



Manidoominens (Beaded) Landscape

photo transfer on paper, acrylic paint, glass beads, matte medium, porcupine quills, feather, cotton thread

signed and dated 2014

29 7/8 x 22 in, 76 x 56 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist

For the title of this work, Manidoominens Landscape, Barry Ace uses Anishinaabemowin and English. Manidoominens is the Anishinaabe word for bead. It can be translated as "spirit energy berry" or "little spirit seeds." Beads are understood to symbolically contain within them the spark of sacred healing energy. When danced, in ceremony or powwow, energy for collective healing emanates from a dancer's regalia. Prior to contact, the Anishinaabeg used quillwork for the purpose of geometric embellishment. By the 1800s, glass beads were introduced through

continuing colonization and trade, providing women with a new technology that allowed the freedom to form the curvilinear floral work that would replace the geometric motifs. The Anishinaabeg became known for their intricate beadwork, used by the Indigenous people of the Eastern Woodlands to incorporate the flora and fauna from the landscape that surrounded them.

In this work, the landscape, which becomes abstracted through the devices Ace employs in the composition, is from a photograph by Ace while “on the powwow trail, in the West, driving between Regina and Brandon, Manitoba.” A dancer himself, in the men’s Woodland and Southern Straight style, Ace has traveled extensively across North America. He also undertook four site-specific dance performances in Paris, titled *A Reparative Act*, to open Robert Houle’s *Paris/Ojibwa*, an installation at the Canadian Cultural Centre in 2010.

Parsing out the many layers of meaning in this work, it is both a biographical reference and a historical commentary. The motif of the stroke of paint bifurcating the white space, bleeding onto the image, is one Ace uses often. “The line is referencing the poignancy of the sharpness of a point that I want to make,” he states. Here, the line cuts into the ominous gray sky of storm clouds converging on the Prairies. It then slashes through the white box cars of a train that Ace notes “ironically looks like a strand of beads referencing the spirit berry but also referencing the seduction of Indigenous people with trade items in perceived exchange for territory.” For Ace, the train also calls to mind Wampum Belts, the beaded leather strands used to signify tribal alliances and treaty agreements to share the land.

The quillwork, jutting out from the blue stroke, “is a double entendre.” More than an embellishment drawing on an Anishinaabe aesthetic, it suggests a tool used to “sign a document or make one’s mark,” as quill pens would have been used to sign the early Treaty documents “not necessarily in our favour,” Ace adds. “We had a different idea of the land. It is to be shared, not sold.” The crackled paint that begins at the top boundary of the image drips down from below a row of glass seed beads alluding to the “shrouding of that history.” The paint continues, migrating out beyond the bottom boundary onto the empty white space of the archival paper. For Ace, this reflective piece is also about presence and absence. “The train is in the landscape where before there would have been the buffalo. Here it is a barren landscape but with a mechanical device, the train, moving through it.” The cars, carrying consumer goods from one point to another, move beyond consequence. In *Manidoominens (Beaded) Landscape*, there is a foreshadowing of an “impending storm of consumerism, resource extraction, global warming.”

The landscape’s edges are contained within colour blocks reminiscent of SMPTE colour bars, used in both electronic and digital devices to properly calibrate the chroma and luminance of the screens, our modern means of communication, that deliver to us the news of what lies ahead. With their incorporation, Ace brackets the historical statement within allusions to the contemporary. He notes, “We are still here in the present looking at this history in an attempt to come to terms with what has happened.”

Work from this same series are in the collection of the Indigenous Art Centre, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC).

Contributing essay by Leah Snyder, digital designer and writer, The L. Project. Snyder writes about culture, technology and contemporary art, and is a regular contributor to the National Gallery of Canada's Gallery magazine and other Canadian art publications.