



The Latcham Gallery presents

Barry Ace



Mnemonic Manifestations

July 9 – August 15, 2015

The Latcham Gallery is very pleased to present this solo exhibition by Anishinaabe (Odawa) artist Barry Ace, who this year was the recipient of the 2015 KM Hunter Award for Visual Art.

Drawing inspiration from multiple facets of traditional Anishinaabeg culture gathered from historical sources, found objects and cultural research, Ace creates objects and imagery that utilize many traditional techniques, forms and motifs and infuses these with a contemporary energy that grounds the work, and by extension the artist himself firmly in the present historical moment. In the bead works that permeate all the pieces in the exhibition the artist uses traditional glass beads in conjunction with capacitors, resistors and light emitting diodes that turn our readings of these objects on their heads. He extends this material mash up by using traditional glass beads to create representations of electronic schematics as well as transposing traditional designs into a digital signal seen on a video monitor hidden beneath the folds of a traditional bandolier bag.

In a memorial work dedicated to his late adopted brother titled **Memory Landscape**, Ace uses the form of the Anishinaabeg sacred birch bark scroll to weave a personal narrative that reveals their shared journey as youths exploring their traditional territory by canoe. Archival Kodachrome images transposed onto scanned pieces of birch bark and infused with hybrid bead-work tell a personal story filled with poignancy and power.

Now based in Ottawa, Barry Ace works to reflect back to the wider multi-cultural Canadian community the vitality and cultural liveliness of his home community of M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island. Weaving the personal with the political and endeavouring to create a convergence of the historical and the contemporary he has generated a body of work deeply steeped in Traditional Knowledge reflecting an enduring spirituality rooted in the land.

Chai Duncan - Curator



Barry Ace

Urban Bustle, 2013, feathers (turkey, duck, chicken), wood, plastic, metal, electronic components, video screen, wood, assorted metal, beads, cotton thread, horsehair, dew claws, wire and paper.

libraries. We recorded our sacred teachings and traditional knowledge in the form of pictographs incised onto sheets of bark sourced from the birch tree, much like the Egyptians and other Middle Eastern and Northern African peoples utilized papyrus. Birchbark is very resistant to decay, and traditionally it was cut into sheets and stitched together with branches and spruce root. Our spiritual people would record our sacred and historical information onto these sheets, including our songs, myths and legends that were important to the tribe. When they became worn out from rolling for storage, new ones would be copied and the traditional knowledge would be preserved and passed on to future generations. Many of these motifs were also painted at sacred locations in pigments sourced from natural minerals such as red iron oxide. This iconography was often placed in unusual and difficult places to access and more often painted on rock cliffs and outcroppings on the numerous lakes and rivers. Many of these rock paintings dating back many centuries are still visible today.

With the introduction of Venetian glass cut beads, subsequent to first contact between Europeans and Indigenous peoples of the Americas, the Anishinaabeg readily adapted and embraced the new technologies that came with trade. The impact was significant, as in the case of the glass cut bead, for now one could readily make curvilinear motifs, which quickly supplanted the often difficult, fragile and awkward traditional material - the porcupine quill. Sacred motifs and medicine flowers quickly began to appear on clothing and ceremonial regalia in vibrant and even more complex patterns and colour combinations. The Anishinaabeg called these rare and coveted glass cut beads *Manidoominens* or "*little spirits*" for their light refracting properties and animated spiritual aesthetic.

My mixed media and textile assemblages and performance art draws from these various aspects of Anishinaabeg (Odawa) culture and the confluence of the historical and contemporary. My textile works replicate traditional Great Lakes' floral motifs often sourced from reclaimed and salvaged electronic circuitry (capacitors and resistors), and act as metaphors for cultural continuity (antithesis of stasis), bridging the past with the present and the future. In doing so, I attempt to break down stereotypes and misconceptions that the Anishinaabeg are still living in the past and trapped in an historical stasis. This perception couldn't be further from the truth, for we have

Mnemonic Manifestations

Mnemonics are memory devices that help learners recall larger pieces of information.

Manifestation is an event, action, or object that clearly shows or embodies something, especially a theory or an abstract idea.

The Anishinaabeg (Ojawa, Ojibwa, Potawatomi) of the Great Lakes' region of Canada have lived here since time immemorial. Today, my home community of M'Chigeeng First Nation is situated on the largest freshwater island in the world - Manido-minising or Manitoulin Island (the island of the Creator). We still speak our language, Anishinaabemowin, and it is through our language that our worldview and sacred connection to the land and creation is innately reinforced. In Anishinaabemowin, we have animate and inanimate nouns, meaning that when we speak our language, we have to be conscious of the spiritual nature of all creation. It is through this lens that our world is constantly in a state of either possessing a spirit or not possessing a spirit or transforming, and it is from this unique perspective that we are overtly conscious of the interconnectedness of everything on our planet and the urgent need for us to protect, preserve and defend our sacred lands. Another distinct attribute of our culture is that we do not have a word in our language for "art". The Western and European concept of art simply does not exist. The closest concept that we have in our language is "something that is made beautiful by the hands". Yet, despite this different perspective on the meaning of art, we do have a very rich and vibrant culture, celebrated through dance, song, ceremony and traditional arts, and including today what we would consider, the contemporary arts.

Prior to European contact, another reason for the lack of a similar definition for art is that traditionally art was not separate from daily living. It was something that we did not hang on the wall for decoration. Our clothes, ceremonial regalia, lodges, utensils, hunting tools, including our sacred and ceremonial spaces were imbued with visual symbols and motifs acting as signs and semiotics reflecting our spiritual and tribal beliefs and customs. We decorated our hide clothing with beautiful organically dyed porcupine quillwork and stitched these into complex geometric patterns. Natural materials were also sourced directly from the land and transformed into our

always embraced new technologies like all other cultures, and we have clearly imbued it with our own distinct Anishinaabeg cultural aesthetic. This is even apparent today in the digital realm, where the digital pixel (cyberspace) has clearly become our new glass cut bead. This is reflective of my work **Bandolier**, where the glass beads have been digitally scanned, manipulated and projected back as abstracted pixel images on digital tablet, while the electronic components (hardware) replace the glass cut beads that would have been used as the applique floral motifs to physically adorn the bag. The work **Nigik Makizinan - Otter Moccasins** revisits early Native American ceremonial moccasins that often incorporated a "trail duster" drag that was added to the heel of moccasins to erase or wipeout any evidence of the wearer's footprints. The work is based on trail dusters depicted by Swiss artist Karl Bodmer and his travels in the 1830s up the Missouri River into Dakota territory with Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied. **Nigik Makizinan - Otter Moccasins** are contemporary moccasins with electronic surveillance trail dusters that have the ability to erase your cyber trail in this new digital age of cyber risk and attacks.

My **Memory Landscape** digital suite of mixed media works is deeply rooted in my Anishinaabeg cultural aesthetic and drawn from this rich history and spirituality. I chose the format of the scared birch bark scrolls upon which to present the work. In the Spring of 2014, a close friend and adopted brother passed away at 55 years of age. We literally grew up together on the land and would take extended journeys into the traditional territories surrounding the Great Lakes for weeks at a time, living strictly off the abundant and rich resources of the land, and always travelling by canoe. We put into practice all that we had been taught about respecting the land as a living being, and we travelled with great respect and humility. In reflecting back on those early years, it has become clearly apparent how the land not only shapes our distinct cultures and worldviews, but also how we connect to a specific place on a much deeper conscious and sub-conscious level with emotional sign-posts and markers becoming entrenched into our personal and collective memory. This suite is my autobiographical scroll (mnemonic manifestation) composed of random digital sign-post and marker images, beaded and digital knowledge, and all lashed together to be read as an honouring tribute.

These works reveal their duality and dichotomy through the diptych image: presence and absence; day and night; sun and moon; summer and winter; male and female; life and death; earth and sky. There are numerous dualities and dichotomies presented throughout the work, some more obvious than others, yet all read as a continuous personal narrative that is simultaneously rooted in the ancient and contemporary. The thunderbird, medicine flowers, shaman figures, land and water beings act as protectors on our journey through life and death and in the after-life. The sacred fire is lit and burns in honour of a life that once was and to light the way for the journey to the next life. My brother left behind no visible mark on the physical landscape - yet he has left an indelible mark on the memory landscape. This work is a contemporary homage, printed in the digital format, and through the juxtaposition of glass cut beadwork and faux digital beadwork (reclaimed electronic components - capacitors, resistors, transistors) acts as a metaphor - a metaphor on how the digital can also bring new life to the historical. Although the medium has clearly changed, the cultural context and intent remains the same. As our beadwork and sacred scrolls of long ago possess their own innate power and energy to heal, transmit knowledge and leave a mark on our memory landscape, so too does the digital pixel, as it unequivocally becomes the new "little spirit" of our collective technological age.

Barry Ace, 2015



Memory Landscape Suite (2014). Digital print on archival canvas, beads, cotton thread, wood, deer hide and metal.

Barry Ace is a practicing visual artist and currently lives in Ottawa, Canada. He is a band member of M'Chigeeng First Nation, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. As a practicing visual artist, his work has been included in numerous group and solo exhibitions, in Canada and internationally including: "m̄ntu'c – little spirits, little powers" Nordamerika Native Museum (2010: Zurich, Switzerland); *Changing Hands 3 – Art Without Reservations* (2012 -2014: Museum of Art and Design: New York); and the upcoming exhibition *Native Fashion Now* at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts in November 2015. His work can be found in numerous public and private collections in Canada and internationally, including the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton (Ottawa); Woodland Cultural Centre (Brantford); Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto); Ottawa Art Gallery (Ottawa); The Canada Council Art Bank, (Ottawa); Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (Gatineau); and the Nordamerika Native Museum (Zurich, Switzerland).

The Gallery wishes to thank Governor General Award for Visual Art recipient **Robert Houle** for generously contributing supporting remarks at our opening reception.



Nigik Makiznan - Otter Moccasins (2014) Found shoes, otter fur, velvet fabric, assorted electronic components, beads, cotton thread, synthetic porcupine hair, deer hide, paper, felt fabric, cotton fabric, brass and beads.

The **Latcham Gallery** is the public art gallery in Stouffville, Ontario. It is dedicated to providing opportunities for members of the community to view art and the ideas that artists express through contemporary practices. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, membership and fundraising events as well as grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Ontario Arts Council.

On the cover: **Healing Dance 2** (2013), Beads, cotton thread, horsehair, metal, beads, raw canvas and velvet fabric.

6240 Main Street, Stouffville ON, L4A 1E2

www.latchamgallery.ca Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10am – 5pm, Saturday 10am – 4pm

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