



Erin Morton, ed.

Unsettling Canadian Art History

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/ Jessica Jacobson-Konefall /

The anthology *Unsettling Canadian Art History*, edited by Erin Morton, digs into specific examples of art and art-historical practice that grapple with settler colonialism from numerous perspectives within this contested nation. Morton introduces the concept of “embodied orientation” in relation to the present and the past—both understood as “positions”—in Indigenous and settler colonial histories on the lands currently called Canada. She goes on to say that “unraveling [colonial] narratives requires a multitude of tactics drawn from anti-racist, decolonial, feminist, and queer, trans, and Two-Spirit methodologies for unsettling dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world” (2). In thinking through these approaches, Morton references scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Eve Tuck, Kim Tallbear, Lisa Lowe, Alice Wing Mai Jim, Charmaine Nelson, Shaista Aziz Patel, Jodi Byrd, and Jas M. Morgan. Morton aims to attend to the tensions and affinities between decolonial and anti-racist discourses that resonate through the chapters that follow. *Unsettling* is organized into three sections: “Part One: Unsettling Settler Methodologies, Re-centering Decolonial Knowledge,” “Part Two: Excavating and Creating Decolonial Archives,” and “Part Three: Reclaiming

Sexualities: Tracing Complicities.”

The section “Unsettling Settler Methodologies, Re-centering Decolonial Knowledge” delineates a rapprochement between settler and Indigenous peoples and lands in art history and practice. Morton and Travis Wysote flesh out histories and works of art underlying their critique of “oxen and plough” settler-colonial art, examining paintings by Homer Watson, Horatio Walker, Clarence Gagnon, and Alex Colville. The authors connect early peasant and landscape painting in Canada backwards to the French Barbizon school and forwards to modern and contemporary settler identity and artworks rooted in memories of place. Carmen Robertson’s essay, “Notes to a Nation,” similarly underscores local, national, and transnational contexts and histories with an illuminating exploration of Norval Morrisseau’s creation and gift of his painting *Androgyny* to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1983. Robertson argues that Morrisseau’s reception in the Department of Indian Affairs—which the PM did not bother to attend—highlights the settler state’s diplomatic failure. Her analysis further points to a fundamental difference in the perception of objects through Anishinaabe or capitalist lifeways when gifting and receiving a work of art. Leah Decter and Carla Taunton’s chapter on critical settler methodologies explores the method of “embodying treaty,” by which they mean “to refuse to be complicit in colonial violence and to commence working in collaboration with Indigenous leadership, as well as to harness reciprocity and responsibility as the creative, operational, or research method” (102). However, I wanted a more granular discussion of phrases like “harness reciprocity and responsibility.” Inuk artist Lindsay McIntyre’s “Silence as Resistance” is powerful, conveying the relationship between her art practice, particularly the film *her silent life* (2012), and her family’s history, which involves her Inuk great-grandmother having been brought to Edmonton from her homeland by her white settler second husband, RCMP officer Ray Ward. These events have cascading inter-generational consequences that McIntyre describes and works through in the chapter in relation to her art practice. Her palpable resentment and ambivalence towards her “step-great-grandfather” Ray Ward in the context of the intimate lived experience of

her great-grandmother Kumaa'naaq is well conveyed. I feel that, in writing of her own experience (she begins by writing "I can only tell stories that are my own"), McIntyre's narrative exemplifies the capacity of personal stories to navigate Indigenous kinship and colonial ruptures, highlighting the salience of her knowledge across difference (112). Her personal narrative and embodied knowledge help to ground what feels abstract in the previous chapter.

In the second section, "Excavating and Creating Decolonial Archives," Mark Cheetham, Charmaine Nelson, Henry Adam Svec, and Sylvia D. Hamilton respond to and undertake archival work in their respective chapters. In Cheetham's discussion of para-fiction, responding to Iris Haussler's *He Named Her Amber* (2011), Camille Turner's *Black Grange* (2018), and Robert Houle's *Garrison Greek Project* (1996), he uses Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of play to discuss the art practices—all walking tours—to great effect. Cheetham draws on Winnicott to describe these artists' embodied re-staging of relationships to land, people, and history—our own and that of others. Cheetham's Winnicottian frame of "play" calls to mind how artists' critical work shifts what Sylvia Winter and Frantz Fanon call "ontogeny," "the production and replication of the social totality in/as our bodies and their neuro-affective responses," how our bodies' orientations materially change through these enactments of relationship. Nelson's devastating archival readings of slave advertisements show that the Canadian downplaying of violence and brutality in its practices of enslavement warrants long-overdue scrutiny and historical attention. Svec critiques the self-narrative of a settler music archivist, Kevin Howes, whose collection *Native North America, Vol. 1: Aboriginal Folk Rock and Country 1966–1985* (2014) embodies what Svec describes as a "specific desire for an Indigenous folk-rock anthology [as] part of an older historical disposition towards music that xwélméxw (Stó:lō) scholar Dylan Robinson has described as 'hungry listening,' an entire ontological and epistemological way of relating to sound and music" (181).

Hamilton's art installation, *Excavation: Memory Work* (2013), "a multiyear, organic, multimedia and

site-specific installation" originally mounted in Kjukpuktuk/Halifax in Mikimaki/Nova Scotia, offers "a personal and collective frame within which to view and explore the complex, linked concepts of memory, place, and history in African descended people" (193). Hamilton's chapter offers readers, like her audiences, a chance to follow her as she builds relationships between documents, materials, lived experience, and art practice. Responsive to the legacy of Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992–93), her curatorial choice to use juxtaposition allows archival documents and collections, like slave advertisements, topsy-turvy or golliwog dolls, and her own art, poems, and installations to converse with each other and their hosting institutions. Interested in memory and history, the valuation of archives, and how she and other Black people came to be here, she calls her ancestors "freedom runners," a reframing of the "fugitive" narrative cited by Nelson. Hamilton narrates archival practice from the 1970s, starting with the African United Baptist Association, and decries superficial and pejorative treatment in the writing of historians and researchers. Her practice is "talking back," in Morton's words (31). With her personal, ancestral, and community-engaged histories informing the installation, she aims for her work to "open conversations."

In the third section, "Reclaiming Sexualities, Tracing Complicities," Dorian Fraser, Dayna Danger, and Adrienne Huard collaborate in a text, titled "Bear Grease, Whips, Bodies, and Breads: Community Building and Refusing Trauma Porn in Dayna Danger's Embodied 2Spirit Arts Praxis," that voices their work together as "kinship practice." This chapter feels invaluable in connecting Danger's well-known, ongoing *Big'Uns* series to community practice, activism, kinship, and ceremony both rural and urban, with elders and community participants in the outreach programs Danger runs. A deliberate lack of editing is employed to wonderful effect: Danger's and Huard's words convey their dispositions effectively and affectively. It felt like an honour to witness these conversations. The chapter deepens the resonance of *Big'Uns*, speaking to conversations in Canadian art around what sorts of writing and speech serve to support Indigenous art practices in meaningful ways, and what sorts of academic-inspired work detracts from the relationships achieved in

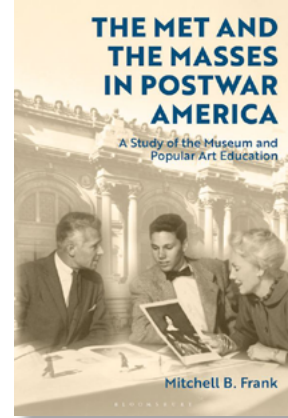
this piece. Andrew Gayed's essay, "Coming Out a l'Oriental," offers an analysis of beautiful and startling works by multidisciplinary artist 2fik, elaborating diasporic Islamicate queer identity and provincializing Western white queer cultures on these lands, within a broad argument "that there exists a strong relation between the historical construction of colonial sexualities and contemporary expressions of diasporic sexualities." Gayed uses "histories of gender, sexuality, colonialism, and their triangulation in the Middle East as a foundation for outlining a cause-and-affect dynamic that reverberates in contemporary queer diasporic subjects" (242). Shaista Patel's chapter "Indian Americans Engulfing 'American Indian': Marking the 'Dot Indians' Indianness Through Geocide and Casteism in the Diaspora" critiques a photography project by artist Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. Patel's discussion of South Asian complicities in settler colonialism, with citation of Dalit scholars regarding caste and its continued influence in South Asian Canadian communities, feels painful and humbling. The final lines of Patel's chapter, in which she quotes Tuck, end the book with her endorsement of a stance of separation, suggesting that non-Indigenous people remain "at an arm's length," "staying away" from Indigenous people (289). This point merits or opens on to a broader discussion. From my white settler standpoint, this articulation speaks to Decter and Taunton's advocacy for "productive discomfort": "the capacity and commitment to accept, embrace, and ply discomfort as an unsettling state of tensile counterbalance is, we suggest, an essential component of unsettling or engaging decolonially from a dominant position" (108).

In Fraser, Huard, and Danger's essay, they cite Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who "invites her readers to imagine reconciliation as a consensual practice that must be embodied and practised with enthusiastic agreement by all Canadian settlers" (220). After reading this collection, I wonder, what practices would invite these styles of relation, of embodiment? Could they be kinship practices, as in the Anishinaabe interpretation of Treaty 1? What capacities do such practices rely on? This anthology inspires me to attune to how its authors enact shifting subjectivity and embodiment through the generative restaging of relationship.

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- 1 Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 23.
- 2 Aimee Craft, *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinaabe Perspective on Treaty One* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).



Mitchell B. Frank

The Met and the Masses in Postwar America: A Study of the Museum and Popular Art Education

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/ *Andrea Korda* /

The Met and the Masses in Postwar America: A Study of the Museum and Popular Art Education examines the mid-twentieth-century collaboration between the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC). Even if you have never heard of this collaboration before, you've likely seen the *Metropolitan Seminars in Art* books that resulted. Author Mitchell Frank recounts how he got started on this project when a neighbour gifted him some of these books, and he admits that he wasn't at all sure he wanted them. I also have a collection of these volumes in my office, passed down from a retired colleague who