



Flight of the Mgizwak (Eagles) Automata

vintage circuit-board, beads, porcupine quills, acetate computer keyboard template on paper
signed and dated 2021

40 x 26 1/2 in, 101.6 x 67.3 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist

The Mgizwak are sacred animals for the Anishinaabeg, the most powerful of birds of flight. Their feathers are used for ceremonial items such as fans, staffs and headdresses, as well as presented as honorary gifts or offerings, as they are imbued with spiritual meaning and strong healing medicine. Due to their potency, protocols are put into place. Eagles also represent the channel between humans and the Great Spirit (Gchi Manidoo), carrying prayers to the sky world.

In Flight of the Mgizwak (Eagles) Automata, the wings of these majestic birds are suggested by the porcupine quills the artist has sewn onto the paper. Gesturing upwards, they are simultaneously in motion yet anchored, visually tethered to columns constructed of beaded blocks of copper, silver and gold, the conductive elements for electrical current. The columns echo the apparent vertical motion of the stacked electronic resistors on the white circuit board, where two gold plates, resembling the outstretched wings of an eagle, are etched. Together, the quill and beadwork also reference the architecture of hydroelectric poles. In Anishinaabemowin, the word for bead is manidoominens meaning “spirit berries,” that transmit power and healing. Ace’s inclusion of the beadwork is a subtle simile for the flow of electrons as well as spiritual energy.

Below the symmetrically placed columns is an acetate computer keyboard template, its edge variable and undulating. Space has been left between where the columns end and the circuitry lines begin, an interstitial gap that interrupts the connection between them. On the template, gold circles indicate the placement for numerical, alphabetical and directional keys - the top row, the probable location of the F-keys, the preset functions that perform the operating system (OS) commands. Whereas the rising wings symbolize communication with a mythological or higher power, the poles and keyboard denote electronic or digital communication.

The work is part of Ace’s ongoing Automata series which looks at the parallels between communication technology (electronic and digital) and mythology, or as Ace has termed it, the “mythotronic.” With both, the transmission of information must follow a prescribed set of coded rules or protocols in order to produce the desired, and predicted, output or outcome. If an eagle feather falls to the ground during a ceremony or dance, a retrieval ritual is required to lift it up. By performing the correct cultural protocol, the desired result, spiritual balance, is achieved.