

# Nitssaakita'paispinnaan: We Are Still In Control

The Blackfoot word *nitssaakita'paispinnaan* can be translated into English as “we are still in control.” It is a term used when a person is still in self-control. It is an important word that Blackfoot people remember because it tells how we are free to make our own decisions; that we are in charge of who we are and how we want to live.

The word also connotes “a-group-of-people-who-are-still-doing-things-as-we-were-taught-to-do-them.” It takes an incredible amount of self-control, hard work, and knowledge to live like this, especially when people from outside the group are persistently trying to force or entice us to stop doing things this way. As Blackfoot people, however, we continue to have this knowing about who we are, and how to do things as we have always been taught. This kind of internal power is growing stronger, not weaker, and it is interwoven with the lands, waters, and skies— *siksikaissksahkoyi*—that we have protected here (now southern Alberta and northern Montana), since time immemorial.

The exhibition *Nitssaakita'paispinnaan: We Are Still In Control* honours this; not only in subject matter, but also in method of creation. It features work by three contemporary Blackfoot artists—Kristy North Peigan, Smith Wright, and Lori Scalplock. We all began our process by visiting with Blackfoot ceremonial knowledge keeper *Kayihtsipimiohkitopi* (Kent Ayoungman), who shared about Blackfoot ways of life, knowledge, *siksikaissksahkoyi*, and about ways-of-doing-things-as-we-were-taught. We had other opportunities to visit with him too, and those visits helped us learn more about ourselves as Blackfoot people. They also inspired these artworks.

For Kristy North Peigan, the visits evoked an exploration of Blackfoot ways-of-doing-things-as-we-were-taught within the context of technology and modernism. Smith Wright was moved by the richness of Blackfoot culture beneath the surface of what is seen in society, and the profound importance of Blackfoot women in this space. Lori Scalplock chose to dedicate herself to a traditional Blackfoot women's transfer ceremony for the rights to do porcupine quillwork and use traditional Blackfoot designs like her ancestors.

Our artworks and collective creation process enact *nitssaakita'paispinnaan*. The Blackfoot people, culture, and ceremonies are still here, still alive. Everything now with us in *siksikaissksahkoyi*—the cities, modern society, newcomers—is nested within this well of life, and so Blackfoot ways-of-doing-things-as-we-were-taught continue to shape society here to this day.

*This exhibition was curated by Troy Patenaude and Kent Ayoungman and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The exhibition Nitssaakita'paispinnaan: We Are Still in Control was generously funded by Syncrude Canada Ltd.*

## COVER IMAGES:

**Left Top Image:** Kristy North Peigan, *Red Carpet*, 2019, Digital print and oil on canvas  
Collection of Kristy North Peigan/Kristy NP

**Right Top Image:** Smith Wright, *Mootwistsiiksiinaki (All Around Snake Woman) #4*, 2019, Crackle paste and acrylic on board, Collection of the artist

**Bottom Images (Left to Right):** Lori Scalplock, *Mothers are the Foundation of our families, Fire in the Night, Renew, Recycle*, 2019, Quill work on smoked Moose hide, Collection of Lori Scalplock

## 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 Curators: Troy Patenaude and Kent Ayoungman

## The Artists:

Kristy North Peigan, Lori Scalplock, Smith Wright

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.

## Contact

Shane Golby, Manager/Curator  
AFA Travelling Exhibition Program Region 2  
Art Gallery of Alberta/CSF  
10550-107 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5H 2Y6  
T: 780.428.3830  
F: 780.421.0479  
shane.golby@youraga.ca

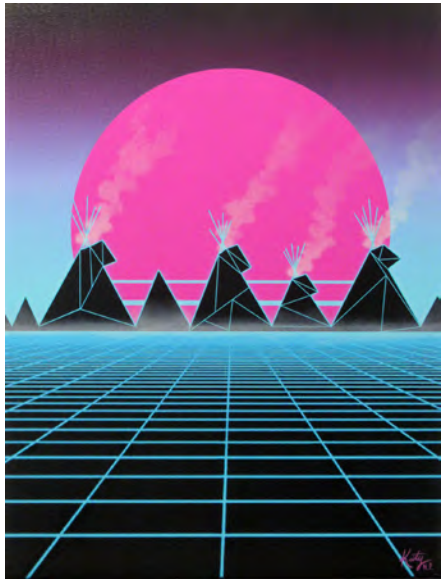


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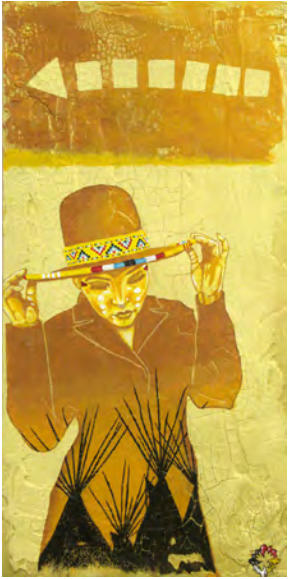




Kristy North Peigan  
*Vaporwave-Signals*, 2019  
Digital print and oil on canvas  
Collection of Kristy North Peigan/Kristy NP



Lori Scalplock  
*Payotapayaki's Tipi*, 2019  
Quill work on smoked Moose hide  
Collection of Lori Scalplock



Smith Wright  
*Mootwistsiksiinaki (All Around Snake Woman) #5*, 2019  
Crackle paste and acrylic on board  
Collection of the artist

**Kristy North Peigan** is a Blackfoot artist from the Piikani Nation. She is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art and Design, where she received a Bachelor of Design in Illustration.

Kristy’s earliest artistic influences were video game culture, books, and similar forms of escapism, especially while living in Calgary. A central identity marker for her has been her experiences as an urban Indigenous person. Like other youth, she was captivated by technology, social media, and modern society, but she was also Blackfoot. Her art practice helped her to explore being Blackfoot, not as something strangled or eradicated by technology, but as something able to grow, change, and thrive alongside it.

Kristy’s embrace of this duality—modern and traditional, reserve and city—is what animates and instigates her art work. She describes her subject interests as technology, culture splicing, and pop culture all married to life on the reserve. Being in the city, Kristy has at times felt less connected to family on the reserve. She’s able to bridge this gap through her art, both at the level of conception, and in her choice of mediums and other forms of expression.

Digital painting is an important medium to her because it is the industry standard for video games and pre-production in movies. Oil painting is important because of its fluidity. Together, these mediums help her achieve high levels of realism, or sometimes surrealism, depending on the subject matter. Kristy’s creative process also allows her to know the endgame first, then she can get and apply the clearest forms of expression to achieve that.

In ***Nitssaakita’paispinnaan: We Are Still In Control***, Kristy continues this exploration at the limits of her artistic abilities, in order to express, without rigidity, how she feels and sees the world. Kristy says that her work in this exhibition aims to:

*...explore my self-identity as an Indigenous person, and how this marries to my experiences in life as a human being.*

**Lori Scalplock** is a Blackfoot artist from the Siksika Nation. She is known for designing and creating powwow dance regalia and contemporary garments that are inspired by her Blackfoot culture.

Lori was always immersed in a life of the arts. Her family was a family of artists and, especially on her dad’s side, everyone was always making things. Lori’s great grandmother also started her powwow dancing at just sixteen months old. When a child, Lori would play with beads while watching her aunties and grandmothers beading. Her aunt Lucille Wright eventually helped Lori learn the art, and Lori’s artistic efforts blossomed from there.

As a teenager, Lori had a vision of becoming a fashion designer and making her own powwow regalia. She soon began formal arts training and developed skills in fashion designing, sketch and pattern drafting, sewing, and painting, as well as explored sculpture and performance art. Whatever her medium, she is moved to making beautiful things; something that is pleasant to look at, like powwow dance regalia. Yet, this is not just about aesthetics. In her own words, “our [Blackfoot] art has been considered a craft, but it means so much more to me, and helps preserve our culture.”

As Lori grew into adulthood, her artwork expanded in its purpose. She began to wonder if she could make a connection to her Blackfoot ancestors through the contemporary world. She is now also more interested in challenging herself creatively, which became an impetus for her artworks in ***Nitssaakita’paispinnaan: We Are Still In Control***.

Lori had never quilled before now. She dedicated herself to learning the skill for this exhibition and underwent the work to have the rights transferred to her in ceremony to quill and use traditional Blackfoot designs. Quilling appealed to her because it was an art practiced by her ancestors before contact with the Europeans. She now uses it to express connection to her Blackfoot culture in this contemporary world, and wants people encountering these works to take away an awareness that the Blackfoot are still here:

*I love the lifestyle we live. We’ve been so oppressed, but as much as colonization has tried to keep us down, in our way we’re still thriving and practicing our culture.*

**Smith Wright** is a Blackfoot artist from the Siksika Nation. He is currently majoring in Painting at the Alberta University of the Arts in Calgary.

Smith’s grandparents raised him within traditional Blackfoot culture. As a child he practiced art and had many important influences. His grandfather was a skilled carver and his brother and uncle got him interested in comic books. His favourites to read were Conan, Spiderman, and Wolverine, and it was not long before he started to draw like he saw in the comics. As Smith grew older, he began emulating favourite comic book artists and was later developing his own characters. He eventually wanted to explore other contemporary mediums besides comics and so enrolled in the Alberta College of Art (now the Alberta University of the Arts).

While in formal art school, Smith’s art was enriched in ways he had not expected. Many different art styles and genres interested him, and he still finds himself constantly experimenting today, exploring ways to provide modern twists on traditional concepts. Drawing got him started, but now he tends to gravitate towards painting. Contemporary art school did something even more for Smith’s art as it inspired him to tap into his own cultural roots—and the political realities of Indigenous people in Canada today—more than ever before. His art practice became a path towards cultural rediscovery and a deepening understanding about who he really is. This is now the predominant motivation for everything he creates. He wants to use his art to spread awareness and be a powerful platform to show a side of Indigenous people not seen in mainstream society.

In ***Nitssaakita’paispinnaan: We Are Still In Control***, Smith continues this journey. Here, he is doing it particularly for murdered and missing Indigenous women. He wants these women to be seen not as numbers, statistics, or stereotypes, but as so much more: for the beauty and cultural significance they embody, which is immeasurable and beyond words.

*I want my art to help people view us differently. They don’t see us; they don’t see our hard work, or that there’s so much more to us than they’ve been taught. I want to show people all that they don’t see.*