

# DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University  
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## Reflecting on Lii Zoot Tayr (*Other Worlds*)

Asynchronous School program for grades 9-12

2022

### SPEAKERS

Carleigh Milburn

### KEYWORDS

Indigenous Art, School Program, School Resource, Grade 9-12, High School Education, Metis Artists

### TRANSCRIPT

**Carleigh Milburn:** Aaniin, Shé:kon, Kwey, Tanshi, Bonjour, Hello. Welcome to the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. My name is Carleigh Milburn.

As the leading arts centre, we would like to acknowledge that Agnes and Queen's University are situated on the territory of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee. To recognize this territory is to identify the history of the land, and the First Peoples of this area, as well as other places across Turtle Island. In connection with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, I encourage you to take the time to learn about the history, geography, and people that occupy the land that you reside on. The purpose of a land acknowledgement is to participate in reconciliation actively. As you move around the exhibition, I encourage you to consider other ways to engage in reconciliation. I will be leading you on a tour of Lii Zoot Tayr (*Other Worlds*) an exhibition curated by Amy Malbeuf and Jessie Ray Short, featuring the work of Metis women artists, Malbeuf, Suzanne Morrissette, Tannis Nielsen, Tiffany Shaw-Collinge, and Short.

During this video, I'll be asking you questions. Please, pause the video and take as much time as you would like to think or discuss.

Contemporary First Nations, Metis and Inuit artists often, though not exclusively, use art as a means to communicate political and social messages to affirm individual, or collective Indigenous identity, and to express and promote cultural renewal. The exhibition title, Lii Zoot Tayr, means Other Worlds in Michif, the traditional language of the Metis people. The exhibition examines the space between what we know, and don't know, and reflects on the visibility or the invisibility of other worlds.

Take a moment to think of the things that you see or experience in your surroundings. Consider things that you cannot perceive but know to be there. Perhaps, you might think of emotions, molecules, the flow of energy through systems, or even spirit.

We will embark on a journey that encourages us to reflect on in/visibility and the unseen forces that are part of our world. Before beginning, it is essential to define the terminology used in this video.

We know invisibility means something that is not perceivable or considered. And we must remember there are many ways to perceive things. Seeing with our eyes is just one example.

Visibility means that something or someone can be seen, recognized, or felt.

The term "in/visibility" refers to something that the senses may not perceive but are visible to those who have received teachings towards these particular insights.

The natural environment refers to all living and nonliving things occurring naturally, not man-made. For example, later in the video, we will be looking at people, trees, animals, water, and rocks. Throughout this video, I encourage you to reflect on the spaces between what is known and unknown in our individual experiences of the world.

We will begin with Tannis Nielsen's installation *Creation*. Have you ever seen static or feedback on an old TV set? Some of this static, also called white noise, is the TV interpreting residual microwaves from the Big Bang. After learning this, Nielsen started using electromagnetic energy to create her visual and sensory video projects that conceptualize her own cultural and cosmological understanding of creation or Genesis.

Nielsen demonstrates one creation story in this work, the Big Bang. But there are many others around the world in various cultures such as the story of Sky Woman. These stories make sense of the beginning of all things. Take a moment to quietly watch Nielsen's work. Imagine it's a portal connecting parallel universes together.

Would you go through this portal? Check in with your senses. How does this idea make you feel?

Discuss: How does this artwork connect with creation stories that you have learned?

This installation called the *Elder Wands* was created by Jessie Ray Short. She describes her work as a winding nonlinear story that encompasses many diverse threads of time, space, and memory. In Short's installation, 13 violet wands hold an electric current, each glowing in the dim light. When a wand is touched, it produces a small shock and glows brighter.

Short's work reflects the action of consent. Consent is when you provide permission to someone or something to do an action. When touching the wand, you are permitting the wand to give you a slight shock. When you choose to touch the wand, you are practising consent. In this work, Short also explores how synchronicities and serendipities occur in life.

Carl Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, defines synchronicities as coincidences that seem to be meaningfully related, supposedly the result of universal forces. A serendipity is when something happens by chance in an unexpected and positive way. Like when you are at a vending machine and short 25 cents, and you look down and see a quarter on the ground.

*Elder Wands* represents the culmination of a strange series of synchronicities, and serendipities that Short noticed as she developed the artwork. It combined stories about the Tesla coil, family knowledge transfer, dreams, consent, BDSM, John A. MacDonald, and colonial legacies of Canada. Short's work allows us to reflect on how our lives are influenced by coincidences, how we are all tied together by life via the magnetics of Mother Earth energy.

In Short's installation, *Elder Wands* makes up the circle. Circles are significant symbols in some Indigenous art forms and teachings. One reason circles are essential is that they symbolize different cycles of the natural world and different ways of knowing. For example, in Anishinaabe teachings, the medicine wheel is a four-coloured wheel or circle, three-dimensional, sacred cosmology that involves the four directions. In the context of some Anishinaabek teachings, the medicine wheel reflects the interrelatedness and connectedness of internal and external worlds. In science, the water cycle is also visually depicted in a circle to show that systems are connected and affected by one another.

Discuss: Can you think of a time when you experienced synchronicity or serendipity in your life?

Why do you think a circle is a dominant symbol in Indigenous art forms?

Would you want to interact with this artwork?

This artwork by Tiffany Shaw-Collinge is called, *my children, my mother, her mother, and their mother, and their mother, and their mother, and their mother*. Immediately, the title tells us

something about the work. It's about relationships between mothers and children. And it's about time, how we're connected to the past, and the future through generations. If you look at the artwork, we can see it's a large sculpture made from a reflective material called Mylar, which has been knitted. If you were to stand in front of it, you'd see your reflection mirrored back and refracted.

Through making, an artist can take an idea or emotion that exists in their head and heart, and bring it into the physical world, making the invisible visible. In this work, Shaw-Collinge addresses the grief, trauma, love, and wisdom that passes from one generation to the next.

After Shaw-Collinge's father passed away, she says her mother knitted for months, and that she herself will continue to do this work of remembering through knitting. Each row of Mylar is connected to the one above, but they become looser and looser as they reach towards the floor. What do you think this loosening represents?

Shaw-Collinge says "with each new birth, we aim to move differently in order to achieve space and distance from trauma, though we cannot fully abandon the network". As time passes, emotions and experiences may fade, but we're still connected to them.

Discuss: What ideas, stories, relationship dynamics, or traditions have been passed down through the generations of your family? Write or talk about one. What impact does it have on your life?

This interactive installation titled, *poplar/poplar* is by Suzanne Morrisette. Morrisette says, "I remember lying in the grass as a child, looking up at the aspen trees. As I lay there, I watched as the branches of the trees swayed with their leaves flickering around each other in rhythmic waves. I often think about the negative space that the wind occupies between the branches. I cannot see it and yet, I know that it is there." She continues. "It also strikes me when I witnessed this tree in movement that there are many things that I do not know with my eyes, and which are taking place in the negative space in between the leaves. With this work, I have been thinking about the shape of knowledge, and the things that surround what I know."

This work, like many works of art, explains a concept through a metaphor. The wind represents the personal and cultural values, privilege, and access. The branches and the leaves represent who you are as a person, and how you're shaped by the wind.

Did you notice that whenever I move through the space, the video pauses? Can you think of a reason the artist chose to do this?

Consider, what in your life represents the wind, things that you cannot see but shape you and what you know? Give an example.

Discuss: Morrisette is inspired by the natural environment. Can you think of a profound, or meaningful interaction that you have had with nature? Was it a sensory experience? Describe the feeling you had.

This work by Amy Malbeuf is titled, *A Once In A Hundred Years*. When creating this work, Malbeuf was inspired by the following quote by scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Robin Wall Kimmerer. Consider this quote as you look the artwork.

"We are all bound by a covenant of reciprocity, plant breaths for animal breath, winter and summer, predator and prey, grass and fire, night and day, living and dying. Water knows this, clouds know this, soil and rocks know they are dancing in a continuous giveaway of making, unmaking, and making again, the earth."

Malbeuf's kinetic sculpture asks us to think about the importance of water. Water is our life force. You and I can't easily see the complex routes that water takes through our bodies to keep us alive.

But we know this process is taking place. Water also moves through the body of Mother Earth in a complex and mostly, invisible way through the water cycle.

However, humans have intervened in these natural systems in invisible and visible ways. The culverts we observe in the sculpture are visual reminder of underground water systems, both natural and manufactured. Many manufactured systems destruct ecosystems and contaminate water with pollutants that are most often invisible to the naked eye. Malbeuf reminds us that, "to those who have the privilege of turning on a tap for clean water to drink, bathe or play in, this is often an invisible issue."

In her work, Malbeuf communicates that capitalist colonial societies take advantage of water. She states, "the violence to the land and water is equivalent to the violence against Indigenous peoples, an invisible system of oppression that is very real and tangible to those who experience it."

Discuss: What do you notice about the movement of the water in this work?

Do you have access to readily accessible clean water? If so, imagine your day-to-day life if you didn't have access to clean water? What would that be like?

Think back to Robin Wall Kimmerer's quote, and ideas of reciprocity. Malbeuf is passionate about water. It's important to the planet and our relationship with it. What is something in the natural world that you are passionate about? And why is it important for the future of our planet?

Miigwetch, Nia:wen, Merci, Thank you for joining our virtual school tour program, reflecting on Lii Zoot Tayr (*Other Worlds*). We hope to see you at the gallery soon. As a class, we encourage you to discuss the following: How will building a healthy relationship with the natural environment assist in building our relationships with Indigenous peoples?