

Powerful Pictures:

REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE Middle and Secondary Levels

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!

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EXPLORE FREE lesson plans for Middle and High School grades!

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

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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, in colour.

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 19 and 28. 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 18

Artist Information and Images begin on page 19

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 is the mainstream media supporting established modes of storytelling? How is it working to expand and decolonize the way it reports the news?



How does the media influence ideas of difference and/or belonging? How are the artists in this guide playing with these ideas in their work?

Why do the artists featured in this guide create the works of art they do? What questions do you think they want us to ask ourselves?



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

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



What are some of the social and ethical implications of creating works of art that represent the “other” (ethical implications concern questions about whether something is morally right or wrong)? Do you think there is a difference between how artists represent the “other” and how news media or popular culture represents the “other”?

How can we use art to explore, investigate, and begin to solve complex issues in our communities?



How does art help us explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and/or belonging?

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 is going on in this artwork? Why do you say that?
- What story do you think the artist is trying to tell?
- 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 33) 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.

Suggested Activities:

CHOOSE ONE OR DO ALL THREE!



These activities are just a few examples of projects inspired by one of the artists included in this guide.

Feel free to create your own version!

ACTIVITY 1: FOUND SCULPTURE OR PERFORMANCE ART

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

Overview: 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, or narrative, with them. For Assu, the narrative changes depending on what environment he places the objects in (for example, in a museum the object becomes an artifact; in a gift shop, a commodity; in a commercial gallery, 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 constructing the narratives.

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, camera/phone, 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. As a class, research the land around your school.

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

2. As a class, explore your school grounds and begin to collect objects for use in your art project.

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. Explore the land around your school. What objects can you find that could help you tell a story as Assu has done? Can you find anything that would have been on the land before European settlers arrived in the area? Perhaps you can only find more recent objects—no problem! Choose at least four or five objects or groups of objects (i.e., if you want to include blades of grass, you can take a handful; just be sure not to take more than you need).

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

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

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

You can do this as a class in the computer lab or on your own at home as a homework assignment. In either case, you should print out an image of the work(s) you have chosen and write a one-page paper about them. 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... Remember that art is a cultural trace, and all forms of culture have the potential to be considered art.

Note: You do not have to choose a historical work. These artistic cultures are alive and thriving. You may want to try to find a contemporary artist working today.

4. Using the artwork(s) you researched and Assu's series included in this guide as inspiration, create one of the following art projects:

- A. A Found Sculpture
- B. A Performance Art Piece

A) A Found Sculpture

Materials: Found objects, camera/phone, glue, tape, paper, etc., as needed, supports for your sculpture, writing materials

Process:

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

2. Once you have completed your sculpture, photograph it in different locations around the school (your classroom, the office, the basketball court, the library...anywhere you think could help you tell a story).

3. Write an artist's statement about your sculpture. Why did you choose the materials you did? How did your research on First Nations art and Assu's work inspire you? How does your work connect to the land around you and its history? What story are you trying to tell?

4. As part of a class exhibition, display your work alongside other students' work. This could take the form of displaying your work in the hallway, holding a "mini exhibition" in your class and inviting other classes to come see your work, having an online exhibit, etc.; the possibilities are endless!

B) A Performance Art Piece

Materials: Found objects, camera/phone, writing materials

Process:

1. Drawing inspiration from the artworks you researched, create and film or record your own performance art piece as a homage or response. It is important that you don't simply copy the artwork using your materials. Instead, use your own ideas distilled from your research and your found objects to create a work of art that is unique to you. Your performance art can take a number of forms. It could be a dance, a story, a song, an

intervention (creating art in the landscape around you). You could even film yourself making a sculpture. The possibilities are endless!

2. Once you have conceptualized and recorded your performance art piece, write an artist's statement about your work. Why did you choose the performance you did? How did your research on First Nations art and Assu's work inspire you? How does your work connect to the land around you and its history? What story are you trying to tell?

3. As part of a class exhibition, share your work alongside other students' work. This could take the form of a live performance in the school or on the school grounds, sharing video documentation of a performance in a class "mini exhibition"; the possibilities are endless!

Summarize/reflect:

- Brainstorm some of the key issues this project addressed. What did it leave out?
- Are there issues you want to keep exploring? What questions do you 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 your school is located in to help keep that language and culture alive.

Inspired by the research you did on contemporary First Nations artists, your 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 2: MEDIA LITERACY

Objective: Explore the concept of media literacy. By engaging with the news media and popular culture, examine some of the ways images are used to create meaning and tell stories, while thinking critically about whose stories are being told and by whom.

Overview: “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.”

This quote from Terrance Houle’s artist statement helps frame this project. In his work, Houle confronts Western conventions of representing Indigenous people in order to start a discussion about storytelling and mainstream media. This activity will help you engage in this dialogue in your own unique way.

Note: While Houle calls his work “*Urban Indian*,” an urban slang phrase that describes an Indigenous person who lives in the city, the word “Indian” is not commonly used today. See definitions of “Aboriginal,” “First Nations,” and “Indigenous Peoples” in the Key Words/Concepts section on pages 29-31 for further discussion.

Materials:

- Terrance Houle’s *Urban Indian Series* (#7)
- Projector
- Images of “popular” cultural representations of First Nations people—e.g., tourist dolls representing Indigenous people, screen shots or clips of representations of Indigenous people in movies or tv shows, etc.
- Access to a news outlet or media outlet (This could be the television news, an internet news site, a newspaper, a tv show, a movie, a radio, a blog, a podcast, a vlog...)
- Writing materials
- Access to a computer

Key Words/Concepts: Cultural Biases, Mainstream Media, Media Literacy, Media Stereotypes, Other, Self

Process:

1. As a class, share images of “popular” cultural representations of First Nations people and discuss “media stereotypes” and “media literacy” using Houle’s work and one or two “popular” images as a source for discussion.

Discussion topics could include the difference in media outlets, the people who run the outlets, the process of meaning making and storytelling, and definitions of the self and the “other.”

2. As individuals and in groups, participate in a “think/pair/share” exercise involving these images.

Take five to ten minutes to look at the images. Think about what you see in the images, what the class discussed, and what assumptions these images/objects potentially lead non-Indigenous cultures to make about Indigenous peoples of Canada. Once you have had a chance to make notes, pair up with another student and take ten minutes to share your ideas.

3. As a class, explore your reaction to these works.

This could include a discussion of the source of these images/objects—e.g., an object in a tourist shop has a different purpose than an object in a museum or art gallery. What could this mean for how we interpret the work?

4. Following this discussion, break into groups of four or five students. As homework, each member of the group will look for news clippings, photos, media clips, blog posts, tourist objects, sports logos, etc., that represent Indigenous people in some way.

5. In your group, share the images or objects you have found with the other students, working together to deconstruct the different images.

Consider questions like the following:

- a. What was the perceived intention of the creator/manufacturer in creating these objects?
- b. How could the image(s) affect non-Indigenous people’s perception of Indigenous people?
- c. Where do the stereotypical representations included in the images/objects come from?
- d. How does Houle’s work help break down these stereotypes? Or how does it help us rethink our perceptions?

6. Pair up with another group and share your images and findings.

7. As a class, discuss the images/objects and how they could reinforce cultural biases. Brainstorm related issues that could possibly affect both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

8. Create a collage or story exploring your reaction to the artworks discussed in class and with your group, as well as your reaction to the works discovered during your research.

Questions you could address in your collage or story include the following:

- What questions did the discussions bring up for you?
- What were some of the most interesting things you learned or discovered?
- What surprised you?
- How did the discussions make you feel? What did you learn about yourself?

You could “retell” a story you think is “wrong” or doesn’t accurately depict the person being represented.

You can create a collage digitally or using the “cut and paste” method. Similarly, your story could be handwritten or typed and annotated with drawings, sketches, images, etc. The possibilities are endless!

9. Share your story or collage with the class in an exhibition or presentation.

Summarize/reflect:

- Brainstorm the issues raised by this activity that you feel most strongly about.
- What do you think needs to change in our media culture?
- 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?

How will you change the story?

ACTIVITY 3: CURATING THE CLASSROOM

Objective: Explore the process of creating narratives. By curating a small classroom- or school-based exhibition, start to understand the processes that take place when images are used to create meaning and develop a narrative or story.

Materials:

- The internet
- Projector
- The images included in this guide, with copies of their background information and artist biographies
- Wall space
- Writing materials

Key Words/Concepts: Curating, Media Literacy, “Other,” Self

Process:

- 1. As a class, view and discuss the artwork included in this guide and complete the “Media Literacy” activity. Then break out into five or six groups.**
- 2. In your group, read the background/context for the selected images, as well as the artist biographies. Make sure you understand the information.**
- 3. Either at school in the computer lab, or as homework if there aren’t enough computers, research the artists included in this guide and their work. Search for five more images that you think speak to ideas of the self and the “other.”**

These additional images can be works of art, video clips, images found in the media, etc.

- 4. In your group, participate in a “think/pair/share” exercise involving what you learned from your research.**

Pair up with another student in your group and take about ten minutes to share your ideas. Then come back together as a group and share your ideas with other group members.

- 5. As a class, discuss what you learned about how the self and the “other” are represented in art. Discuss how these narratives are perpetuated in the media and popular culture.**

6. Return to your group and use the four images from the guide as well as the five images you have selected to curate a narrative exhibition in the classroom.

The goal is to tell a story about how the media, popular culture, and artists represent the self and the “other.”

7. Present your narrative exhibition to the class. Watch as the other groups present their exhibitions.

8. As a class, discuss the issues that emerged as you curated your exhibition.

The following are some questions you could address:

- a. Who was included in and who was left out of the narrative?
- b. Were you aware you were making decisions to include certain groups and leave others out?
- c. What other issues came up during this activity?

Summarize/reflect:

- Comment on the similarities and differences you notice in the exhibitions.
- Brainstorm the issues this project addressed or left out.
- What could/would you do differently if you did this again? Who would you ensure was included?
- 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:

Work to connect your class with a community organization that deals with one or two of the issues addressed in the call to action.

HOW WILL YOU CHANGE THE STORY?

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 -

Artifacts of Authenticity deals with the issues of reclaiming identity and space by documenting the waste of the dominant affluent culture. Through a series of photographs, Assu has explored the conventions of anthropological spaces as the perceived voice of authenticity for Indigenous artifacts.

Photographing discarded cedar objects in-situ, *Artifacts of Authenticity* challenges the three eyes of “authority” placed upon Aboriginal arts and culture: The anthropology institution, the commercial art gallery and the stereotypical tourist trap. Through these images, Assu utilizes the camera as a conceptual record of “authority” to capture the cedar objects in circumstances staged solely for the camera.

The series is an inversion of authoritative voice of the anthropologists; the gallerist; the curators; the historians and the purveyors of the stereotype for the tourist. It calls into question the meaning of authenticity of what or who is considered Aboriginal.—Sonny Assu (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 33 for detailed bio):

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. (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:

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? 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. The work serves to question ideas of tradition, identity and culture that are often negated or replaced by Western cultural standards. Also, in 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.—Terrance Houle. (from Terrance Houle, "Terrance Houle," accessed August 22, 2016 <http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/hide/terrance.html>)

Brief Artist Bio (see page 34 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:

In-Between Worlds explores the mixing and transforming of bi-cultural identities—Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian. This series addresses the idea of liminality, of being betwixt and between cultural identities and histories. *In-Between Worlds* is a sequence of moments that appear out of the ordinary and can be interpreted as being in a state of suspended belief. Talisman and prop-like sculptures become extensions of the body that suggest a collaging of identities. *In-Between Worlds* is a dialogue in which the viewer questions themselves and the world in new ways.—Meryl McMaster (from Meryl McMaster, “*In-Between Worlds*,” accessed July 8, 2016.

http://merylmcmaster.com/section/163115_In_Between_Worlds.html)

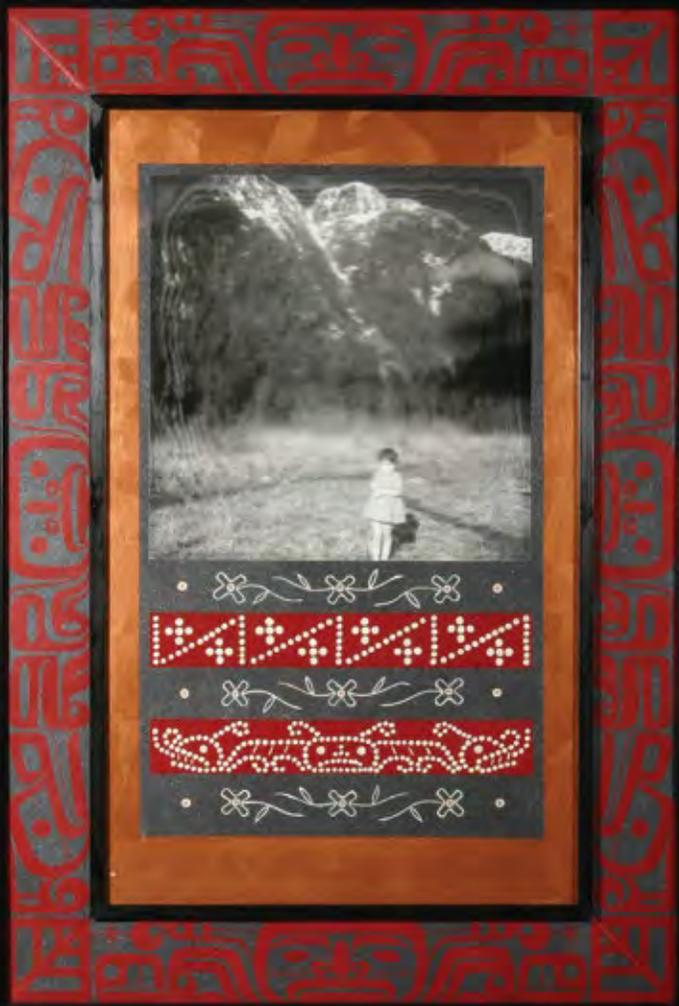
Brief Artist Bio (see page 35 for detailed bio):

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. 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>)

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 outer 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

It seems to me that I tend to work in series. As I'm creating one piece, I realize that maybe something more can be said with the next one; they reflect each other and build off each other.—Marianne Nicolson, in *Marianne Nicolson: The Return of Abundance* (Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2007), 32.

Brief Artist Bio (see page 35 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.

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)

Cultural Biases: The phenomenon of interpreting and judging phenomena by standards inherent to one’s own culture. (source: The Oxford Dictionary)

Curating: The act of selecting and interpreting works of art. The person who does this work is a curator. Contemporary curators also work with living artists to develop exhibition content and programming.

Ethical: Relating to beliefs about what is morally right and wrong.

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). You will notice that Aboriginal, First Nations and Indigenous are all used in this guide. Our intention is for this to be an evolving resource, responsive to communities’ needs and feedback.

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, 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.

Land Rights: Collective rights that flow from Aboriginal peoples’ continued use and occupation of certain areas. They are inherent rights that Aboriginal peoples have practised and enjoyed since before European contact. (source: First Nations and Indigenous Studies, University of BC, “Land & Rights,” accessed July 8, 2016. <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/land-rights.html>)

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)

Media Stereotypes: As used in the media, a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

“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.

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)

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

Self: Me. (How you view yourself)

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. Within this, I deal with the loss of language, loss of cultural resources, and the effects of colonization upon the Indigenous people of North America.

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 & 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)

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 Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University of Art and Design (1996), a Masters in Fine Arts (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," accessed August 24, 2016, <http://www.mariannenicolson.com/bio.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!

schoolprograms@aggv.ca