



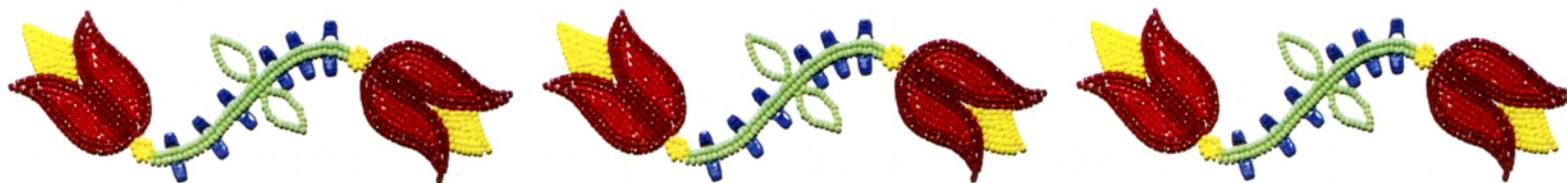
mazinigwaaso / to bead something

Barry Ace: Bandolier Bags as Cultural Conduit

Curated by Lori Beavis

November 4 - December 13, 2019

**FOFA Gallery,
Concordia University,
Montreal**



Barry Ace: Art and Art-making as Cultural Presence

by Lori Beavis

Each of Barry Ace's bandolier bags is carefully and intricately crafted with beadwork – yet the beadwork requires a second look as the expected glass beads are replaced with tiny, colourful capacitors and resistors – the detritus of our technology. Ace's mixed media bandoliers are based on the cross-shoulder bags often associated with the Anishinaabeg. These bags with their wide, often ornately beaded wide strap have become a vehicle for Ace to incorporate a variety of materials that cross culture and time periods.

Barry Ace is an Anishinaabe (Odawa) multi-media visual artist based in Ottawa. His art practice and the work in the bandolier bag series (2011-) is his recognition of the on-going cultural presence of the Anishinaabe. His knowledge of culture, history and his own personal narratives have led Ace to his assemblage textile practice drawing on historical Anishinaabeg arts of the Great Lakes region which he then transforms. He converts the materiality of floral and geometric beadwork patterns by incorporating reclaimed and salvaged electronic components and circuitry. In his transformation of the technological refuse he is referencing beadwork as a bridge between the past, present and the technological future, thus inscribing in his work an on-going

presence and acknowledgement of the distinctive shifts of Indigenous culture.

Each bandolier bag in the exhibition is unique as Ace combines such materials hand-made paper, fibres, wire, silver jingles, porcupine quills, tiny video screens as well as the unfathomable amount of wiring required to run the circuitry of technology. This exhibition will bring together work such as *Digital Bandolier* (2011), *Mashkiki (Medicine) Bandolier Bag* (2015), *Gashkibidaagan for Jean Baptiste Ense (Great-Great-Grandfather)* (2018) and *Bandolier for Alain Brosseau* (2017) because each explores personal and community narratives while also speaking to larger issues of art as a medium for a discussion of cultural history and resurgence. This exhibition also presents early work that informs on Ace's process, these are *Manidoominens - Spirit Seeds* (2013) and *Beaded Abstraction* (2014); others that reduce the bag to its purest form and line (strap, pouch and tassel) *Coalesce* (2015) and *Study for Mashkiki (Medicine) Bandolier Bag* (2015) is a preliminary drawing that reveals Ace's procedure. New work for this exhibition includes, *Bandolier for Nibi, Noodin, Aki* (2019) and *Bandolier for Plant and Water Life* (2019) works that draw attention to Ace's concerns for the environment and for the

Indigenous Elders and Water Walkers who have led the environmental charge.

The exhibition theme of presence and resilience is furthered with the inclusion of *Mino bimaadiziwin* (2017) a complete set of Anishinaabe men's and women's regalia, two videos in the Black Box – one an historical silent film of ceremonial dance (filmed in 1925 in Wiikwemkoong, Manitoulin Island, when such was banned under the 1876 Indian Act) and a video by artist- film-maker Shelley Niro, *Homage to Four in Paris* documenting Ace's site specific *Reparative Act* dance performances in Paris, France in 2010.

The above-noted work, individually and accumulatively, contributes to the discussions taking place within Canada and other settler nations on the topics of decolonization and re/conciliation. The discussions and resultant initiatives are integral as Canadian cultural workers strive to heed the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Artistic investigations such as Ace's continue the efforts to make change and fill the gaps – as art has an important role in educating and sharing stories.



Constructed Continuities: Barry Ace's Electro-Gashkibidaaganag

by Amy Prouty

Gashkibidaaganag, or bandolier bags as they are commonly called, are a testament to Anishinaabeg resilience, speaking to a long history of adaptation and survival in the face of forced assimilation. Initially decorated in intricate quillwork, artists began to incorporate glass beads into their designs after the arrival of European settlers. Anishinaabe (Odawa) artist Barry Ace continues this tradition of adaptation in his contemporary bandolier bags, negotiating a long history of colonization and adaptive resilience to demonstrate both the continuity of Anishinaabeg aesthetics as well as their futurity.

Obtained through trade, glass beads speak to cross-cultural encounters between Indigenous nations and European settlers. There is a tendency by settler scholars and collectors to assign varying degrees of authenticity to Indigenous objects by sorting them into “pre” and “post” contact periods of history, such as reflected by the inclusion of glass beads. This is counter to how history is conceptualized within Indigenous worldviews. Kanien’kehá:ka scholar Deborah Doxtator wrote that for Indigenous peoples, history is not a series of contained periods but, “... an additive process, building upon what has gone before in a kind of consciously constructed continuity...

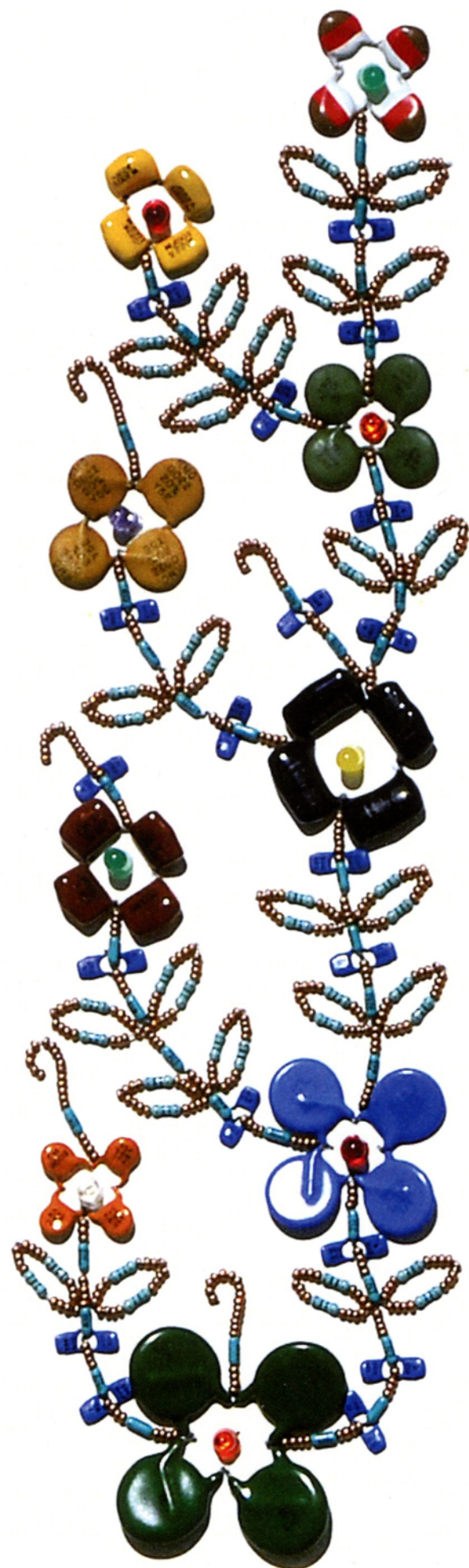
nothing is lost or taken away: all is incorporated within the next addition, and differences actually function not to separate but to unify groups.”¹

Ace’s bandolier bags embody this “constructed continuity” by once again incorporating new materials into Anishinaabeg art, in this case, electronical components in lieu of glass beads. The choice of medium is apt, the Anishinaabemowin word for beads, *manidoominens*, translates into English as “little spirits.” Beadwork is more than ornamental; these motifs contain a form of spiritual energy within Anishinaabeg aesthetic values². Likewise, on computer motherboards capacitors serve to hold energy and release it when needed. In Ace’s practice, they are a reminder that objects are never truly dormant, when activated they share histories and knowledge that reflect survivance and kinship through skills passed down from generation to generation. In *Beaded Abstraction* (2014) and *Coalesce* (2015), Ace argues for a recognition of these formal aesthetics in the canon of art history through the language of abstraction. As most Bandolier bags contain no pocket, their power lies not within their functionality as in much of Indigenous visual culture, but wholly within their aesthetic properties.

Time-consuming to make, these bags were gifted to honour important men and worn at important occasions. Ace continues this tradition in *Bandolier for Norval Morrisseau* (2019) which pays homage to the iconic Anishinaabe painter who created representations of energy through his trademark painted black “power lines”. Ace, through his own symbols of electronic energy, in this case uses a digital screen to display old photos thus bringing the memory of the artist back to life, rejecting the stillness and the distancing often placed on the past. The use of digital technologies in Ace’s practice works to counter Eurocentric, linear narratives of time, highlighting Anishinaabeg artforms that exist before, during, and – as is implied by the discarded nature of Ace’s beading materials – well beyond the digital age.

¹ Deborah Doxtator, “Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro-Based Concepts of Time, History, and Change,” in *Decentering the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*, edited by Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 39.

² Alexandra Kahsenni:io Nahwegahbow, *Always Vessels*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Art Gallery, 2017), 7.



Thank you and Acknowledgements



FACULTY OF
FINE ARTS
FOFA Gallery



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

University Research Chair in Circumpolar
Indigenous Arts, Art History



Conseil
des arts
et des lettres
du Québec



UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CHAIR
IN COMPUTATIONAL MEDIA & THE
INDIGENOUS FUTURE IMAGINARY

Thank you to the Lenders

Michael Belmore, Ottawa

Maxime Faille, Vancouver

Rick Hiebert, Toronto

Gaye Sihin, Victoria

Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto

Collection of the City of Ottawa, Ottawa

INAC Indigenous Art Centre, Corporate Secretariat
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa

Westerkirk Capital, Works of Art, Toronto

and the artist, Barry Ace.