

IN DEFIANCE



DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

MARY JO HUGHES, DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA LEGACY ART GALLERIES



TEYOTSIHSTOKWÁTHE DAKOTA BRANT
MOHAWK NATION, OHSWÉ:KEN TERRITORY

The University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries is honoured to be hosting the premiere presentation of Lindsay Delaronde's exhibition *IN DEFIANCE*, which features her photographic project entitled *Squaw*. In it, Delaronde, an Iroquois Mohawk artist, acts in strong defiance to that negative word that has long been used to disparage Indigenous women. Her portrait series breaks down stereotypes by providing opportunities for individual women to portray themselves more authentically reflecting truth of individuality, diversity, power, and respect. In particular, Delaronde facilitates the women's exploration of their own sexual identity through their portraits, noting that, "the sexualisation and exploitation of female representation within mainstream society has been consistent over time, disregarding the rich cultural existence Indigenous women have maintained..." By allowing each of her sitters to consider and then bravely present themselves as they would like to be seen, she facilitates a reclaiming of individual identity for these women that is so often denied by long-held prejudices and simplistic labelling rampant throughout the media and society.

The individualistic portraits offer us a positive and authentic alternative to the stereotypes and negative attitudes that have contributed to the disrespect of, and violence against, Indigenous women. In particular now that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has been launched in Canada, we hope this project and the accompanying programming will provoke dialogue around these issues that weigh heavily on us all.

Thank you to Lindsay, all the women who collaborated on the project, the Legacy staff and students who made the exhibition happen and the BC Arts Council for their generous funding.

ARTIST STATEMENT

LINDSAY KATSITSAKATSTE DELARONDE



TUJ'T'TANAT - CEASE WYSS
SKWXWUJ/MESH/STO:LO/HAWAIIAN/SWISS

The sexualisation and exploitation in the images of women in mainstream society disregard the rich cultural existence that Indigenous women have maintained through traditional knowledge, social roles and power. This objectification of women demonstrates that in Western society there is a lack of understanding of, and relationship to, traditional teachings. It is time to push the continuum of these teachings forward to expose vulnerability, to celebrate sensuality and to reclaim eroticism through the matriarchal body.

To this end, I originally conceived of "Squaw," a series of photographs of Indigenous women in response to the derogatory usage of the word. Each woman was invited to stage a portrait reclaiming her natural sovereign powers of eroticism, sensuality and vulnerability. Together, these women deconstruct and challenge mainstream ideas around sexuality. Their photographs dismantle negative stereotypes of First Nations women and portray more authentic truths of diversity, power and respect. Through this project, each woman has found a voice and a safe platform to stand *In Defiance* through the expression of her most private and sensual aspects.

Through the women's own interpretation and experiences of sexuality, the images are in defiance of the negative perceptions of Native women and the damaging connotations that are attached to the word "squaw."

The project emerged three years ago in relation to my own personal reflection process. I felt the desire to extend this opportunity for self-exploration to women in the community. I did not have an agenda in terms of the women I was going to approach but incorporated spirituality and the power of intention in my process. Instead, my main strategy was to hone in on intuitiveness and the instinct to bring forward the women who were meant for this project. As a visual artist, I casually began to discuss this project with community members. The proposal of doing this type of work naturally attracted many people

to it. As the conduit of this project I was guided by a force greater than myself and began trusting that this work was important.

Recruiting the women became an organic process that included women of all ages and nations. I believe the diversity that I was seeking is present in the resulting photo series. The women who were engaged in this work are from different realms; some are part of the Victoria community and some come from as far away as Vancouver and Chilliwack.

In this project, the process is as important as the final product. Developing a project description and manifesting the process was extremely empowering with many blessings and lessons to follow. A critical part of this was the development and follow through of a project strategy that protected and provided support to the women during the whole collaborative process. For example, I set up support within this community to assist any of the women who were struggling to examine their sexualities or had come up against any trauma-related issues. I contacted the sexual assault centre at the University of Victoria and they offered to be of direct support and provided me with a broader resource list in Victoria.

As an emerging professional artist this project has changed my work on many different levels. When first developing it, I did not have a clear vision as to "how" things would manifest themselves because this was a very new process for me. I've realized an important component that I have integrated into my work is spirit. I have done a lot of prayer during this art project knowing that I needed to be connected to a higher power. I knew intuitively that this work was important, challenging and revolutionary in the sense that I was creating a platform for healing. Being an Indigenous artist and having a spiritual aspect to my work helps me stay grounded and focused on the work. I would consider this outlook to be key in my development as an artist.

The healing power of creativity and art is another factor that has contributed to my personal development as an artist. I was able to implement many skills while working with these women. For example,

relationship building was top priority in establishing trust and safety with them. Because each woman participated from her own experience, my ability to adapt to each individual was strengthened. My capacity to form relationships in healthy and collaborative ways grew significantly and ended up being a wonderful experience. I am now beginning to examine increasingly how art and healing can be beneficial to the art community and, more importantly, First Nations peoples.

In relation to my photography skills, I was able to learn more during each photo-shoot. The improvement in my ability to control lighting with the camera and to develop an eye for the right composition was extraordinary. Establishing a working alliance with my mentor Ellie Dion was essential to my photography skill development. It was useful to have the technical support from my mentor as she guided me to take better photos and try new things. She pushed me to look at other photographers' work and to explore other projects that touched on parallel topics.

I hope to extend this project into other areas of art and healing. I have experienced how integrating healing and art is helpful for the people involved. It allows for the processing of feelings and information in safe and gentle ways. I was very happy to know that I can give the women involved in this project an opportunity to use art and creativity as a tool for their healing. I look forward to sharing this work with the broader community and inviting dialogue around it.

IN DEFIANCE OF “SQUAW”

KAREN WHETUNG

By incorporating an Indigenous perspective through the creation of these artworks, we ourselves can define and transcend this one discriminating word into powerful images that reflect an internal transformation process. The importance of First Nations women's perceptions of themselves needs to be expressed through their own voices, bodies, and environment, rather than having exterior influences defining what it means to be an erotic, sensual, vulnerable Indigenous wom[an].

– Lindsay Delaronde



CARRIELYNN VICTOR
STÓ:LO COAST SALISH

Recently, my friend and I flipped through an old copy of a *Better Homes and Gardens* cookbook from 1958. We giggled at photographs of molded jiggly jellies and winced while we read revolting recipes. When I saw the word “Squaw” I became stoic. My eyes widened as I consumed the recipe for “Squaw Corn”: something like scrambled eggs with canned ham and creamed corn. The recipe title evoked the clichéd image of a Pocahontas-style maiden serving some sort of succotash, and the ingredients conjured up the stereotypical idea of a destitute single mom serving slop. Through the images associated with “squaw” the archetypes of the Madonna and the Whore¹ are implanted, but remain voiceless and faceless. This recipe reveals the internalized mainstream consciousness of “squaw” through juxtaposition with primed perfectionists modelling the ideal woman of the times.

Historic photographic portraits of Indigenous women such as those by American photographer Edward S. Curtis established a pervasive romanticized and sometimes fetishized interpretation of their unidentified subjects that have been integrated into the foundations of society today. Curtis is known for capturing more than 40,000 images of over 80 North American tribes in the early 1900s that he

¹ See article by Rayna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (1975): 698-714.

believed were at risk of vanishing. However, by recreating scenes and manipulating images, he ended up only producing homogenized and inauthentic representations that negatively impacted the Indigenous peoples of North America. In the end, his photos did little to preserve a sense of true culture but rather helped to erase a people who continue to live.

The word “squaw” has circulated (in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts) for a long time in popular culture and its origins date back about 400 years. In the early seventeenth century, it was recorded as meaning “woman” in Algonquian.² However, linguists have argued that “French trappers borrowed the Mohawk word for female genitals, ge-squaw, to refer to Native women and their sexuality.”³ Over the centuries it has been used as various other pejoratives: cunt, pussy, bitch, fag, and slut.⁴

Instead of perpetuating the restrictions that the term “squaw” has imposed on female sexuality, this exhibition is held in defiance of them, and seeks to project the unrestrained beauty of women not confined by the gaze of the outsider. *IN DEFIANCE* strives to “educate the general public to understand the marvelous diversity of our histories, languages, homelands and cultures, instead of stereotyping all Indians.”⁵ Many of the photographs have nature-based settings, not as an attempt to embody the Pocahontas complex, but rather to honour the land-based connection integral to their identities as Indigenous women. Each of the photographs reclaims the diverse voices that have lived for generations under the surfaces of their skin and, unveils a womanhood that refuses to vanish.

Lindsay Delaronde, Kahnawake-born Iroquois/Mohawk woman and professional artist, has been engaged for the past three years in creating the photographs (as part of her “Squaw” project) that are now being debuted in the exhibition *IN DEFIANCE*. One of her primary

² Nancy J. Parezo and Angelina R. Jones, “What’s in a Name?: The 1940s-1950s ‘Squaw Dress,’” *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2009): 376.

³ Parezo: 393.

⁴ Parezo: 373-404.

⁵ Lindsay Delaronde in communication with author, June 2016.

intentions is to embrace traditional values in innovative ways that will help people heal and grow in their lives. “This project is created for the individuals participating to seek a relationship with themselves, rather than striving to conform to external images and beliefs outside themselves.”⁶ In her previous projects, Delaronde typically utilized an eclectic array of media including print-making, painting, drawing, video, and performance to reveal aspects of what it means to be an Indigenous woman in contemporary mainstream society.

Delaronde began her journey as a photographer after conceptualizing the photograph *Threesome* for Janet Rogers’s poetry collection *Red Erotic* in 2010.⁷ She also showcased her original photography in the five panel screen printed series titled *I don’t want to play house* which featured an urban Indigenous homeless woman beside her cart. The bright colours and pop-art style did not highlight a victim of oppression: it illuminated the defiance of oppressive conventions, the parallels between the traditional and the contemporary, and the strength of women who define “home” on their own terms. Delaronde’s multi-disciplinary skillset allows her to create art that cultivates an individualized lens to see Indigenous peoples and their stories.

As a process-oriented artist, Delaronde’s finished works reflect the female internal journey of self-determination set in a patriarchal landscape. Her work for *Red Erotic* spawned new questions about photography, eroticism, and female sexuality: inhibitions and restrictions, protocols and taboos. As Delaronde started “embracing and expanding this critical and creative role in [her] life in relation to the ownership of [her] own female body,” she wondered “how Indigenous women embrace their sexuality in a world that has used sexuality to dehumanize them.”⁸ She defines dehumanizing as “break[ing] the whole person into consumable parts. A woman is no longer [a] mother, daughter, sister, wife, leader, artist, etc., [for] she is

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Janet Rogers, *Red Erotic: Indigenous Erotica in Pictures and Words*, Victoria: Ojistah Publishing, 2010.

⁸ Delaronde, 2016.

reduced to absurdity because the sacred has been removed.”⁹

With the support from the BC Arts Council and mentorship of photographer Ellie Dion, Delaronde embarked on the eight-month journey to reinfuse the sacred in her portrait photography. In this project, the sacred is self-determination. Featuring colour photographs of twenty Indigenous women, *Project Squaw* was initiated. Delaronde utilized her own relationships within community to invite participation in the project and engage conversations around Indigenous womanhood—connecting women through unifying themes, while honouring personalized contributions.

Delaronde worked collaboratively with each sitter to create an image that would express each individual’s internal values and beliefs as they relate to culture and sexuality. Decolonizing the entrenched colonial narratives “planted in the age-old power structure requires both subverting the racist and sexist assumptions [...] and re-defining people and places based on the Indigenous peoples’ own ideological context.”¹⁰ To honour the importance of this process, Delaronde moved into a supporting role: visiting with each sitter multiple times, holding space during the photoshoots, buying specific props, and travelling to various locations chosen by the women. The strict protocols surrounding this project were a means to revitalize integral aspects of healthy sexuality—choice, safety, and consent. By asking each sitter to choose the one photograph that she wanted to include in the final compilation, Delaronde made self-determination integral to all aspects of the project.

Like the word “squaw,” Delaronde’s original project has transformed over the years. This artistic conversation, now titled *IN DEFIANCE*, has grown to include eleven more women who want their voices to be heard. From the privacy of her one-on-one visits to the public sphere of the “ReMatriate” movement—a social media campaign that focuses

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Janice Misko-Kisikàwihkwè Acoose, *Iskwewak—Kah’ Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1995), 58.

on the empowerment of Indigenous women—Delaronde became immersed in discourse that reframed her concept. She learned that “squaw” did not just have race and gender implications, but was also a class-based term. “...(S)quaws were not elite individuals of leisure or privileged ladies. English speakers in the American South came to call indentured servants, slaves, and poor rural white women squaws.”¹¹ The word attacks a female who refuses to define herself by a patriarchal construction of the feminine. Through this project, Delaronde sought to promote the reclamation and re-establishment of the feminine as something sacred and powerful.

Delaronde photographed a non-indigenous woman for the series *IN DEFIANCE* to include marginalized women in this conversation. As the majority of the photographed women are of mixed ancestry, spectrums of skin fill the frames on the gallery walls: willows, chestnuts, and coppers. This diversity is shown in the colour photographs that reclaim space to unveil more than flesh. They reveal the journey “their bodies and sexuality have endured throughout history and well into present day.” And, like sentinels, they hold space for viewers to do the same.¹²

The word “squaw,” like the images that it invokes, doesn’t fill us with nourishing concepts of diverse women, but rather corrals those individual women and brands them for consumers. Lindsay Delaronde’s exhibition, *IN DEFIANCE*, has opened this can—labelled “Squaw”—and poured out the stagnant water that has preserved these archaic images. By working individually with each participant to create and photograph Indigenous womanhood through her own lens, Delaronde shows that if there ever was a squaw, she has yet to be captured. So, “out of respect, we can cease using ‘squaw’ as a generic term for Native women,” and begin a new dialogue.¹³

¹¹ Parezo: 377.

¹² Lindsay Delaronde in communication with the author, June 2016.

¹³ Ibid.

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LINDSAY KATSITSAKATSTE DELARONDE
IROQUOIS, MOHAWK NATION

BIOGRAPHIES

LINDSAY DELARONDE

I am an Iroquois, Mohawk woman, born and raised on the Kahnawake reservation. I began my journey to become a professional artist after travelling to the West Coast of British Columbia, obtaining a B.F.A. at the Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design, followed by a M.F.A. from the University of Victoria. The philosophical approach through which I explore my creative practice is determined by my position within a traditional matriarchal society. I am from a long line of Mohawk women descendants who were integral decision makers to their respective communities/nations and determined as well as carried the responsibility of the land, children, ceremonies, songs and dances. I am now embracing and expanding this critical and creative role in my life in relation to the ownership of my own female body. I stand strong within such a potent gendered Indigenous history and seek to create projects to reclaim and empower First Nations peoples and communities to express our natural sovereign powers of eroticism, sensuality and vulnerability through our presence over time.

I am currently in a Masters in Counselling at the University of Victoria, specializing in working with Indigenous peoples. My current focus in my artwork and profession is creating environments where art and healing can merge to help people heal from colonial traumas and systemic violence while simultaneously embracing the teachings, culture and knowledge of First Nations peoples.

KAREN WHETUNG

Karen Whetung is a young Anishnaabe writer, teacher, and First Nations support worker. Her writing oeuvre is largely fiction but her experience as a support worker and workshop facilitator as well as her involvement in Indigenous community groups provides her insight into the social issues that inform this artistic project.

LIST OF PORTRAITS

ALL WORKS ARE DIGITAL C-PRINTS AND APPROXIMATELY 11" X 14"

Anonymous

Anonymous - Chippewa/Southern Ojibwe/Scottish

Kelly Aguirre - Nahua/Mixtec/Welsh/Russian

Natu Bearwolf - Wet'suwet'en nation, Gitumden clan, house of Anasaski

Amanda Bird - Mikisew Cree

Teyotsihstokwáthe Dakota Brant - Mohawk Nation, Ohswé:ken Territory

Margaret Briere - Shíshálh Nation - Two-Spirit

Kelli Clifton - Gitga'ata Nation

Isobel Clutesi - Nuuchahnulth

Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde - Iroquois, Mohawk Nation

Amanda Engen - Dene Tha'/Métis

Emilee Gilpin - Saulteaux-Cree/Métis

Erynne M. Gilpin - Michif (Saulteaux, Cree-Métis)/Filipina/Irish/Scottish

Nikke Goodwill - Nuuchahnulth/Dakota Sioux

Hana Gordon - Métis

Sarah Hunt - Kwakwaka'wakw

Robyn Kruger - Syilx, Southern Interior Salish, Okanagan Nation

Nicole Mandryk - Anishnaabe/Irish/Ukrainian

Madelaine McCallum - Cree/Metis

Kelli Morningbull - Blackfoot

Sacha Ouellet - Haida

Kim Paquette - Cree

Sionnon Phillips - Migmaw/Polish/Irish/Ukrainian

Inez Point - Stó:lō/Métis/Ojibway

Bonnie Quaite - Coast Salish

Valerie Salez

Nadia (Sa'an n'ahn gu'as) Salmaniw - Haida

Roseanne Supernault - Métis/Cree

Carrielynn Victor - Stó:lō Coast Salish

Keilah Lukenbill-Williams - Nuuchahnulth (Tseshaht, Kyuquot)/

Quw'utsun' (S'amuna')

Sabrina Williams -2014 Nuuchahnulth

Eddi Wilson - Métis

Tuy't'tanat Cease Wyss - Skwxwu7mesh/Sto:Lo/Hawaiian/Swiss

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CURATORIAL PROJECT MANAGER **MARY JO HUGHES**
GUEST WRITER **KAREN WHETUNG**
DESIGN **KATIE HUGHES**
PROOF READERS **CAROLINE RIEDEL, GILLIAN BOOTH**
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BACK COVER
ANONYMOUS



**IN DEFIANCE OF MAINSTREAM STEREOTYPES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN
LINDSAY DELARONDE COLLABORATES WITH WOMEN TO RECLAIM AND
EXPRESS PERSONAL VULNERABILITY, STRENGTH AND SEXUALITY THROUGH
THEIR PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS.**



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