

CUSTOM MADE

Tsitslem te stem te ck'ultens-kuc



Elizabeth Nutaraluk Aulatjut
Rebecca Belmore
Hannah Claus
Wally Dion
Phil Gray
Maggie Groat
Maureen Gruben
Gabrielle Hill
Ursula Johnson
Merritt Johnson
Brian Jungen
Bev Koski
Amy Malbeuf
Mike MacDonald
Divya Mehra
Peter Morin
Nadia Myre
Jeneen Frei Njootli
Wendy Red Star
Charlene Vickers

CUSTOM MADE

Tsitslem te stem te ck'ultens-kuc

Curated by Tania Willard, Aboriginal Curator in Residence
Kamloops Art Gallery
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Editor: Charo Neville and Shannon Smyrl

Front cover: Bev Koski

Banff #4, 2012

Found object, beads, thread, 11.5 x 5.5 x 4 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Kukstemc, (thank you) to Kamloops Art Gallery staff and volunteers, Canada Council for the Arts, Kevin Adam, my sons Skyelar and Leo, my *'kwséltkten* (family) and my ancestors.

kamloops ART GALLERY



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CUSTOM MADE / *Tsitslem te stem te ck'ultens-kuc*

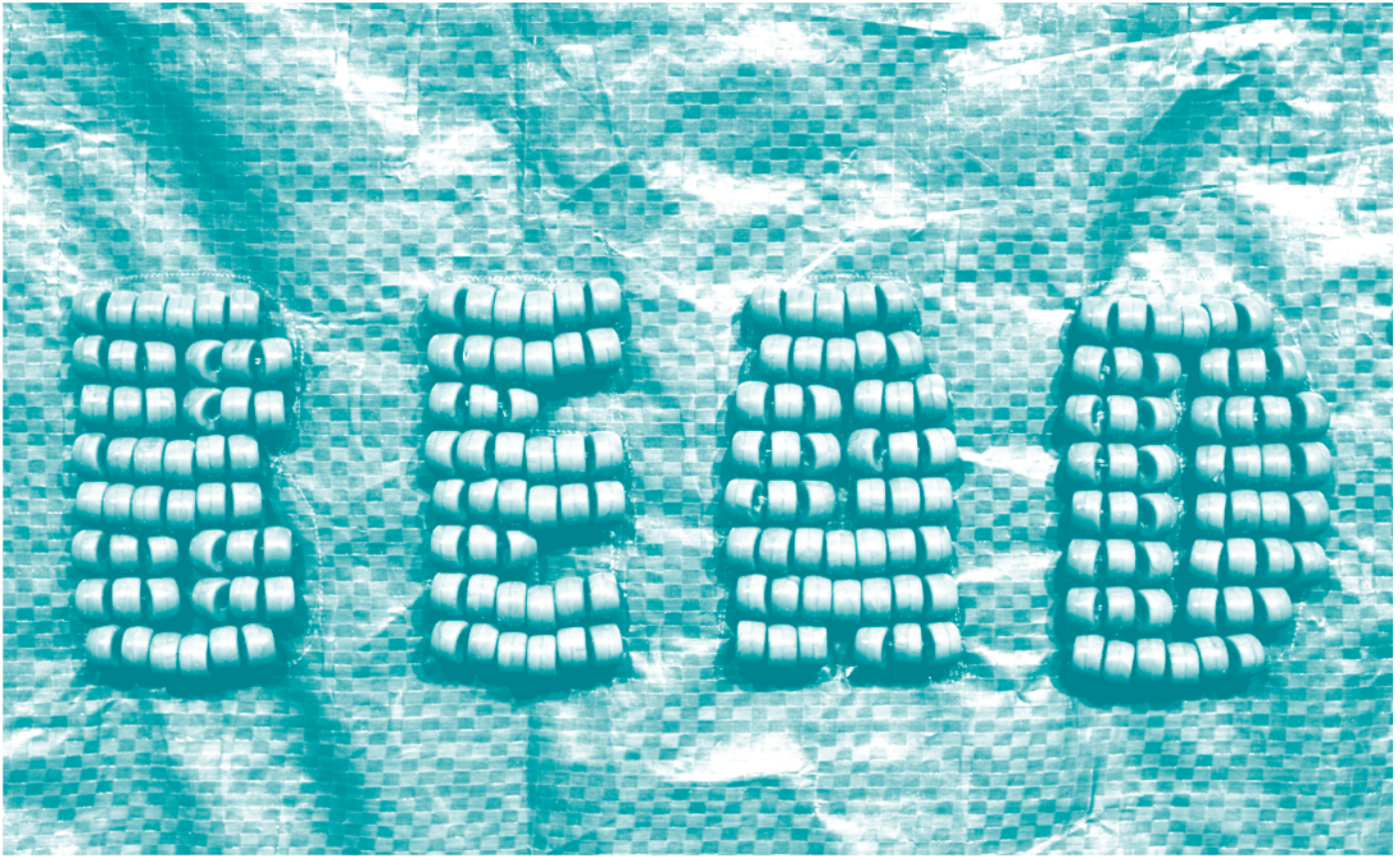
CUSTOM MADE/ *Tsitslem te stem te ck'ultens-kuc* brings together artists who reference skills-based artistic production within a contemporary and transformative context. The exhibition explores the ways in which such artists are manipulating, transposing and re-learning skills-based arts like beadwork and basketry. It draws our attention to how the artists relate these skills to cultural heritage, new materials, concepts and techniques. CUSTOM MADE frames a dialogue between artists whose works cross boundaries, challenging and conflating the binaries of art and craft and contemporary and traditional.

The Secwepemcstn translation for the exhibition title, *Tsitslem te stem te ck'ultens-kuc*, was translated by cultural leaders Janice Billy and elder Flora Sampson from my home community, Neskonlith Indian Reserve. A literal translation of this title to English would be New Things Made from Our Culture. As a curator of Secwepemc First Nation heritage, it is important that I locate the ideas I am exploring through the exhibition within a Secwepemc cultural framework while also working within the conversation about contemporary art and with artists of diverse cultural heritage, Aboriginal, mixed-blood identities and South Asian. The English title is also a play on words where custom is meant to refer both to original handicraft design as well as to ideas of cultural tradition or customary practices.

A persistent paternalism has underscored the production, marketing and presentation of Native arts and crafts in Canada since the 1920s. This paternalism has shaped the reception of these skills and practices for both a general audience and contemporary artists. Over time, Native handicraft has been both subject to cultural repression and appropriation, as well as championed by non-Native educators, collectors, anthropologists and gallerists. Such reception has informed contemporary Indigenous art practice in complicated ways. However, persistent distinctions between fine art and craft still often exclude Native arts and artists. This exhibition notes the spaces between art and craft, fine craft and Native art, Native craft and Native art, identity-based practice within the realm of contemporary art, skills-based practice and handicraft. In doing so, it questions and challenges how these practices are defined.

Artists in the exhibition employ unconventional forms, contrasting natural and commercial materials, digital technologies and found objects to investigate notions of materiality, identity and culture. More than a beautiful object, cultural display or decorative painting, these works embody concepts of cultural knowledge(s), sustainability, global production and politics in experimental forms, including performance, basketry, quilting and kinetic art. Together these distinct works and artistic practices reveal shifts across cultural zones. They value and recognize practices that are rooted in a culturally informed tradition within a transformed, translated and transmuted contemporary artistic context.

The exhibition also highlights shifts in scale to illuminate distinctions between art and craft. This exhibition asks us to become the lens, zooming in and out to examine our own perceptions, cultural/gender biases and artistic views. Examples of this shift in scale can be found in Bev Koski's small scale sculptural beading of kitschy figurines and the more monumental nature of Amy Malbeuf's beaded tarp that echoes conversations within contemporary Indigenous art. Malbeuf's beaded tarp contains a quote by artist Jimmie Durham that is from Durham's past, when he was a member of the American Indian Movement (AIM). In this quote, highlighted in Malbeuf's work, Durham describes beadwork as an anti revolutionary act. This highly charged quote leaves us to think about the context of Durham's political stance at the time, the influence of AIM, and the role of patriarchy in revolutionary endeavors. Ultimately Malbeuf's work leads us to see her act of beading as a challenge to this statement. In Nadia Myre's series of circular beaded medallions, *Meditations on Red*, the beadwork has been digitally scanned and blown up to become sleek and refined. It is important to note here that although many people think of beadwork as a traditional Native art form, the materials and techniques are a form of cultural



Amy Malbeuf
Jimmie Durham 1974, 2014
Glass crow beads, tarp, rope, wood
(396.24 x 274.32 x 91.44 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

adaptation and aesthetic innovation. Glass beads only became available to most Aboriginal cultures after contact with settlers. Ornamentation with shells and quills was a pre-existing practice. In Myre's work the glassy surface of the digital images make them hyper real, bringing us into an immersive and meditative experience with the original hand made item.

The exhibition asks us to expand our expectations of conventional forms of traditional practice—to see, for example, basketry as something that can be performed and personified, as in Ursula Johnson's basketry performances. Wally Dion's work, *Steppes*, pushes established conventions by drawing from the use of colour in a dancer's regalia within Pow Wow culture. Though this conceptual reference is not easily readable in the work the kinetic nature and the inner mechanics of the constructed object are laid bare. The crafting of an object takes on a new meaning in the constructed mechanics of Dion's sculptural work, oscillating between what is revealed and what is hidden. Brian Jungen's work, *The Men in My Family*, considers found objects and their significance as a sculptural form. The freezer becomes the plinth or display stand for the sculptural hide circles that are stitched together obscuring the automobile parts contained within. The chest freezer becomes an object full of significance, suggesting the importance of wild meat, hunting and subsisting off of the land. The hides recall the holistic use of a hunted animal in many Aboriginal cultures. These materials contain many different associations with class, culture and the world we live in. Working with the ready-made or found object, Maggie Groat's *Lines for Alternatives* enters a discourse with the market and domestic goods. While the work is primarily concerned with the line as a refined aesthetic object, it extends this line to encompass the line as a barrier, as a treaty line, as a border or as the lines of social class and gender.

Similarly, in Mike MacDonald and Gabrielle Hill's work, the objects within the gallery point to interventions within the landscape, a landscape that includes the socio-political situation of Aboriginal people. In Mike MacDonald's, *Butterfly Quilt #2*, the artist concerned himself with environmental issues, planting and maintaining butterfly gardens at several gallery locations including outside the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff, AB. The quilting of the butterflies is created with digital images. MacDonald's early work in new media has influenced an entire generation of Aboriginal artists working with new media today. In Gabrielle Hill's work, the artist harvests materials in the area of Main and Terminal streets in Vancouver BC. In her act of salvage Hill re-scribes the traditional Squamish place name of this area, Skwachàys, and she is pointed in her choice of materials, using the 'peels' or plastic casings left over from stripped copper wires that are sold as scrap. Occupying margins of existence, the artist weaves together the 'peels' indicators of social inequity. Following found patterns for net weaving, the artist suggests a transformed world; one in which only one hundred years ago would have seen Coast Salish people weaving cedar and hemp rope nets to harvest from an area that (before settlers arrived) was a tidal flood plane.

The exhibition also features important works such as *Ayumee-aawach Oomama- mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991) by Rebecca Belmore, a sculptural and audio work that seeks to locate political protest as poetic action. Merritt Johnson's, *Paradox is an english word (watheriyo kahonre /a nice basket gun)* and *Condolences (yoterihwihson /it is appropriate)* function in a similar way, interweaving a sense of rebellion within basketry materials. These works examine gender and cultural revolt as an embedded aspect of the object and the way it is crafted. While Belmore's work invites our participation and responsibility through the symbolic form of the basket-like megaphone, Johnson's forms seem to violently assert their own autonomous space. In some ways the association with the handmade and craft is a by-product of the conceptual and performative impetus of Rebecca's megaphone, while in Ursula Johnson's work the association to the handmade is the primary conceptual reading.

Elizabeth Nutaraluk Aulatjat's, *Amautik Frontpiece* is a work more aligned with traditional "Native" arts. The inclusion of this artwork points to the ways in which cultural items like this are collected and how these types of objects have a history of being referenced and appropriated by contemporary non-Native artists. Including this work integrates the skills-based approach of this artwork into the cannon of contemporary art. The work was reframed to reflect a more contemporary reading.

As a counterpoint to this work, Maureen Gruben's moose hide works, Wendy Red Star's photographs, Charlene Vickers' moccasin boots and Jeneen Frei Njootli's aerated sculpture each reconstruct the use of traditional and modern materials used in fashioning cultural regalia. These artists approach these materials in innovative ways. In Gruben's work the smell of smoke tanned moose hide imbues the gallery with a conceptual reference to the process of hide tanning and the intimacy of the maker's knowledge of the land. Another work, *Variations of Ancestral Selves* by Charlene Vickers, explores a similar practice in the repositioning of the moccasin and the mukluk as a mode of cultural symbology, while the use of beer boxes is an underlying reference to marginalization and historic injustice experienced by Aboriginal people. In a more abstract and humorous approach, Njootli's *i couldn't start this skidoo but I made this* references Gwich'in patterns that have been reconstructed by her community through museum collections. In Wendy Red Star's series of photographs, recognizable elements of Pow Wow dancer regalia have become fantastic and otherworldly through the repositioning of this aesthetic—from the Pow Wow arbor to the gallery and the solar system.

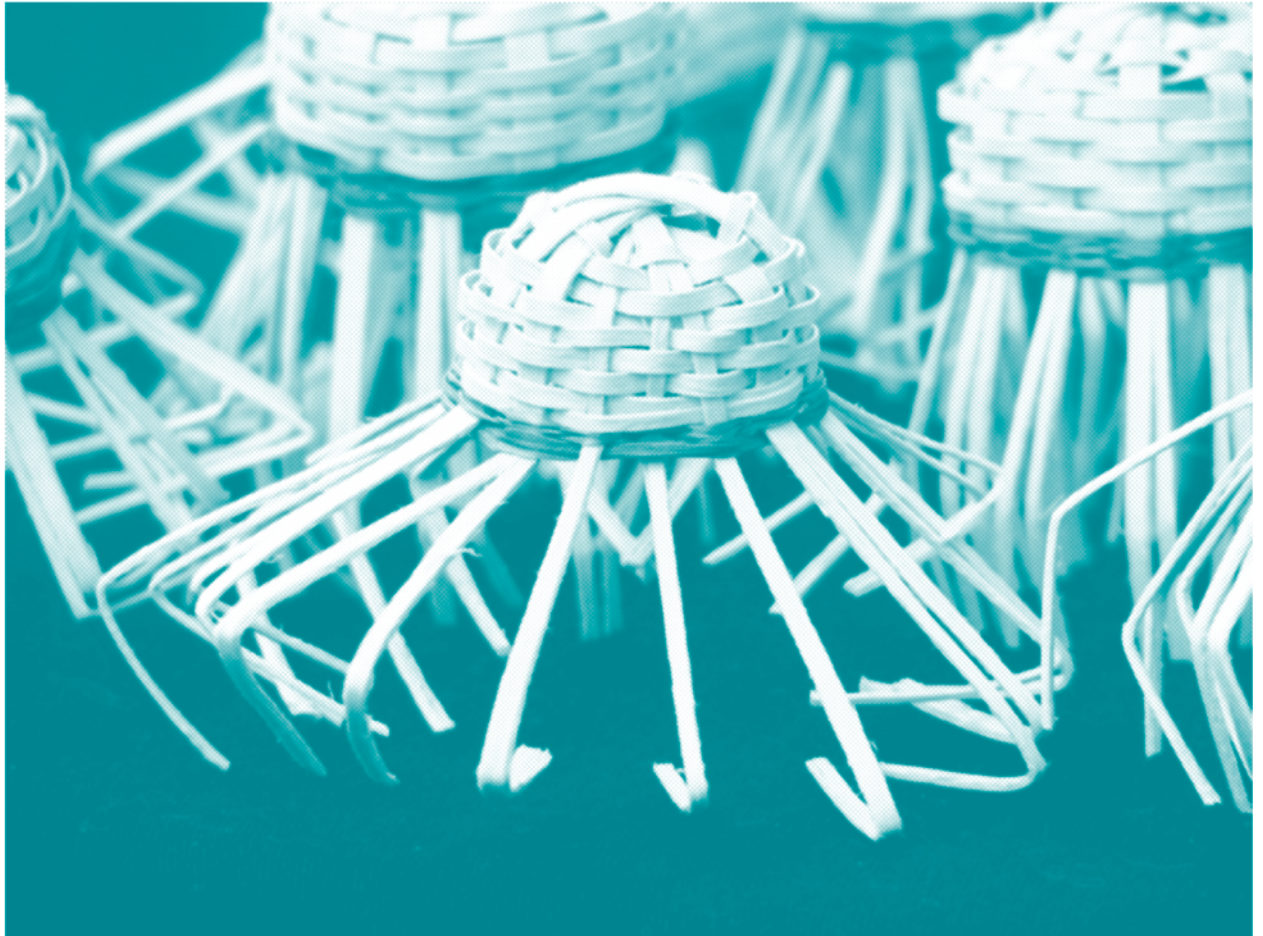
Concepts of time and knowledge transfer become the concern in a number of works in the exhibition. Time is indicated and explored in many types of skills-based practices, Ursula Johnson's durational performance, in which she weaves a basket around herself, speaks to this. We see the artist weaving herself into the basket for a period of roughly 6 hours, but we do not see the time inherent in the harvesting and preparation of the materials, or the ways in which her ancestors had to endure repression and cultural genocide to be able to continue to practice their art forms. This distinction between what is revealed and what we have the capacity to understand in terms of the passage of time is also present in Peter Morin's 3 beaded cell phones, *Ancestral Talking Devices 1-3*. The phones contain the artist's personal data accumulated since 2009. Included in these



Wendy Red Star
Hoop in the Cloud, 2011
Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on
dibond printed at The Lab, Minneapolis
Courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery

data packets are performances wherein the artist challenges the Queen and the legacy of Canada's treatment of Aboriginal peoples. However, the viewer would not know this because the phones are sealed within their beaded cases—not adorned but bound. Whether they are bound in an act of protection or an act of defiance is not determined. Phil Gray's video, *Becoming Tsimshian*, references time in relation to cultural practice and traditional arts. In this video, the artist uses time-lapse to show the emergence of a carved mask from the wood block he is carving. With the artist absent from the frame of the video we are given a more intimate viewpoint than the relatively ubiquitous carver publicly carving a totem pole. While representing the passage of time we are left to also consider the legacy of North West Coast art in its cultural resurgence, Native art markets and anthropological collections. The personification and adornment of the mask emerge frame by frame as a powerful witness to the artist's process, to time and to the ceremony of bringing something into existence.

Hannah Claus' installations with porcupine quills and pine needles reference time and process through an understanding of land based practices and the harvesting of materials. The animated video work references William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Where Morris appropriated South Asian (Indian) design and substituted British flora and fauna in the designs, here the artist uses Secwepemc traditional plants to redraw the scope of Arts and Crafts movement. The porcupine quill installation reads as a manifesto for the transmutation of something like quill work, which has a strong Native art history, to be brought out of the museum and curio shop and into the gallery. By installing the quills on the wall, the artist literally inserts the quills into the institutional white cube gallery space.



Ursula Johnson
Migration, 2010
Wood, black ash and sweetgrass
Courtesy of the artist

Divya Mehra's work, *Contemporary South Asian Art*, enters into a conversation with Claus' installation. A contemporary artist, Divya ironically points to 'identity art' of the early 90s while commenting on inclusion and the sphere of contemporary art practice as a potentially exclusive zone. In this exhibition, this work takes on new meaning that is explored between artist and curator. As one of the artists not of Aboriginal ancestry in the exhibition, the work posits cultural translation as a component of aesthetic value. As a curator of Aboriginal heritage who has worked within the field Indigenous contemporary art, there is, a problematic relationship between the spaces we hold for Indigenous art, culture and writing and the freedom to be informed, inspired and invested in artists of other cultural backgrounds without losing the importance of Indigenous specific spaces. I want to be careful here and assert that these Indigenous led spaces are vital and should be protected and expanded, but I still have an interest in other practices and the diverse ways artists comment on the world around us. I have a strong appreciation for Divya's work and appreciate the double entendre this work poses in the context of an exhibition that is curated by an Aboriginal curator/artist and an exhibition that presents work by a majority of Aboriginal artists.

The works in the exhibition, including the performative, the customary and the conceptual, infuse the art object with readings and associations that challenge our preconceptions. CUSTOM MADE assembles a complex narrative of artist, object, process, community and concept as a generative act of interrupting the spaces between convention and innovation, positing not a new age of cultural practice but the possibility of freedom from cultural hegemony, both within and without.

List of Works

Rebecca Belmore

Ayume-e-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother, 1991
Mixed media sculpture, 256 x 247 cm
Collection of the Walter Phillips Gallery

Hannah Claus

Ugstaqamuit: This is where we are from, 2013
Porcupine quills, 81 cm diameter
Courtesy of the artist

Hannah Claus

Interlacings
Video projection, pine needles, 152 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Wally Dion

Steppes, 2014
Wood, acrylic, medium, various
Courtesy of the artist

Phil Gray

Becoming Tsimshian, (2007)
Digital video
Courtesy of the artist

Maggie Groat

Lines for Alternatives, 2015
TEKLA cotton tea towels, salvaged flannel, salvaged cotton sheet, cotton thread, found images, salvaged wood, 83.8 x 33 x 12.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Maureen Gruben

Moosehide #1, 2014
22 hoops of stretched moose hide, ranging from 3.25" x 3.25" x 0.5" to 27.5" x 18.5" x 0.5" (8.26 x 8.26 x 1.27 cm to 69.85 x 47 x 1.27 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Maureen Gruben

Moosehide #2, 2015
folded moosehide blanket and aluminum stand, 14" x 14" x 7" (12' x 12" x 45") (35.56 x 35.56 x 17.78 cm {365.76 x 30.48 x 114.3 cm})
Courtesy of the artist

Maureen Gruben

Moosehide #3, 2015
Moosehide pieces, red yarn
70' x 0.5" x 0.5" (2133.6 x 1.27 x 1.27 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Gabrielle Hill

Tidal Economies, 2014
Basketball hoop, plastic wire casing
Courtesy of the artist

Ursula Johnson

Migration, 2010
Wood, black ash and sweetgrass
Courtesy of the artist

Ursula Johnson

Basket Weaving, 2015
Performance
Courtesy of the artist

Merritt Johnson

Paradox is an english word (watheriyo kahonre / a nice basket gun), 2014-2015
Hand dyed and woven fiber, life-size
Courtesy of the artist

Merritt Johnson

Condolences (yoterihwihson / it is appropriate), 2015
Hand dyed and woven fiber
Courtesy of the artist

Brian Jungen

The Men of My Family, 2010
Rawhide, metal, paint, freezer, 269.2 x 121.9 x 76.2 cm
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund

Bev Koski

Toronto #6, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 9 x 6.5 x 5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Toronto #3, 2013
Found object, beads, thread, 8 x 6.5 x 7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Toronto #2, 2013
Found object, beads, thread, 10 x 6 x 7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Toronto #9, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 7.5 x 6 x 4 cm, 7.5 x 6.5 x 4.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Ottawa #1, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 8 x 4.5 x 8.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Disneyland, California #1, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 11 x 6 x 5.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Banff #4, 2012
Found object, beads, thread, 11.5 x 5.5 x 4 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Upper Peninsula, Michigan #3, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 9.5 x 7 x 3.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Bev Koski

Berlin #1, 2014
Found object, beads, thread, 10.5 x 5 x 5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Amy Malbeuf

Jimmie Durham 1974, 2014
Glass crow beads, tarp, rope, wood, 13' x 9' x 3' (396.24 x 274.32 x 91.44 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Divya Mehra

Contemporary South Asian Art, 2010
Acrylic vinyl
Courtesy of the artist

Peter Morin

Dark Matter Drums 1 through 4, 2014
Deer hide, chalk board paint, chalk
Courtesy of the artist

Peter Morin

Ancestral Talking Devices 1-3, 2014
Beads, cell phones
*beadwork by Judy Elk
Courtesy of the artist

Nadia Myre

Meditations on Red #1-5, 2013
Digital prints mounted under plexiglass, 122 cm diameters
Edition 7 of 7
Courtesy gallery Art Mûr

Jeneen Frei Njootli

I couldn't start that skidoo but I made this, 2015
Aerated sculpture, 91.44 x 91.44 x 304.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Wendy Red Star

Stirs up the Dust, 2011
Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on Dibond printed at The Lab, Minneapolis
Courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery

Wendy Red Star

Sits with the Stars, 2011
Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on dibond printed at The Lab, Minneapolis
Courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery

Wendy Red Star

Hoop in the Cloud, 2011
Archival pigment print on Museo silver rag mounted on dibond printed at The Lab, Minneapolis
Courtesy of the artist and Bockley Gallery

Charlene Vickers

Variations and Traces of Ancestral Selves, 2013-2014
Glass beads, thread, felt, DIMs variable
Courtesy of the artist

Elizabeth Nutaraluk Aulatjut

Amautik Frontpiece, n.d.
Beads, cariboo teeth and thread on fabric, 54.5 x 39 cm
Collection of Kamloops Art Gallery
Gift of Glenn and Mary Martin

Mike MacDonald

Butterfly Quilt #2, 1998
Photo transfer on cotton, 231 x 148.5 cm
Collection of Kamloops Art Gallery
Purchased with financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program