



Between Rocks and Hard Places: Indigenous Lands, Settler Art Histories, and the ‘Battle for the Woodlands’

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In all of these works, my primary desire has been to examine and perhaps articulate the delicate yet elemental relationship of land to consciousness, especially as this is revealed in the technologies, designs, and narrative traditions of the Ojibway.

Bonnie Devine¹

The challenge of settler-colonial art history . . . is to articulate how claims to these kinds of authority and authenticity are being wielded, by and for whom, and to disrupt their naturalization by demonstrating the ways in which they fail.

Damian Skinner²

In the summer of 2015, just before the expected arrival in Toronto of international visitors and participants for the Pan American Games, I arrived at the city’s downtown airport on my way to see *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* which had just opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). As I walked from the gate I was greeted by a large mural-sized sign welcoming me to the city. An Aboriginal man in powwow dress was pictured riding up one of the airport escalators next to the message: “We’re Here. You are Welcome in Toronto. The Mississaugas of The New Credit First Nation Host First Nation Welcome You to Toronto 2015.” This offering of a first welcome by the traditional owners of the land acknowledges on a symbolic level the primary relationship of an Indigenous nation to a particular place by virtue of its members’ descent from the totemic being or *dodem* (pl. *dodemag*) identified with it. Although this protocol has been honoured for some years in Western Canada, it is a recent phenomenon in southern Ontario. Indeed, the advent of such signage might puzzle residents of Toronto who are aware that in 1787 and 1805 the ancestors of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation transferred to British colonial officials the twenty-two and a half by forty-five kilometre piece of land that is roughly contiguous with their modern-day city. In the Indigenous world, however, people remain irrevocably tied to places through the *dodem*

Detail, Bonnie Devine, *Battle for the Woodlands* (background), 2014, and *Treaty Robe for Tecumseh* (foreground), 2013, Art Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: the artist)

system. As Lakota historian Vine Deloria has written “American Indians hold their lands – place – as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind.”³ Even though the Mississaugas’s *dodem*, the eagle or thunderbird, can no longer be seen flying over Toronto, it still soars in graphic form on their welcome signage and the logo that represents their First Nation.

The 1015 square kilometres of the Toronto purchase are now home to the 6,000,000 inhabitants of the Greater Toronto Area, the most densely populated region of Canada. The 1900 members of the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation are today in possession of a reserve one fortieth the size, located near Niagara Falls, about a hundred kilometres away. The Mississaugas are an Anishinaabe nation, closely related to other speakers of Anishinabemowin – the Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin, and Cree – who spread across the great geological formation known as the Canadian Shield. Covering more than half of Canada, the Shield is the largest expanse of Precambrian rock in the world and extends from modern day Quebec west to Saskatchewan, encompassing the five Great Lakes lying at the heart of the North American continent. During the last ice age, the retreating glaciers created a topography of forests, rivers, and lakes bordered by thousands of kilometres of rocky shoreline and wind-sculpted trees – a landscape made iconic of Canada during the early twentieth century by the Group of Seven.

In the Indigenous world, which has existed in this place for millennia, human beings share these lands with the powerful *manitous* or “other-than-human beings,” who can assume animal, human and other forms. They roil the waters and electrify the skies, bringing wealth, fertility, and healing powers as well as danger, destruction, and death.⁴ Humans can thrive only by establishing and maintaining relationships of reciprocity with the manitous and acquiring from them knowledge of empowering medicines. For at least two thousand years, the Anishinaabeg have done this by seeking contact with these beings through dreams and visions, and by making offerings at and marking with images places in the land where the presence of the other-than-human powers is most evident. Whirlpools are places where powerful underwater beings whip their long tails; mists may indicate hidden spirit presences;⁵ high cliffs are sites where the all-powerful thunderbirds nest; and deep crevices in the rock face provide channels of communication with the fearsome underwater panther, the Mishipeshu, and the little anthropomorphic Maymaygwayshi who live inside the rock. All are potential givers of medicines.

The figurative and abstract images painted on these sites are termed pictographs in the scholarly literature. They also occur as the mnemonic signs incised on birch bark panels and scrolls to record songs and the order

of rituals of the Midewiwin society of shamans, most of which are now regarded as sacred, culturally sensitive, and not suitable for public display.⁶ They are also closely related to images painted or, in earlier times, tattooed on the body, and painted, woven, embroidered, and carved on medicine bags, drums, rattles, and war clubs. These small portable articles have been collected and preserved by Europeans since the early years of contact and form the canonical corpus out of which histories of Indigenous arts in the Great Lakes are constructed. In contrast, rock paintings and petroglyphs have remained the concern of archaeologists and barely figure in narratives of the history of art in North America, whether settler or Indigenous. Yet this body of imagery, inscribed directly on the land, is the form of visual culture that speaks to us most compellingly about Indigenous conceptualizations of place and space. Its omission is therefore evidence of the processes by which Indigenous concepts and representations of land have been overwritten with those introduced by European settlers over the course of four centuries of colonial rule.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that Selwyn Dewdney, a professionally trained artist and amateur ethnographer, made the first systematic effort to map, record, and interpret the rock art of the Canadian Shield. Commissioned by Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, he spent many summers canoeing the shorelines of lakes and rivers, interviewing local people – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – in order to locate and, where possible, interpret the painted images. He drew, photographed, and made full-sized tracings of the anthropomorphic, animal, and abstract images he found at two hundred and ninety sites in the province of Ontario.⁷ Dewdney's work has been carried forward by archaeologists Thor Conway and Grace Rajnovich, who have advanced the project of interpretation through ethnohistorical research and further intensive work with Anishinaabe elders. Because the practice of rock painting ceased around the turn of the twentieth century, these elders are the last generation to have had both direct contact with the shaman-artists who painted on rock surfaces and training in oral history and ritual knowledge. The decisions they made to share knowledge with researchers are especially precious.

The vast inventory of images preserved on the sheer rock surfaces of the Canadian Shield constitutes, I would argue, the essential ground line for an inclusive art history in Central Canada, both literally and metaphorically, and the relative silence that surrounds it therefore invites interrogation. This silence suggests three different kinds of problems. The first is the uneasy fit of rock paintings with Western constructs of "art." The term "pictograph" is preferred by archaeologists because they study these images primarily as a form of picture writing. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

scholars like Garrick Mallory undertook broad comparative studies of world pictographic systems as representing an early phase of human literacy, and it is difficult today to divorce the term from the cultural evolutionist framework of that anthropological literature – now, of course, thoroughly discredited.⁸

For the art historian, however, a difficulty in categorizing this vast body of imagery as “art” arises from their highly variable aesthetic quality. While some, such as the great Agawa image of Mishipeshu, display a formal power that fully realizes the conceptual power of the subject, a great many others are crudely rendered (Figs. 1 and 2). Because they are painted on vertical cliff faces descending directly into the water, many must have been made quickly and in a summary fashion by someone standing in a canoe or balancing on a ladder set on a narrow rock ledge many metres above water level. Over the centuries, weathering has further compromised our ability to recapture the aesthetic power individual examples may once have had. Yet at the same time, for Indigenous viewers, the aesthetic quality of the rendering would not have altered a rock painting’s ritual and communicative functioning. Rock paintings, like other traditional Anishinaabe graphic forms, functioned both as images and text – in Anishinaabemowin the morpheme “mazi” or “mazena” is the root of the words for both “image” and “book.”⁹ Thus, just as a poorly printed book can convey its message as efficiently as one that is beautifully designed, rock paintings marked and honoured places of spiritual presence whether well or indifferently rendered. Classifying all these images as “art” finesses the issue of aesthetic discrimination. And where such a classification is based on a modernist taste for direct expression and radical simplification of form, it also risks re-inscribing the primitivist gaze with all its implied cultural hierarchies and contradictions.

The problem of “art” is paralleled by a problem of “history.” Rock paintings are notoriously difficult to date because the animal fats and fish glue binders that were mixed with powdered red ochre to make the paint have been washed away over the years. Without such organic substances, radiocarbon dating cannot be used. Other kinds of tests have produced results indicating a greater antiquity for these paintings than was first assumed, but no hard dates. The waters that have washed away the paint binders have left behind a translucent mineral coating. Tests of cross-sections of rock paintings carried out by the Canadian Conservation Institute using high powered electronic magnification revealed multiple layers of paint and mineral coating, indicating successive generations of overpainting on the same sites.¹⁰ Using other archaeological evidence found at rock painting sites, Rajnovich has made a convincing case that rock painting goes back two thousand years, to the beginning of the Woodland period, when peoples ancestral to the Anishinaabeg inhabited the same regions. Despite such

finds, it may be that the failure of art historians to integrate rock art into their chronological narratives is due to the disciplinary divide between archaeological and art historical methods and disciplinary conventions.

A final problem has to do not with discursive but with physical erasures. As Dewdney's years of exploration of rock art sites showed, most of the known sites are in thinly populated northern regions and only reachable by canoe or motorboat. Rock art specialists speculate that many sites that must have existed in the southern parts of the Canadian Shield have been physically obliterated or submerged under water in the course of two centuries of urban-industrial development: rivers and lakes have been dammed to facilitate logging and mining, and streams have been paved over to build railways, roads, and cities. These transformations of the land have most affected the southern areas of the Canadian Shield, and because these are also the most densely populated regions of Canada, the impact of the erasure of Indigenous markings on settler historical consciousness is magnified. The biggest losses, however, are those of memory and knowledge that have resulted from forced Indigenous displacements from land which have ruptured the bonds between people and topography, and from the cultural violence of assimilationist policies. Designed to obliterate Indigenous languages, they have walled off the discourses and ritual practices integral to the meaning of the visual imagery.

Despite this history of erasure, important projects of recovery have, however, also been underway during the past fifty years, carried out not only by archaeologists, but also by Anishinaabe artists. In George Kubler's terms, artists have reopened the abandoned mine shafts of the conceptual and iconographic traditions expressed in rock art and brought up rich ores of image and form.¹¹ The pioneer was the painter Norval Morrisseau (1932–2007). Selwyn Dewdney sought him out in 1960 as an informant on Anishinaabe shamanism and oral traditions and, in return, sent the young artist copies of his drawings of rock art and his 1962 book, *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*. In much the same way as Picasso's discovery of ancient Iberian sculpture catalyzed his breakthrough into cubism, Morrisseau's access to the bold outlines and flat pictorial space of Anishinaabe rock paintings proved the key to his reinvention of Anishinaabe tradition as a modernist art form. His dramatic and successful entry into the Canadian art market soon after was a turning point in the history of Canadian Indigenous art, inspiring a whole generation of younger Anishinaabe artists to explore Western fine art genres as a site for the revival of traditional knowledge. In the contemporary moment, rock is being explored as a site of inscription and identification by Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine (b. 1952). In contrast to Morrisseau, whose art affirmed Indigenous traditions of mysticism, shamanism, and spirituality

in a modern idiom, Devine's work engages with a contemporary politics of land and the environment. And where Morrisseau's concerns made it relatively easy for his early patrons and promoters to frame his work within the comfortable tenets of modernist primitivism, Devine's work speaks both to contemporary contestations over land ownership and to a world now facing the ultimate disaster of environmental implosion.

In the remainder of this article I want to look at the issues of Indigenous and settler concepts of art and place in terms of an interlocking set of contemporary issues arising from Indigenous decolonization and land claims on the one hand, and the parallel process of a decolonizing world art history on the other. I will argue that, in Canada and elsewhere, these issues are currently converging in a shared consciousness of the growing environmental crisis. I will also urge that an art history that deals more authentically with place and space by attending to histories in the land can serve as a unifying force. I will attempt this admittedly ambitious task by examining in more detail the chronological spectrum of Anishinaabe visual art: the rock painting tradition that reaches back many centuries before the arrival of Europeans; the traumatic negotiations of new systems of land; spirituality and visuality imposed by settlers during the nineteenth century; and contemporary art as represented by Bonnie Devine's recent projects. This exploration also has a personal dimension, for Anishinaabe visual culture and arts belong to the place which I, too, call home, and therefore necessitate a reflection on the narrow space between the bedrock of the Western art historical tradition and the hard place of accepting different Indigenous epistemologies. In the quest for an inclusive and global art history the need to negotiate such difficult topographies is unavoidable.

Canadian Shield Rock Art

Rock paintings communicated not only through the power of images but also through the power of place. The sheer cliff faces on which rock paintings are found command attention in part because they contrast with the ubiquitous rounded contours of the rocky outcrops left behind by the retreat of the glaciers. Those who have studied rock paintings closely speak eloquently of the relationship between the paintings and their sites on the margins of land and water. In their book on the Agawa site, Thor and Julie Conway write: "Forget the pictographs for a moment and let your senses take over. Lake Superior has moods, feelings, and subtle influences on those who can stand still and let emotional forces take over. The pictograph site location can energize or calm us. The setting certainly leads us away from the 20th century into a more natural world. In some ways, a poet can get closer to the

site than a scientist.”¹² They further explain that “great vertical cliffs were believed to be ‘cut rock’ – powerful places where the earth’s energies were exposed.”¹³ Grace Rajnovich observes, along the same lines, that rock painting sites are “places where sky, earth, water, underground, and underwater meet . . . They allowed the manitous and medicine people to pass into each other’s worlds.”¹⁴

We also need to attend to Anishinaabe understandings of the materialities of rock art, for both stone and red ochre carry connotations of power. For millennia, Indigenous people across North America have regarded red ochre as a sacred material emblematic of blood and the life force and have valued its protective and healing powers. They have painted their bodies and their clothing with red ochre and placed it in burials to protect the dead.¹⁵ On some rock faces washes of red ochre occur rather than paintings. Anishinaabe researcher Maria Seymour has explained that “the ‘wash’ denotes the special spirituality of the site.”¹⁶ The American abstract painter Barnett Newman, I think, would have understood these ancient fields of sacred colour.

Stone, in English and other Western languages, carries connotations of impenetrability, inanimacy, and obduracy – qualities diametrically opposed to animacy and personhood. Talking to an unresponsive person is like “speaking to a stone.” To be lacking in empathy is to have a “heart of stone,” while to try something impossible is like trying to squeeze “blood from a stone.” In the traditional Anishinaabe world, by contrast, stone can be permeable and resonant of power. A. Irving Hallowell, one of the most perceptive students of Anishinaabe world view, conducted fieldwork in Northern Ontario during the 1930s. In his classic essay on Ojibwe ontology, he reported an exchange he had with an elder who had pointed out a stone animated by thunderbird power: “I once asked an old man: Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, ‘No! But *some* are.’”¹⁷ As Hallowell commented, “The Ojibwa do not perceive stones, in general, as animate, any more than we do. The crucial test is experience. Is there any personal testimony available?”¹⁸

Such experience – knowledge of the presence of power and spirit in particular places – was acquired through observations of the special features of land and then detailed in dreams. Shamans – people with exceptional powers to dream in this way – were able to establish particularly effective communication with the other-than-human beings and gain from them knowledge of medicines. As Rajnovich explains:

“Medicine” had a great depth of meaning in traditional Indian usage. It meant something like “mystery” and “power” and included not only the activities of curing with tonics from plants and minerals, but

also the receipt of powers from the *manitous* for healing, hunting, and battle. The most important step in the practice of medicine was communication between the practitioners and the *manitous*.¹⁹

Power also expressed itself as the ability to transform one's human or animal appearance – the quintessential power possessed by the *manitous*. Paintings on rocks are, then, representations of the experiences to which Hallowell refers, and they testify to the presence of other-than-human beings in those particular places.

A story told to a researcher in northern Manitoba in 1973 illustrates the relationship between shamanic dreaming, the acquisition and use of power, and the making of rock paintings which must lie behind the many undocumented sites:

Years previously a woman was very sick. Her family asked an old man named Mistoos Muskego to cure her, upon which he tried many cures but they would not heal her. Finally the old man said the only hope was to go and ask, “the men who lived in the rock” for more powerful medicines. He canoed to a cliff face and used his power to enter the rock, the home of the medicine *manitous*. They talked for a long time and the old healer was then given a medicine which eventually cured the woman. He said that everyone must remember the men in the rock, and the aid they offered to the people, so he took the people of his band back to the rock face and drew a stick figure with a line running from the head, giving a rabbit-eared appearance.²⁰

The image, Rajnovich argues, must have resembled the rabbit-eared men found at other sites.²¹

The individual nature of the experiences that lead to the making of paintings on rock explain the highly varied repertoire of the rock art lexicon. We can sample this repertoire by looking in more detail at the famous paintings at Agawa Bay on the northern shore of Lake Superior (Fig. 1). Nineteen panels of images have been identified at Agawa, some of them now very indistinct. They include some of the most visually compelling and best documented paintings in the Canadian Shield. Travellers in the Great Lakes from the mid-seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries mention seeing or hearing about rock paintings, but the most detailed account was given in the 1840s to Henry Schoolcraft, the Indian agent at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, by the prominent Anishinaabe chief Shingwauk (Shingwaukonce), whose community was located near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, 130 kilometres east of Agawa Bay. Schoolcraft, who was married to Jane Johnston, the



1 | Agawa site, Rock paintings by Myeengun (*left*) and Shingwauk (*right*).
(Photo: Bob Elliott)

granddaughter of an Anishinaabe chief, was a keen amateur ethnographer who compiled an early and important multi-volume publication of information about Great Lakes peoples which includes Shingwauk's account.²² Shingwauk described both the images which had been painted on the rock by an Anishinaabe shaman and warrior named Myeengun (the Wolf) and the more recent paintings he himself had made. Shingwauk, in Schoolcraft's rendering, described Myeengun as a man "of much skill and secret power," a shaman who, by virtue of his high rank in the Midewiwin Society,

acquired influence, and crossed Lake Superior in canoes. The expedition was not barren in other respects of success, but this exploit was considered as a direct evidence of the influence of his gods, and it gave him so much credit that he determined to perpetuate the memory of it by a Muz-sin-a-bik-on. He made two inscriptions, one on

the south, and the other on the north shores of the lake. Both were on the precipitous faces of rocks.²³

Although Shingwauk gave drawings of these “inscriptions” to Schoolcraft, the American writer never saw the original rock paintings and they remained unknown to outsiders until Selwyn Dewdney located the Agawa site in 1958. Through his discussions with Shingwauk’s grandson Fred Pine and other elders, Thor Conway was able to date and establish the historical references and purpose of Myeengun’s paintings. The artist was almost certainly the chief recorded as “Mahingan” who signed the 1701 treaty known as the Great Peace of Montreal with the beaver dodem of the Amikwa Anishinaabeg who lived at the northeastern end of Lake Huron. Myeengun used his shamanic powers to predict the coming of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) warriors, who were waging an aggressive war for dominance of the fur trade in the central Great Lakes during the mid-seventeenth century. Calling on the powers of the great underwater beings, Myeengun caused the invaders to drown in their canoes. As Fred Pine told Conway: “Oh that Michipeshu, the big lynx with the horns. He’s up north here. None of the underwater creatures were dangerous for the medicine men . . . But Michipeshu and the giant serpents were here to protect their tribe.”²⁴

The defeat of the Haudenosaunee would have occurred between 1650 and 1662, enabling the Conways to conclude that “from the evidence . . . Myeengun was an Amikwa leader from northeastern Lake Huron, who was displaced to the Lake Superior area during the Iroquois wars of the 17th century. At that time, he battled the Iroquois on eastern Lake Superior, and made a commemorative pictograph panel during a ritual after the event”²⁵ (Fig. 2). Myeengun painted not only the other-than-human protector of his war party, but also the party itself, which appears as a group of four vertically stacked canoes led by their dodemag. The crane represents Shingwauk’s community at Sault Ste. Marie; the eagle or thunderbird, the Mississaugas, who were then living on the north shore of Lake Huron; and the beaver, Myeengun’s own people on the eastern shore of Georgian Bay. In Fred Pine’s account, Myeengun was able to rally these distant nations through magical powers of long-distance messaging. Myeengun’s rock paintings thus comprise a kind of history painting which commemorates a great victory in war accomplished through a shaman’s ability to enlist the aid of the powerful underwater beings at the place where they reside.

The paintings Shingwauk made at Agawa illustrate a third cultural-ritual context that could stimulate the making of a rock painting. The panel consists of a horse and rider and a small insect above a row of four circles and two broad arcs (Fig. 1). These motifs record not an historical event, but



2 | Myeengun, *Mishipeshoo and Canoe with warriors*, Agawa Site, Lake Superior.
(Photo: Ruth Phillips)

the great powers possessed by Shingwauk himself. Fred Pine told Conway that the horse and rider are dream images from a vision quest, and the archaeologist has been able to relate the row of circles and the cross to Shingwauk's high rank and powers within the Midewiwin Society. The insect, a louse, represents Shingwauk's magical shape-changing abilities. As Fred Pine recounted, "He could transform himself into any animal. One way he travelled and hid from his enemies was by becoming a louse. When he changed into a louse, nobody could recognize him."²⁶

Few rock painting panels can be dated so accurately or attributed with such certainty to particular artists. This is not surprising, for in their own time they were not intended to be read in such specific and literal ways by

casual viewers since the details of encounters with other-than-human beings had to be kept private in order to retain their power. Rock art images are thus profoundly narrative while at the same time withholding the details of the stories to which they refer. They proclaim the painter's access to power while retaining the mystery of that power, and they affirm a degree of human control and achievement in a universe controlled by beings whose powers are far greater. Fred Pine summarized the interactive nature of rock painting, which links humans to places and places to powers, when he told Thor Conway: "When I see one of these marks, I know what it is right away. But there's more meaning to it. It's like shorthand. You have to dream about it. It's an effort on your soul by the spirits."²⁷ In the past, members of Anishinaabe communities would have understood many of the general references of this shorthand. Many no longer do, and such understandings are even rarer in settler society. The restoration of the field of common reference is a classic Panofskian project, and a contribution that art historians can make which will be valued if managed with respect for areas of Indigenous knowledge today regarded as private, proprietary, or sacred.

Mississauga Topographies and Transformations

The different styles in which rock art thunderbirds, eagle dodemag, and contemporary First Nations graphic symbols have been drawn are the visual indicators of centuries of rupture and cultural trauma, and also of the extraordinary efforts of will which have kept the fundamental concepts alive. I have long found haunting a passage in Donald Smith's biography of the most prominent Mississauga man of that period, the Reverend Peter Jones, because it suggests how people experienced dislocation from the lands that conferred on them their fundamental identities. Jones was born in 1802 to the daughter of Wabenose, one of the Mississauga chiefs who would sign the Toronto purchase, and Augustus Jones, a Welsh surveyor engaged in the colonial project of translating land into property. Peter Jones's Anishinaabe name, Kahkewaquonaby, or Sacred Feathers, directly referenced the Mississauga eagle dodem, and he was given both a traditional Anishinaabe upbringing and an English education. He reached adolescence, the time when young Anishinaabe men first sought the protection of a manitou, during the War of 1812. The Mississauga lands at Burlington Bay were at the heart of the conflict, and the Burlington Heights – the cliff-rimmed isthmus which lies between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie – became the site of a military encampment and a major battle. The Mississaugas believed that the caves and hollows of Burlington Heights were, as Jones later wrote, "the homes of many manitous."²⁸ They would have been favoured places for the pursuit of the vision quest and the making of rock paintings. Smith writes:

3 | Matilda Jones,
*Kahkewaquonaby, the
Reverend Peter Jones*, 1831,
oil on ivory, 11.3 × 8.7 cm,
National Gallery of
Canada, Ottawa. (Photo:
National Gallery of
Canada, 28618)



The arrival of white settlers, then this incredible war, had rendered the Mississaugas' universe unrecognizable. Although the spirit world was real to him, Sacred Feathers never experienced a vision. The Indians believed that after the arrival of the white settlers many of the spirits had left. The water creature living on the Credit River had taken his leave in a tremendous flood, retreating into Lake Ontario when the white people began taking salmon from the river. Similarly, the supernatural beings in the caves at the Head of the Lake, who made noises like the volley of gunfire, had left for the interior when the alien presence approached.²⁹

Throughout southern Ontario, and in due course in other areas, similar failures of belief and practice occurred when the relationships to space and place to which they were integral failed. Within a few years,



4 | David Octavius Hill (1802–1870) and Robert Adamson (1821–1848), *The Waving Plume* (Chief Kahkewaquonaby, the Reverend Peter Jones, 1802–1856, 4 August 1845, salted paper print, 20.1 × 14.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada, 31195)

Kahkewaquonaby converted to Methodism and devoted his life both to converting his fellow Mississaugas to Christianity and to securing their remaining land rights.

Two well-known portraits of Jones evidence the conceptual shift entailed by the new concepts of land imposed by the settler world to which Indigenous peoples had to adjust during the first half of the nineteenth century. In both, land is represented as landscape, a transformation that was paralleled by the legal-political transfers accomplished by the land surrenders being signed in rapid succession across southern Ontario during those years. In the miniature portrait painted in 1831, Jones is shown in front of two contrasting landscape vignettes: the old world of the wigwam, nomadic hunting, and the untamed forest on the right, and the new world of the frame house, land ownership, and cleared fields on the left (Fig. 3).³⁰ In a photographic portrait made in Edinburgh a decade later, Jones poses outdoors in front of a hedge – a space serving as the photographer's studio (Fig. 4). In both cases and in varying degrees, the British and Scottish portraitists stereotype, sentimentalize, and exoticize their subject. In both, the land becomes a background, a backdrop, a painted screen spatially separated from the human presence. Thus objectified, the land becomes controllable, subject to dominant human agency.

The psychic toll taken by the rapidity of change during the first half of the nineteenth century can only be imagined, but portraits such as these provide clues. Kristina Huneault has convincingly argued that the miniature exhibits the signs of the conflict Jones was experiencing,³¹ and we also know from letters he wrote during his later Edinburgh sojourn that he hated having to act the savage Indian by wearing what he called the “*odious* Indian costume” his audiences expected to see.³² Yet at the same time, Jones wears his identity on his body in proud and deliberate ways – in his inclusion of the woven sash and chief's medal in the miniature, and, in the photograph, in the images prominently displayed on his fringed hide coat: eagles and serpents are locked in their cosmic battle on the lapels, while the cuffs display the classic meander lines that form the tail of the underwater panther, Mishipeshu. Despite the sincerity of Jones's Methodist beliefs, it is hard to imagine that anyone other than himself devised the iconographic program of his coat. Through such choices Jones, like many others, kept alive the visual language of the powers in their land. These beings, who had fled the cliffs and caves of the Mississauga homelands, remain present in such visual reifications.

Bonnie Devine's *Battle for the Woodlands*

The Canadian Shield is rich in minerals, resources which continue to be a mainstay of Canada's economy. Rather than finding medicine power in the rock through mystical transformations, settlers found ores and extracted them through physical and chemical transformations that are often

irreversible. Bonnie Devine is a member of the Serpent River First Nation on the north shore of Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, and shares its crane *dodem*. During the past century and a half, Serpent River has felt the impact of natural resource industries and the changes they bring, from commercial fishing, to the railroad, logging, roadways, and mining. The discovery of uranium at nearby Elliot Lake in the 1950s threatened the community's survival in unprecedented ways. Health problems began when a sulphuric acid plant was built on the reserve to supply the mine. They became worse when the plant closed a decade later and the setting of an explosion intended to dismantle it spread toxic waste throughout the reserve. The explosion made the land radioactive while the waste from the mine's tailings ponds poisoned the river and made the fish inedible.

Devine retains vivid childhood memories of the mounds of glowing yellow sulphur that stood on the reserve. They struck her as beautiful, and she says, with an irony that is dead serious, "I think this is why I became an artist."³³ Her extensive research into uranium mining for her master's thesis led to a sustained drawing project and to her 2004 exhibition *Stories from the Shield*, in which she exhibited a fragile five-metre long canoe made out of the handwritten pages of her thesis research alongside seventy-eight of her drawings bound into three books, or codices, entitled "Radiation," "Radiance," and "Transformation" (Fig. 5). The drawings express the terrible beauty of the landscape of her childhood and invite comparison with Edward Burtynsky's photographs of tailings ponds at the Elliott Lake uranium mine (Fig. 6). Both wield the attractive power of aesthetic rendering as an activist strategy and as a weapon. Anishinaabe artist and curator Robert Houle drew other comparisons in his catalogue essay for Devine's show, seeing strong parallels to the pictographic traditions of rock painting and the Midewiwin scrolls. He points to the narrative quality of both and their use of images to tell a story of land and its powers: "Her own story about Rooster Rock, Serpent River, and Elliot Lake reveals a 'radiance' during the final moments of a vision, a radiant light, a brilliance, followed by darkness and pain, yellow and sulphuric, beautifully and powerfully rendered."³⁴ They also share a mnemonic intent. Devine's images are, for Houle, "as threatening as those found in the sacred scrolls, in the pictographs and petroglyphs of the Canadian Shield, the Devine scroll sheets are drawn in a cryptic calligraphy illustrating the forewarned disaster dream sequence as a sudden burst of light in the evening sky at Rooster Rock."³⁵

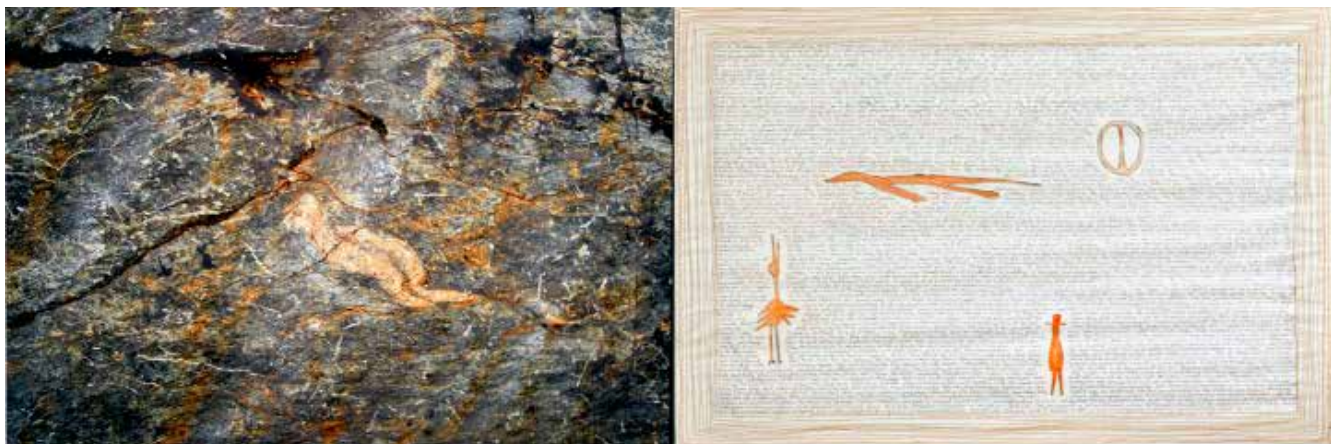
Four years later, in her exhibition *Writing Home: The Art of Bonnie Devine*, the artist addressed the rocky terrain of Serpent River with a new literalness, grappling with extraordinary force and focus with its materiality and meaning.³⁶ The project also called forth innovative techniques for recording the presence and potential of the rock. In her own words:



5 | Bonnie Devine, *Set for 'Rooster Rock, the Story of Serpent River'*, 2001, mixed media, 61 × 91 cm, collection of the artist. (Photo: the artist)



6 | Edward Burtynsky, *Elliot Lake Uranium Tailings #12*, Elliot Lake, Ontario, 1995, chromogenic print, 57 × 114 cm, collection of Edward Burtynsky. (Photo: © Edward Burtynsky, courtesy Metivier Gallery, Toronto)



7 | Bonnie Devine, *Letter to William*, 2008, Diptych, giclée print, graphite and cotton thread on paper, 76.2 × 121.9 cm, collection of the artist. (Photo: the artist)

It came to me some time ago that the rock up here has something to tell and so I have come to listen and watch and somehow if I can devise a way, record what it will say. I have been thinking about wetting down sheets of cotton paper and stretching them over the rock face until they are dry and stiff enough to be peeled away. I have imagined paper set down where the river flows past so the edges fray, to record what the river writes. *Letters From Home* is the name I've been thinking of calling these papers.³⁷

For the exhibition, she recorded the rock and her own techniques in a sequence of digital slides and also displayed glass castings of the rock whose transparency and luminescence suggested the spiritual essences her ancestors had found within. The centrepieces of the exhibition were four diptychs that juxtaposed photographs of rock with a series of written and stitched letters (Fig. 7). While the photographs evoke a sense of the living rock, rich in colour and texture and potent with emergent manitou-like forms, the letters combine lines of written script with enigmatic, parallel wavy lines of red thread stitched through the paper.³⁸ These elements come together to suggest the fluidity of text, image, and materiality in the construction of home. As curator Faye Heavyshield wrote in the exhibition brochure: "The stitches become legible as memory and the handwritten letters are missives to her place in this landscape . . . 'Writing Home' merges absence and presence . . . words become threads and the rock transformed into the lens of glass remains the rock."³⁹ In some of her letters, Devine incorporated painted images which are recognizably derived from the pictographic vocabulary of dodemag and rock



8 | Bonnie Devine, *Battle for the Woodlands* (background) detail, 2014, installation on 3 walls; height 365.6 cm, width 1826.8 cm and *Treaty Robe for Tecumseh* (foreground), 2013, 182.9 x 182.8 x 548.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: the artist)

paintings – a crane-like bird; a long-tailed being; a man wearing a top hat; a divided circle.

These beings return, greatly enlarged, in *The Battle for the Woodlands*, the installation that curator Andrew Hunter commissioned in 2014 for the Art Gallery of Ontario's Canadian Wing (Fig. 8). Devine chose an alcove

which had been designed for a previous exhibition of nineteenth-century art entitled *Constructing Canada*, and retained its mural-sized enlargement of a nineteenth-century map of Ontario taken from *Bartlett's Canadian Scenery*, one of the most popular publications of the era. In overpainting the five Great Lakes with the figures of Bison, Otter, Turtle, Mishipeshu, and the great trickster Nanabush, she marked them as Anishinaabe places, reclaiming the land from its European cartographic rendering. Yet these images do not seem firmly fixed in the space of the map; rather, they appear to fall, hang, and slide off it, and to be constrained by the beaded bands that run across its surface, representing the treaty belts dividing First Nations from settler territories. On the wall to the “east” of the map, Devine painted ships bringing soldiers and settlers. To the “west,” battles rage between Indian warriors and European soldiers, who are painted on pages torn from historical novels in a naïve style that is reminiscent both of Plains ledger-book paintings and children’s book illustrations.⁴⁰ In the first phase of the installation, Devine paired her wall paintings with a sculptural floor piece entitled *Treaty Robe for Tecumseh*. A headless body form wrapped in the Union Jack makes present the great Shawnee leader who rallied the First Nations to hold the line against further white encroachment during the War of 1812. The figure drags behind it the heavy train of treaty belts that had already been exchanged.

In 2015, Devine completed the second iteration of her installation. She painted in a new group of spirit animals representing the Anishinaabe who moved west under pressure from eastern settlers, and she replaced *Treaty Robe for Tecumseh* with two further additions. The new floor piece, entitled *Anishinaabitude*, consists of three figures woven with traditional basketry techniques out of commercial fibres and twigs collected from her own Serpent River First Nation, the Walpole Island First Nation – said to be the burial place of Tecumseh – and the Don River, which flows through traditional Mississauga lands in the heart of Toronto (Fig. 9). These figures introduce a living presence into the gallery while also suggesting a quality of timelessness. The second addition, *Objects to Clothe the Warriors*, are garments made in honour of three great Indigenous leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Tecumseh, the Odawa chief Pontiac, and the Oglala Lakota warrior Crazy Horse. As Devine has explained, “They have been positioned to be easily at hand should these warriors return to continue the resistance, their spirits newly clothed to join the ongoing battle for the Woodlands.”⁴¹

Devine’s development of *The Battle for the Woodlands* traces a movement from histories that highlight the active resistance to land loss of past generations to a future which she makes present only as a potentiality. The battle for the Woodlands is not in the past, she tells us, but “ongoing” – the great leaders may yet return. Her point of departure, which has unified



9 | Bonnie Devine, *Anishinaabitude*, 2015, willow and maple branches, seagrass, paper twine, dimensions variable, Art Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: the artist)

the work throughout its incremental development and continues to be fundamental to its meaning, is the juxtaposition of the Indigenous and Western concepts of land glued to, and painted on, the wall. Her wall paintings, she says, are a “symbolic gesture of acknowledgement . . . I wanted to talk about the land . . . as a being with whom we are in a reciprocal relationship . . . and also . . . to allude to the pictorial tradition, the pictographs on the cliff.” She also articulates the essential difference that keeps separate the underlying and overpainted images: “We’ve made marks not on canvas but on the rocks themselves, as marks of presences not of ownership.”⁴² In insisting that there is an alternative to “ownership” and the uncontrolled and destructive exploitation of land, Devine’s work, like Peter Jones’s coat, instantiates the quality Anishinaabe literary scholar Gerald Vizenor has called “survivance” – a quality of resistance and active presence that Indigenous peoples have maintained for four centuries against the heaviest of odds.⁴³

Settler-colonial Art History

Indigenous survivance puts pressure on art historians to develop new ways of practicing their discipline which acknowledge the co-presence of Indigenous and Euro-North American artistic traditions. New Zealand art historian Damian Skinner has termed such a practice “settler-colonial art history” and defined it in ethical and epistemological terms “as an explanation and primary dynamic shaping art, but also as a possible method for breaking down the unholy alliance of art history and the nation state.”⁴⁴ Settler-colonial art history, he argues, is a subset of postcolonial studies that is distinctive in a number of important ways. Unlike external colonies which expelled their former colonizers and are now self-governing – such as India, Indonesia, or Senegal – settler societies must confront the failure of centuries-old policies designed to absorb, assimilate, or destroy their internally colonized Indigenous minorities. In Canada, New Zealand, and elsewhere, there is a growing consciousness that the places settlers call home were taken from their original inhabitants by theft, deception, and violence. Visitors to the *Nation to Nation* exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian, for example, are told a history of progressive betrayal of land surrender treaties negotiated in good faith during the early years of contact and in later years under duress.⁴⁵ As they leave the exhibition, they are reminded that all non-Indigenous Americans are “treaty people” – whether they arrived on an airplane a year ago, or are descended from ancestors who spent weeks and months crossing oceans in ships. In the same vein, visitors to *Picturing the Americas* at the Art Gallery of Ontario encountered, on exiting the exhibition, an enlarged reproduction

of the Toronto purchase of 1805 and video interviews in which Indigenous historians and artists discuss identity, land, and relationships to place.

Theorists of indigeneity have demonstrated the dialectical relationship between the constructs of indigene and settler – one, obviously, cannot exist without the other. But both Indigenous and settler identities are also the products of deep processes of cultural exchange and intermixture comprised of appropriations, adoptions, resistances, and mimicries – all informed by radical imbalances of power. In the course of their different but intertwined anti-colonial struggles, settler artists have often sought to indigenize themselves through appropriations of Aboriginal art forms, while Indigenous artists have accepted the universalist promises of artistic modernism and deployed Western art practices as powerful weapons of decolonization and reclamation. “Making settler colonialism visible,” writes Skinner, “necessitates an awareness of the conflicting tendencies that fracture the settler collective; the desire for indigenization and national autonomy sits uneasily with the desire to replicate a European, civilized lifestyle.”⁴⁶

The reverse action of “to colonize” is “to decolonize,” a term often heard these days in Indigenous North American political and art worlds. To decolonize art historical work requires reflexive analysis on the part both of settler and Indigenous practitioners. Not surprisingly, this reflexivity has been articulated primarily by Indigenous artists and art historians. Bonnie Devine’s artist’s statements express the tension entailed in decolonization which arises when Western disciplines, epistemologies, and techniques of historical and art-historical research are invoked as part of the process of recovering Indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, and traditions of visualization. “As a First Nations woman,” Devine has written, “I am interested in the oppositions inherent in the terms history and memory, science and mythology, art and artifact, and these oppositions and their cultural antecedents form the basis of much of my work.”⁴⁷ She also makes clear that erasing the erasures of the colonial past is at the heart of her decolonizing project: “My work attempts to trace the absence of the Anishinaabek in these territories using the colonial mapping and claiming techniques that have strategically served to erase their history and the Indigenous methods of mark-making and mapping that reassert it.”⁴⁸ Her strategies use the familiar in order to defamiliarize – re-forming the written pages of her thesis research into a canoe, re-rendering written letters as lines of stitches. Such acts are both cancellations and retrievals; they explore processes of visualization which turn words into images and images into words.

The eminent Anishinaabe writer Louise Erdrich has also meditated on the bicultural conundrum in a small and lovely memoir entitled *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country: Travelling in the Lands of my Ancestors*. She

recounts a summer canoe trip among the 14,000 islands of the Lake of the Woods. “Some of them are painted islands,” she writes, “the rocks bearing signs ranging from a few hundred to more than a thousand years old. So these islands, which I’m longing to read, are books in themselves.”⁴⁹ Erdrich sees offerings left on rock ledges beneath the paintings, and thinks about the beliefs in spirit presences that inspired them in relation to her own Western cultural and academic formation. She writes:

There was a time when I wondered – do I really believe all of this? I’m half-German. Rational! Does this make any sense? After a while such questions stopped mattering. Believing or not believing, it was all the same. I found myself compelled to behave toward the world as if it contained sentient spiritual beings. The question whether or not they *actually* existed became irrelevant. After I’d stopped thinking about it for a while, the ritual of offering tobacco became comforting and then necessary. Whenever I offered tobacco I was for that moment fully here, fully thinking, willing to address the mystery.⁵⁰

Erdrich’s response to the dilemma of the rock and the hard place – the challenge of reconciling Western and Indigenous epistemologies – is, then, a kind of suspension of disbelief achieved by opening herself to the possibility of a radically other worldview. She also thinks through the difference between her ability to grasp this world view and that of her partner, a fluent speaker of Anishinaabemowin brought up on the lake in the traditions of Anishinaabe civilization:

He knows the lake in a way that only Indigenous people can truly know anywhere. His people were the lake, the lake was them. At one time, everyone who lived near the lake was essentially made of the lake. As the people lived off fish, animals, the lake’s water and water plants for medicine, they were literally cell by cell composed of the lake and the lake’s islands. Tobasonakwut’s father once said to him, *The creator is the lake and we are the waves on the lake.*⁵¹

Erdrich seeks knowledge of Anishinaabemowin in order to gain access to this world view:

The word for stone, *asin*, is animate. After all, the preexistence of the world according to Ojibwe religion consisted of a conversation between stones. People speak to and thank the stones in the sweat lodge, where the *asiniig* are superheated and used for healing. They

are addressed as grandmothers and grandfathers. Once I began to think of stones as animate, I started to wonder whether I was picking up a stone or it was putting itself into my hand. Stones are no longer the same as they were to me in English.”⁵²

She reports that finding recent offerings placed below the old rock paintings “makes Tobsonakwut extremely happy, as do all the offerings that we will see as we visit the other paintings. It is evidence to him that the spiritual life of his people is in the process of recovery.”⁵³ Erdrich’s journey is a part of this recovery. She wills a dual Western and Indigenous consciousness and claims it by virtue of her Anishinaabe heritage.

The settler’s claims, however, are differently grounded, for the silences of colonial history mystify the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the settler’s tenure. Is a similar dual consciousness possible or desirable for the settler? A second small book that meditates on the lands, waters and Indigenous histories of the Great Lakes suggests some answers. *A Face in the Rock: The Tale of a Grand Island Chippewa* was written by Harvard historian of science Loren Graham about the island in Lake Michigan where he has spent his summers. Deeply researched through a combination of oral history, documentary records, and archaeological findings, the book attempts to solve the mystery of how the island came into settler occupancy. Like Erdrich, Graham meditates poetically and empathetically about the deep histories of Indigenous occupancy and art making that belong to the place. Both reflect on the relationships between human beings and this landscape and how they have been mediated over time. Both seek answers in the marks that people have left on the land – in Graham’s case, a monumental carved “face in the rock.” Both authors are aware of the imperative of combining the history in the Western archive with the memory of Indigenous people, and both feel a cautious optimism about the future reassertion of Indigenous presence despite the long histories of removal and attempts at cultural obliteration.

The kinds of myths perpetrated by art historical narratives may seem relatively benign in comparison with those of the history books, but their acts of silencing, as I have argued, have been no less violent. The settler art historian, as Carla Taunton and Leah Decter argue, must begin by decolonizing herself, to realize that we are all “beneficiaries of colonialism who continue to be part of settling, and thereby occupying, Indigenous territories.”⁵⁴ The second task is to become conscious of the ways in which art historical discourses have supported colonial dispossession and violence in critically important ways – how, through colonialism, Western visualizations of space and place have replaced those of Indigenous people through acts of silencing, decontextualization, and marginalization. As Skinner writes, “It

was not enough to assert legal processes that transferred ownership from Indigenous peoples to settler populations, or to create and manage social processes of dispossession. The land itself also had to be re-imagined and remade, and in this process the ideologies of race and the organization of space became intertwined, based on the remarkable commonality that both are conceived of as natural, given, and elemental.”⁵⁵ The recognition of such processes is a notable achievement of poststructuralist and postcolonial art historical work, as exemplified in Canada by the extensive critique of the iconic status of the landscapes of the Group of Seven.⁵⁶ We have come to understand how the Western genre of landscape served as a primary site for this reimagining and remaking of land by rendering it objectifiable, and therefore divisible, commodifiable, and possessable. Deconstruction, however, cannot be an end in itself. It is, rather, a stage in the development of a new construct that better fits current needs. I pointed to the problematic nature of the characterization of rock painting as “art” at the beginning of this paper, and similar problems have emerged in relation to Western constructs of “history” and “land,” as well as to standard Western genres of the portrait, the still life, and the history painting. Just as land is understood as embodying powers which are independent of human beings and with which humans collectively must establish relations of reciprocal responsibility, so representations of identity may take the form of lineages and collectivities rather than individuals, and performative forms may be privileged over graphic expression in recording historical memory. If we cannot expect Indigenous thought-worlds to be conformable to and containable within Western understandings of artistic genres and terms – if we cannot produce inclusivity merely by extending the mantle of Western genres over things that seem to resemble them from other parts of the world – what kind of common conceptual vocabulary can serve the needs of a world art history?⁵⁷

The further challenge that confronts us involves not merely the reconstruction of art histories that have been unwritten or marginalized, but, rather, the taking on of their epistemological and ontological differences, their radically different understandings of space, place, and the ways human beings are positioned in relation to them. This task cannot be accomplished by well-intentioned settler art historians on their own. If the Indigenous and the settler-colonial summon each other dialectically, then a settler-colonial art history requires the complement of an Indigenous art history. A rising generation of Indigenous art historians trained in Western conventions but committed to survivance and the reclamation of Indigenous world views has begun to enter the academy. And although their work is necessarily complicated by the dual traditions to which they are heir, a distinct Indigenous art historical discourse is nascent. Fluid and difficult



10 | George Heriot, *Fall of the Grande Chaudière on the Outaouais River*, 1807, hand coloured aquatint on wove paper, 13.3 × 18.9 (print), engraved by Frederick Christian Lewis, Library and Archives Canada. (Photo: Library and Archives Canada, 1989-479-17B, C-010691)

to characterize at present, it will take shape as part of a larger political and cultural project of decolonization.

Settlers and Indigenous peoples are not only divided but also united – profoundly, indivisibly, fatally, hopefully – by their shared sense of space and place. In Canada, the renewed threat of global environmental disaster is proving to be a meeting ground, engendering the new kinds of alliances that are embodied in the Idle No More movement. It is not accidental that the rallying ground for this movement, which initially formed to protest the Harper government’s repeal of important environmental protection laws and regulations, has been an island in the Ottawa River adjacent to the Chaudière Falls, a sacred Anishinaabe site. Victoria Island, which lies just below Parliament Hill, is unceded Anishinaabe land.⁵⁸ Champlain, the first French explorer of the river, gave the rapids and great waterfall which lie next to it the name “Chaudière” or “kettle,” a direct translation of “Asticou,” its name in Anishinaabemowin (Fig. 10). He wrote that the falls made a noise so loud that the sound could be heard from miles away, and that his Anishinaabe guides stopped to make tobacco offerings to the beings that lived there (Fig. 11). In the early twentieth century, the rapids were ringed in by a large dam to



11 | C.W. Jeffreys, *Offering of tobacco near the main Chaudière Falls*, ca. 1930, size unknown, watercolour, Library and Archives Canada. (Photo: Library and Archives Canada, C-073701)

facilitate the production of the paper mills that spread themselves across the islands (Fig. 12). The mills are now closed, and the Kitigan Zibi Anishinaabeg of Quebec have formed a “Free the Falls” movement to remove the dam and return the site to its original state. They oppose a major development of the adjacent islands as a new residential and commercial complex. The eminent, Ottawa-based Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal is among those opposed. “The falls are like our Mecca or our Jerusalem, or St. Peter’s Square,” he told a newspaper reporter. “For 10,000 years, people have come there for spiritual ceremonies, and it was only taken over by force. Now, we don’t do things that way. We are supposed to treat each other with respect . . . Would they build condos on St. Peter’s Square? No. But here, it’s a bunch of Indians.”⁵⁹ The Pikwakanagan First Nation in Ontario who claim the islands, however, have negotiated an agreement with the developer which would provide forms of recognition and economic advantages sufficient to allow them to support a major residential and commercial development on the islands. It remains an open question whether contemporary projects of restoration and reclamation related to land claims and Indigenous spirituality can triumph over twenty-first century economic pressures and urban needs. The best hope, however, seems to lie in alliances built on shared environmental concerns and an



12 | Henri Fabien, *Chaudière Falls and Bridge [on the Ottawa river]*, 1914 (after the construction of two hydro generating stations in 1891 and 1900), size unknown, oil on canvas, Library and Archives Canada. (Photo: Library and Archives Canada, C-010663)

emergent decolonial historical consciousness – one which gives rise to images of land informed by a sense of its integral powers.

NOTES

- 1 In Bonnie DEVINE, Tom HILL, Robert HOULE, and Diane PUGEN, *Stories from the Shield: Bonnie Devine* (Brantford, ON: The Woodland Cultural Centre, 2004), n.p. Accessed 15 Aug. 2015, <http://ccca.concordia.ca/c/writing/d/devine/dev002t.html>.
- 2 Damian SKINNER, "Settler-colonial Art History: A Proposition in Two Parts," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 35:1 (2014): 142.
- 3 Quoted in Christopher T. GREEN, "Anishinaabe Artists, of the Great Lakes? Problematizing the Exhibition of Place in Native American Art," *ARTMargins* 4:2 (2015): 80–96 and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. DOI: 10.1162/ARTM_a_00113.
- 4 The first human habitation of the region dates back approximately 11,000 years; the life-style followed by Indigenous peoples in southern Ontario at the time of contact

- originated in the Woodland period which began about 1000 BCE. Accessed 15 Aug. 2015, <http://www.trca.on.ca/dotAsset/37523.pdf>.
- 5 Maureen MATTHEWS and Roger ROULETTE, "Mapping the Ojibwe Universe, *Giishkaanadong*," Ojibwe Cosmology Discussion Paper, Prepared for Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site Committee, May 2010, 7.
 - 6 For the classic account of shamanism as a global spiritual system, see Mircea ELIADE, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964). On shamanism in North America and the distinction between shamanic and shamanistic societies, see Esther PASZTORY, "Shamanism and North American Indian Art," in *Native North American Art History: Selected Readings*, ed. Aldona Jonaitis and Zena Pearlstone Mathews (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1982), 7–30.
 - 7 Dewdney gave the number as 162 in the 1967 revised edition of his book; the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources plaque at the Agawa site gives 290, but new sites continue to be discovered.
 - 8 Garrick MALLORY, *Picture Writing of the American Indians* (Don Mills, ON: Dover, 1972), 2 vols. (reprinted from *Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888–'89*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893).
 - 9 Personal communication from Alan Corbiere: "The word we use here on Manitoulin for picture/painting photograph is *mzinaazgan* which could be *mazina'aazigan* in other dialects." Email of 4 Aug. 2015.
 - 10 Thor CONWAY and Julie CONWAY, *Spirits on Stone: The Agawa Pictographs* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Heritage Discoveries, 1990), 53.
 - 11 George KUBLER, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).
 - 12 CONWAY and CONWAY, *Spirits on Stone*, 11.
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 Grace RAJNOVICH, *Reading Rock Art: Interpreting the Indian Rock Paintings of The Canadian Shield* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, 1994), 159.
 - 15 Ibid., 13.
 - 16 Quoted in *ibid.*, 66.
 - 17 A. Irving HALLOWELL, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," *Contributions to Anthropology: Selected Papers of A. Irving Hallowell*, with introductions by Raymond D. Fogelson, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 361.
 - 18 Ibid., 363.
 - 19 RAJNOVICH, *Reading Rock Art*, 10–11.
 - 20 Ibid., 42. Wheeler collected this account at Oxford House, Manitoba.
 - 21 She specifies Crowneck Inlet, Rainy Lake.
 - 22 Henry Rowe SCHOOLCRAFT, *Historical and Statistical Information respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, with illustrations by Capt. Seth Eastman, published by authority of Congress, (6 vols., 1851–57).
 - 23 Quoted in CONWAY and CONWAY, *Spirits on Stone*, 58 (from SCHOOLCRAFT, *Historical and Statistical Information*, 406).
 - 24 CONWAY and CONWAY, *Spirits on Stone*, 60.
 - 25 Ibid., 61.

- 26 Ibid., 32.
- 27 Ibid., 43.
- 28 Peter JONES (Kahkewaquonaby), *History of the Ojebway Indians, with Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1861), 255.
- 29 Donald B. SMITH, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 35.
- 30 See Kristina HUNEAULT, "In Miniature: Trauma and Indigenous Identity in Colonial Canada," in *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and Image in Post-Traumatic Cultures*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 41–59.
- 31 Kristina HUNEAULT, "Miniature Painting as Transcultural Object? The John Norton and Peter Jones Portraits," in *Transculturation in British Art, 1770–1930*, ed. Julie Codell (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).
- 32 Ibid., 50.
- 33 Personal communication, 23 Oct. 2014, Toronto.
- 34 Robert HOULE, "DibaaJimowin/Storytelling," in *Stories from the Shield: Bonnie Devine*, n.p.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 The exhibition "Bonnie Devine: Writing Home," was curated by Faye Heavyshield for Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB, and shown there from 2 Feb. – 21 Mar. 2008, and then at Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Winnipeg, from 12 Feb. – 27 Mar. 2010.
- 37 Bonnie DEVINE, "An Artist Statement," in *Writing Home: The Art of Bonnie Devine*, n.p.
- 38 Devine has written of these works: "The photographs were taken on the stretch of ancient rock beside the Serpent River on the Canadian Shield where I grew up. They record diverse mineral content, hint at primordial geological activity, and trace the dramatic contours of the rock that are visible there. The panels beside each photograph contain literary passages handwritten in dense graphite text, and the vestiges of maps, pictographic symbols, and machine-sewn cotton thread. Accessed 22 Aug. 2015, <http://www.cacnart.com/#!/bonnie-devine/ccbe>.
- 39 Faye HEAVYSHIELD, "Writing Home: The Art of Bonnie Devine," in the exhibition brochure of the same title, n.p.
- 40 See Devine's related 2013 work, "A Dictionary of Names." *Canada & China Contemporary Art Communications*. Accessed 22 Aug. 2015, <https://www.cacnart.com/bonnie-devine>.
- 41 Quoted from Devine's text. The final text as installed read: "They are hung to be easily accessible should these warriors return to join in the ongoing battle for the Woodlands."
- 42 Bonnie Devine, personal interview with the author, Art Gallery of London, ON, 23 Oct. 2014.
- 43 Gerald VIZENOR, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.
- 44 SKINNER "Settler-colonial Art History," 132.
- 45 "Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations," opened in September 2014 and is scheduled to close in fall 2018. The publication is edited by Suzan SHOWN HARJO (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books and National Museum of the American Indian, 2014).

- 46 SKINNER, "Settler-colonial Art History," 140.
- 47 DEVINE, "An Artist Statement."
- 48 "Bonnie Devine Artist Statement." Accessed 22 Aug. 2015, <https://www.cacnart.com/bonnie-devine>.
- 49 Louise ERDRICH, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country: Traveling in the Land of My Ancestors* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2003), 3.
- 50 Ibid., 16.
- 51 Ibid., 34.
- 52 Ibid., 86.
- 53 Ibid., 50.
- 54 Carla TAUNTON and Leah DECTER, "Addressing the Settler Problem: Strategies of Settler Responsibility and Decolonization," *Fuse Magazine* 36:4 (Fall 2013): 32–39.
- 55 SKINNER, "Settler-colonial Art History," 136.
- 56 See, for example, John O'BRIAN and Peter WHITE, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).
- 57 I discuss the imposition of Western landscape and portrait genres in "Indigenous Lands/Settler Landscapes: Art Histories Out of Joint," in *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic*, ed. Peter John Brownlee, Valeria Piccoli and Georgiana Uhlyarik (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press), 92–98; and "From Harmony to Antiphony: The Indigenous Presence in a (Future) Portrait Gallery of Canada," in Ruth B. PHILLIPS, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 231–51.
- 58 Historically referred to as Algonquins, the two claimants, the Quebec Kitigan Zibi and Ontario Pikwakanagan First Nations are Anishinaabe peoples.
- 59 Alex BOZIKOVIC, "Land rights, city-building at odds in Ottawa's Zibi development," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Jan. 2016. Accessed 1 Aug. 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/home-and-garden/architecture/land-rights-city-building-at-odds-in-ottawas-zibi-development/article28074115/>.

Entre l'arbre et l'écorce / Au pied du mur : Territoires autochtones, histoires de l'art coloniales et la « Battle for the Woodlands »

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Dans le monde autochtone, qui existe sur le Bouclier canadien depuis des millénaires, les êtres humains partagent les territoires avec de puissants manitous ou « êtres non humains » pouvant prendre des formes animales, humaines ou autres. Ces êtres, qui troublent les eaux et illuminent les cieux, sont dotés de pouvoirs de guérison, de fertilité et de richesse, tout en étant porteurs de danger, de destruction et de mort¹. L'épanouissement des humains repose sur l'établissement et le maintien de relations de réciprocité avec ces manitous, de même que sur l'acquisition de précieux savoirs médicaux détenus par ces derniers. Depuis au moins 2000 ans, les Anishinaabeg² tentent d'établir un contact avec ces êtres à travers leurs rêves et leurs visions, ainsi qu'en leur faisant des offrandes et en marquant d'images des lieux au sein du territoire où la présence de ces puissances non humaines détentrices de connaissances médicales recherchées se fait plus manifeste.

Dans les publications savantes, les images figuratives et abstraites peintes sur ces sites sont appelées des « pictogrammes ». Ces images sont aussi présentes sous forme de signes mnémoniques gravés sur des panneaux et des rouleaux d'écorce de bouleau, servant de transcription d'étapes de rituels et de chansons propres à la société shamanique Midewiwin; la plupart de ces inscriptions sont aujourd'hui considérées comme étant sacrées, sensibles au plan culturel et non destinées à une exposition publique. Ces images sont par ailleurs étroitement liées à celles peintes, ou autrefois tatouées, sur le corps humain, ainsi que celles brodées, tissées, peintes et gravées sur des sacs médecine, des tambours, des hochets et des clubs de guerre (aussi appelés casse-têtes). Ces petits articles portatifs ont été collectionnés et préservés par des Européens depuis les toutes premières années de la période de contact et constituent le canon à partir duquel se bâtit l'histoire des arts autochtones des Grands Lacs. En revanche, les peintures rupestres et les pétroglyphes sont demeurés l'objet d'étude des archéologues et figurent à peine dans les récits de l'histoire de l'art de l'Amérique du Nord, tant autochtone qu'allochtone. Pourtant, ce corpus d'images, inscrit directement dans le territoire, est la forme de culture visuelle qui nous communique de la façon la plus éloquente les modes autochtones de spatialisation et de conceptualisation du lieu. Son

évacuation témoigne du processus à travers lequel les représentations et concepts territoriaux autochtones ont été supplantés par ceux introduits par les colons européens au cours des quatre siècles de l'époque coloniale.

Ce n'est qu'au milieu du 20^e siècle que l'artiste professionnel et ethnographe amateur Selwyn Dewdney se consacre à un premier effort systématique de cartographie, d'archivage et d'interprétation de l'art rupestre du Bouclier canadien. Chargé de ce projet par le Musée royal de l'Ontario à Toronto, il passe plusieurs étés à parcourir en canoë les rives de lacs et de rivières et à s'entretenir avec des populations locales, tant autochtones que non-autochtones, afin de localiser et, lorsque possible, d'interpréter ces images peintes. Il dessine, photographie et réalise le tracé en grandeur nature d'images anthropomorphiques, animalières et abstraites qu'il trouve dans 290 sites à travers la province de l'Ontario³. Les archéologues Thor Conway et Grace Rajnovich poursuivent et approfondissent les travaux d'interprétation entamés par Dewdney en s'entretenant de façon intensive avec des aînés. La pratique de la peinture rupestre ayant cessé autour du tournant du 20^e siècle, ces aînés représentent la dernière génération ayant été en contact direct avec des artistes-shaman et ayant reçu un enseignement de l'histoire orale et des connaissances rituelles. Leur décision de partager leurs savoirs avec des chercheurs s'avère particulièrement précieuse.

Je soutiens que le vaste inventaire d'images préservées sur les surfaces rocheuses lisses du Bouclier canadien constitue, métaphoriquement et littéralement, la fondation pour une histoire de l'art inclusive du Centre du Canada, et en ce sens, le mutisme relatif entourant ce sujet suscite des interrogations. Ce silence évoque trois différents types de problèmes. Le premier concerne une certaine incompatibilité entre la peinture rupestre et les conceptions occidentales de l'« art ». Les archéologues privilégient le terme « pictogramme », considérant principalement ces peintures comme des formes d'écriture par images, ou pictographie. Au 19^e siècle et au début du 20^e siècle, certains chercheurs universitaires, dont Garrick Mallery, entreprennent de vastes études comparatives de systèmes pictographiques à travers le monde, qu'ils considèrent représenter une première phase de l'alphabétisation de l'humain; il s'avère aujourd'hui difficile de dissocier la notion d'alphabétisation du cadre théorique de l'évolution culturelle qui caractérise ces études anthropologiques, cadre évidemment totalement discrédité de nos jours⁴.

Pour l'historien de l'art, cependant, la difficulté quant à la catégorisation de ce vaste corpus d'images comme étant de l'« art » découle de la grande variabilité de sa qualité esthétique. Si certaines peintures, comme la représentation du Mishipeshoo d'Agawa, sont dotées d'une puissance formelle rendant manifeste le pouvoir conceptuel du sujet dépeint, de nombreuses autres sont rendues de manière rudimentaire. Peintes sur des flancs de

falaises surplombant directement des plans d'eau, plusieurs de ces images ont certainement dû être réalisées rapidement et sommairement par une personne debout dans un canoë, ou en équilibre sur une échelle perchée sur une étroite corniche à plusieurs mètres au-dessus du niveau de l'eau. Au fil des siècles, l'érosion a compromis davantage notre capacité à capturer le pouvoir esthétique que certains exemples d'images ont pu posséder. Néanmoins, la qualité esthétique du rendement d'une peinture rupestre n'altère en rien ses fonctions rituelles et communicatives, tout comme un livre conçu et imprimé de façon médiocre peut être lu avec autant d'aisance qu'un ouvrage élaboré avec talent et style. Par ailleurs, si les notions d'image et de texte peuvent être distinguées dans les langues européennes, en Anishinaabemowin, le morphème « mazi » ou « mazena » est à la fois la racine du mot « image » et du mot « livre⁵ ». La classification de ces images en tant qu'« art » peut résulter soit en une nuance enrichissante de ces enjeux, soit en l'imposition d'un filtre moderniste et primitiviste si l'appréciation de leur rendement radicalement simplifié repose sur des considérations esthétiques.

Au problème de la question de l'« art » s'ajoute le problème d'« histoire ». La datation des peintures rupestres présente une difficulté notoire, de par l'effacement graduel à travers les années de la peinture utilisée, composée d'un mélange d'ocre rouge en poudre et de gras animaux ou de colle de poisson, servant de liants. Sans la présence de ces substances organiques, une datation au radiocarbone est impossible. D'autres types de tests ont mené à des résultats révélant une ancienneté plus importante qu'initialement évaluée de ces peintures, sans pouvoir fixer de dates de création précises. Grâce à des preuves archéologiques trouvées sur des sites de peintures rupestres, Rajnovich a bâti un argumentaire convaincant selon lequel la pratique de la peinture rupestre remonterait à 2000 ans, soit au début de la période Woodland, alors que les ancêtres des Anishinaabeg occupaient ces mêmes régions. Malgré de telles découvertes, il est possible que l'incapacité des historiens de l'art à intégrer l'art rupestre à leurs récits chronologiques soit due à un clivage entre les méthodologies et conventions disciplinaires archéologiques et historiographiques.

Un dernier problème concerne non pas l'effacement discursif de ce corpus, mais plutôt ses effacements physiques. Tel qu'en témoignent les années d'exploration de Dewdney, la plupart des sites rupestres connus se trouvent dans des régions nordiques peu peuplées et accessibles uniquement par canoë ou par bateau à moteur. Des spécialistes de l'art rupestre avancent l'explication selon laquelle de nombreux sites ayant pu exister dans les régions du sud du Bouclier canadien ont été anéantis ou submergés au cours des deux siècles de développement industriel et urbain. En effet, nombre de barrages ont été érigés à travers des rivières et des lacs afin de faciliter l'exploitation forestière

et minière, et des ruisseaux ont été recouverts et pavés afin de permettre la construction de chemins de fer, de routes et de villes. Ces transformations territoriales ont tout particulièrement affecté les régions dans le sud du Bouclier canadien. Ces dernières étant les zones les plus densément peuplées du Canada, l'impact de l'effacement des marques autochtones de la conscience coloniale est amplifié. Les pertes les plus importantes, cependant, sont celles de la mémoire et des savoirs ayant découlé d'une part des déplacements forcés de peuples autochtones, dont les liens à la topographie ont par conséquent été rompus, et d'autre part de la violence culturelle inhérente aux politiques assimilationnistes. Conçues dans le but d'anéantir les langues autochtones, ces politiques ont mené à une marginalisation des pratiques rituelles et des discours autochtones indissociables de la signification de ces imageries visuelles.

Malgré cet historique d'effacement, d'importants projets de régénération ont été instaurés au cours des derniers cinquante ans non seulement par des archéologues, mais aussi par des artistes anishinaabe. Le peintre Norval Morrisseau (1932–2007) en fut le pionnier. En 1960, Selwyn Dewdney fait appel à lui à titre d'informateur afin d'en apprendre davantage sur les pratiques shamaniques et sur les traditions orales anishinaabe. En échange, il envoie au jeune artiste des copies de ses dessins de peintures rupestres et de son livre de 1962, *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*. De la même manière que la percée de Picasso dans le cubisme s'est enracinée dans sa découverte des sculptures ibériques anciennes, l'accès de Morrisseau aux contours épais et à l'espace pictural en aplat des peintures rupestres anishinaabe s'est révélé être la clé de sa réinvention des traditions anishinaabe sous une forme d'art moderne. Peu après, son entrée retentissante et fructueuse dans le marché de l'art canadien représente un point tournant de l'histoire de l'art autochtone canadien, inspirant toute une génération de jeunes artistes anishinaabe à explorer certains genres artistiques occidentaux en tant que sites de revitalisation des savoirs traditionnels.

Actuellement, l'artiste anishinaabe Bonnie Devine (n. 1962) s'intéresse à la roche comme site d'inscription et d'identification. Contrairement à Morrisseau, dont l'art situait les traditions autochtones de mysticisme, de shamanisme et de spiritualité au sein d'un langage moderne, le travail de Devine aborde les politiques territoriales et environnementales contemporaines. Si les préoccupations de Morrisseau rendaient aisée l'inscription de son œuvre par ses premiers mécènes et promoteurs dans les préceptes convenus du primitivisme moderniste, le travail de Devine se penche à la fois sur les contestations territoriales actuelles et sur le désastre ultime d'une implosion environnementale auquel le monde fait présentement face.

Dans cet article, j'examine les conceptions autochtones et coloniales des notions d'art et de lieu, dans une optique qui imbrique un ensemble de problématiques contemporaines découlant d'une part d'une décolonisation et de réclamations territoriales autochtones, et d'autre part du processus parallèle d'une histoire de l'art globale décolonisée. Je soutiens qu'au Canada et ailleurs, ces problématiques convergent au cœur d'une prise de conscience collective d'une crise environnementale grandissante. J'affirme également qu'une histoire de l'art qui traite plus authentiquement du lieu et de l'espace en abordant les histoires autochtones issues du territoire peut agir comme force unificatrice. J'entreprends cette tâche ambitieuse en examinant de manière plus approfondie un récit chronologique du spectre des arts visuels anishinaabe : la tradition de la peinture rupestre qui remonte à plusieurs siècles avant l'arrivée des Européens, les négociations traumatiques face à l'imposition par les colonisateurs de nouveaux systèmes territoriaux, spirituels et de visibilité au 19^e siècle, puis l'art contemporain tel que représenté par des projets récents de Bonnie Devine. Cette exploration revêt aussi une dimension personnelle, puisque les arts et la culture visuelle anishinaabe appartiennent à des lieux que je considère comme chez-moi; une réflexion s'avère par conséquent nécessaire quant au point de tension séparant les fondements établis de la tradition de l'histoire de l'art occidentale et une situation d'acceptation graduelle de différentes épistémologies autochtones par de plus en plus d'historiens de l'art issus de sociétés colonisatrices.

NOTES

- 1 Une première occupation humaine de la région remonte à approximativement 11 000 ans; les origines du mode de vie mené par les peuples autochtones du sud de l'Ontario à l'époque du contact s'enracinent dans la période Woodland, qui débute autour de 1000 av. J.C.
- 2 Les Anishinaabeg (ou Anishinaabe, au singulier) parlent l'Anishinaabemowin et sont aussi connus sous les noms de groupes locaux Mississauga, Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin et Cris (Cree).
- 3 Dewdney évoque le nombre de 162 sites dans la version révisée de 1967 de son ouvrage; la plaque installée sur le site par le ministère ontarien des richesses naturelles indique plutôt 260, mais de nouveaux sites continuent à être découverts.
- 4 Garrick MALLERY, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians* (Don Mills, ON: Dover, 1972), 2 vol. [réimprimé à partir du *Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888-'89*, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1893].
- 5 Correspondances personnelles avec Alan Corbiere: « Le mot que nous utilisons ici à Manitoulin afin de désigner une image/peinture/photographie est *mzinaazgan*, qui peut aussi être *mazina'aazigan* dans d'autres dialectes » (notre traduction). Courriel du 4 août 2015.