

LAND BACK

Oct. 9, 2020 – Jan. 16, 2021

Open Space / 510 Fort Street, 2nd floor
12-4pm Wed-Sat. Free admission.
openspace.ca / [@openspacevic](https://www.instagram.com/openspacevic)

Exhibition Statement

October 9, 2020-January 16, 2021 Open Space presents LAND BACK, a group exhibition featuring the work of artists Nicole Neidhardt, Lacie Burning, Chandra Melting Tallow, and Whess Harman, curated by Eli Hirtle.

LAND BACK is many things to many people, but at the root of this project are our responsibilities to and relationships with the land, and our work to (re)connect with our territories and waterways in meaningful ways. We come from the land. Our teachings, laws, and stories come from the land. We are the land. The land is our home, our mother, our caregiver.

From the Wet'suwet'en solidarity occupations and blockades, to 1492 Land Back Lane, to the Mi'kma'ki fight to assert fishing rights, we are witnessing a heightened period of solidarity and momentum to protect our lands and waters. Through sculpture, photography, poetry, painting, and sound the participating artists will each speak to their own interpretations of LAND BACK from their unique perspectives, lived experiences, and lineages.

As Indigenous peoples, we have relationships with our plant, animal, and supernatural kin that we must uphold and respect—through these acts of presencing and reclamation, we can renew and repair these sacred bonds that have been ruptured in a myriad of ways by the settler-colonial project that is Canada. LAND BACK is a demand for the return of jurisdiction over our lands and waters, and an assertion of this responsibility. It is not theoretical or metaphorical. It is a rallying cry to protect the lands and waters that took care of our ancestors, sustain us today, and that will nurture the generations to come.

To accommodate the realities of the pandemic, each artist has installed their work one at a time, unfolding the exhibition slowly. As they have done so, their work calls to the ever-changing, fluid, and responsive nature of land-defense occupations and blockades, where bodies come and go in waves as needed.

Lekwungen: Place to Smoke Herring

Brianna Bear & Eli Hirtle

Digital Video, 14 min, 2018

The film *Lekwungen: Place to Smoke Herring* was collaboratively created by Brianna Bear and Eli Hirtle in order to share a brief history and overview of the Lekwungen territory. Our hope is that this film will help people gain a deeper understanding of and respect for the culture, language, traditions, and history of this territory, which have been nearly erased and under attack in many ways since first contact with Europeans, and subsequent settlement of this area. To show how the territory and people of this land are still thriving we interviewed Songhees community members Cheryl Bryce, Joan Morris, and Skip, Butch & Bradley Dick, so they could share their knowledge, stories, and teachings so people can learn about the Lekwungen peoples' historical and contemporary connection to these lands and waters. As Butch Dick says in the film, "The most important thing you can do is learn as much as you can about Lekwungen people, because this is our land."

Lekwungen Youth "Unity" Mural

Brianna Bear, Nicole Neidhardt, Shauntelle Dick Charleson, Julia George, Leigh-Annah Sam, Wilfrado Harris and Carmanah Dick with support from Morgan Mowatt, Gina Mowatt, Hayden Neidhardt, and Annabelle Hill.

Over the month of September 2020, Open Space worked with Kinship Rising and artists Brianna Bear and Nicole Neidhardt on a mural project with Lekwungen youth. As a result of the limitations regarding in-person meetings and prioritizing the safety of community members during Covid-19, we decided that a face-to-face mural design workshop with local youth was not possible. 20 care packages were dropped off to youth in the Lekwungen communities of Esquimalt and Songhees with items for self-care and creativity, and a process for contributing to the mural design with the theme of the shoreline; the place where the land and water meet. These artistic contributions from the youth were transformed into the design composition created by Brianna Bear and Nicole Neidhardt.

Nicole Neidhardt

Beam Me Up, Asdzáą́ Anilí

hand-cut mirror mylar, sand from Diné Bikeyah, light, 2020

Indigenous Futurisms and Land Back weave together in my installation, Beam Me Up, Asdzáą́ Anilí. The installation is a Diné Transporter Pad, stemming from my love of Star Trek, that holds a portrait of one of my ancestors Asdzáą́ Anilí. They were alive during the Diné (Navajo) Long Walk in the 1860's and escaped from the U.S. Army to return to our ancestral homelands. As a leader, protector, medicine person, and matriarch from my community, Asdzáą́ Anilí embodies the strength, power, and deep connection to Land that is innate to Land Protectors. Asdzáą́ Anilí is a Time Travelling Matriarch and Land Protector who exists in a temporal realm slightly different than our own, coming to support Indigenous Land Defenders in moments of need. This transporter pad acts as a portal, to transport you into a pocket of Diné time and space where you can truly experience the Glittering World we live in.

The installation is made of mirror mylar, a glittering, reflective material that bounces light and dances to the slightest of air currents. The walls of the transporter are hand-cut stencils that feature Asdzáą́ Anilí's portrait, a Chief blanket design to acknowledge their role as a matriarch in our community, and the words Dadíłzinii Jidisin (Protect the Sacred) overlaid with a corn stalk design. The light and shadows activate the transporter as much as the earth from my home community, Round Rock, Arizona. In my interactions with Time Travelling Matriarchs, Land Protectors, and Diné stories, I have learned the Land is the original time machine. It holds our stories in the rocks, soil, and waters. This is why Land Back is so deeply important. The Land holds our Ancestors, our kinship relations, our histories, our stories, our bodies, our trauma, our dreams, and our futures. Beam Me Up, Asdzáą́ Anilí carves out some time, some space, for us to dream of these Indigenous Futures so they can be put into motion.

Lacie Burning

Blockade Rider

inkjet print on plywood, 34 x 24", 2019

attat

c-print, 34 x 34", 2020

who protects

c-print, 34 x 18", 2020

we will bury it again

woodland camo jacket, thread, XL, 2020

“[Kayanerenkó:wa] realistically recognized that peace is never static or secure, but needs to be maintained, preserved, recovered, and spread. Peace is a process, not a state.”

- Kayanesenh Paul Williams

The series of works presented in Land Back are reflections of land sovereignty movements since Kanonhstaton in 2006 to the present. This new series looks closely at the act of engaging with land defence tactics and desire for a future embedded in peace. Over the course of observing these resistances camouflage was one thing that stood out. What does the camouflage do for us? What does it do for the trees, for which it is imitating?

We will bury it again comes from reflecting on the teachings of Kayanerenkó:wa, the Great Law of Peace, set forth by the Haudenosaunee confederacy. The idiom “bury the hatchet” comes from Haudenosaunee Kayanerenkó:wa, where when we made peace amongst our five nations of the confederacy, we buried our weapons under the great tree of peace and vowed to no longer fight one another. The camo jacket, sewn shut and rendered unusable, yearns for a future where we no longer need to put our bodies on the line for our land and our rights.

Chandra Melting Tallow

IUKAAKIMAT

215 prayer ties

This work consists of 215 prayer ties, the title translating to 'Try Hard' in Blackfoot. Within the context of this exhibition it reflects the manner in which prayer and ceremony have been integrated within the fight for Indigenous Sovereignty, as well a form of contribution to that fight for those, like the artist, that are physically disabled and unable to be present at actions.

Whess Harman

Body as Vessel/Body as Blockade

mural, 2020

This work is a response to the question oft asked of anyone doing land defense work: “why are you doing this?”. For myself, the why could be explained in direct personal connections, or through a larger creed of advocating for Indigenous Sovereignities, but what is felt on a fundamental level is untranslatable into a brief and easily exchanged answer. The state and the bodies which enact its violence (the police, corporations, government officials, etc) seem like insurmountable behemoths where the only expectation is to throw yourself against them and slowly crumble a little more with each impact; but above that terror of what could happen as a result of one’s defiance, is the knowledge born into our bodies as descendants of the land; that this work has been carried into us, will be passed into the next of us, and that our present carries pieces of both.

The colours for this piece were chosen to reflect hummingbirds; their radiant energy and light-footed way of perching from place to place is how I see the necessity of movement in direct action and the cohorts that build around them.

Artist bios

Nicole Neidhardt is Diné (Navajo) of Kiiyaa'áanii Clan and is from Santa Fe, NM. She has a BFA from the University of Victoria and is currently working on her MFA at OCAD University in Toronto, ON. Nicole's Diné identity is the heart of her practice which encompasses installation, illustration, painting, beadwork, and murals.

Lacie Burning is a Mohawk interdisciplinary artist raised on Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve in Ontario. Their work focuses on politics of Indigeneity and identity from a Haudenosaunee perspective. Burning was a First Runner Up for the Philip B. Lind Prize and Longlisted for the New Generation Photography Award both for 2020.

Chandra Melting Tallow is an interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, and music producer of mixed ancestry from the Siksika Nation. Their practice confronts the ghosts of intergenerational trauma and their relationship to the body through the lens of physical disability, utilizing humour and surrealism to subvert oppressive structures of power. Their practice encompasses experimental film, textile based installation, and performance, and has been exhibited across North America.

Whess Harman is Carrier Wit'at, and is currently living and working on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. Their multidisciplinary practice includes beading, illustration, poetry and curation. As a mixed-race, trans/non-binary artist they work to find their way through anxiety and queer melancholy with humour and carefully mediated cynicism.

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