

# there are so many stars

Hannah Claus Peter Morin

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## **THIS EXHIBITION IS A BEGINNING.**

Historically, colonization has removed and separated the contributions of artists from Indigenous societies, often leaving artists unnamed and unknown in its archives. It removes artwork made by artists from the possibility (threat) of creative agency. As artists, we take and hold the responsibility of remembering these contributions and honour how they have influenced our thinking.

*Peter: I remember the first time seeing Tahltan artwork outside of the museum. I was twenty-five. Mom and I were visiting around. We were at Ray and Annie's place at Tahltan. Annie made tea. Mom told her—Peter likes Art. At hearing this, Annie disappeared into her room and returned with a beaded belt. She placed the belt in my hands and asked me—So what do you think of this? It was the first time I had seen older Tahltan artwork outside of museum glass cases. I held a one hundred year old Tahltan artwork in my hands. My first thought was to get better at beadwork.*

*Hannah: The Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen means "the words that come before all else". This reciprocal spoken acknowledgement for the Haudenosaunee is to recognize and affirm the relationships that make up our experience and existence. It enacts the idea of relationship through what is said, as well as in the way it is told. It highlights the foundational importance of relationship.*

Naming these artists recognizes relationships and continuity.

## **IT IS EMBODYING ART TERRITORIES. ART AS TERRITORY.**

As artists who work through materials and process, the created object becomes a metaphor for this memory. There is a cultural responsibility to acknowledge the gifts you inherit. The ceremony of trade by artists on these physical territories goes back to the beginning of time. This is reciprocity.

As Indigenous people who no longer live connected to our communities, or who maybe never lived connected to our communities, we continuously negotiate relationships with culture, body and land. The act of making by artists can become a place of connection or relationship. We experience art territories as fluid and transformative.

*Hannah: Sky woman fell from her world and was placed on the back of the great turtle. She danced and sang the world into being through spreading the earth from the bottom of the ocean over the turtle's back with her feet. She planted the medicines she had brought from her world in the sky. Her actions are creation. She is an artist.*

In this collaboration of artwork and exhibition, we choose to privilege an Indigenous acknowledgement of experience and space over chronology.

**THIS IS THE GROUND WE STAND ON.**

As Indigenous visual artists/curators, how do we create knowledge and the structure that houses it? This act of looking decentres the colonial affect. This deep shift acknowledges the act of making and aesthetic values which shape the object.

*Peter: In one Tahltan story, there is no light. The world is in darkness. The people live in a world that has absence of light. The Big Crow decides to find the light. When the big Crow finds the light, he shares it with everyone. The Big Crow flies to the tallest tree and throws the light out towards the space. In one read the light is the light. In another read the light is knowledge. In another read, the Big Crow is an artist and the light is the art.*

We recognize the gallery space as a sacred space and as an embodiment of our Indigenous arts community. We propose to utilise the scope of making as a respectful act of remembering the contributions of Indigenous artists.

**WE HAVE BEEN THINKING OF OUR STARS.**

because the reality they know may be too different from their reality once "discovered",  
because they are accessing knowledge that others may not think should be shared,  
because they are accessing knowledge that others may not understand,  
because they may not be producing work others think they should,  
because they may not be "brown enough",  
because they are asked to speak for the experience of "the many",  
because they need to do so much with not enough time and resources,  
because academics need images,  
because canada forgets them too quickly,  
because we can forget them too quickly,  
because we forget that artists help us to remember our history.

— Hannah Claus & Peter Morin

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