



Buckskin (2021) 172 x 99 cm, Lokta Nepalese handmade paper, Pellon, capacitors, resistors, light-emitting diodes, porcupine quill, horse-hair, velvet, rope, glass beads and bias trim.
Collection of the Artist.

As a traditional dancer on the powwow circuit, Barry Ace has made many journeys across Canada and the United States to participate in competitions and ceremonial gatherings. During his travels, he has witnessed the cultural diversity of regalia that are unique to First Nation and Native Americans from the East to the West, North and South. The paper and textile regalia works, *Traditional* and *Buckskin*, are a man and a woman's regalia, and reference patterns one might see worn on a dancer.

Traditional, the men's regalia, is embellished with Ace's contemporary iteration of the Woodland style motif of beaded flowers that evoke the healing energy of medicinal plants. As a dancer performs, the sacred medicine is evoked and transmitted to those present. This concept of the transference of energy led Ace to make a connection between the bead, Manidoomin or "little spirit berry" in Anishinaabemowin, and electronic components. Capacitors and resistors generously adorn the vest, cuffs, belt, apron, leggings and moccasins of the paper regalia. Integrated into the ornamentation are coiled inductors whose practical application is to store energy in a magnetic field created by the use of iron inside the coil. Aesthetically, the insulated copper wire wound around the coils calls to mind jewellery design. On the belt, Ace has inset an inductor within a circuit board to reference a buckle. Light-emitting diodes are sewn into the trim that outlines each section. The black paper and Pellon replicates black velvet, a material often used in Woodland style regalia. Animal hide and calico fabric are other materials that continue to be used for dancers' regalia. A cotton fabric that had its origins in India, calico was then introduced through trade with Britain and France post-contact and gifted as part of treaty negotiations. Ace has lined the inside of the shirt with the calico fabric referencing these treaty gifts. The handmade Lokta paper, tan in colour, recalls the texture of hide. The paper, sourced from Nepal, is produced using the inner bark of shrubs indigenous to the forests of the Himalayas. Its fibrous composition offers it a unique durability. As a material, it defies the types of damage paper often succumbs to - water, humidity, and insect infestations. For this reason, it has been used to pass down knowledge in sacred Buddhist texts for thousands of years.

For Buckskin, Ace uses Pellon material as a semblance for buckskin hide often used in women's traditional regalia. In the brain tanning process hides turn white. This work references women's Plains style traditional regalia with fringes that extend off the arms to touch the ground, an embellishment that when moved in a controlled swaying motion references wind on prairie grasses. A horse hair trimmed beaded medallion with a Thunderbird hangs at heart level, a symbol of protection. Arranged at the top and bottom of the dress, ceramic capacitors, like the Philips Mullard 'tropical fish' capacitors with their should this be striped patterns, are configured as morning stars; below the torso horse hair hangs from copper jingles; the diamond shape motifs with central morning stars represent a historical alliance between Anishinaabe communities. For Ace, the works are "autobiographical," reminders of a specific time in his own personal history. "I was moved by the unique styles of regalia, all handmade, all works of art," he states. Through the work he pays homage and respect to the men and women who continue to practice and maintain traditional knowledge and ceremony.

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