

Powerful Pictures:

REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

Elementary Level

A R T GALLERY
O F G R E A T E R V I C T O R I A





LEARN about four thought-provoking, contemporary, Indigenous, Canadian-based artists from the AGGV collection!

learn



EXPLORE FREE lesson plans for Elementary grades!

explore



DISCOVER how art engagement can inspire creative and critical thinking and connect us with our communities in meaningful ways!

discover

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Powerful Pictures:

REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE: THE "BIG IDEA"

You may be familiar with works by artists like Picasso and Van Gogh. These men created some fascinating and important artworks, but they were active before your students were born, they lived in countries far from Canada, and their paintings were often inspired by issues relevant to their own time and place. This guide offers an opportunity to learn about living artists, two men and two women, who are creating compelling work that contributes to important conversations about the nature of Canadian culture and history.

Culture is created by the stories we tell. Stories that show who we are individually and collectively can shape us and the people around us. As part of the storytelling process, we include and exclude certain people or groups of people, intentionally or unintentionally. *Powerful Pictures: Representation and Storytelling* features work by four artists—Sonny Assu, Terrance Houle, Meryl McMaster, and Marianne Nicolson—who explore different ways of telling stories. By examining concepts of the self and the "other," identity, and culture, these works ask us to consider Indigenous peoples' rights and world views.



Is there another term I could use to refer to “others”?

Perhaps the “non-self”? The term “other” can sometimes create a sense of “us” versus “them”; it makes us feel separate, and not part of a collective whole.

How can we break this barrier down?

Related to this, there is currently a heightened awareness in Canada of the impacts of colonialism on Canadian culture and history. The artworks featured in this resource guide have been chosen to inspire creative inquiry and critical thinking about the effects of colonialism through engagement with art.

As they work through the activities in this guide, students will engage in discussions of such topics as colonialism, media culture, Indigenous world views, and representing the self and the “other,” and will explore artistic responses to these topics. They will learn visual literacy and media literacy skills, and will begin to think in a holistic way about their communities (local, national, and global), their own identities, and different ways of representing the self and the “other.”

By learning about the Indigenous, Canadian-based artists included in this guide, students will explore key questions about representation and identity, and create projects inspired by contemporary artists.

Note: New terms are underlined and included in the **Key Words/Concepts** section.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Powerful Pictures: Representation and Storytelling is designed to complement a wide range of BC Curriculum Competencies and subject-specific curriculum goals. Skills that students practise in the activities are **observation**, **interpretation**, and **inter-cultural sensitivity**, as well as **critical and creative thinking**. The content of the program directly relates to the following **competency profiles** and **subject areas**: Communication Competency, Critical Thinking Competency, Social Responsibility Competency, Positive Personal & Cultural Identity Competency, Art Education, Science Curriculum, and Social Studies Curriculum.

USING THIS GUIDE: THE BASICS

01

Print out the document for yourself.

02

Read through the document carefully.

03

When you are ready to engage your class, project the images of the artworks in your classroom. You can find the images between pages 20 and 30. For best results, download high-resolution projector images here and view full screen, single page. Use the questions and activities provided to lead the discussion.

Troubleshooting: If you are having trouble downloading any of the PDF documents, please contact your IT support.

MAIN GOALS

- To introduce contemporary, Indigenous artists engaging with issues of representation and storytelling
- To explore the ideas of stereotypes and media literacy by thinking critically about who creates meaning and what that might signify for those who are unable to participate in the creation process
- To introduce the idea that art is a construct that is created and conceived differently in different cultures, and that the art of the dominant culture may not accurately represent all people and their varied world views equally
- To inspire curiosity and experimentation! And to connect learning with the wider community

LOOKING FORWARD IN THE GUIDE

Activities can be found on pages 10 to 19

Artist Information and Images begin on page 20

Guiding Questions

TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION



What does it mean to “walk a mile in someone else’s shoes”?

Culture is created by the stories we share—this guide asks you to be curious about what kind of stories are being told. How do you think the people around us and our experiences influence the stories we tell?



How do stereotypes influence how we feel about ourselves and others? How are the artists in this guide playing with ideas of self, “other,” and belonging in their work?

How does looking at works of art help us form our own sense of “self”? How does it help us develop understanding and empathy for other people?



How does art help us explore relationships between identity (self and “other”), place, culture (Canadian, Indigenous, Settler, Immigrant...), and/or belonging (in our family, classroom, school, community...)?

Why do you think the artists featured in this guide create the works of art they do?



What can we learn about an artist’s creative process by exploring their artworks?

How can we use art to explore the world around us? How can we use it to better understand our world?



The Art of Seeing:

VISUAL THINKING QUESTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a great way to begin exploring art with your class.

VTS is a method of teacher-facilitated discussion of art images and is documented to have a cascading positive effect on both teachers and students. It is perhaps the simplest way in which teachers and schools can provide students with key behaviours sought by Common Core Standards: thinking skills that become habitual and transfer from lesson to lesson; oral and written language literacy; visual literacy; and collaborative interactions among peers. For more information visit www.vtshome.org

Follow steps 1 to 4 to use VTS with your class. The VTS questions and strategies can be applied to all the works in this guide.

1. CLOSE LOOKING AND DESCRIBING

Ask your students to look carefully at one of the works of art. Have them describe what they see. Start the questioning with elements of art and broad, open-ended questions. Take your time. The following are some sample questions you could use to begin the discussion:

- What is the first thing you see?
- What colours do you see?
- What materials do you think the artist used?
- What shapes do you see?
- Can you see different kinds of lines?
- What is going on in this artwork? Why do you say that?
- What story do you think the artist is trying to tell?
- Do you see any people or animals in this artwork? How old do you think they are?
- What does this work make you feel? Why do you say that?
- What else do you see?

Continue to encourage students to explore close looking and describing. It can be helpful to neutrally paraphrase your students' comments and point to the area they are describing during your discussion. It can also be helpful to link and frame your students' comments to discussions you have had in class or to other students' ideas. See the VTS website for further examples of questions.

2. ANALYSIS

Once the students have completed listing everything they observed in the artwork by close looking, begin to ask simple analytical questions that will help to deepen their understanding of the work of art.

3. LAYERING INFORMATION

Share the background information (starting on page 34) about the artist and the work of art. This is information that a viewer cannot get simply by looking at the artwork. Once you have shared this information, your students will be ready for deeper analysis and interpretation of the work of art.

Once the background information has been shared, you might consider asking the following questions:

- Do you think the title makes sense? Why or why not?
- Does knowing the title help you understand the story the artist is trying to tell?
- Do you think the artist was successful in the story they were trying to tell?
- Do you still see the same things now that you know the background information?
- How would you have seen the artwork differently if you had known the background information first?

4. INTERPRETATION

Interpretation brings the close looking and describing, analysis, and background information together to aid in better understanding the work of art.

Activities:

CHOOSE 1 OR ALL 3!

ACTIVITY 1: STEREOTYPES, IDENTITY, AND STORYTELLING

Objective: Explore the concept of stereotypes. By engaging with Terrance Houle’s work *Urban Indian Series* (#7) and examples of memes, students examine some of the ways images are used to create meaning and help tell stories. At the same time they think critically about whose stories are being told and by whom.

Note: The basic ideas discussed in this activity can be applied to many of the works of art included in this guide.

Overview: This quote from Terrance Houle’s artist statement will help frame this assignment: “The *Urban Indian Series* is a comment on personal identity and cultural commodity in today’s contemporary culture. Specifically, what is my culture as it compares to the mainstream understanding of Native Peoples?...The work serves to question ideas of tradition, identity and culture that are often negated or replaced by Western cultural standards.” In his work, Houle is asking questions about how non-Indigenous people have pictured Indigenous people in paintings, movies, stories, and imagination. His questions are meant to start a discussion about storytelling and mainstream media. This exercise will help students explore these ideas of identity, tradition, culture, and representation in their own way.

Materials: Terrance Houle’s *Urban Indian Series* (#7), sample memes from the internet, projector, meme templates, art supplies for meme project (pens, pencils, crayons, etc.)

Key Words/Concepts: Assumption, Jump to Conclusions, Meme, Misinterpret, Perception, Stereotypes

Process:

1. As a class, view Terrance Houle’s *Urban Indian Series* (#7).

Work through the four steps outlined in “The Art of Seeing: Visual Thinking Questions and Strategies.” Start by taking a moment to have the students look deeply at the work of art before you begin your discussion. Talk about what they see in the work, what they think is going on in the picture, how the image makes them feel. Ask open-ended questions (see page 7 for examples) and let the students experience the work in their

own unique way before building on their comments with deeper questioning and layering of context information. When you have given them this additional information, ask how it changes their view of the artwork.

2. Building on the discussion of Houle's work, introduce the following concepts:

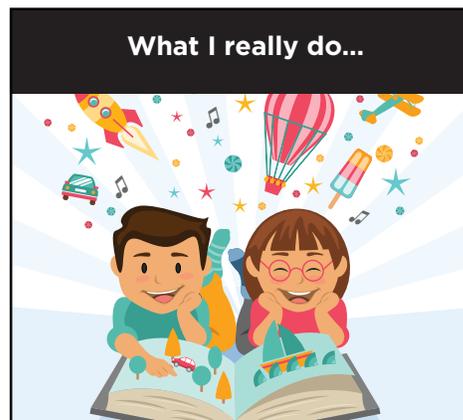
Assumption, Jump to Conclusions, Misinterpret, Perception, Stereotypes, and Storytelling. Use the work to discuss these concepts: can the students see the artist using them in his work?

3. Discuss how this work illustrates the idea that the way we see ourselves might be different from how others see us.

Project images or present print images from your internet research to provide students with an age-appropriate example of a meme. To stimulate discussion you could start with the following questions:

- Why might people have the wrong idea about what teachers do?
- Do some of these ideas tell the real story or part of the story?
- Why would there be these ideas about what teachers do?
- Can you think of times when people have the wrong idea about what you do at school?

Sample Teacher Meme:



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4. Discuss how this meme helps us understand some of the ideas Houle is working with: Assumption, Jump to Conclusions, Misinterpret, Perception.

As a class, discuss how these terms can contribute to stereotypes, and how stories can contribute to these ideas and stereotypes.

5. Once students understand the key concepts and the idea of a meme, have them fill out the following meme template.

Who my friends think I am... 	Who my family thinks I am... 	Who my pet thinks I am...
Who my coach thinks I am... 	Who my teacher thinks I am... 	Who I think I am...

6. In small groups or on their own, have students create memes that describe who they are.

For this activity, encourage students to draw, write, collage, paint, etc., or use a mixture of methods, to get their point across to the viewer. The artistic possibilities are endless!

Note: This activity could be done multiple times, addressing different stereotypes and perceptions. You could start by having students work individually, then organize them in groups and see what they come up with in each setting. You could also model this exercise by creating a class meme. Be creative, gauge your students' abilities and make this exercise work for you and your class.

7. Have students share their meme with the rest of the class.

This can be an opportunity to engage your students in a storytelling exercise. You could use the meme to help your students develop a short story about themselves or their group, or they could create the meme one day and share the meme the following day by dressing up for school in a way that will help them tell their story. Let Houle's work inspire them.

Summarize and Reflect:

- What were some of the key issues raised in discussions?
- How can you address them as a class?
- How does Houle's work open our eyes to questions about storytelling and who is making meaning?
- As a class, what is one way you can contribute to changing the narrative in the classroom, the school, or your larger community?

ACTIVITY 2: FOUND SCULPTURE

Objective: Explore the process of creating an artwork using found objects as primary materials. With Sonny Assu's work as an inspiration, students begin to think about how the materials and processes chosen for a work of art can affect how the work is experienced and the story it communicates.

Overview: Have your students take a close look at the five works by artist Sonny Assu included in this guide. For this series, Assu is working with “found sculpture,” taking discarded objects he has found and creating a story with them. For Assu, the story changes depending on what environment he places the objects in (for example, in a museum the object becomes an artifact; in a gift shop it becomes a commodity; in a commercial gallery it becomes fine art).

With this work, Assu is asking us to consider many key issues affecting First Nations people in Canada, including appropriation, land rights, and the construction of narratives in museums, gift shops, and commercial art galleries. Among other questions, Assu is asking: who is telling the story?

The genre of found sculpture has been explored by many artists. Britain's Tate Museum describes the genre as “a natural or man-made object, or fragment of an object, that is found (or sometimes bought) by an artist and kept because of some intrinsic interest the artist sees in it.” (Note: This definition comes from a Euro-centric, Modern Art perspective. <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/f/found-object>)

Materials: Projector; found objects; glue, tape, paper, etc., as needed; supports for your sculpture; writing materials; access to a computer (Note: Materials needed may vary depending on what students choose to create)

Key Words/Concepts: Homage, Inspiration, Performance Art, Sculpture

1. Have students in the class research the land around the school.

On what First Nations territory is the school located? What is the Indigenous language of this territory?

2. Have the class explore the school grounds and begin to collect objects for use in their art projects.

Explain that the objects Assu found for his series are cuts of cedar taken from a log-home developer on the We Wai Kai Nation reserve in Campbell River, BC. Ask students to explore the land around the school, looking for objects that could help them tell a story as Assu has done. Can they find anything that would have been on

the land before European settlers arrived in the area? Perhaps they can only find more recent objects, but that is not a problem. Ask them to choose at least four or five objects or groups of objects (e.g., if they want to include blades of grass, they can take a handful—but please remind them to only take what they need).

Discuss Indigenous teachings about taking objects from the land. Are there any teachings from the First Peoples of the place the school is located?

Note: As homework, have students collect objects from their yards, the parks or playgrounds around the school or their home, the beaches near their home...the idea is to have students explore the territory they live on and collect as broad a range of items as possible that they can use in their artwork.

3. When students have gathered their objects, have them research one or two artworks/cultural objects created by a First Nations artist from the territory the school is located in; think about materials, artistic forms, background information, cultural use and significance, etc.

Students can do this as a class in the computer lab or on their own as a homework assignment. In either case, have students print out an image of the work(s) they have chosen. Chosen artworks could include a mask, a button blanket, a copper, an archival photograph showing a big house or totem pole, a story, a contemporary video of a traditional dance... Remind students that art is a cultural trace, which means that it is a sign or record of a culture, and all forms of culture could possibly be considered art.

Note: It is important to stress that students do not have to choose a historical work. These artistic cultures are alive and thriving. You may want to encourage your students to try to find a contemporary artist working today.

4. Using the artwork(s) they researched and Assu's series included in this guide as inspiration, have students create a found sculpture.

Process:

1. Drawing inspiration from the artworks they researched, students can create their own sculpture as a homage or response. It is important that they don't simply copy the artwork using their materials. Instead, encourage them to use their own ideas, distilled from their research and found objects, to create a work of art that is unique to them.

2. Ask students to write an artist's statement about their sculpture. Why did they choose the materials they did? How did their research on First Nations art and Assu's work inspire them? How does their work connect to the land around them and its history? What story are they trying to tell?

3. As a class, organize a class exhibition to share students' work. This could take the form of displaying the work in a school hallway, holding a “mini exhibition” in the classroom and inviting other classes to come see the work, having an online exhibit, etc.—the possibilities are endless!

Summarize/Reflect:

- Brainstorm some of the key issues this project addressed. What did it leave out?
- Are there issues that students want to continue exploring? What questions do they still have?
- As a class, come up with a “Call to Action” that addresses one or two of the issues the group feels strongly about.
- Brainstorm how, as a class, you can take action on the issues that came up during this activity.

How will you become an “activist” in your community?
You can be active in so many ways—quiet, small ways or louder ways.



The “big question” is:

What one action can I take in my community (class, school, neighbourhood, etc.) that will create positive change?

EXAMPLES:

Inspired by Sonny Assu’s work, this action could be learning how to say “hello” and “thank you” in the First Nations language of the area the school is located in to help keep that language and culture alive.

Inspired by the research students did on contemporary First Nations artists, the class could invite a local contemporary First Nations artist to come speak about their work and how they use art as a way to tell stories.

HOW WILL YOU CHANGE THE STORY?

ACTIVITY 3: MASKS AS STORYTELLERS

Objective: Explore the process of creating narratives. Use ideas of variation and similarities to explore different aspects of social and cultural diversity; challenge stereotypes, perceptions, and assumptions; and use art to represent and celebrate differences.

Overview: As a class, take a close look at the works by Terrance Houle and Meryl McMaster included in this guide. Both artists are using clothing and costumes to help tell a story about who they are. For Houle, wearing traditional Blood Tribe clothing during his daily life is a way to reclaim his Indigenous heritage, while McMaster uses costumes to explore her own diverse heritage. This activity gets students thinking about people's similarities and differences, as well as how artists use clothing and costumes to help tell a story. Using Houle's and McMaster's work as inspiration, students will create their own masks to help them share their story.

Materials: Lemons, eggs (raw and boiled—if time and resources allow—and brown and white), Terrance Houle's *Urban Indian Series (#7)* and Meryl McMaster's *Winged Calling*, projector, mask-making materials

Learning Strategies Used: Analyze ideas of same and different using lemons, white and brown eggs

Process:

1. Lead the class in a review of the ideas of “same” and “different” as well as “self” and “other.”

2. Lead the class in two “same”/“different” exercises.

Exercise One:

1. As a class, review the external and internal characteristics of a lemon. Lead students through discussions of what they see, asking open-ended questions.
2. Have students form groups of 2. Distribute lemons to each group and ask students to carefully examine the outside of the lemon. Ask students how they would go about identifying their lemons (i.e., determine any similarities to/differences from other lemons).
3. As a class, put all the lemons into a bag and shake them around. Ask students to try to find their lemon.
4. Discuss how lemons are like people.

Exercise Two

1. As a class, examine a brown egg and a white egg.
2. Hold up each egg, one at a time.

Note: This could also be done in groups of 5 or 6, with one student holding the eggs for the group, or the eggs being placed in a bowl in the center of the group.

3. Ask students to describe the external surface of the eggs.
4. Ask students to predict what the inside of the eggs will look like.
5. Break the shells and put the contents of the eggs into glass bowls.
6. Ask students to describe the contents of the eggs. Has anyone ever seen anything else in an egg? (Sometimes you might be surprised and get a double yolk!)
7. Discuss how eggs are like people.

3. As a class, look at Terrance Houle’s *Urban Indian Series (#7)* and Meryl McMaster’s *Winged Calling*.

4. Use Visual Thinking questioning techniques to help students uncover messages in the work, using questions like the following samples:

- What’s going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What do you think you might have missed?
- What do you think the artist wanted you to notice?
- Why do you think each artist dressed like this?
- How would you feel if you saw this person in a grocery store? Why do you say that?
- What similarities or differences to the lemons or eggs can you notice or think about?
- What cultural group do you think each artist is showing with what the person in the artwork is wearing?
Where have you seen this before?

6. Have students create their own mask to tell a personal story.

Process:

1. Use the example of a paper plate to illustrate “inside” and “outside,” “interior” and “exterior.” Young children may need a concrete example. Use yourself as an example and talk about some things people may not know about your identity (for example, you sleep with your socks on). With a marker, write that on the inside of the plate. Talk about things people do know about your identity (for example, your hair colour) and write that on the outside of the plate.
2. Encourage students to think about, then discuss with a partner, aspects of their personal identity.
3. Distribute paper plates with holes cut for the eyes and holes for attaching a string or elastic so students will be able to wear the mask.
4. Distribute pens, glue, glitter, feathers, buttons, magazines for collage—anything and everything that you think will help your students best express their ideas—to decorate the masks and represent their

external self. Ask students to record things the world may not know about them (and are comfortable sharing) in print on the inside of the mask (use pencil, marker, etc.).

5. In small groups, have students decorate their masks.

Summarize/reflect:

- We share parts of our self/identity with others and keep parts of our self or identity private.
- The parts we are comfortable allowing others to see might be misunderstood if people make assumptions about us—or if they don't take the time to be curious and learn about us.
- We all want to see ourselves represented or shown in ways that are accurate and complete. It is important that we all take the time to understand and to be understood so we can live together in ways that are respectful and make us all feel good about ourselves and each other.
- What did you learn about yourself and others?

Artworks:

SONNY ASSU



*Museum of Anthropology, 2011. From the series Artifacts of Authenticity • Archival Digital Photograph, 71 x 122 cm
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent Collection (2012.022.002.1)*

“Artifacts of Authenticity deals with the issues of reclaiming identity and space by documenting the waste of the dominant affluent culture.”

- SONNY ASSU -

In a series of photographs called *Artifacts of Authenticity* which includes *Museum of Anthropology*, Sonny Assu is creating artworks that comment on conventional ways of displaying Indigenous artefacts in museum, gallery, and commercial settings (often as highly commercial art or as objects from a “dead culture”). By photographing discarded cedar objects in museums, commercial art galleries, and “tourist trap” shops, Assu is challenging the stories told about Indigenous cultures in each setting. In the words of the artist: *Artifacts of Authenticity* deals with the issues of reclaiming identity and space by documenting the waste of the dominant affluent culture.” In other words, Assu is using his artwork to make a powerful statement about his own identity as well as the culture of waste that he sees in affluent cultures.

Overall, the series seeks to challenge the authoritative voice of anthropologists, galleries, curators, historians, and purveyors of the “Indigenous” stereotype for tourists. As Assu notes, the series calls into question the meaning of authenticity of what or who is considered Aboriginal. (Quotes from Sonny Assu: Artist Statements, “*Artifacts of Authenticity*,” accessed July 8, 2016. <http://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/artifacts-of-authenticity>)



We Wei Kai (Warrior #1), 2011

Archival Digital Photograph, 38 x 49 cm

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent

Collection (2012.022.001.5)



Wise Ones (Elder #1), 2011

Archival Digital Photograph, 38 x 49 cm

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent

Collection (2012.022.001.1)



Wise Ones (Elder #2), 2011

Archival Digital Photograph, 38 x 49 cm

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent

Collection (2012.022.001.2)



Wise Ones (Elder #3), 2011

Archival Digital Photograph, 38 x 49 cm

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent
Collection (2012.022.001.3)



Wise Ones (Elder #4), 2011

Archival Digital Photograph, 38 x 49 cm

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent
Collection (2012.022.001.4)

Image Background/Context:

Four years ago, I stumbled upon the site of a log-home developer on the traditional territory of the We Wai Kai Nation, my reserve on northeastern Vancouver Island. I found it comical that my nation leased a plot of land, on un-ceded territory, to a company that exploits our resources to assemble log homes to be shipped off to the wealthy around the world.

While exploring the piles of discarded wood, I discovered a unique by-product of this industry: off-cuts that looked remarkably like pre-fabricated Northwest Coast masks. Left to be reclaimed by the earth or chipped up into cat litter, they are considered worthless by the developer and the consumer.

These “masks” have an inherent beauty: the poetics of a chainsaw paired with centuries-old growth rings reveal the wisdom of these once majestic cedar trees. Each one has a face and story within—and therefore also an inherent wealth. The felling of the rainforest enables us to display wealth in the form of luxury vacation homes, but we often give little thought to the waste produced by such affluence.

Historically, dominant cultures and ruling authorities have taken it upon themselves to preserve artifacts from perceived lesser societies, displaying the objects in galleries as a sign of their own wealth and authority. Today,

we show our prosperity by accumulating posh, inanimate objects. And perhaps subconsciously we display the waste from this consumption (water bottles, disposable coffee cups, product packaging) as further markers of wealth.

These works are my commentary on what these waste products could have been. The display of these discarded objects, using museum-quality mask mounts, assigns wealth in an artistic and anthropological sense. Through this work I challenge the institutions to collect remnants of our consumption culture. —

Sonny Assu (from Sonny Assu: Artist Statements, “*Longing*,” accessed July 8, 2016.

<http://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/longing>)

Brief Artist Bio (see page 34 for detailed bio):

Through museum interventions (that is, the artist “taking over” the museum setting), large-scale installations, sculpture, photography, printmaking, and paintings, Sonny Assu combines Indigenous iconography with a pop art style to address contemporary political and ideological issues. His work often focuses on Indigenous issues and rights, and the ways in which the past informs contemporary ideas and identities. Assu uses humour to start a dialogue about the use of consumerism, branding, and technology in Canadian culture. In this context, his work deals with the loss of Indigenous language and cultural resources, and the effects of colonization upon the Indigenous people of North America. (from Sonny Assu, “Biography,” accessed July 8, 2016.

<http://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/biography>)

Artworks:

TERRANCE HOULE



Urban Indian Series (#7), 2007 • Digital C print; LightJet; colour, 72.4 x 92.9 cm • Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent Collection (2010.022.001)

“The *Urban Indian Series* is a comment on personal identity and cultural commodity in today’s contemporary culture.”

- TERRANCE HOULE -

Image Background/Context:

Discussing this work, Houle notes: “The *Urban Indian Series* is a comment on personal identity and cultural commodity in today’s contemporary culture.” For the artist, this work explores the following question: “What is my culture as it compares to the mainstream understanding of Native Peoples?” Like other artists included in this guide, Houle is using his artwork to tell an important story. He states: “My regalia is both a catalyst in the image, breaking up the sea of mundane western garb, and a representation that is part of my everyday, much like my culture, thus challenging the suggestion that I am out of place in a world that only identifies with conformity.” For the artist, the work serves to question ideas of tradition, identity, and culture that are often negated or replaced by Western cultural standards. By capturing the image of the “Indian” in portraiture and regalia, the *Urban Indian Series* seeks to comment on the historical relationship between photography and aboriginal identity. (Quotes from Terrance Houle)

Brief Artist Bio (see page 35 for detailed bio):

Terrance Houle is an interdisciplinary media artist and a proud member of the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe). Involved with Aboriginal communities all his life, he has travelled to reservations throughout North America participating in Powwow dancing and native ceremonies. Houle makes use of performance art, photography, video and film, music, and painting in his work. Likewise, Houle’s practice includes various tools of mass dissemination such as billboards and vinyl bus signage. (from Terrance Houle, “About,” accessed July 8, 2016. <http://www.terrancehouleart.com/about.html>)

Artworks:

MERYL MCMASTER



Winged Calling, 2012. From the series *In-Between Worlds* • Digital Chromogenic Print, 94.6 x 130.9 cm
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria Permanent Collection (2015.014.002)

“In-Between Worlds explores the mixing and transforming of bi-cultural [two cultures] identities—Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian.”

- MERYL MCMASTER -

Image Background/Context:

This work is part of McMaster's *In-Between Worlds* series. In the words of the artist: "*In-Between Worlds* explores the mixing and transforming of bi-cultural [two cultures] identities—Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian." In other words, this project plays with what it means for McMaster to have both Aboriginal and Canadian Settler ancestors. For McMaster, this series addresses the idea of liminality, of being betwixt and between cultural identities and histories. Like many of us, McMaster comes from a diverse and culturally rich background, and her artwork helps her tell her story.

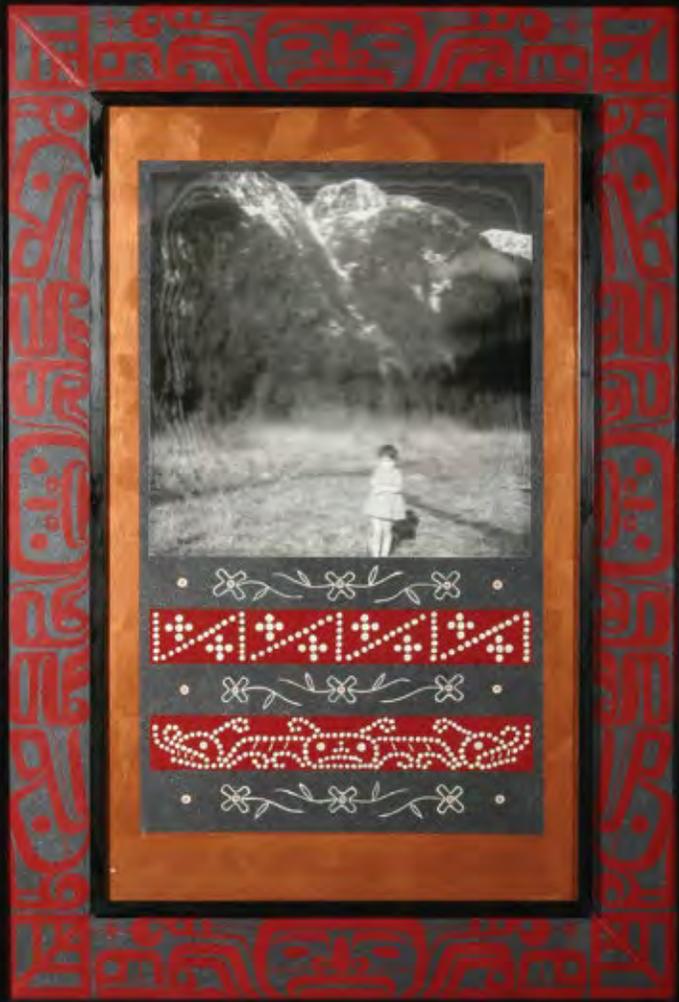
Discussing her costume and props, McMaster notes: "Talisman and prop-like sculptures become extensions of the body that suggests a collaging of identities." In working with these complex ideas, McMaster is creating narratives to help viewers question themselves and the world in new ways. (Quotes from Meryl McMaster, "*In-Between Worlds*," accessed July 8, 2016. http://merylmcmaster.com/section/163115_In_Between_Worlds.html)

Brief Artist Bio (see page 36 for detailed bio):

Meryl McMaster is a Canadian-based artist and a graduate in photography from the Ontario College of Art and Design. Her artistic practice begins with photography, evoking a journey that follows a path of self-discovery. She is interested in exploring questions of how we construct our sense of self through lineage, history, and culture. McMaster's practice extends beyond straight photography by incorporating other artistic media into how she builds images and expresses her ideas. (from "Meryl McMaster," accessed July 8, 2016. <http://merylmcmaster.com/home.html>)

Artworks:

MARIANNE NICOLSON



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 1), 2004
Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.1)



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 4), 2004
Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.4)

“My work stems from a strong belief in the value of Indigenous philosophies and ways of being on the land.”

- MARIANNE NICOLSON -



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 1), 2004
 Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.1)



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 2), 2004
 Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.2)



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 3), 2004
 Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.3)



Memorial Work for Hayusdisalas (part 4), 2004
 Acrylic, photograph, wood, paper; 122 x 84 cm
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Permanent Collection (2006.016.001.4)

Image Background/Context:

“These four panels complete a series of memorial works...This work in particular memorializes my late aunt Barbara Willie, whose Kwakwaka'wakw name was Hayusdisalas. The interior images are composed based on the formal layout of a ceremonial dance apron. The outer images are of two sisiutl with two humans in between. The out forms reference traditional Kwakwaka'wakw post and beam house structure. The four panels are composed so that land based images of our home territory flank the interior portrait imagery of both an individual portrait and a group baptism. The work is meant to reflect upon an individual life lived within the context of both Dzawada'enuxw territory and community.”— Marianne Nicolson

Brief Artist Bio (see page 36 for detailed bio):

Marianne Nicolson ('Tayagila'ogwa) is an artist of Scottish and Dzawada'enuxw First Nations descent. The Dzawada'enuxw People are a member tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Her training encompasses both traditional Kwakwaka'wakw forms and culture, and Western European-based art practice. She has completed a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design (1996), and an MFA (1999), a Masters in Linguistics and Anthropology (2005), and a PhD in Linguistics, Anthropology and Art History (2013) at the University of Victoria. She has exhibited her artwork locally, nationally, and internationally as a painter, photographer, and installation artist; has written and published numerous essays and articles; and has participated in multiple speaking engagements. Her practice engages with issues of Aboriginal histories and politics arising from a passionate involvement in cultural revitalization and sustainability. (from Marianne Nicolson, “Bio” and “Artist Statement,” accessed July 8, 2016. <http://www.themedicineproject.com/marianne-nicolson.html>)

Key Words/Concepts:

Aboriginal: Born in or belonging to a country. The original inhabitants of a place; existing in a place from the beginning. (source: SD61 Aboriginal Nations Education Division.) Please note: The term “Indigenous” is currently preferred over “Aboriginal.”

Appropriation: The action of taking something for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission. In art, it is the artistic practice or technique of reworking images from well-known paintings, photographs, etc., in one’s own work. **Cultural appropriation** is the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of a different culture without invitation or permission to use them.

Assumption: Something that is accepted to be true without explanation or proof.

Colonialism: The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. (source: The Oxford Dictionary)

Colonization: The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the Indigenous people of an area.

Contemporary Artist: Most simply, a contemporary artist can be defined as an artist living in the twenty-first century, whose work is a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects that challenge traditional boundaries and defy easy definition. In an ever-expanding world, contemporary artists seek to give voice to the varied and changing cultural landscapes of identities, values, and beliefs. (source: ART21)

Curator: The title given to a person who selects and interprets works of art. Contemporary curators also work with living artists to develop exhibition content and programming.

First Nations: A widely accepted term used to refer to the collective nations of Canada’s first people. The term came into use in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which many people found offensive. The term “First Nations Peoples” refers to the Indigenous people in Canada, both status and non-status. Many Indigenous peoples have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word “Band” in the name of their community. (source: SD61 Aboriginal Nations Education Division)

Homage: A way of showing respect to an artist, writer, musician, etc., by using their style or ideas in your own work.

Indigenous Peoples: The definition of “indigenous” is “native to the area”—for example, Aboriginal people are indigenous to North America. The term “Indigenous peoples” can have two definitions:

- A. Peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.
- B. Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations that inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries, and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions.

Indigenous World Views: Indigenous philosophies of life and conceptions of the world. These can include the circle, community, the drum, the importance of the environment, and ideas of interconnectedness, place as a connection to land and identity, self-determination, time, and ways of knowing. (Source: Dragonfly Consulting Services Canada, “Aboriginal World Views,” accessed July 8, 2016.

<http://dragonflycanada.ca/resources/aboriginal-worldviews/>)

Inspiration: The process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative; to be inspired by something in your life and to act on it in an artistic way.

Jump to Conclusions: Make a quick decision without knowing all of the information about the situation.

Mainstream Media: Traditional forms of mass communication, such as newspapers, television, and radio. (source: The Oxford Dictionary)

Media Culture: In cultural studies, media culture refers to the current Western capitalist society that emerged and developed during the twentieth century, under the influence of mass media.

Media Literacy: Media literacy is concerned with helping students develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by these media, and the impact of these techniques. More specifically, it is education that aims to increase students’ understanding of how the media work, how they produce meaning, how they are organized, and how they construct reality. Media literacy also aims to provide students with the ability to create media products. (source: Ontario Ministry of Education)

Meme: Captioned photos that are intended to be funny, often as a way to add valid insight to misconceptions about people (often transmitted on the internet).

Misinterpret: To interpret something or someone in the wrong way.

“Other”: A term often used to describe a group of people believed to be outside the dominant culture. This is a problematic term as it can set up an “us” versus “them” dichotomy that perpetuates division and segregation within society.

Perception: The way we look at or think about something.

Performance Art: An art form combining elements of theatre, music, and the visual arts. Performance art is usually carefully programmed and generally does not involve audience participation. (source: The Oxford Dictionary of Art)

Personal Identity: The concept you develop about yourself that evolves over the course of your life.

Sculpture: The art of making two- or three-dimensional representational or abstract forms.

Self: Me. (How you view yourself)

Stereotype: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Visual Literacy: The ability to identify, read, and understand images in order to successfully make meaning in our visual world. (source: Toledo Museum of Art)

World View: A particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.

Artists' Background

The following background information highlights the artists whose work is included in this resource.

SONNY ASSU (B. 1975, IN RICHMOND, BRITISH COLUMBIA)

Through museum interventions, large-scale installations, sculpture, photography, printmaking, and paintings, Sonny Assu merges the aesthetics of Indigenous iconography with a pop art sensibility in an effort to address contemporary political and ideological issues. His work often focuses on Indigenous issues and rights, and the ways in which the past has come to inform contemporary ideas and identities. Assu infuses his work with wry humour to open the dialogue towards the use of consumerism, branding, and technology as totemic representation. Within this, his work deals with the loss of language and cultural resources, and the effects of colonization upon the Indigenous people of North America.

His work has been accepted into the National Gallery of Canada, Seattle Art Museum, Vancouver Art Gallery, Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Burke Museum at the University of Washington, Hydro Quebec, Lotto Quebec, and the Audain Museum, and is in various other public and private collections across Canada, the United States, and the UK.

Assu is Ligwilda'xw (We Wai Kai) of the Kwakwaka'wakw nations. He graduated from Emily Carr University (2002) and was the recipient of the distinguished alumni award in 2006. He received the BC Creative Achievement Award in First Nations art in 2011 and was long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2012, 2013, and 2015. Assu is an MFA candidate at Concordia University, while he currently works and lives in South Surrey.

(Source: Sonny Assu, "Biography," accessed July 8, 2016. <http://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/biography>)

"Shedding light on the dark, hidden history that Canada continues to harbour towards the Indigenous people is a main driving force behind my work. I often use humour as a way to ease the viewer in or out of the conversations I create, and the use of autobiographical components is my way of placing a human face on the contemporary and historical realities of being an Indigenous person in Canada...

“I use painting, sculpture, large-scale installations, print, and photography as a way to challenge our Western civilization’s consumption culture through introspection of our consumer-driven monolithic ways.

“By melding Kwakwaka’wakw art, cultural and societal structures with various Western art movements, I am challenging and persisting that consumerism, branding, and technology are new modes of totemic representation.”

(Source: Sonny Assu, “General Artist Statement,” accessed July 8, 2016.

<http://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/general-artist-statement>)

TERRANCE HOULE (B. 1975, IN CALGARY, ALBERTA)

Born in Calgary, Alberta, and raised on the Great Plains of North America, Terrance Houle is an internationally recognized interdisciplinary media artist and a proud member of the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe).

Involved with Aboriginal communities all his life, he has travelled to reservations throughout North America participating in Powwow dancing and native ceremonies. Houle makes use of performance, photography, video and film, music, and painting in his work. Likewise, Houle’s practice includes various tools of mass dissemination such as billboards and vinyl bus signage.

Houle graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design in 2003 with a BFA Major in Fibre. His groundbreaking art quickly garnered him significant accolades and opportunities. In 2003, Houle received an invitation to participate in the Thematic Residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. This residency’s focus was on thirty-four international Indigenous people exploring issues of colonization and communion. In 2004, his work in short video and film won the award for Best Experimental Film at the Toronto ImagineNATIVE Film Festival. In 2006, Houle received the Enbridge Emerging Artist Award, presented at the mayor’s luncheon for the arts. Houle’s work has been exhibited across Canada, the United States, Australia, the UK, and Europe. Terrance Houle’s first major solo exhibition, GIVN’R, opened at PLUG-IN Institute for Contemporary Art in Winnipeg, Manitoba. GIVN’R is a small retro-exhibition of his works in film, video, performance, installation, mixed media, and photography between the years 2003 and 2009.

Houle lives and maintains his art practice in Calgary.

(Source: Terrance Houle, “About,” accessed July 8, 2016. <http://www.terrancehouleart.com/about.html>)

MERYL MCMASTER (B. 1988, IN OTTAWA, ONTARIO)

Meryl McMaster is a Canadian-based artist and a graduate in photography from the Ontario College of Art and Design. Her artistic practice begins with photography, evoking a journey that follows a path of self-discovery. She is interested in exploring questions of how we construct our sense of self through lineage, history and culture. McMaster's practice extends beyond straight photography by incorporating other artistic media into how she builds images and expresses her ideas. McMaster's resulting work takes advantage of both the spontaneity of photography and the manual production of props or sculptural garments, performance and self-reflection. McMaster's work unravels identity and subjectivity as something that is never complete, but always in process and invariably formed from within.

(Source: "Meryl McMaster," accessed July 8, 2016. <http://merylmcmaster.com/home.html>)

MARIANNE NICOLSON (B. 1969, IN COMOX, BRITISH COLUMBIA)

Marianne Nicolson ('Tayagila'ogwa) is an artist of Scottish and Dzawada'enuxw First Nations descent. The Dzawada'enuxw People are a member tribe of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Her training encompasses both traditional Kwakwaka'wakw forms and culture, and Western European-based art practice. She has completed a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design (1996), and an MFA (1999), a Masters in Linguistics and Anthropology (2005), and a PhD in Linguistics, Anthropology and Art History (2013) at the University of Victoria. She has exhibited her artwork locally, nationally, and internationally as a painter, photographer, and installation artist; has written and published numerous essays and articles; and has participated in multiple speaking engagements. Her practice engages with issues of Aboriginal histories and politics arising from a passionate involvement in cultural revitalization and sustainability.

"My work stems from a strong belief in the value of Indigenous philosophies and ways of being on the land. It is also driven by a mandate for social justice and the well being of all peoples. Art, writing, performance, and academics are all platforms for the expression of these ideas. Fundamentally, it is about communication, resolution and inspiration. My inquiry questions the social and political contexts which frame the existence of my own Nation, the Dzawada'enuxw of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. Our history, both magnificent and tragic, is deeply rooted in the lands we inhabit, the Kingcome Watershed and the Broughton Archipelago. Since contact, this relationship has been threatened by outside forces and we are under duress to hold on to our traditional ways of being. My practice is an attempt to manifest these philosophies into contemporary spaces and conversations. My hope is that through this process of expression the ideas remain alive and others

can experience their value. I do this because I believe that Indigenous worldviews can benefit all peoples, in particular our notions of community connection to one another and to the land.”

(Source: Marianne Nicolson, “Bio” and “Artist Statement,” accessed July 8, 2016.

<http://www.themedicineproject.com/marianne-nicolson.html>)

THE ARTWORKS IN THIS GUIDE ARE PART OF THE ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA'S PERMANENT COLLECTION

The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria has an extensive permanent collection of more than 18,000 works that reflects three main areas: our Asian art holdings include the most comprehensive collection of Japanese art in Canada; our historical collections feature Canadian and international works; and our contemporary art collection features national and international artists, with a particular commitment to Canadian artists and those from British Columbia and the local regions.

We hope you enjoyed this guide!

We would love to hear what you learned. Send us information about how your class explored these ideas—photos, videos, journal entries—so this learning can inspire others!

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