

Calls to Action for the Lazy Academy

Cathy Mattes

The idea of reconciliation is not new to Indigenous peoples on this land. As Leanne Simpson aptly states in *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, “Indigenous Peoples attempted to reconcile our differences in countless treaty negotiations, which categorically have not produced the kinds of relationships Indigenous Peoples intended.”¹ With the naming of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action, many universities have signed memorandums of understanding as a commitment to activate and contribute to reconciliation. This requires that non-Indigenous academics play an active role in remedying colonial efforts of the past and present. Those of us who work in art history and fine arts departments are in a position to guide social change through art and art history. It is we who can, and should, take a leading role in reconciling the past and naming the truths of the present. Below is a list of calls, or strong suggestions, for those who may not know how to start, or continue, as allies to Indigenous peoples on this land.

Kitwaam marsii,

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1. Prioritize the truth, in Truth and Reconciliation. Reconciliation cannot happen if the truth of colonization is not learned and recognized on individual and collective bases.

2. If you are unfamiliar with the history and implications of colonization on these lands, Google it. Start by Googling the Indian Act (and the Potlatch Ban of 1884), the Royal Commission on First Peoples (1997), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. For good measure, also research the Métis resistances of 1870 and 1884 and the impact of colonization on Inuit communities (i.e., TB, residential schools, the tag system). Take this new knowledge as a starting point to conduct more thorough research that you will apply to your work and everyday life.

3. If Indigenous students, faculty and staff have organized culturally specific events like grad pow wows, sharing circles, or cultural demonstrations at your institution, show up, and even volunteer. They always take notice that you are there and willing to support and help.

4. Ensure that your institution is prioritizing Indigenous research that is conducted by Indigenous scholars first, over that of non-Indigenous faculty. In doing so, you are helping Indigenous faculty whose research contributions often go unfunded and unnoticed.

5. Make sure that land acknowledgements are more than a mere platitude. They should be embodied and

ignite change in yourself and those who hear your land acknowledgement.

6. If there are occurrences of overt racism on your campus, i.e., white nationalists tagging buildings or destroying tipis, and covert racism, i.e., administration or union boards discriminating through policies, reach out to your Indigenous colleagues. It's a small gesture that will mean a lot.

7. When Indigenous folks take on positions at academies, they carry additional roles and responsibilities. Recognize that, learn what those are, and help ensure that your institution is holding up those academics in the best way possible.

8. If you conduct Indigenous-specific research, do so in an insurgent way that privileges the voices of Indigenous scholars, artists, and communities. Also, time and space are circular, and this research can't be rushed. Be patient, we are...

9. Degrees and a nice salary do not eradicate the impact of colonization on Indigenous faculty. Working at institutions that are sometimes resistant and toxic is hard and requires much patience on our part. If we occasionally show frustration, be understanding and supportive. If we ask for help, give it until it's no longer needed.

10. Make the word "ally" a verb, by doing all of the above, and more. ¶

1. Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2011), 21.