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Tansi! Hello everybody, my name is Kent Monkman. I'm Cree, I'm from Manitoba, I belong to the Fisher River First Nation and I moved away from Manitoba after I graduated high school. And I've been an artist my entire life. I guess I had that identity affirmed in me pretty young, I was probably four or five and I knew I was an artist. I would obsess over drawing horses. I had some books, my family had some books of art history, books of horses, and I would obsess over drawing these horses. So, I grew up from the time I was very young knowing that I was an artist. And really, the question for me, was how does one actually become a professional artist? And that was where I had to kind of figure that out. I'm going to kind of walk you through a little background of my painting practice, because it's an evolution. You don't just one day wake up and figure out exactly what you want to say or even know how to say it.

After I graduated high school, I was fortunate that I had some teachers in high school that saw some talent there and they were like, "Oh, you should go study illustration, you know, because if you study illustration you can actually make a living, you know, doing what you do." And I thought, "Hey, that's pretty cool, I think I'm going to try that." I was good at drawing and I was good at painting, so that kind of came naturally.

I moved to the Toronto area, and I studied, and I learned how to become an illustrator, and I found a way to become a freelance illustrator and that pretty much funded my art practice. Right away I was making oil paintings, right away I was starting to show in galleries around Toronto. And Victoria, here, actually bought one of my early works! I'm grateful for the support that I got from people very early on because an artistic path is very, very long, and you need to be supported all along the way. And there were different points in my career where I was really struggling financially and even was questioning my next step forward, and we're fortunate here in Canada that we're also supported quite well by the funding bodies, the grants: the Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council. And I remember just feeling really down, I had been doing it for twelve or fifteen years and I just felt like I wasn't really quite cracking, it wasn't really moving in the right direction. And I got this Chalmers grant, and this Chalmers grant bought me the time that I needed to make some really pivotal work. So, I'm going to talk a bit about that body of work and how my work shifted and how I really found my sort of more mature direction as an artist. And so, for any of you young artists, it's okay to kind of feel a little lost. But take your time, and just really spend that time learning your craft because that's so important in understanding the actual *how* you make the work.

And so...I'm going to start talking about this: this is called *The Prayer Language* series. For that first twelve or fifteen years, I worked as an abstract painter, basically. Semi-representational work, I called it. Because there were elements inside that you can see, there's these kinds of figures ghosted in behind these layers of paint. And I had been working with acrylic paint in an abstract way, moving it around, pouring it onto canvasses that were horizontal, moving it around with squeegees and just really trying to figure out how to make paintings. And at that point, I thought, well, the way you make a painting, or the way you make your mark as a painter, you have to find that unique mark. It has to be a very unique drip, or splash, or stripe,

or whatever it is. That was my quest at that time, to find that unique way of making that mark on canvas. This took time and experimentation. I was mixing gel medium and making very semi-transparent layers of painting and ghosting them over and putting iridescent paint in. It was like chemistry in a way and I was quite satisfied with the end result. And the themes I was exploring had to do with the impact of Christianity on Indigenous communities and this writing that you see here, this is all Cree syllabics. I'd been painting in my studio one day and digging around in some boxes and I found this prayer book that had belonged to my parents. My father was Cree and his family had been Christians since probably two generations before him. My grandmother had gone to residential school in Brandon, and Cree was called the prayer language in this reserve where my great-grandmother was born, in St. Peter's, Manitoba. And so, I thought, well this way of making a mark, these syllabics, really speak to who I am, so I'm going to work with these syllabics because that's something I can readily identify as something unique to how I make a mark. Each one of these paintings is a Christian hymn.

The titles of the hymn became the titles of the paintings. You can see that there are these ghosted below, or these bodies wrestling. So, at that time I was also thinking about colonized sexuality. Why do we have homophobia in our Indigenous communities when there was a time when Indigenous peoples accepted Two-Spirited people? It was through this process of colonization and the impact of the Church and missionaries that we became homophobic in our communities. I really wanted to deal with that in my work, and so I kind of brought these two things together: these homoerotic images of men wrestling, submerged between these layers of Cree syllabics. And the paintings got bigger and bigger and I was really enjoying it because I was building scaffolds, you know, I was crawling overtop of these paintings and pouring the paint. It was all about the chemistry of the paint and finding and discovering exactly how long the paint should dry before I squeegeed it, and all of that. It was really fun in terms of, you know, learning what the paint could do, and how to make a mark. But after making this series of paintings, I realized, after showing them and kind of explaining them to people that people would sort of puzzle over them. They were left outside the work somehow. And I thought, you know, after striving to make that unique mark as a painter, here I was with something that was leaving people outside this message that I thought was really important. And I thought, why after all these years of painting in an abstract way, why have I accepted this sort of paired down vocabulary of painting when painting in fact is a much more extensive, deeper language of communication? And here I'd accepted the abstract expressionist reduced language of painting. And I thought, you know, I'm not a white guy from New York, why am I painting like this?

So, I decided that I was going to go back to the drawing board. With all my work, I work small with watercolour or pencil sketches and this was a way for me to identify and be more clear about what I wanted to say. And I thought, first of all, I need to be more clear about how those figures are because I'm really talking about, you know, homosexuality here, I'm talking about Indigenous people accepting homosexuality and having it repressed by the church. So, I then identified one as a brown man, and one as a white man. And from there, one became a "Cowboy" and one became an "Indian." And then I thought, well, the background is really important too. Where are they? And what are they fighting about? And so, I thought, they're fighting over land. Then I think, well, landscape is really important because those are the

paintings that represent the landscape, or the land, here in North America. So of course, I started looking right away at the Group of Seven, because, you know, living here in Canada, the Group of Seven are everywhere. These paintings were also very graphic, so I thought okay, this will adapt well to this style I'm using here with Cree syllabics and the use of text. And then I decided that I was going to drop the syllabics and started using text from these pulp Western novels. So, I would find the most kind of racist, violent passages I could and then I would overlay it with these images of men grappling and struggling with these Group of Seven landscapes. But then I thought, the more I looked at landscape painting—the history of landscape painting in North America—the more I started looking at the art history of North America and the story that was being told, or was told of European settlers coming to North America.

And then I saw this painting and a little light bulb went off. And I thought, it's been years since I actually drew or made paintings in a representational style, can I still do that? Because as an illustrator, I thought that was something that I do to make money and I kind of rejected it. Because I thought "real artists" don't make things look like anything—they just squiggle paint around. So, I thought if I could just kind of forget that whole idea, that ego of the brushstroke, the ego of that individual mark, and just go in "stealth mode" and drop that hand, and submerge myself into that art history, I could challenge these narratives that were being told in this art history. And the more I looked at these narratives, the more interesting it got because then I realized that the themes I was dealing with in my abstract paintings were very similar. The Christian ideology transplanting itself into North America.

This painting is called *Daniel Boone's First View of the Kentucky Valley* and it's a painting by William Tylee Ranney. So, I thought, I'm going to have a stab at that. So, I did: *Daniel Boone's First View of the Kentucky Valley*.

And you know, it was a timid move in that direction. Timid in the sense of...okay...timid in the sense of scale, okay? But it was a small little painting, it was probably 8x10. And I thought, "Oh, okay this is interesting...I can do this. I can do this." That's when I realized that with the text, you still see this ghosted layer of text. I thought, that's still too heavy-handed, that's an affectation. I'm just going to get rid of that and submerge my hand completely and disappear my hand into these paintings.

This is a painting by Albert Bierstadt. And Albert Bierstadt was someone, you know, I saw these paintings that I was like, "Oh my god, these are insane!" First of all, they were these monumental paintings with these romantic vistas and you can see the presence of God basically shining out of the heavens, they felt kind of biblical in a sense. And you can see the players, Indigenous people, miniscule keepers of nature, just bit players in this large scheme of creation here. So, I decided to really start putting my energy towards imitating these paintings because I thought, okay, this is a new challenge. This is really hard to do this. So, I completely changed my direction and decided to work with this representational language.

So, here's Thomas Cole, he was one of the Hudson River School painters. This is upstate New York, but also known as the *Garden of Eden*. And then John Mix Stanley was another artist that I was looking at. And you can see here, he's painted himself into the work. I thought, "Oh, okay, that's interesting. Here's an artist who is also putting himself in the work and telling this story about his own travels, and his own heroic deeds as a hunter and how 'butch' he was, right?"

I also started looking at the work of George Catlin. And here George Catlin wrote about in his journals how he was considered to be a shaman by the Indigenous communities that he was visiting. And here he is making a portrait. And he's painted himself making this portrait.

So, this is a personage named We'wha, who was a Zuni Two-Spirited person who had standing in her nation and represented her nation in Washington. And I thought, if I was to have my own character, if I was to represent myself in my own work, that I would want to honour the tradition of Two-Spirit culture in North America by creating someone that could really represent that acceptance of gender and sexuality that was present before the European missionaries arrived and started to suppress it. We'wha was my hero and I decided I was going to create an alter-ego based on her.

So, Miss Chief was born. And Miss Chief arrived loud and clear in a small little painting. And her look, her first look, came from none other than Cher. And I love Cher, I grew up watching Cher, *The Sonny and Cher Show*. This beautiful, glamorous Chiefton's outfit worn by Cher, to me, really resonated too because it was gender-bending, cross-cultural dressing. And I thought it was kind of the perfect look for Miss Chief in her debut painting. But Cher didn't do it first, Molly Spotted Owl, actually. This is a photograph of a Penobscot woman who was dancing in these female reviews in Paris in the early twentieth century and I thought, okay, well there is also this tradition of performance culture. So even before I was even thinking about a performance character, I was looking at images like this in order to construct Miss Chief as this painter that was going to live in the work. And then I realized, not only is she going to be an artist living in that time period, or that genre of painting, but she was also going to turn the lens and reverse the gaze on the European male. So, the European male became her subject.

About a year after that, I realized that Miss Chief had to come to life as a performance character and I was invited to do a weekend residency at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. And at that time the McMichael had just undergone a battle on the board, because the McMichael's had founded the museum to basically uphold the very conservative idea of Canadian art being mostly the Group of Seven with Indigenous art being in its little ghetto, marginalized gallery. Some friends of mine, Mary Anne Barkhouse and Michael Belmore, had made a piece and it had been removed off the grounds and put out by the dumpster. So, the place was kind of sliding backwards because the McMichael's were kind of pushing the place backwards in time. So, I went in and did a tour through the museum and in the First Peoples Gallery there was an Edward Curtis film being screened as this kind of voice of authority. And for those of you who don't know him, he was a romantic. Well, he was a photographer from nineteenth century, early twentieth century but he created these very romanticized images of Indigenous peoples and he made this one film called *In the Land of the Headhunters*. So, I

thought, there's so many problematic things with the McMichael right now I need to do something very aggressive right now to make a statement. I decided to do this performance piece where Miss Chief finds these two European males and she brings them into her studio and she dresses them up to look more European and then paints their portrait. And the text that she delivers is all based on the texts of George Catlin and Paul Kane, these artists that had made very sweeping generalizations about Indigenous peoples. So, it was really fun to sort of flip the gaze against the European settler and it was really, very revealing about how simplistic it became. That was a very auspicious day. It was like thirty degrees in August and we went and occupied Tom Thomson's shack and we made a Super 8 film that day and it's called *Group of Seven Inches*. So, Miss Chief was born on a hot August afternoon and we had the best time. And I had realized that I had now sort of become a performance artist. And at that point I was also shifting my filmmaking practice because I had just made some conventional films with sync sound. So, there I was with this small crew, we were shooting Super 8 film without sound, and we had a blast. It was a great day for bringing Miss Chief to life but also just changing how I made my films.

Shortly after I was invited to England to do a performance and I staged a very similar thing with Robin Hood and Friar Tuck. And they have an archery contest. At that point, I had started to think of Miss Chief's backstory as this character that could live in art history. Who was she? And what was driving her? I started to trace performance art history and Indigenous peoples performing for European audiences. This group was actually performing with George Catlin in his Indian Gallery, as he called it, in Paris and London. So, I kind of imagined that Miss Chief was one of Catlin's protégés early on and she was performing with him. So, I did a suite of photographs called *The Emergence of a Legend*, sort of imagining her as this performance character. This is her as a sharp shooter in a Wild West show. Here she is an early silent film star. And then, you know, getting behind the camera as the director.

Here's another painting again by Thomas Cole, showing the expulsion from Eden, the expulsion from Paradise. And I realized the more I looked at these paintings, the more fertile the ground was for Miss Chief to really start rampaging through this art history. So here she is, this painting is called *Rebellion*. Here she's trying to seduce this Mounty into her canoe that's stuffed with Louis Vuitton luggage. And so, I set about to kind of start interacting with real moments in history, Canadian history, and this was really the beginning of her interaction with historical figures and challenging, questioning the history as it has been written. In this trilogy of three large paintings—these were also my first large paintings—this was still me in the studio, by myself, I hadn't hired any assistants yet and I was just brushstroke by brushstroke doing everything by myself. And I made these three paintings and I imagined that Miss Chief was running away with Thomas Scott. And Thomas Scott was this Orangeman from Ontario that had irritated Louis Riel and provoked the beginning of this violence in the West. So, I sort of situated Miss Chief in the middle of this cataclysmic moment in Canadian history. And here they are as these star-crossed lovers running away from this impending storm. And this is quoting a painting by Pierre Auguste Cot from the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

And then I started to look at more art history. I didn't limit myself to just Canadian or North American art history. I was looking at *The Storm*, and here in this painting, I'm quoting Goya. So, it just got deeper and the more confident I got with representational painting, the more I realized how little I knew and how I had so much to learn as a painter and I had to really apply myself. And you could look at that painting and if you didn't see Miss Chief there, you wouldn't know who made it, and I loved that. I loved that now the hand of the artist was in "stealth mode" and I could really start fucking with these narratives.

So here she is: she's upstaging the execution scene of Thomas Scott by fainting. And then the final in this trilogy is the scene of grief, where she's grieving at his grave, and lo and behold, behind her, comes this Indigenous priest. So, further complicating how we read these narratives.

There's a lot of work in between that stuff, but I wanted to kind of bring us up close to the present because I had another epiphany when I stood in front of this painting. I was in Prado and I had never been there before and I was looking at these history paintings. And this painting just kind of grabbed me by the throat and it blew me away. And I thought, you know, painting has the ability to not only hold these narratives but have emotional weight and resonance. And this was an execution scene of these men that were being lined up to be executed in a firing squad, and it's probably, fourteen feet by twenty, or something. It's just massive. The figures are life-size. The impact that that painting had was just so powerful. And I decided in that moment that I need to do this for Indigenous histories. I need to find a way, I need to improve my painting, I need to find a way to make paintings that have this power. This painting was made 150 years ago and it felt like I was in that moment. I wanted my paintings to have that power to just travel across time and grab people 150 years from now and say: "This happened and this is important." And for all of those paintings that were made that I was looking at that were of this story of North America, there was virtually nothing that had even attempted to talk about the Indigenous experience. Of course, it was told by the European settler, so it was very biased, very subjective. I wanted to see history paintings that spoke about Indigenous experiences here. And so, I needed to improve my game, really. Because this painting was so astonishing in its force, but also how restrained it was in some ways too. And Spanish painters just have such an amazing affinity for the use of black, and I was just in love with this piece, so it just stayed with me.

Fast-forward five years: Barbara Fischer from the Art Museum of Toronto contacted me and said, "Canada 150 is looming, would you like to do a response exhibition?" And of course, I just jumped at that opportunity. I had already been making works that were critical of the colonial period and I knew that there would be a lot celebrations of Canada. But I wanted this opportunity to ask Canadians to reflect on the Indigenous experience over the last 150 years. So, I set about to do a research period. Barbara had seen some of my other museum projects where I had created works in response to museum objects and paintings and things like that. She found the resources for me to have a year to research. I travelled with my studio manager and we travelled across the country, went into about twelve institutions, pulled out drawers, sent the curators keyword searches and lists of themes and subjects and discovered some

amazing things. And through that period of discovery I started to think about how I could reference that dominant version as we discovered in the museums, but also, create my own images to kind of create another version of this history.

In that period of time, since I started working with the representational work, of course, I started looking at Old Masters paintings more and more and more. And I saw this painting by Caravaggio. And I thought, that's the death of a young woman, it's called *Death of the Virgin*. And I was thinking about Missing and Murdered Women, young teens committing suicide in our communities. And I thought, I need to make a painting that's inspired by this incredible painting. Again, this is my first drawing, and this sketch is about three or four inches. I do these little thumbnail sketches like that to hammer out the composition. And from there, the next stage is a watercolour study to sort out lights and darks. I've been working with assistants now for about eleven or twelve years and in that process, I've had some painters work with me, and then in the last few years I've had a couple of assistants who were really astute at examining my process and we would often just analyze and say: "Well how can we make better work?" And they were asking me, "How can we help you to make better work? And how can we help you to make *more* work?" And so, we realized that we were going to, with *the Shame and Prejudice* exhibition, start using models. And I guess I had been kind of reluctant to use models—I had used them occasionally, but not very often. I would always just draw everything out of my head and from pencil and that's the way I always worked when I worked on my own. But then I thought, okay, I shouldn't be so resistant to photography because it's a tool and Delacroix used photography, and I can do it too. So, we staged this photograph. We did a casting call on Facebook and we brought Indigenous people into my studio and we staged this set up. We lit it in such a way that we would have the kind of lighting on it. And all of this process has kept evolving and improving and improving over the years to a point now to where we've really nailed down all of these aspects in getting this source image to use for paintings. So, from that source image, then it's converted into another colour study, and the colour study is, you know, a couple of feet, maybe 2x3 or 3x4 feet. Small. From that, the final version is done. This exhibition, one of the themes in the exhibition is "the making of." So, you'll see in the exhibition some of Robert Harris's studies. And for me that was fascinating. This exhibition is sort of challenging the construction of this narrative, so I really like that the process is sort of part of it. These are paintings. And so, how does an artist make these paintings?

This image wasn't inspired by a Caravaggio—just kind of something that I had thought about that I wanted to make because I wanted to authorize that moment. That moment where Poundmaker and Big Bear were starved into submissions. The Canadians deliberately starved these people by withholding rations and eventually they had no choice but to surrender, they were really just at the end of their rope. So, I wanted a painting to commemorate that moment where these Chiefs were in leg irons and forced to sign treaties, and put in prison. And that really became an important part of this exhibition. Something that I felt was an important way in honouring these leaders and elevating them to the same stature as the Canadian leaders whose names are on our schools and things like that.

And people have asked me, you know, do you think we should remove John A. Macdonald's name from schools? And you know, that's for you Canadians to make that decision. That's not for me. But I will say that I want to educate Canadians so that you do learn the other histories. So that you do learn Indigenous histories. So that you do learn what your leaders did. Justice Sinclair, who led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was asked that too. And I really respected what he said, and he said: "Well we should not tear down those things as Indigenous people because we're going to attract more energy, and we don't need any more negative vibes." So, he said, "Let's elevate our own leaders." And that's what I believe in and that's what I want to do with my own work and with this exhibition.

So here we are, again, just showing you the process, the watercolour, and moving to staging the shoot in the studio. The study. The final version.

When this exhibition was first shown, we had some extra square footage. There's about two or three chapters that are missing, unfortunately, and one of them is the period of New France. When I was thinking of this story of Canada, I wanted to go back to the period of New France, because the period of New France was before the treaties, before the reserve system, Indigenous people were still players in the economy, they were still participating in the economy, they weren't forced onto reserves, they were moving freely. And I thought this was a good place to begin and so I decided to construct this image, or feeling, of New France. This opulent time, with Baroque paintings. And we were able to borrow this School of Rubens painting from the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

I decided to make this painting called *The Massacre of the Innocents*. I gave these beavers kind of human characteristics, so here they are being trapped.

This is a study that's in the exhibition for a larger painting that was actually commissioned by the Montreal Museum for their section on Canada and New France and it's called *Les Castors du Rois*, and here I have beavers, kind of having human characteristics. There's violence there. You can see in the background, there's a beaver condo. And I love that beaver condo, I got inspiration from this eighteenth century engraving.

So, here I constructed this diorama, and I had been working with that idiom of the museum diorama in my sculptural installation work for a number of years because I grew up going to the Manitoba Museum where I would see these museum dioramas representing Native peoples, you know, basically frozen in time in this pre-contact state. And the Manitoba Museum is right on the main street. In the 1970s, we would take our school trips down there and the worst of Skid Row was right there outside of the museum, the fallout of colonization, Indigenous people wasted, drunk on the street. So, I would go into that museum with my classmates and we would see these kind of "idyllic representations" of my culture, and then step outside, and my classmates would be sort of looking at me for some kind of answer. And I didn't know. I didn't have an explanation. I didn't have any way of even understanding what had happened, myself, much less be able to tell them. So, this exhibition in some ways was also a way to reconcile that. To find the language to talk about that. And unfortunately, the chapters where I use the

dioramas are not here [at the Agnes], but hopefully you'll get a chance to see them at some of the other venues.

So, there is this image of the beaver. The beaver became central. There are three animals that factor into this exhibition as thematic animals, and one is the beaver. The beaver was basically the currency in North America because of the fur trade. So, I created these beaver images—there's a beaver rosary. One of the museum objects I found were these silver rosaries with beavers engraved into them and made by Indigenous peoples. So, for me, that also really spoke to another theme in the exhibition, which was the impact of Christianity and the Church, so it was this kind of blending of these different themes. And you'll notice in the exhibition there's a number of different blending and overlapping of chapters, thematically.

And here's the *Beaver Bacchanal*, there's the beaver condo in the back, and it's also based loosely on that Rubens painting. So, it was a great time...that period of New France.

One of the chapters is about the deliberate starvation of the Plains Indian people. The Bison were being destroyed, and that's the food source for the Plains Indian people. So, I wanted to make an installation that took us from that time of plenty, this opulence of New France, and with these museum objects—these commemorative platters that commemorate Wolfe and Montcalm and the Battle of the Plains of Abraham—it starts in the period of New France and kind of moves down the table. And the table itself becomes desiccated. We made this table to kind of disintegrate, become more desiccated as you get to the end of the table. But you're able to see a view into New France and you can see the opulence...the grapes, the wine grapes, and so forth. And it was a way of connecting the chapters, as well. And then on the walls around this table, we have images of the bison, often by Europeans who had often never seen a bison, so they sometimes look a bit ridiculous. These are pages from books and I love the book. And pages of a book became another theme that factored into the exhibition. There are little booklets here and I hope that you all take one with you.

The didactic panels for this exhibition, I decided that they needed to be written in Miss Chief's voice. I wanted her to narrate this story. And so, I collaborated with my long-time collaborator, Gisèle Gordon, and she wrote these incredible and very concise and moving chapter descriptions. And those are all printed in the little booklet. During the exhibition, we were approached by McClelland & Stewart, and I guess this gentleman saw the exhibition, and he said, "Oh, I'd like to do a book on you." Kind of imagining that it would be a biography on me. They had just done one on Mike Myers. And I thought...and I said, "Well, no, I don't want to do that. But, how about we do Miss Chief's memoir?" So, I pitched them on that idea and they're going to be publishing Miss Chief's memoir, we're working on it right now. So, it's going to come out in 2019. It'll be a very lushly illustrated book, with about 50/50 texts and images. I'm really looking forward to that because we're taking this body of work that I've created over the last fifteen to twenty years and distilling it into this narrative.

At the end of the table I made these *Starvation Plates*. And the idea there was that these were...you can't really see them here, but you see in them in the exhibition, they're archival

images of all these mountains of bison bones. It represents the slaughter of the bison and it also represents the starvation of the Plains Indian people. And just the fact that they're these starvation images on a plate where you'd eat food, for me, was a very powerful statement about that. The bison bones were ground up and made into bone china.

When I first set out to make the exhibition, I thought that the railroad was going to be this driving theme. It sort of factored into this one chapter but the more I looked and looked in the museum collections, it became less and less important. But on that table, there is a number of silverware and things that were representative of the railroad because the railroad was instrumental in getting all those settlers into the West and bringing about that decimation. So here I thought of the railroad as this Trojan horse. And then from this table, you get a view into this other room with another table, which is the table where the Fathers of Confederation are gathered in their meeting at Charlottetown to basically, you know, divide up Canada into provinces. And there was a little stool that I noticed in all of Robert Harris's studies—it's not in all of them—but there was this empty place in front of the table. And I thought that's the perfect place to perch Miss Chief totally nude. Kind of doing that Sharon Stone thing with her legs. And so, all of their eyes are kind of like, you know, puzzled or...well you can see the details in the work. And that painting, you know, this was a copy that exists in the House of Parliament so we contacted the government and said, "Can you please send us a high-res image of this painting?" And I thought I would get just a high-resolution file that I could then print out and work from that, but they sent me this little glossy image in the mail. And we scanned that, and I tried to blow it up, so I did my best to make representative portraits of these people as much as I could. And we relied on Google searches to try and find likenesses elsewhere. But I did my best to make them look themselves as much as possible. And then Miss Chief is sitting on this box of Chateau Miss Chief champagne. And there's champagne scattered about the table, and whiskey and that, because these gatherings were known as these big drunk-ups.

Here are the Harris studies. I also created a series of photographs where I was imagining Miss Chief interacting with these Daddies of Confederation. And here she's these five different biblical vixens: Delilah, Potiphar's Wife, Salome, Judith, and Jezebel.

And this painting, I was imagining Miss Chief summoning the spirit powers of the bears to mess around with these Daddies. So here she's this dominatrix and these bears are helping her.

So, we wanted a kind of salon-style hanging, we found these official portraits of the Canadian politicians and of course, the Queen.

And I also imagine that Miss Chief was having an affair with John A. Macdonald...it didn't go very well.

We found Poundmaker's moccasins which was one of my exciting finds and so we were able to show those, and I was able to paint them into the image, as well. This room, I knew I had to deal with the residential schools. I didn't know how at first. But then for me, at the core of that, is the loss of children. The children who died in the schools but also the parents who had the

children torn from their arms. As I looked through the collections, I came across these incredible cradle boards made by mothers or grandmothers for the children. And they're made with such love, and they're such incredible works of art, that I wanted to fill this room with cradleboards to represent those missing children. And we also found these objects that were made by children in a residential school. When I thought about that image, you know, I had also read the TRC and it was kind of as I imagined it. They talked about the Mounties, and the priests, and the nuns going into the communities at the end of August and just grabbing the children and putting them on planes, or buses, or trucks, and taking them off to residential schools. And there was such violence in that. The way they were taken and the way that the police had to enforce this. I thought about the *Massacre of the Innocents*, you know, those paintings that depicted King Herod's decree to slaughter all the children because he was afraid that the King of the Jews would rise up and usurp his power. Those paintings have such violence in them, and I think there's actually a version at the Art Gallery of Ontario. I wanted the painting to have that impact, that emotional impact, that I felt standing in front of that painting in Spain, but also the violence of children being torn from their parents.

A few days before the exhibition, everything was ramping up, I didn't know how the exhibition would be received, and this painting went onto Miss Chief's Facebook page three or four days before the show opened. And I just watched in astonishment as the views, and the likes, and the numbers went up and up and up. Normally Miss Chief would get five hundred likes or something, maybe a thousand on a good day, but this thing went viral. Within a week there were three hundred thousand views and I don't know how many shares. And at that moment, I realized, that this painting had really put its finger on something that Canadians had known about, were at least coming to learning about, it wasn't in school curriculum when I was growing up, and I hope it's entering school curriculums now. But it really hit a nerve with people in this country and it just went viral. So that was my first indication that there would be profound response to this exhibition, which then was proven by just the sheer numbers of people that turned up for the exhibition in Toronto and kind of blew all of their audience records away.

I was really kind of in amazement to experience that as an artist, because, I've worked in obscurity for so many years and to finally get to this point where people are really responding was a very rewarding and powerful moment for me.

So, because we couldn't borrow all of the cradleboards that I wanted, I had to think of a way to kind of give the feeling of many, many, many boards. We decided to make these ghost boards and then chalk-like on a blackboard with their outlines.

One of the chapters that's not here is this chapter on The Res House. And I decided that this nativity scene—it's based on a Northern Renaissance painting—would stand in for Miss Chief's birth. A low birth, just like another low birth. So, there's a number of things going on in here, I've sort of re-appropriated this racist sports logo, we beaded it. There's the beaver rosaries in there and we had these commodity foods, these kinds of shitty foods that you get on reserves in the far north that are over-priced; so, we put realistic prices on them. One of the characters

here has...yeah...So, I started putting my head on all of these mannequins because a number of years ago when I started doing these dioramas, I went to the Natural History Museum in New York and the Native American display. I mean...you know...it's so depressing because United States is so far behind on a number of things, and one of them is how they represent their Indigenous cultures, especially in the museum like the Natural History Museum. So, I walked through there with my friend Gisèle and we were just kind of almost suffocating with the display and then we saw that they had used basically one male face on these mannequins to represent all Native Americans, whether they were male or female, and so I started thinking, well, I'm just going to put my head on everybody now. So, this became a Miss Chief logo. We made a patch called Team Miss Chief patch. Yes, that is an exploding dick in her hair. And these are real prices. \$18 for a can of Carnation Milk.

And this was another real interesting find, these Jesuit journals. And this artist, Nicolas Pointe—at the Jesuit Archives in Montreal—had made these books full of his journals, but also these incredible miniature paintings that revealed his experiences in these communities. Unfortunately, I don't have a detail, but anyway, I really loved those works. And those for me represent, again, the crossing over these different themes, and from this view you can see the ascension of the virgin, the virgin birth, and the death of the virgin all from one view.

I also made these praying hands out of washable silicone.

And here in context is the *Death of the Virgin*, with the hospital bag. But that painting, you know, I wanted to reflect on sickness in our communities. Whether it's mental illness, or the institutionalization of Indigenous people in foster care, or in hospitals, or in prisons. You know, the theme of incarceration became a really important part of this exhibition. I wanted to contrast Western medicine and then Indigenous medicine with that piece.

Here are some views of the Urban Rez series. Unfortunately, we didn't have space for these here but I did a series of paintings that were set in Winnipeg. Winnipeg is where I grew up, so that Skid Row bar there is right across the street from the Manitoba Museum. And I use these images of Picasso's female nudes to talk about the violence against the female nude, to talk about the violence against Indigenous women.

And the bears appear again as protectors.

There are Native gangs in Winnipeg and there's a considerable amount of violence living in the inner-city.

This is the chapter on Incarceration. I was looking a lot at the modern art period and the period of modernity, it basically ran concurrently with the last 150 years. Being able to take these elements like Picasso's cubist women and how the modernists kind of flattened pictorial space, I've used that in my work to talk about the flattening of culture, the compression of culture.

Here's a painting that again kind of talks about incarceration, but it's about this kind of transcendence. Again, set in Winnipeg's main street. Another painting that speaks about spiritual transcendence. These prisoners coming out of Stoney Mountain Penitentiary, where Big Bear and Poundmaker were incarcerated. Here's images from the Glenbow archives. And you can see that Poundmaker there is holding his leg iron. That's Stoney Mountain, just outside of Winnipeg.

So, I'm going to end it there. We have time for a few questions.

<Applause>

Question 1.

Sago, Skano! Hi Kent, I've actually seen your work last year in Toronto. It's amazing, and thank you for all the work that you do. So, I'm a student here at Queen's in Education, I'm Indigenous, Mohawk from Six Nations. I just now claimed the term Two-Spirit in my life. I was wondering if you could speak to, or have advice, about the nature of reconciliation and ally-ship work. So, this year has been the most mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually draining year of my educational journey. I feel like educators have the most responsibility to speak to these counter-narratives, counter-hegemonic narratives. Just me speaking my lived experience is such a threat and I can feel that emotion in my classes a lot. And it has been so draining this year. I do have allies, like a handful of allies in my circle, but now they're being ostracized by their peer groups for just advocating and speaking to these counter-narratives. So, we're in the realm of reconciliation, but how can we have active ally work to take some of that pressure off Indigenous folks in this field and speaking to these histories? I don't know if you can speak to that, it's a huge question. But I full on knew coming here—Queen's in twenty-five years older than Canada, itself—I knew this was the home place of John A. Macdonald. I asked myself, are you prepared to face this every day? It is a struggle. I was wondering if you have any advice to speak to reconciliation work but also the work of ally-ship to take the pressure off Indigenous folks?

<Applause>

Kent:

Well I hope that this exhibition will do a little bit in terms of moving towards that, because I think, I never set out to be an educator but I became one with my work because I realized how little most Canadians or even North Americans know. Or were taught. So, I've accepted, kind of, unwillingly, this burden of having to move everyone forward a little bit at a time. Unfortunately, we are all in that position as Indigenous people because that's just this burden of colonialism which is still going on. And we're still decolonizing. And it requires Canadians to participate. It requires Canadians to get on our side. And that's why I was saying earlier about removing John A. Macdonald's name or whatever, that's for the Canadian people to get there, but we have to help them arrive at that point of understanding. You just kind of have to do exactly what you're doing, which is decolonizing that space around you, even if it's a small space. Start small and hopefully grow it. And I'm hoping that this exhibition as it tours will decolonize more and more

space. One of the funders of this exhibition are the Sobey family, they're amazing in terms of their support of this exhibition and my work, and there's a gentleman that works for the Sobey Foundation. They're hosting this exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and he's calling that opening party, which is coming I think next year, *Total Decolonization*. And I love that. That there's going to be this space created with that in mind. And I think that's really what we all have to do as individuals in our own way. I've been fortunate that I've, you know, had this kind of collective momentum growing around my work and I just keep pushing it, and the more support I get the more I just try and get the message out further and wider, go and do talks like this, travel with the exhibition. Get Miss Chief's memoir out there. And my heroes are Indigenous artists and writers who have done that consistently their entire lives. And there are many people that I look up to, you know, Tom Hill and Roberta Jamieson from Six Nations. They were early supporters of my work and I looked up to them as my heroes, and I still do, and we have many people who have been doing that. And over the years it improves little by little by little. But there's still so much further to go. And I step across into the United States and I just feel like I've been kicked in the face because they're like a generation behind. And I feel very frustrated sometimes going down there because museums down there are just in a dark age, so, I feel like we're moving forward a little bit in Canada, you know. We have Indigenous curators now, occupying, decolonizing inside museums. That's so important. And the first Indigenous curator was hired in Winnipeg this year. It's amazing, you know. But it's like, wow, it takes a long time to make these shifts, they don't happen overnight. I understand your frustration because I felt exactly the same when I was younger. But it takes a long time, so just keep at it.

Question 2:

Thank you for your presentation and for what you do. You kind of answered a little bit of my question that I was going to ask. But, I was going to ask, when you were developing as an artist, were there Indigenous artists that, you know, you saw that kind of indicated to you that "I can do this not just as an artist, but as an Indigenous artist, and put myself out there like that." And I wonder if you could name some of those artists?

Kent:

Yeah for sure. Well, because I'm from Winnipeg, I remember seeing Robert Houle's exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and I went in there, and I grew up doing Saturday morning art classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, so I felt kind of like an ownership of that space, and then I saw Robert Houle's exhibition there. And there he was, this Abstract Expressionist Indigenous painter, and I was like, "Yeah! Abstract painting! I'm gonna do that." So, people like Robert Houle, definitely, and then performance artists like Rebecca Belmore and James Luna, and Dana Claxton, there are many...

Question 3:

Hi. Your work is audacious. It definitely takes the gloves off. So, today, you're talking to people who are, you know, you're sort of preaching to the converted today, this audience. People who appreciate your work. So, I was wondering what other feedback have you had that perhaps

hasn't been as positive? What are others, outside say, the academic community and people who are more well-informed, saying about your work?

Kent:

Well, you know, I remember a number of years ago, I had shown some work in an American institution and someone on this conservative online journal caught wind of it and wrote this scathing piece and was mortified that a gay Indian got tax dollars to make art. And why are tax payers funding this gay Indian? And I emailed the curator and he's like, "Oh you've made it, man! You've made it!" So, I don't really...I don't read comments. I don't read the comments section. I was actually talking to my assistants about that. I don't really care, to be honest, I just do my thing and I just kind of, you know, buckle down and do it. Put the work out there. I don't spend a lot of time or energy worrying too much about what the haters think, you know, I really don't even go there.

Applause.

Question 4:

I wonder if you'd be willing to say a little more about decolonizing sexuality? And I understand to say Two-Spirit, there's a range across Indigenous experiences and understandings, but what do you see Two-Spirit saying, both to the LGBT community, those of us in the LGBT community, and to the dominant straight community?

Kent:

Well, I think that when I did my own research and I was really wanting to represent a powerful, empowered perspective on my own sexuality and then the sexuality of Two-Spirited people, I realized and I took a lot of encouragement and strength from the fact that our traditional societies had a place for us, as men living as women, women living as men, and this fluid interplay of, you know, warriors having one of their wives being a Berdache, a male living as a woman. For me, it was like a pride, knowing that there was a place for it. So, it was about having to decolonize all of this repression in our own communities, you know, about homosexuality. For instance, my grandmother, who went to residential school, had become this very conservative Christian and had very conservative ideas about sexuality. But it all depended on where you would go and which community you would be in, and some people weren't brought into residential schools. And I'm working with an elder on the Miss Chief memoir, he's Cree and he escaped residential school, so as a result, he has this phenomenal understanding of Cree culture and the language and cosmology and everything and it's all embedded in the language and it's non-interrupted. And for me, I'm just in awe of him, because those interruptions that happened through this colonial process didn't affect him and I'm just so grateful that he's a friend and that he's helping us with Cree worldview and bringing his knowledge of language into the book. I hope that answers your question.

Question 5:

Could you please speak about Poundmaker's moccasins? Why and how you found them? I think they're one of the most significant parts of the exhibition...

Kent:

Well it was as simple, believe it or not, as me Googling Poundmaker's moccasins. Yeah. Because when I originally sent my search to the Museum of History in Ottawa I didn't know exactly...I wasn't specifically looking for it. But when I was making the painting and I realized that I had to paint his feet...I wondered if Poundmaker's moccasins are somewhere. And sure enough, there they were. And there are a number of things that belonged to Poundmaker that have actually been repatriated into his community. And a friend recently—he's a good friend of mine from many years ago—he's now the curator of the Poundmaker Museum on the Poundmaker Reserve and I guess he hasn't seen the exhibition yet but he heard about it, and reached out to me and showed me these objects that have been repatriated and asked if I would do a history painting on Poundmaker for their museum, which I'm going to do this year. So, I'm really excited about that.

Question 6.

Thanks for your talk, I just had a question about this as an Indigenous story, and whether Miss Chief might be including some of our relations in the Arctic, telling part of the Inuit story in this whole narrative?

Kent:

There is so much material, I often get overwhelmed with how much there is out there that has never really been entered into the canon of art history. And I've thought a lot of Inuit people and the art that's made by them and I haven't found a way to do it yet, but it's on my to-do list, so stick around.

Sunny Kerr:

Well thanks everyone for their questions and I'd like to invite you all to the Agnes atrium to join us there for some food and drink just following this event. And I'd like to thank Kent again for his generosity.

<Applause>

</End>.