

# Ahkameyimo - Never Give Up

*Sometimes, I think that non-Native people picture us as being stuck, historically. They think of us as being stuck in the past. But while we talk about our history – because if we don't, it would be completely erased – we're active in our resistance and in what's happening now.*

(Mahtowin Munro, Co-leader of the United American Indians of New England)

According to 2016 Canadian statistics, over 1,673,785 Indigenous peoples live in Canada, making up 4.9% of the total Canadian population. As of 2016, over half of the Indigenous population (51.8%) of Canada resided in urban areas with a population of 30,000 people or more. The city of Edmonton, with an Indigenous population of approximately 74,430 people, has the second largest urban Indigenous population in the nation while the cities of Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto also have large Indigenous populations.

Despite these statistics the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in the urban environment are often ignored and erased. Canada, as an active settler colony, continues to rely on the founding myths of the nation in its portrayal of Indigenous peoples, thinking of Indigenous communities as remote and reserve based and that Indigenous people are defined by their relationship to the land, a romanticized and non-urban space that exists only in pre-colonial history. Urban Indigenous peoples who do not conform to the racist stereotypes and discriminatory practices that derive from these views are seen as assimilated and then accused of lacking 'cultural authenticity'.

As stated in the Urban Indigenous People Research Report of 2019, Indigenous people have long struggled to define who they are and resist the political categories forced upon them. Many are now choosing new directions, contesting the colonial belief that cities are non-Indigenous spaces and re-envisioning Western institutions and practices to support Indigenous cultures and identities (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Ottawa, Ontario, page 29). Such efforts recognize urban Indigenous identities as positive, complex, authentic and pluralist, involving a diversity of different ideas and expressions.

The travelling exhibition **Ahkameyimo - Never Give Up** features the work of two emerging Indigenous artists whose works, while respecting traditional culture and visual imagery, also engage with the urban environment in which these artists reside. This exhibition features art works by Matthew Cardinal and Lonigan Gilbert.

The exhibition **Ahkameyimo - Never Give Up** was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA TREX program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

FRONT COVER IMAGE:  
Lonigan Gilbert, *Catch 22*, 2020  
Acrylic on wood panel  
Collection of the artist

## The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

### Our Thanks

The artists

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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## The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

# Ahkameyimo - Never Give Up

Alberta





Matthew Cardinal  
*Family as Medicine*, 2022  
 Acrylic, Aerosol, house paint on canvas  
 Collection of the artist

### Matthew Cardinal

Matthew Cardinal is of Cree heritage and was born in Grande Prairie. He lived in John D'or Prairie, Little Red River Reserve in Treaty 8 Territory, until he was three years old. His family then moved to Edmonton, where he has lived ever since, believing there were more opportunities in the city.

While Matthew was interested in art as a child, as he grew up he gradually lost interest in it. At the age of thirteen, however, he started attending iHuman Youth Society, a non-profit agency in Edmonton engaged with fostering positive personal development and well being among marginalized youth, and was re-introduced to art making. While at iHuman he noticed that his friends and family started getting into graffiti and he became interested in it as well. As expressed by this artist, being a graffiti artist 'sort of relates to being Indigenous': just as Indigenous people were traditionally nomadic so too is a graffiti artist, travelling all over the place to work.

Matthew relates that he has been painting for about eight years. In his work he focuses on emotions and he describes his work as very intuitive. The main subject matter of his personal art pieces is animals with his interest in them coming from traditional teachings and through learning about the gifts they can bring a person. Matthew creates his paintings in an abstract fashion, incorporating animal imagery and graffiti lettering and elements. He creates his animals in a mosaic-like manner, with the colours varying depending on what he has available to him.

As an artist Matthew wants his work to take the viewer on a journey through the piece. He also wants each piece to be like a photograph in the viewer's memory; stuck in their heads so they will remember the work long after actually seeing it. On a more personal level, Matthew sees his art making as a means of self-empowerment: making art reminds him to stay committed to something and it helps make things more achievable for himself. For Matthew the title of the TREX exhibition, *Ahkameyimo - Never Give Up*, speaks to this sense of empowerment. As he describes it, the title reflects resilience, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, and he will keep moving on, going from one art piece to the next and nothing will destroy him.



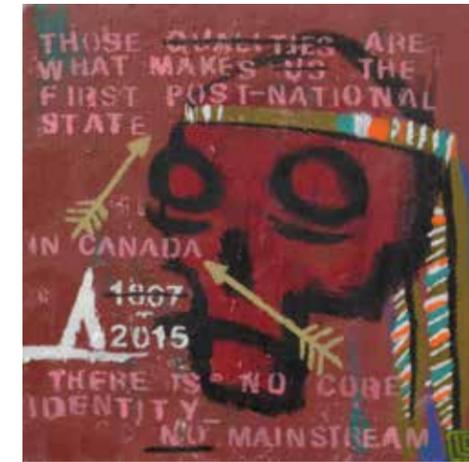
Matthew Cardinal  
*A Days Rest*, 2022  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 Collection of the artist



Lonigan Gilbert  
*The Last Buffalo Hunt*, 2020  
 Acrylic, spray paint on canvas  
 Collection of the artist



Matthew Cardinal  
*Expression*, 2022  
 Acrylic and house paint on canvas  
 Collection of the artist



Lonigan Gilbert  
*Post National*, 2019  
 Acrylic, sand, glue on wood panel  
 Collection of the artist

### Lonigan Gilbert

Lonigan Gilbert is a Cree artist, presently living in Edmonton. Born and raised in Winnipeg, Gilbert moved to Edmonton in 2017 to support his mother and sister and to see a new place and try a new experience.

Since he was a child Gilbert dreamt of working in an art gallery. While growing up he took art classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery which got him 'hooked' into working in one some day. When he moved to Edmonton he started working with Visitor Experience at the Art Gallery of Alberta but was forced to leave due to health reasons. Despite this personal challenge, however, Gilbert has maintained a vigorous art practice and has been achieving some recognition in the Edmonton region.

Gilbert has been interested in art since he was a child. His father was a cartoonist and this inspired him from a young age. As he relates concerning his early artistic efforts:

*The first time I ever got paid for art was in Grade Six when I painted a bison hunt for a school wall. I thought it was strange as I never grew up on a reservation but I did the commission. I experienced some bullying in school and art was a way to 'fight' back. I felt good about doing anything related to Indigenous culture and this opened doors for me to paint other projects at school.*

While Gilbert's father was his first big influence, he was also very inspired by the concept paintings and illustrations of Ralph McQuarrie, who designed many of the sets and costumes for the original Star Wars trilogy and the films E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial and Cocoon. At one time Gilbert wanted to go into drawing and concept art as he loved the story-telling aspect of this art form, which is also a part of Cree culture. A bicycle accident, however, ended these plans and Gilbert's work has become looser and more expressionsitic than what he was initially interested in. He sees his style of painting, however, as a means to allow viewers of his work to have their own interpretations of what they see. As he expresses, the overall narrative being expressed is very open to interpretation.

Gilbert views his art work/practice as an outlet for himself and what he strives for is honesty in his work. What he sees around himself and political and social values and dynamics of people are the sources of inspiration for his art and while his work can deal with some very heavy subjects, he is not trying to dictate interpretations or tastes. Rather, he leaves it up to the viewer to arrive at their own interpretations.