

Michelle Gewurtz

In my view, naming one's practice "critical curating" is predicated upon recognizing that there is a relationship between curating and politics. As a feminist curator, I strive for a radical politics of inclusion. My approach to critical curating can be seen in the methodology used in *Adisòkàmagan/ Nous connaît-re un peu nous-mêmes/We'll All Become Stories* (Ottawa Art Gallery, 2018), an exhibition that I co-curated for the newly built facility for Ottawa's only municipal gallery, founded in 1988. Each component of the trilingual title is distinct and specific to the three languages—Anishnabemowin (Algonquin), French, and English—which appear in the order this land was settled.

Adisòkàmagan, which translates as "every object tells a story," was conceived as the first, in-depth telling of the art history of Canada's Capital Region, a geographic area that encompasses Ottawa, as well as Gatineau, Quebec. As the new building is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishnabeg (Algonquin), it was crucial to employ critical curatorial strategies so that the exhibition fostered cross-cultural dialogue and acts of reconciliation. Hence, in the planning stages, my colleagues and I engaged in a process of consultation with the Elders of the Kitigan Zibi First Nation, and also met with the director of the cultural centre of the Pikwakanagan First Nation, as both communities lay claim to the territory that makes up Ottawa-Gatineau.

The Elders debated our proposal to include well-known watercolours by British land surveyors, as these contained stereotypical and colonial representations of their land. Collectively, we decided to juxtapose Henry Pooley's *Entrance of the Rideau Canal*, 1833, with Dean Ottawa's *Kabeshinàn* (2000). Pooley's watercolour features a view of the military barracks on the site that is now Parliament Hill and an Indigenous encampment with a cone-shaped tent (*tipi*) that is not typically associated with Anishnabeg dwellings, but is instead unique

to people of the Plains. *Kabeshinàn* (2000), a drawing by Dean Ottawa (of Kitigan Zibi), depicts the same site—Parliament Hill—with the traditional structure, a wigwam. Such a juxtaposition serves as an interrogation of the colonialist depictions of Indigenous peoples. In addition, we installed nearby Kitigan Zibi artist Janet Kaponicin's *Tragic History Behind the Parliament Building* [Kà kotàmigowebak ishkwayang Wabishkiwe ogimàwogamigong] (2004), an acrylic and birchbark collage that tells the story of an Anishnabe girl raped and murdered by British soldiers. The story has survived through seven generations; it was recounted by women beginning with Kaponicin's own great-great grandmother, who was at the encampment at the time of the murder. Recovering this element of oral history and making it known to a wider public is but one example of the way, I believe, curators should make space for the telling of different stories. Employing a thematic, non-chronological approach enables art to serve as a form of encounter and engagement that links contemporary society and politics to the past, as we could include this young girl as one of the subjects of the Canadian Government's Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

I view the processes undertaken here as deeply feminist, as they prioritized diverse knowledges and histories to achieve radical inclusivity. Hence, we also included works by artists from Ottawa's Being Studio, which serves a community with developmental disabilities. I believe that a key question curators must ask in our work is, What stories do people want to tell each other so that as-yet-untold stories can emerge? Artistic practice is full of potential to reimagine the world and the alternate narratives that need to be told. ¶

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