

# CHRONOTOPIC VILLAGE



*Chronotopic Village* gathers together the work of Nadia Myre, Kevin Burton, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Darlene Naponse and Thirza Cuthand, who each in turn invite the audience to engage multiple and diverse chronotopes (times-spaces.) Each artist presents meditations on new and ever-changing cultural imaginaries that co-exist within the modern nation state in both its cities and rural spaces. In this exhibition curated by Wanda Nanibush, the specific locations of each artist are multiple, and how that impacts their artistic engagement with time-spaces is the Chronotopic Village. Song, land, language and time-based media collide and combine to produce the Chronotopic Village.

**Kevin Lee Burton** is a director, film festival programmer, offline editor and freelance camera operator who is Swampy Cree from God's Lake Narrows, Manitoba. In his directorial works he has designed a niche by specifically working in his ancestral tongue, Cree.

**Thirza Cuthand** was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1978, and grew up a Cree Scots Irish bipolar butch lesbian two spirited boy/girl thingamabob in Saskatoon. She has produced experimental videos and films on low to no budget, exploring issues of identity, race, sexuality, relationships, ageism, and mental health.

**Cheryl L'Hirondelle** (aka Waynohtêw, Cheryl Koprek) is an Alberta born but currently a Vancouver based, halfbreed (Metis/Cree-non status/treaty, French, German, Polish) multi/interdisciplinary artist and musician. Since the early 80's she has created, performed, collaborated and presented work in a variety of artistic disciplines.

**Nadia Myre**, an Algonquin and member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, graduated with an associate degree from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 1997, and with an MFA from Concordia University in 2002. Myre's multi-disciplinary work poetically addresses notions of language, loss, desire, and reclamation.

**Darlene Naponse** is an Ojibway woman from Atikameksheng - Whitefish Lake First Nation in Northern Ontario, Canada. She is a writer, director, producer and poet. She is an independent filmmaker creating "Rez-Style" films.

Image: Nadia Myre, *Portrait as a Line*, 2008.

## Curator's Statement:

**Chronotopic Village** gathers together the work of Nadia Myre, Kevin Burton, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Darlene Naponse and Thirza Cuthand who each in turn invite the audience to engage multiple and diverse chronotopes (times-spaces.) In the artistic chronotope, "Time...takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history." (Bakhtin, 84) Each artist presents meditations on new and ever-changing cultural imaginaries that co-exist within the modern nation state in both its cities and rural spaces. The specific locations of each artist are multiple and how that impacts their artistic engagement with time-spaces is the Chronotopic Village. Song, land, language and time based media collide and combine to produce the Chronotopic Village.

When I was young our school often went to a museum that consisted of a reconstruction of an old Huron (Ouendat) village of the 1500s. Without getting into the history of the place, I was always struck by the distance between myself as a living, breathing Indigenous person and the place as a history of an Indigenous past stuck in time. I had motion, the village was static. The actors playing Huron in this village were relatives and friends from the local Anishinabeg nations, not Ouendat at all. On those trips I felt that all of the students existed in different times and spaces in that one moment. The dead past being presented to me was part of my people's living history as acting income, as a signifier of colonial loss, and an example of our erasure as contemporary changing cultures. In those moments, I wished we were forced to visit contemporary art exhibits which engage the past as something constantly being reinterpreted for the here and now. The chronotope, as a concept, allows me to think about how memory, history, identity and culture are not objects that can be picked up -whole, complete and touched. They are forces, fluids, movements that constantly shift and evade capture. Just when we think we know what happened someone tells a new story and the 'facts' shift. Just when we think we have ourselves figured out, something happens and we are lost, unhinged and transformed. The idea that I cannot completely know the past for sure or myself, for that matter, can be a freeing feeling because I no longer have to see the changes and traumas my culture has undergone as losses that leave us inadequate as Indigenous Peoples.

The artists of the Chronotopic Village use technology as a tool to bend, mix, and blend time-space configurations in order to more accurately reflect the multiplicity in who they are and the ever-changing nature of tradition.

Nadia Myre's works are *Portrait in Motion*, a video rear-projected onto a framed glass screen embedded in the wall; *Portrait as a Line*, a silent video rear projected onto a piece of frame and matted BFK paper; and *Portrait as a Line (Paper)*, an embossed canoe, which is the sister piece to the video.

Myre brings together contradictory tendencies like stillness and motion, drawing and erasing, appearance and disappearance valuing complexity over easy categories. Myre folds her contemporary hybrid identities onto an old anthropological conception of space and time. The canoe used in *Portrait in Motion* is an art piece in itself, a hybrid structure of aluminum and birch-bark. The act of building the canoe folds generations of the past, present and future into one time. She had found an elder, Pinoch (Daniel Smith), to teach her birch-bark canoe building. In the process she connected to an old technology of one of her people, Algonquin of Kitigan Zibi, "remembering things she never knew." (Meier, 13) At the time of building she was seven months pregnant, carrying the next generation. When she paddles out of the morning mist, the birds are chirping and the sound of paddling through the water creates a perfect romantic pictorialist vision of the 'Indian' vanishing romantically and tragically lost to history. Emerging from the mist is a new mother in a hybrid canoe, an art work made practical. When she finally comes into view, she looks at the audience, interpellating them into a new chronotopic village, one where the present is pregnant with the past and constantly projecting towards the future.

Darlene Naponse's *4 Directions Series* consists of four short 4 min. experimental videos that engage the land of her people, the Ojibway of Atikameksheng. She uses media technology and strategies of time-lapse and editing, to present the 'nature' of land as procesual, transformative and metaphorical. The old village encapsulated in the phrase, "We are the land," becomes instead, "We speak the land and the land speaks us." Naponse's series forces an engagement with the lands language, made possible with time bending and space compressing technology, infusing the cultural ideas of the four directions with a poetic complexity.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle's new media performance work *êkâya-pâhkaci (don't freeze up)* involves the installation of a ten foot by 6 foot white tent. There is audio and media inside the tent. Carpets are placed in front of the tent for the audience to sit on. *êkâya-pâhkaci* is an installation version of a performance of the same name. It operates through an intersection of nomadic site-specificity, visual patterning, language, narrative, movement and rhythm. In this work the audience is invited to sit by an adaptable travelling tent and witness a soundscape made from Cree words, teachings and mixed sounds. This installed version has the virtual presence of L'Hirondelle's body and voice, inviting a meditation on the contemporary invitation to commune long distances. *Êkâya-pâhkaci* as an installation where the performer can not be there in person allows for a meditation on the chronotopic (time-space) of the body, language and culture in our contemporary techno-mediated communities. L'Hirondelle takes the tent as a transient home, an innovative technology, and a metaphor of cultural change. The tipi poles' teachings in Cree syllabics on the floor of the gallery give an embodied presence to the continuing significance of cultural philosophies for contemporary artists. Part honouring and part invitation, *êkâya-pâhkaci*, transforms loss into the language of becoming where no repetition is ever the same, time and space has shifted, bringing newness into the world.

The invitation to reinvent within Indigenous languages and within a nomadic relationship with space is carried on in Kevin Burton's video-audio work. *Nikamowin* is a linguistic soundscape comprised of the deconstruction and reconstruction of Cree narration that dances with various manipulated landscapes. The viewpoint of the camera is that of the boat which helps the viewer feel as if they are in the boat and on the journey. The journey traverses cityscapes, water and rural lands, allowing for multiple identifications with a diverse set of spaces. The layering of the language, and the hailing of the viewer into a desire to learn the language is projected onto land which begs the question of where language arises. Is language an embodiment of the rhythms of travel and adaptation, of incorporation and borrowing? What is maintained and lost in the nomadism of contemporary life?

*Love and Numbers* by Thirza Cuthand is a complex rendering of the breakdown of meaning brought about by the violation of colonialism. A Two-spirited woman speaks of all the 'codes' she receives; from her ancestors, from colonial narratives, from the hospital, from her heart in love. She marks out the pain and confusion in being unable to navigate through the competing narratives of who she is in order to be able to transmit, to signifying her-self. Her voice and the first person view point makes us implicated in what she sees. We get to walk literally and figuratively in her shoes. The vulnerability of this self-rendering marks out the ways in which we perform ourselves for others as a form of request. Cuthand's work tries to fold one person's chronotope (space-time) onto another's. She communicates as if it were possible to completely understand one's own or another's perspective and experience while at the same time the audio-visuals perform the very impossibility of complete understanding.

Indigenous time-based media and installation as an "[a]lternative aesthetics are multi-temporal..., in that they are often rooted in non-realist, often non-western cultural traditions featuring other historical rhythms, other narrative structures, and other attitudes toward the body and spirituality. By incorporating para-modern traditions into modernizing or postmodernizing aesthetics, they problematize facile dichotomies such as traditional and modern, realist and modernist, modernist and postmodernist." (Stam, 33) Indigenous artists live in the same time zone as late global capitalism where the postmodern, modern and pre-modern all exist in the same time-space. Indigenous artists are influenced by the avant-garde movements in Europe which drew upon the so-called 'primitive' to produce 'new' aesthetics and they also drawn upon old cultural concepts for the creation of contemporary alternative aesthetics. This is a mess of time-space, not linear at all. Each artwork carries within it all the histories and chronotopes of its citations and influences. In the case of Indigenous works, those chronotopes are also culturally multiplied and the navigations of cultural differences are more akin to walking tightropes or fault-lines. The difference between what these artist's works say and what a postmodern discourse argues is that within the context of colonial histories and its current continuance one can not enjoy free play and the abdication of identity.

Welcome to the chronotopic village.

**Wanda Nanibush** is an independent curator and media artist from Beausoleil First Nation. Her curatorial work has largely concentrated on re-contextualizing Indigenous time-based media to examine the underlying philosophical complexity of the work as well as rethinking how culture and identity are framed by contemporary artistic discourses.

### **Bibliography**

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