

CURRICULUM VITAE: Barry Ace

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Barry Ace – Anishinaabe (Odawa), b. 1958

Barry Ace is a practicing visual artist and currently lives in Ottawa, Canada. He is a [debendaagzijig \(citizen\)](#) of [M'Chigeeng First Nation](#), Odawa Mnis (Manitoulin Island), Ontario, Canada. His mixed media, assemblage and textile works explore various aspects of cultural continuity and the confluence of the historical and contemporary. Drawing inspiration from multiple facets of traditional Anishinaabeg (Odawa) culture gathered from historical sources, traditional knowledge, found objects and cultural research, Ace creates objects and imagery that utilize many traditional forms and motifs. By disrupting the reading of these works with the introduction of other elements, Ace endeavours to create a convergence of the historical and contemporary. He states, *“My textile and paper works replicate traditional Great Lakes’ floral motifs often sourced from reclaimed and salvaged electronic schematics and circuitry (capacitors and resistors) that act as metaphors for cultural continuity (antithesis of stasis), bridging the past with the present and the future. In doing so, my work intentionally integrates traditional cultural art practices, such as beadwork, which is then juxtaposed against contemporary ephemera, breaking new ground as a distinct genre of contemporary indigenous abstraction.”*

As a practicing visual artist, Ace has been exhibiting since the 1990s, his work has been included in numerous group and solo exhibitions, including: [Emergence from the Shadows – First Peoples Photographic Perspectives](#), Canadian Museum of Civilization (1999: Ottawa); Urban Myths: Aboriginal Artists in the City. Karsh-Masson Gallery (2000: Ottawa); The Dress Show, Leonard and Ellen Bina Art Gallery (2003: Montréal); [Super Phat Nish](#), Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba (2006: Brandon); 50 Years of Pow wow, Castle Gallery (2006: New York); [Playing Tricks](#), American Indian Community House Gallery (2006: New York); Home/land and Security, Render Art Gallery (2009: Waterloo); Meditations on Memory – A Metaphysical Dance. Alcove Gallery (2010: Ottawa International Airport); “m̄ntu’c – little spirits, little powers” Nordamerika Native Museum (2010: Zurich); Changing Hands 3 – Art Without Reservations (2012 -2014: Museum of Art and Design: New York); and [Native Fashion Now: North American Native Style](#) (2016 – 2017: Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts); [Anishinaabeg Art and Power](#), Royal Ontario Museum (2017: Toronto); [Every. Now. Then. Reframing Nationhood](#), Art Gallery of Ontario (2017: Toronto); [2017 Canadian Biennial](#), National Gallery of Canada (2017:

Ottawa); [We'll All Become Stories](#), Ottawa Art Gallery (2018: Ottawa); [URL : IRL](#), Dunlop Art Gallery (2018: Regina); Public Disturbance: Politics and Protest in Contemporary Indigenous Art from Canada, Supermarket 2018 (2018: Stockholm, Sweden).

His work can be found in numerous public and private collections in Canada and abroad, including the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, Ontario); Canadian Museum of History (Gatineau, Québec); Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Ontario); Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto, Ontario); Government of Ontario Art Collection (Toronto, Ontario); City of Ottawa (Ottawa Ontario); Ottawa Art Gallery (Ottawa, Ontario); Woodland Cultural Centre (Brantford, Ontario); Canada Council Art Bank (Ottawa); North American Native Museum (Zurich, Switzerland); Ojibwe Cultural Foundation (M'Chigeeng, Ontario); Global Affairs Canada (Ottawa, Ontario); McMichael Canadian Art Collection (Kleinburg, Ontario); and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (Gatineau, Québec).

Ace's contribution to contemporary art in Canada is noted in the Art Institute of Canada's [Glossary of Canadian Art History](#).

In 2010, at the invitation of artist Robert Houle, Ace travelled to Paris (France) and undertook [four site-specific dance performances](#) honouring the Ojibwa dance troupe lead by Maungwaudaus (George Henry), whom in 1844 performed in George Catlin's traveling portrait gallery exhibition. Ace's dance performances are documented in Shelley Niro's award-winning film Robert's Paintings, chronicling the life and career of Robert Houle. Ace's essay, [A Reparative Act](#), written for Houle's exhibition catalogue from the perspective of a dancer, won the [Ontario Association of Art Gallery's Curatorial Writing Award](#) for 2012. Under special commission by the Ottawa Art Gallery, Shelley Niro and Katharine Asals edited a film short entitled [Homage to Four In Paris](#) from the stock footage that was shot in Paris in 2010 for inclusion in the Ottawa Art Gallery's inaugural exhibition [Àdisòkàmagan / Nous connaître un peu nous-mêmes / We'll All Become Stories](#).

As an accomplished and award-winning writer and educator, Ace has worked in the milieu of visual, literary, and performing arts for over 25 years. In the early 1990s, he was Lecturer with the University of Sudbury in the Indigenous Studies Program, and he was principal writer for the distance education manual Indigenous Arts of the Americas: Retrospect and Transition. He has also written numerous essays on contemporary Indigenous art and artists, including a series of essays on four contemporary Native American artists for Manifestations – New Vocabularies in Native Art Criticism published by the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Most recently, he completed a comprehensive essay, [Reactive Intermediates: Aboriginal Art, Politics, and Resonance of the 1960s and 1970s](#), for (7), a major exhibition of the Indian Group of 7 (Odjig, Janvier, Morrisseau, Sanchez, Ray, Beady, Cobiness) for the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina. He has also written, presented at conferences, and published extensively on Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau.

From 1994 to 2000, Ace served as Chief Curator with the Indigenous Art Centre, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and during his tenure, he curated or co-curated numerous exhibitions, including the international touring exhibition, Transitions: Contemporary Canadian Indian and Inuit Art (1997). In 1999, Ace and his team won the Deputy Minister's Outstanding Achievement Award for the development and implementation of a ground-breaking artist-in-residence and exhibition program at (CIRNAC) that featured an impressive roster of emerging and established Indigenous artists, including Shelley Niro, George Littlechild, Michael Belmore, Maria Hupfield, Ron Noganosh, Mary Anne Barkhouse, Nadia Myre, Jeffrey Thomas, Greg Stats, Jerry Evans, Rosalie Favell, David General, Roger Simon, and many others. For a complete early history of the Indigenous Art Centre Program (INAC) read [Presence and Absence: Indian Art in the 1990s](#) by Ryan Rice.

In 2006, Ace co-founded and served as the inaugural Director of the [Indigenous Curatorial Collective \(ICC\)](#), an incorporated national non-profit arts service organization in support of the Indigenous critical and curatorial communities with membership in Canada, United States of America, New Zealand and Australia. In 2011, Ace co-founded the Ottawa-based artist collective: [Ottawa Ontario Seven \(OO7\)](#) with local Ottawa-based Indigenous artists to provide opportunities for self-curation, public engagement and critique, and he regularly exhibits under this moniker in Canada and the USA.

In 2015, Ace was awarded the prestigious [KM Hunter Visual Artist Award](#). This award is administered by the Ontario Arts Foundation and given to support mid-career, professional artists who have a reasonable body of work, a fair degree of public exposure, have made an impact in their chosen field and demonstrate an original artistic voice within their artistic tradition.

Since 2017, the National Gallery of Canada acquired [five of Ace's works](#) for their permanent collection and included the work Healing Dance 2 in the [2017 Canadian Biennial](#) exhibition. In January 2018, Ace completed the month long [Nigig Artist-in-Residency](#) program through the Indigenous Visual Culture program at Ontario College of Art and Design University in Toronto. During his residency, Ace mentored students, presented in numerous classes on his work and

completed in his studio a new work on Indigenous residential schools entitled, How can you expect me to reconcile, when I know the truth? This work was included in the exhibition Public Disturbance: Politics and Protest in Contemporary Indigenous Art from Canada for SAW Gallery (Ottawa) who invited Ace as the featured artist to Supermarket 2018, an international artist-run-centre art fair in Stockholm Sweden.

In November 2018, Ace was selected as the first Indigenous artist for the newly established [Art + Law Indigenous Artist in Residence Program](#). This exciting new residency came about as a partnership between the Arts Council Windsor & Region, the University of Windsor Faculty of Law and School of Creative Arts in support of contemporary Indigenous art and its practices as an integral educational opportunity for both students and community. Being the first of its kind, the Art + Law residency brought together 94 students, faculty, and participants from the Indigenous community and the general-public around a collaborative project.

Ace proposed a collaborative work that would coalesce a very complex legal document, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's – Calls to Action ([download here](#)), into a single work of art taking the form of an 11.5 metre long contemporary wampum belt. Working in the Armories Art Gallery in the School of Creative Arts, each participant was asked to confirm their participation by first surrendering their rights to the work by signing a witnessed document and symbolically accepting one dollar in exchange. The surrender was a wry reference to the treaty making process in Canada, and also reflected in the work's title, [For as long as the sun shines, grass grows and water flows](#).

In October 2019, Ace participated in the international art fair [Art Toronto](#) 2019. Ace exhibited three works: Bandolier for Aanikegamaa-gichigami: Lake Erie (Chain of Lakes Sea) (2019); Bandolier for Gichi-ziibi (Big River), Ottawa River (2019) *and* Bandolier for Gichi-zaaga'igan: Lake Ontario (Big Lake) (2019). All works are now placed in private collections in Canada and the United States.

In November 2019, Ace's work was included two exhibitions: one group and one solo exhibition. Ace's [Nigig Makinzinan \(Otter Mocassins\) \(2014\)](#) and [Healing Dance 2 \(2013\)](#) were included in the second large scale survey exhibition of international Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Canada. This group exhibition entitled [Àbadakone | Continuous Fire | Feu continuel](#), builds on the first exhibition mounted in 2013 entitled [Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art](#). The same week as the National Gallery of Canada opening ceremony and vernissage, Ace also launched a solo exhibition entitled [mazinigwaaso / to bead](#)

[something – Barry Ace’s Bandolier Bags as Cultural Conduit](#) at the Faculty of Fine Art Gallery, Concordia University in Montreal. This exhibition was curated by [Lori Beavis](#) and presented for the very first time a survey featuring Ace’s two-dimensional and three-dimensional bandolier bags spanning almost a decade of work.

2020 was a difficult year. As with so many, Ace was also adversely impacted by the the coronavirus pandemic and global lockdown with the cancellation of all upcoming exhibitions, international conference presentations, artist residencies and access to his City of Ottawa art studio. During this time, Ace had only a short window of opportunity to remove any art supplies from his art studio before the city restricted access. Ace produced his [Covid-19 Series](#), a suite of 19 mixed media works on paper, at home during several months of self-imposed isolation in his makeshift studio between March 15 to May 31, 2020. The suite of works marks a unique perspective of an artist’s personal experience and reflections during a global pandemic.

In 2022, Ace was invited to participate in the international exhibition [wāwīndamaw – promise: Indigenous Art and Colonial Treaties in Canada](#), Nordamerika Native Museum (NONAM), Zurich, Switzerland (April 8, 2022 to January 8, 2023). The exhibition responded to the concept of treaty and treaty-making processes in Canada; inherent rights and relationship to land and power; and the historical and contemporary impacts from an Indigenous perspective. Ace undertook a new site-specific work for the exhibition based on the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#). While the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) – Calls to Action document is applicable within Canada, UNDRIP is an international instrument that calls for the international recognition of Indigenous treaty rights by the United Nations and signatory countries.

The workshops for the new work [waawiindmawaa – promise \(to promise something to somebody\)](#) took place in Zurich at NONAM with a second session at the [Musée d’ethnographie de Genève \(MEG\)](#) in Geneva. They involved 46 international law students, artists and general public participants (23 in Zurich and 23 in Geneva) who each hand-beaded a floral motif design and hand wrote one of the 46 UNDRIP articles in graphite on a sheet of vellum. At the start of the workshop, each participant confirmed their participation by first surrendering their rights to the collaborative work by signing a witnessed document and symbolically accepting one Swiss Franc in exchange for the extinguishment of their rights. This surrender was a wry reference to the treaty-making process in Canada. The Musée d’ethnographie de Genève (MEG) produced a video short entitled [L’art autochtone et les traités coloniaux au Canada](#) of the Geneva workshop sessions.

This collaborative work is a collective acknowledgement of UNDRIP and a commitment by the United Nations and [Canada as signatory](#) to this international declaration to uphold and honour the treaty agreements (including other social, political, economic and cultural rights contained therein) with Indigenous peoples of Canada. When read together with [For as long as the sun shines, grass grows and water flows](#), the two works are a contemporary visual and mnemonic waawiindmawaa – to promise something to somebody.

Working throughout 2021, Ace began to produce new work for his upcoming solo exhibition [Encoding Culture II: The Works of Barry Ace](#) at Heffel Galleries in Toronto. The exhibition ran from October 26 to November 9, 2022 and two works ([Traditional](#) and [Erased](#)) sold to Global Affairs Canada for their permanent collection and will be exhibited in Canadian diplomatic missions abroad in 2023. All the proceeds from the sale of [Erased](#) was generously donated by the artist and Heffel Galleries to Bruce House (Ottawa). In late 2022, Ace's work was also acquired by Canada Council Art Bank for their 50th anniversary acquisitions that included 72 new artworks by emerging and established artists from across Canada.

From January 16 to 26, 2023, Ace travelled to France with a delegation of artists, curators, researchers and educators to participate in the project [Rencontres décoloniales](#) in the port city of [La Rochelle](#) and met with museums and visited their collections that include Indigenous art from the Americas. These meetings and discussions with partners and institutions will lead to future collaborative projects in the spirit of decolonization.

Ace also maintains an ongoing studio practice creating new works for the art galleries who represent his work and for several [upcoming group and solo exhibitions](#) in 2023 and into 2025.

His work is available through [Heffel Gallery Ltd.](#) (Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver) and in Ottawa at [L.A PAI Gallery](#).

