

Aakíí isskská'takssin (Woman - thought)

Aakíí isskská'takssin examines the theme of 'story' within the context of Blackfoot traditional teachings and cultural expression of aakíí artists applied in a contemporary context. This photography series is curated to explore emerging Indigenous artistic practice within the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Marjie Crop Eared Wolf and Star Crop Eared Wolf are recent graduates of the University of Lethbridge's Native American Art History and Museums studies program. Their photographs reflect the way in which Blackfoot oral history and visual culture intersects with contemporary thought, as the question of cultural identity has become fluid and mutable. Story is shared through song, dance, language, and art. We use story as a way to entertain and to share who we are with each other. In this way, story is used as a tool to carry our experiences forward for future generations to reflect on.

Marjie Crop Eared Wolf's artistic practice challenges academic institutions to legitimize the traditional art practices of Indigenous people. In this photography series, she disrupts racist graffiti with pictographs she designed and which were inspired by her Blackfoot and Shuswap heritage. The graffiti Marjie 're-works' often targets Indigenous people and perpetuate a visual language of hate. These visual landmarks affect everyone who walks through these spaces, especially young children. Marjie's pictographs interfere with the negative energy implied by the spray paint. She references the visual culture of Blackfoot people to counter graffiti that is typically used in urban spaces to contrast images of commercialism. But in Southern Alberta, some graffiti is used to assert racial messages in underground bike paths and on bridges. By placing her pictographs over the racist images, she sees it as an act of counting coup.

Star Crop Eared Wolf's artistic practice explores Blackfoot cultural, political, and social issues through contemporary photography. In this work of images, Star has used black and white photographs to capture the moment of knowledge transfer between mother and daughter, father and son, and elder and community and which are shown through relationships. Indigenous teachings are demonstrated and shared through connections of community and family.

The women in this exhibition are exploring within their studio practice a contemporary interpretation of story that raises awareness and hopes to influence how we move forward as a society within Canada.

This exhibition was curated by Jennifer Bowen and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The exhibition **Aakíí isskská'takssin (Woman - thought)** was generously funded by Syncrude Canada Ltd.

COVER IMAGES:

Top Image: Star Crop Eared Wolf, *ssksinima'tstohki (Teachers) #6*, 2018, Photograph, Private Collection

Bottom Image: Marjie Crop Eared Wolf, *Four Beaver* (detail), 2018, Photography of installation, 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 approximately 60 venues in over 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

Exhibition Curator:
Jennifer Bowen

The Artists:
Marjie Crop Eared Wolf
Star Crop Eared Wolf

Syncrude Canada Ltd.

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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Marjie Crop Eared Wolf
Smallpox, 2017
 Photography of installation
 Collection of the artist

Marjie Crop Eared Wolf was born in Fort Macleod, Alberta. Her early childhood was spent with the Shuswap Nation in Kamloops, B.C. and then on the Kainai Nation (Blood) reserve south of Calgary. Introduced to art by her father, she attended the Albert College of Art and Design in Calgary and then transferred to the University of Lethbridge. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2009.

Crop Eared Wolf entered art school focusing on drawing and painting. In school, however, she was introduced to a variety of media and this has influenced her current practice. As she describes it, she now takes a very fluid approach to art making; sometimes the media influences the idea of the work whereas other times the idea behind the work determines how it is made.

Much of her artistic inspiration comes from wanting to share what she knows about her culture and Indigenous art history with her son and others. In recent artworks Crop Eared Wolf was inspired by pictographic images seen at Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park and other areas. On a trip she once took to Writing-On-Stone she discovered that a fence had been built around the pictographs as contemporary graffiti had defaced many images. This experience generated for Crop Eared Wolf an interest in both the pictographs and in graffiti itself, interests that were furthered by her experiences at art school. There she found that Indigenous art was not recognized, or was categorized as primitive. Finding this rather insulting, she began researching the meaning or stories behind pictographs. She also began researching graffiti art itself, wishing to know its history and the techniques used by graffiti artists.

Crop Eared Wolf's research inspired her to create art pieces in answer to the graffiti and vandalism she witnessed at pictographic art sites.. She created stencils of both Shuswap and Blackfoot pictographic images and went to spots on her reserve and to areas of traditional Blackfoot territory and put the pictographs 'back up'. Through this work Crop Eared Wolf is

...hoping that the viewer recognizes the first art of North America...and reads it as a renewal of that first art practice. Maybe they too will be more understanding of those site-specific areas where traditional art is located and help safe-guard them for the future.



Marjie Crop Eared Wolf
Capture Rifle, 2010
 Photography of installation
 Collection of the artist



Star Crop Eared Wolf
ssksinima' tsthoki (Teachers) #8, 2018
 Photograph
 Private collection



Marjie Crop Eared Wolf
Coyote and Spider, 2010
 Photography of installation
 Collection of the artist



Star Crop Eared Wolf
ssksinima' tsthoki (Teachers) #3, 2018
 Photograph
 Private collection

Star Crop Eared Wolf was born in Lethbridge and lives on the Blood Reserve outside the city. She is a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy/ Kainai Tribe.

Star began drawing and painting as a child and then, influenced by her father's work in the medium, began working with photography when she was fifteen years old. Star is inspired in her work by the simple need to create and to share what she sees with the world. For her, artistic expression is *...like I'm giving a gift to others*. In her photographic work she focuses on documentation, using photographs as a means of documenting her people as she sees them rather than as they have been seen by outsiders. She also enjoys the freedom of photography which allows the artist to take a photograph and then manipulate it. As she expresses it, *...there's so much one can keep doing to a photo*. Finally, Star finds that there is a 'healing aspect' to the art of photography. The medium demands that the artist has to go out into the world to take their photos and this really makes one notice the world and the beauty and interest in everything.

Much of Star's work involves her community and she finds a great deal of inspiration in her community. As she states

I like to capture the true essence of what's going on at this time.

For her works included in the exhibition **Aakii isskska'takssin (Woman - thought)** she focused on different traditional practices that are still being pursued and are being passed on to younger generations. Her photographs express the moment when this traditional knowledge is being shared through story and lived experience. Through these images Star wants the viewer to see that such practices are still being passed on: that Indigenous people are a real people and not a vanishing race and are still here, thriving, and practicing their traditions. As described by the artist:

These aren't staged photos. We're not mascots or princesses...we're not buckskin and feathers. We're a real people and a way of thinking and living.