

CYBORG HYBRIDS - KC ADAMS



Image: KC Adams, "GANG MEMBER" Cyborg Hybrid Niki (visual artist, performance artist & videographer), 2006, digital print

In Modern Fuel's main gallery space, KC Adams presents a selection from her ongoing portrait series, CYBORG HYBRIDS, featuring digital prints of Euro-Aboriginal artists who are forward thinkers and plugged in with technology. Adam's work references Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," which states that a cyborg is a creature in a technological, post-gender world free of traditional western stereotypes towards race and gender. Challenging the views towards mixed race classifications by using humorous text and imagery from two cultures, Adams photographs artists who fit the Cyborg Hybrid criteria in a manner slyly recalling early photographs of Aboriginal people as well as glamour shots in fashion magazines. Accessorized with white chokers and photographed in stoic poses, her subjects all wear white t-shirts that are beaded with slogans illustrating common Aboriginal stereotypes. The defiant poses of the Cyborg Hybrids challenge the viewer to classify their identity. Adam's exhibition at Modern Fuel not only comprises portraits of people from the Manitoban cities of Winnipeg and Brandon, reflecting their regional situation, but also adds Kingston to the Cyborg Hybrid Nation.

KC Adams Bio

A graduate of Concordia University's Bachelor of Fine Arts' program, Adams has had several solo exhibitions, most recently Cyborg Living at The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto in September to November of 2005. She has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including a performance intervention called CAP at the Platform Gallery in Winnipeg in July 2005 and Cyborg Living Space II, The Language of Intercession at the OBORO Gallery in Montreal in February of 2005. She maintains her own website at www.kcadams.net showcasing her work

and flash art projects. She has participated in residencies at the Banff Centre, the Confederation Art Centre in Charlottetown and the Annex Gallery in Winnipeg. Her many community activities include consulting for the creation of a National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Vancouver this year and serving as president of the Board of Directors of acaertinc. in Winnipeg from 2000 to 2004. She has received several grants and awards from Winnipeg Arts Council, Manitoba Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts.

Essay by Carla Taunton

KC Adams' ongoing digital portrait series, *CYBORG HYBRIDS*, features artists of mixed European and Aboriginal descent, captured in sexy-glossy 25"x33" prints. Beyond hybridity, the criteria for modelling for Adams' requires you be forward thinking, plugged into technology, and involved in artistic production. The individuals photographed are simultaneously subversive activists and glamorous fashion models. This series offers a space within the gallery setting for conversations surrounding issues of reclaiming, resisting and re-envisioning. Adam's work references Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," which states that a cyborg is a creature in a technological, post-gender world free of traditional western stereotypes towards race and gender. This series of photographs presents the celebrities of the contemporary Canadian indigenous art scene defiantly posing while wearing stereotypical slogans. In the upcoming Ottawa series, Inuit artist and curator Heather Igloliorte, whose beaded t-shirt reads "I Club Baby Seals," has pointed out, "We put those slogan there ourselves." The complexities of this series, such as the duality between using the construct of Western stereotypes to subvert those same stereotypes, is what makes this multi-city series so powerful.

These images conjure many different questions and challenge classifications of race, culture, and identity. They also offer an opportunity to reflect back on the ways in which indigenous peoples and their cultures have been represented by Euro-Canadian society and Eurocentric disciplines, such as anthropology and ethnography, and institutions, such as the museum and popular media. The images in *Cyborg Hybrids* critically expose the ways the photograph has been used to document, record, produce and construct Aboriginal peoples by the Western lens. Furthermore, they subvert the colonial ideology of the salvage paradigm and the concept of the vanishing Indian. The salvage paradigm was a late 19th and early 20th century attempt to collect and preserve Aboriginal material culture, to document cultural, social and political practice, and to create a permanent record based on the Eurocentric belief that Aboriginal peoples were vanishing. Although the attitudes expressed above in the academic and museological sense shifted, Marcia Crosby argues that much of the Aboriginal art produced today is an attempt to reclaim the image of the 'Indian' from the ethnographic context of the salvage paradigm. The 'Indian' was theoretically and physically collected; material and visual culture were 'salvaged' and placed into museum collections.

Colonial legacies remain embedded in Canadian culture. This is exemplified in the misplaced yet common belief of the loss of 'authentic' indigenous cultures through contact with European society. This feeling of loss in non-Aboriginal consciousness resulted in the construction of a fixed, non-changing Aboriginal culture that indigenous peoples have resisted and subverted throughout the processes of colonization and decolonization. The *Cyborg Hybrids* series reveals a fundamental thread that connects heterogeneous indigenous nations across the Americas: tradition as continuous change.

Dressed in the cyborg hybrid uniform of glossy red lips, white chokers, furs and beaded t-shirts, and photographed in stoic poses, curator Ryan Rice has called the installation of the Winnipeg/ Brandon series a virtual "front line" of artist-activists. In this sense, Adams' strategically uses the cyborg hybrid type -dressing up her models- in order to resist and refuse the stereotypes placed on indigenous peoples. The use of a unified look for each individual conjures up a subversive challenge to historical ethnographic photographers' use of props, regalia and other strategies to create what was seen as the 'authentic' and 'pure' Aboriginal subject. Many times the props included by photographers such as Edward Curtis were not culturally appropriate for the individual sitter and usually reflected customs of dress from previous generations. In this sense, *Cyborg Hybrids* tackles the front line issues faced by Aboriginal peoples, from stereotypes to cultural genocide. By inviting the leaders of the Aboriginal art-scene to pose with their personalized stereotypical slogans, KC Adams' *Cyborg Hybrids* contributes to the self-determined indigenous network. Each

individual including the artist now forms a collaborative artistic force, a network of socio-political activism which is theoretically and practically challenging the legacies of colonization and is contributing to indigenous empowerment, sovereignty and decolonization.

Carla Taunton is a PhD Candidate at Queen's University in the Department of Art. She is a teaching fellow at Queen's and an alliance member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, co-founded by Ryan Rice. Her current research interests are indigenous performance art, contemporary indigenous visual culture, interventions and activism in the arts, as well as globalization theory.

Cyborg Hybrids Photos

In conjunction with this exhibition, and in collaboration with the Union Gallery, Modern Fuel presented the panel discussion **Revisions/Reversals** at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre.