultural, social, economic and political ventures. For instance, Julia V. Emberley writes that "heteronormativity is implicated in the histories of imperialism and colonization." Emberley feels that the European, western ideal of the heteronormative family unit was forced upon indigenous peoples in an attempt to exert control, power and dominance. Ron Bourgeault provides evidence of the conscious effort by colonizers to impose European family and gender norms as a vehicle for their overall colonizing agenda. Bourgeault argues that settlers created a basic division between European and Indian labour which "...was based primarily upon maintaining the Indian as a peasant."
In his analysis of the introduction of mercantile capitalism in the fur trade, Bourgeault asserts that:

The creation of individual commodity production was the beginning of the decline in the communal family and the beginning of the formulation of the individual family unit of production. With men established as responsible for the production of commodities, they assumed the role as head of the family and women became dependent support workers within each family unit.  

For Bourgeault, the imposition of European gender and family roles represented a way to further a form of mercantile capitalism which, from the beginning, subjugated indigenous populations while, at the same time, cemented Europeans into positions of power. This imposition of European heteronormative gender roles stemming from their Christian ideals of sexuality and gender, was also a tool for creating an economic system which oppressed indigenous peoples. Emberley asserts that, as the colonizing project marched on:

The family' was one of those technologies of social life through which the reason and utility of 'civilization' were secured. In Canada, government legislation in the mid to late nineteenth century...helped to establish the institution of the European bourgeois family, its heterosexual norms, racial management, and patriarchal governing strategies, in colonial space.

Therefore, in a brief summarization of Bourgeault and Emberley, it becomes apparent why Chris Finley recognizes that “…heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity should be interpreted as logics of colonialism”. In order to truly decolonize, one must utilize exercises of "queer native survivance" to deconstruct and challenge these logics which have been enforced through generations.

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14 Ibid, 55.
This leads one to contemplate how such a vast undertaking can be accomplished through indigenous artists such as Kent Monkman. A possible answer rests with the theory of Judith Butler that gender and sex are culturally constructed concepts, which can be troubled. Butler argues that:

(...) gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.\(^{17}\)

Butler thus challenges the widely accepted notion that gender and sex are concepts that exist separate from discourses of power and knowledge. This disrupts the notion that western heteronormative gender and sexuality concepts are natural and undisputable concepts, and opens up a space for queer indigenous genders/sexualities. Butler calls upon us

…to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.\(^{18}\)

It can be argued that Monkman takes up Butler's call "to make gender trouble" in his work through mobilization, subversion and challenges to strictly enforced western heteronormative binaries of gender/sex. This can be evidenced through an examination of the paintings, *Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601* (2008) and *The Triumph of Mischief* (2007). *Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601* is one of Monkman's references to the "dandies" or "berdache" that artist George Catlin came into contact with in the early nineteenth century.


\(^{18}\) Ibid, 33-34.
Ben Portis explains that Dandies among the Indians were a source of vexation to frontier artist George Catlin, who encountered such fops throughout his travels, disparaged in his journals, yet at the same time harboured secret fascination at their preening, narcissistic attention to physical appearance and fancy costume. Catlin once began a portrait of one of these young men that reportedly aroused such a ruckus in the village that he abandoned it having only rendered its figure in preliminary outline.

In *Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601*, Monkman draws attention to this erasure of the existence of non-heteronormative indigenous forms of sexuality and gender by settler artists such as Catlin. Old Bear is reminiscent of George Catlin's renditions of stoic looking, romanticized and colourfully dressed indigenous men. Behind Old Bear is "Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601" which is Monkman's acknowledgement of the fact that Catlin referred to the "berdache". It is also a playful reminder that Catlin was extremely particular about characterizing his subjects as random ambiguous numbers. In Monkman's versions, the animated, yet ghostly images such as "Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601" draw more attention than the frontal figures like Old Bear who are the primary subjects of the paintings. In this way, Monkman draws viewers to the existence of non-heteronormative sexualities and genders during the nineteenth century. He subverts the stylized and stereotypic nineteenth century paintings by colonial artists, and returns power, focus and gaze to his own renditions as a (queer) indigenous male. In the play, *George Catlin's Traveling Indian Gallery*, by Norman K. Denzin, *Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601* is mentioned by a character known as "Virile Dandy". The following exchange occurs between the character, Indian Show Chorus and George Catlin after this reference:

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20 Ibid, 2.

Indian Show Chorus
Speaker One
This is why we like Kent. He takes George down a notch or two. Kent's bucks are not George's bucks. George's chiefs are not Kent's chiefs. Kent gives us dignity, pride. We like his paintings.

George Catlin
Speaker Two
I don't get it. I tried to save you people, and instead you mock me and make fun of me.

Indian Show Chorus
Speaker One
This is the point, George. We never asked for your help. We were doing just fine before you got here. n21

Denzin thus applauds Monkman's critique of Catlin through works such as Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601. The Indian Show Chorus recognizes that Monkman returns pride and dignity to indigenous peoples in North America through his artwork, and does so by troubling western heteronormative versions of history through the insertion of queer indigenous peoples into the picture. The Indian Show Chorus reminds Catlin (and the audience) that indigenous peoples were "fine" before settler contact. Monkman's piece informs them that not only were pre-contact indigenous peoples "doing just fine", they also had a strong queer membership in their society. Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601 therefore is a significant work by Monkman in terms of queer native survivance, as it empowers queer indigenous peoples and the larger indigenous community by subverting the power relationship that was established in early colonial painting and photography.

Monkman also troubles gender in his 2007 work, The Triumph of Mischief. In this piece, Monkman provides a multi-layered critique of colonization through a narrative of queer native survivance. Miss Chief Eagle Testickle (wearing only a pair of pumps and a pink shawl draped over her arm) strolls through a wild and detailed scene of homoerotic imagery, violence and debauchery. Commenting on the cast of players, curator Candace Hopkins says:

Making appearances in the painting are the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark; artists Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, George Catlin, Paul Kane and Edward S. Curtis; and characters from myth and Native prophecy, including the white buffalo, the shapeshifter who gave the gift of seven sacred ceremonies to the Lakota people. In the meadow, all variety of transgressions take place -- cultural, sexual and social...  

The piece is filled with a plethora of cultural and colonial critiques and references which are left to the viewer to decipher. It is arguable that this lack of explanation is a conscious effort by Monkman to decolonize by playfully leading viewers into asking questions through images and ideas that may confuse or puzzle. Anishinaabe artist Carl Beam also utilized this technique in his own work, explaining that "the works are like little puzzles, interesting little games. Nobody can live with an unconstructed puzzle before them. It's a nice game." Like Beam, Monkman playfully draws viewers into this vibrant and sexually charged scene, which troubles gender and preconceived notions of historical and contemporary settler-indigenous relations, and then snares them through challenges to colonization by forcing them to make connections and envision an alternative narrative to the Canadian (and North American) metanarrative. For instance, one subversive image in The Triumph of Mischief is a half naked white male kneeling, as a naked indigenous man is placing what appears to be feathers into his buttocks. The viewer is challenged to view this as a subversive critique of power relations between settler and indigenous peoples, and a challenge to white male artists such as Catlin, Kane, and Curtis, who for too long held the power to portray indigenous men and women to suit their own image...  

24 The playful humour in The Triumph of Mischief may also draw viewers into Monkman's critiques and challenges of colonization and dominant settler narratives. For instance, Don Kelly argues that "Humour is a fantastic communications device. If you yell at people or browbeat them into submission, they'll tune out and walk away. But if you can keep them laughing, they'll keep listening." (Don Kelly, “And Now Ladies and Gentlemen, Get Ready for Some (Ab)original Stand-up Comedy”, in *Me Funny*, ed. Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 59.)
of the authentic "indian". Their "authentic indian" images consciously attempted to erase the presence of alternative sexualities and genders. With regards to Monkman, Gerald McMaster explains that:

…it's as if he rebuffs all that's been said of his ancestors' debased morality by using the ardour of sex and sexuality with complete abandon. Yet, for all his explicitness, Monkman does not intend to be covertly repulsive or simply voyeuristic; rather, it is a subterfuge in which the tide of these struggles is turned against the colonizer, usually white and male, who is either handcuffed or aggressively raped. If that doesn't work, the reversal is effected by the force of persuasion, with the antagonist becoming turned on, and turned over, to a more evocative acumen.25

Therefore, the use of sexuality in Monkman's works such as The Triumph of Mischief is a deliberate act of subversion and deconstruction of the logics of power and knowledge that came with colonization. In an interview, Noam Gonick asked Monkman if he ever was "...taken to task for eroticizing the genocide of Native people".26

Monkman responded:

I don't think I'm eroticizing genocide at all. I think what I'm presenting is an empowered perspective and an empowered way of life, looking at our own sexuality; and yes I'm playing with traditional power relationships and reversing them, but it's certainly not about sexualizing or making fun of genocide. No one has ever raised that question or issue with me.27

Therefore, it is clear that Monkman's artistic practice should not be interpreted as merely a way to scandalize audiences or to eroticize and make light of a history of genocide of

indigenous peoples in North America, but rather, as a way of challenging and confronting the heteronormative, patriarchal and racial logics of colonization that have attempted to subjugate and disempower indigenous peoples. This is truly an act of queer native survivance.

Today, indigenous peoples are still facing the effects of colonization through reinforced Western perceptions of sexualities and genders. Monkman says:

...I think if you go to a lot of Aboriginal communities now in Canada they’re very conservative, sometimes more conservative than the non-native communities, and I think that has been largely due to the impact of the Anglican church or the Catholic church.

There’s been a lot of repression about sexuality, as a result of that, there’ve been many thousands of people who’ve experienced all kinds of sexual abuse in residential schools so there’s that aspect of impact. And I think there’s just that general sort of level of conservative values and conservative ideas towards sexuality, which have really impacted people of alternative sexuality meaning two-spirited people who can’t really be comfortable in their own home communities because of that homophobia. So on a personal level I’m really talking about homophobia but I know there are other people whose sexuality has been impacted through this whole process of colonization through Christianity.²⁸

The colonial attempts at enforcing heteronormative gender roles and family units to assimilate and further their social, cultural, political and economic agenda therefore still proliferate and have real consequences for indigenous peoples today. Queer indigenous peoples not only face frequent attempts at oppression from larger societies and nations, but, as Monkman suggests, they also face challenges from within their own indigenous communities. Through his troubling of gender, colonization, and settler versions of history, Monkman shares stories of "queer native survivance" that truly push for decolonizing visions, as they deconstruct and challenge the multiple logics of colonization.

Monkman's Queer Native Survivance vs Indian Tropes and Stereotypes

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As previously touched upon briefly, settler-created tropes and stereotypes of the "authentic indian" denied the existence of queer indigenous sexualities and genders. Daniel Francis succinctly and persuasively argues that "the Indian is the invention of the European", and explains that:

The Indian began as a White man's mistake, and became a White man's fantasy. Through the prism of White hopes, fears and prejudices, indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and to have become "Indians"; that is, anything non-Natives wanted them to be.29

Gerald Vizenor elucidates this understanding, stating that: "The indian is a simulation, the absence of natives; the indian transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories. The postindian must waver over the ascetic ruins of indian simulations".30 This "indian" simulation took on many forms, such as "the noble savage", the evil bloodthirsty pagan indian (cowboy and indians), and the "vanishing indian". In these tropes and understandings, while indigenous peoples of North America do exist, the "indian" trope is merely an invention by settler colonists that was created and maintained to enforce and carry on the project of assimilation and colonization. It at once denies and accepts indigenous historical and contemporary presence. Contemporary indigenous peoples are still affected (and sometimes informed and influenced) by these indian simulations and are now left to grapple with understanding and constructing new stories of native identity and survivance.

This task can be fraught with tensions and hostilities, and can result in negative and exclusionary consequences, especially in terms of the subjugation of indigenous sexualities and genders. For instance, in reaction to the oppression of Aboriginal women, many scholars and activists are attempting to empower these women by arguing that traditionally, they held

positions of power and influence as "women" and should have a power and role in their communities today. Métis scholar Emma Laroque argues that Kim Anderson's understandings of women's roles in *A Recognition of Being* (2000) promotes the maternal role and power of women, to the exclusion of many others. Laroque states that: "...such maternalization is totalizing and exclusionary. Many women today choose not to be mothers, and they neither have the desire nor appreciate being forced into what is essentially a heterosexist framework, even if a feminine one". Therefore, the indigenous quest to re-establish and reclaim a *postindian* identity is a necessary step on the road to decolonization, but it is one replete with the dangers of creating new exclusionary hegemonic identities that are reminiscent of the *indian* versions they are attempting to eradicate.

In response to these tensions and complexities, some indigenous artists, at best, shy away from confronting identity politics in their works, or at worst, propagate romantic perceptions of native peoples. Reflecting on Monkman in this regard, Gerald McMaster writes that "his paintings refuse to simplify the struggles of Native people or to rhapsodize their existence before the arrival and eventual onslaught of Europeans, a practice followed by some Native American artists." In fact, Monkman refuses to romanticize indigenous historical or contemporary experience and instead, exemplifies "queer native survivance" by creating a space for queer indigenous peoples in debates on indigenous identity. This is evident in an examination of his performance pieces, *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* (2012) and *Iskootâo* (2010).

*Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece* was performed on February 4th, 2012, at the National
Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Information on Monkman's website explains that: "Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece deconstructs issues of blood quantum, race and tribal enrolment, inducting members into the [world's] fastest growing nation, the Nation of Miss Chief". In this performance, Monkman, as Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, directly and unabashedly delves into extremely contentious and multi-faceted issues of contemporary North American indigenous identity. Miss Chief also hears enrolment cases pertaining to the Nation of Miss Chief that relate to poverty, Native American artists, Europeans who are compelled to "become native" and queer rights. As Justice of the Piece, as well as "...chief magistrate, clan mother, CEO, president, chairman of the board, secretary, publicist, spokesmodel, minister of finance, minister of immigration and citizenship, queen, princess, and all-around boss lady for the Nation of Mischief..." Miss Chief playfully takes a leadership and power position in these identity debates and issues. This, itself, is an act of "queer native survivance", since queer indigenous people are often excluded from such debates (both unconsciously and consciously by structures of power and knowledge, and by other leaders in the Native community). For instance, some tribal leaders of the Cherokee Nation in the United States actively deny the historical and contemporary existence of Cherokee alternative genders and sexualities. In Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece, a gay white man who married a Cherokee man asks for entry into the Nation of Miss Chief since the Cherokee Nation has banned gay marriage and will not accept any adopted children in their union to be adopted into the nation. Miss Chief responds: "..It is sad that our own nations, who once embraced and revered two-spirited people, have become so conservative. I think the

most dangerous and insidious part of colonization is the self-hatred from within our own communities”.

We existed in every tribe, and our nations had names for us in our own languages, Winkte, Illhama, Agokwe, and so on... The French called us the Berdache, which stems from an Arabic word--Bardaj--meaning male concubine. It shows how little they understood of us; we were men and women who from childhood were blessed by the creator with the role of the opposite gender. We were keepers of culture, mediators between the sexes, shamans, or medicine people. We had special roles in ceremonies, and those of us born as males made fabulous wives because we were big and strong. My dear friend We’Wha, a famous Zuni Berdache, was a revered member of her tribe, and was sent as a diplomat to represent her people here in DC. She was a skilled potter. So you see, there is room for you and yours in my nation! Welcome!

This quote is critical in understanding Monkman as a practitioner of "queer native survivance". Firstly, Monkman recognizes the oppression of queer indigenous peoples by their own communities not only as a result of colonization, but as "...the most dangerous and insidious part of colonization...". To his audience, Monkman makes known the force of heteronormativity and patriarchy in indigenous communities, and then traces the long and influential role that queer/two-spirited peoples had in indigenous communities. Monkman proclaims that not only were these people central to the spiritual life of the communities, but also mediated between sexes, and like We'Wha, were politically active too. Miss Chief performs this act of "queer native survivance" in a public setting of the National Museum of the American Indian. Here, her audience of indigenous and non-indigenous people are subjected to hearing and understanding the realities of how these identity debates ignore and subjugate queer indigenous individuals by blatantly turning a blind eye to the structures of power and knowledge of colonization that are fundamentally entrenched in

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37 Ibid, 87.

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heteronormativity and patriarchy. Much like *Justice of the Piece*, Monkman's *Iskootāo* also portrays a story of "queernative survivance" in the public sphere of The Village of Yorkville Park, in Toronto, Ontario. *Iskootāo* was performed by Kent Monkman with Gisele Gordon at the 2010 Scotiabank Nuit Blanche. Monkman's website explains that:

> Iskootāo is the Cree word for fire but also means "woman's heart." In a live performance with sound and light, [a] 650-tonne billion-year-old chunk of the Canadian shield is transformed into the pulsing heart of Mother Earth by Kent Monkman's infamous alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle...Steps away from the third most expensive retail space in North America, Miss Chief takes us back to the core. Every heartbeat penetrates deep into the lands of the Mississauga, Seneca, Wendat, Cayuga... 

In this performance, Miss Chief reclaims Mother Earth for all indigenous peoples on Mississauga, Seneca, Wendat and Cayuga lands in the urbanized and capitalist core of Toronto. More specifically though, Miss Chief reclaims this space for queer indigenous peoples in an act of "queer native survivance". As Miss Chief in all her colourful glory, brazenly and loudly beats her drum and dances in this public sphere, it may become impossible for audience members to accept the longstanding myths and tropes of the indian simulation. Instead, they are pushed to accept that queer indigenous peoples are actively here and part of Turtle Island (what is also known as North America). Therefore, both Miss Chief: *Justice of the Piece* (2012) and *Iskootāo* (2010) are examples of Monkman engaging in "queer native survivance" as he deconstructs the ever popular and damaging tropes and perceptions of indigenous peoples which have resulted in contentious debates on identity that potentially hold dire consequences for indigenous peoples. This is a deliberate attempt of queer native survivance by Monkman, as he explains that:

> In my recent films and paintings, I play with sexuality and gender to discuss power. I employ cinematic and painterly idioms of the nineteenth century, creating narratives with which to challenge the subjectivity of the original artists, and dismantle commonly held assumptions regarding Native peoples, history and the colonization of sexualities. Under the guise of "cultural

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http://kentmonkman.com/works.php?page=performance&start=1#
preservation" and "ethnology," these contrived romantic images ultimately served a more sinister agenda of cultural and racial obliteration: If Native people could be depicted as relics of the past, and romantic causalities of a dying race, they would be innocuous, irrelevant and without a future. "But we are still here! And we are constantly redefining ourselves as Native people in a fast-changing world. We cannot escape history, but we can question the subjectivity of those who wrote it".39

Through his recent work, Monkman asserts queer native survivance by asserting that (queer) indigenous people have been here, and are actively here and thriving today. Today, indigenous peoples must realize that efforts to decolonize are especially prone to failure if they exclude queer indigenous peoples and Monkman works to ensure their participation by illustrating their existence, power, and influence in their communities.

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My critical examination of Old Bear With Tinselled Buck No. 10, 601 (2008), The Triumph of Mischief (2007), Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece (2012), and Iskootāo (2010) has demonstrated that Monkman exemplifies a "queer native survivance" that troubles, calls attention to, and deconstructs the heteronormative and patriarchal structures of power and knowledge embedded in the ongoing project of colonization. Monkman reminds us all, both indigenous and non-indigenous, that we need to include queer indigenous peoples (and by extension, all queer peoples) in our debates and efforts to decolonize, since sexuality, gender and heteronormativity are all spheres that the colonizing forces attempted to subjugate, oppress and eventually assimilate all indigenous peoples in. Monkman affirms that queer indigenous people existed at contact, and were central to indigenous societies then and now.

As Chris Finley says,

It is time to bring "sexy back" to Native studies and quit pretending we are boring and pure and do not think or write about sex. We are alive, we are sexy, and some of us Natives are queer. Native nationalisms have the potential to be sexy (and are already sexualized), but to be sexy from a Native feminist perspective, they need to be decolonizing and critical of heteropatriarchy.40

As an individual who identifies as a feminist, a student of Native studies and as a person of mixed settler/indigenous ancestry, Finley's words resonate with me after engaging in an examination of Monkman's work. I feel challenged to attempt to recognize, deconstruct and challenge the heteronormativity and patriarchal structures of power and knowledge in the colonizing project. After being witnessed, heard or seen, Monkman's stories of "queer native survivance" cannot be unheard or unseen since, as, Thomas King argues: “...the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”41 and after being given a story, King reminds us that: "It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you would have heard this story. You’ve heard it now".42 There is therefore a responsibility that comes with knowledge and stories. But how does this link back to Sakabàn, which is where this exploration began? As previously highlighted, of the many works by indigenous artists, Monkman's two pieces were among the few works to include critiques, challenges and awareness of sexuality and gender in indigenous nations, despite the fact that deconstructing and fighting heteronormativity and patriarchy are recognized as fundamental, necessary steps in decolonization. Like myself, the Sakabàn artists and members of the general public witnessed Monkman's stories of "queer native survivance" and now have the responsibility to do something with this new knowledge and understanding. For the public, this may be as simple as spreading awareness and understanding of queer genders and sexualities. For the Sakabàn artists, this may mean incorporating themes of sexuality and gender in their own work,

42 Ibid, 119.
and bringing the stories back to be shared within their own communities across the globe. Engaging in dialogue to achieve understanding is the first step in the process of critically informed decolonizing action.

Works Cited


Emberley, Julia V., "Genealogies of Difference: Revamping the Empire? or, Queering Kinship in Transnational Decolonial Frame", in *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 239-259.


