

**They Forgot That  
We Were Seeds**



**KC Adams**

**Deanna Bowen**

**Roxana Farrell**

**Bushra Junaid**

**Amy Malbeuf**

**Meryl McMaster**

**Cheyenne Sundance**

**Katherine Takpannie**

**Curated by Kosisochukwu Nnebe**





# Introduction

Kosisochukwu Nnebe

Ottawa derives its name from the Algonquin word *adawe*, meaning “to trade.” The Kichi Sibi (Ottawa River) has been a vital transportation and trade route for millennia, first used by Indigenous peoples and later by settlers. Locating itself on the unceded, traditional territory of the Algonquin nation, *They Forgot That We Were Seeds* explores, from the perspectives of Black and Indigenous women, what a history of trade in both goods and people reveals about Canada’s embedding in global colonialist history.

The exhibition reaches back to the historic trade of Newfoundland cod for sugar and salt as part of the transatlantic slave trade. Roxana Farrell’s *600,000 lbs per week* renders visible the systems and networks that continue to uphold a globalized capitalist system wherein bodies, labour and goods are all treated as commodities for mass consumption.

Bushra Junaid investigates hidden ties between Newfoundland and the Caribbean, locating the roots of Jamaica’s national dish—ackee and saltfish (salted cod)—in the triangular trade that connected Newfoundland to the Caribbean. Together, Farrell’s and Junaid’s works ask us to reconsider Canada’s role in the slave trade and its legacies.

From the production of sugar in the Caribbean, *They Forgot That We Were Seeds* traces its arrival onto Turtle Island. Sugar, flour, salt, cream and lard were provided as government rations to First Nations peoples displaced from their traditional lands and moved onto reserves. KC Adams and Amy Malbeuf complicate the relationship Indigenous

peoples have to the “five white gifts,” as they are known, pushing against narratives that convey their devastating effects on Indigenous communities solely through statistics around the prevalence of diabetes.

Adams’s installation speaks to the global impacts that dietary transitions have had on Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island to Australia, and the fight against the ultimate act of violence—forgetting. Malbeuf’s work speaks to the tense balance between adaptation and assimilation and the weight the disease has imposed on individual families.

To talk about food is to talk about land. This becomes clear as the exhibition moves westward, to the Prairies. In her video *sum of the parts: what can be named*, Deanna Bowen recounts her family’s migration from “somewhere in Africa” to Oklahoma and then Alberta, searching for a land to call home. Interspersed in this narrative are mentions of moments in history that speak to how this migration was mediated by state policies to control Black bodies (e.g., segregation laws in the U.S.), or, in the case of Canada, prevent their entry.

Meryl McMaster’s photographs evoke a different kind of alienation and displacement. The devastation of Indigenous food sources such as bison precipitated the treaty-making process and movement onto reserves. Situating herself in Prairie landscapes, McMaster highlights their significance to her Plains Cree ancestors while surfacing concerns about our current and future relations with the land.

Cheyenne Sundance and Katherine Takpannie locate decolonial futurities in relations between Black and Indigenous women and between

humanity and nature. An installation by Sundance, an urban farmer, turns to nature to unearth possibilities for counteracting oppressive and alienating structures while reconnecting with the land, including by growing one's food—an act rooted in justice and sovereignty.

Takpannie's photographs of a gathering of Black and Indigenous women and two-spirit people in Ottawa last fall bear witness to intimate moments around the sharing of food and new ways of being with one another.

In this exhibition, Black and Indigenous women are more than just the seeds that history has tried to bury; they represent deep roots and a harvest more plentiful than we could ever imagine.



# KC Adams

## **The Gift that Keeps on Giving** (2012; 2020)

Earthenware, ground mollusk shells, ground grandfather rocks, Manitoba earth, spirit, local stones, flour, sugar, lard, salt and milk substitute

Courtesy of the artist

To create this work, KC Adams, a Winnipeg-based artist of Ojibway, Cree and British ancestry, produced clay vessels using a coil pinch-pot technique once common among Indigenous peoples of the ancient Lake Agassiz region.

The pots hold flour, sugar, lard, flour, salt and a liquid representing milk—ingredients commonly used to make bannock today. The Government of Canada provided rations of these “five white gifts” to First Nations families as it removed them from their traditional land—and food sources—and moved them onto reserves.

Over time, the liquid poured into the porous, unfired vessels will slowly change the composition of the clay vessels, causing them to slump and decompose. At the exhibition’s end, the clay and rocks supporting the vessels will be returned to the land.

Adams’s installation evokes the ongoing effects of colonization on Indigenous bodies and forms of knowledge, which bear the marks of trauma but resist the ultimate act of violence: forgetting.





# KC Adams

## **Legacy** (2012)

Black and white photographs

Courtesy of the artist

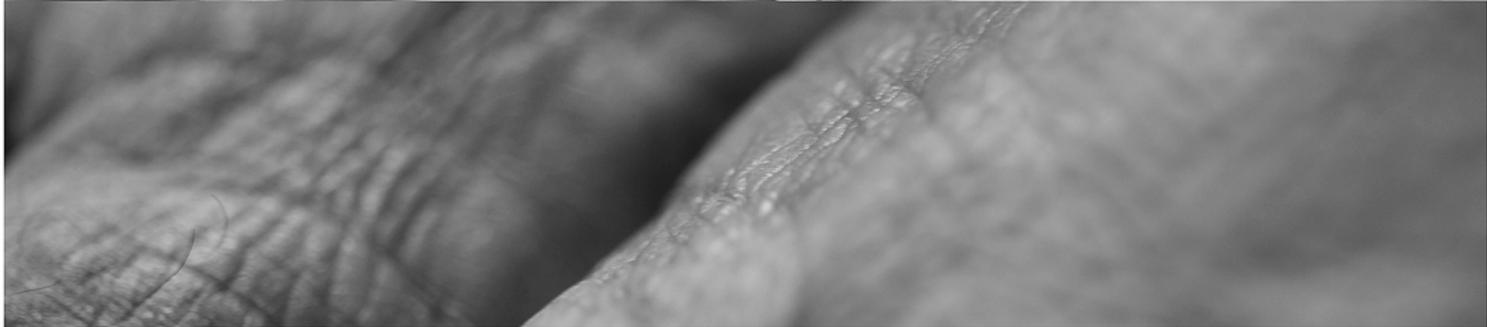
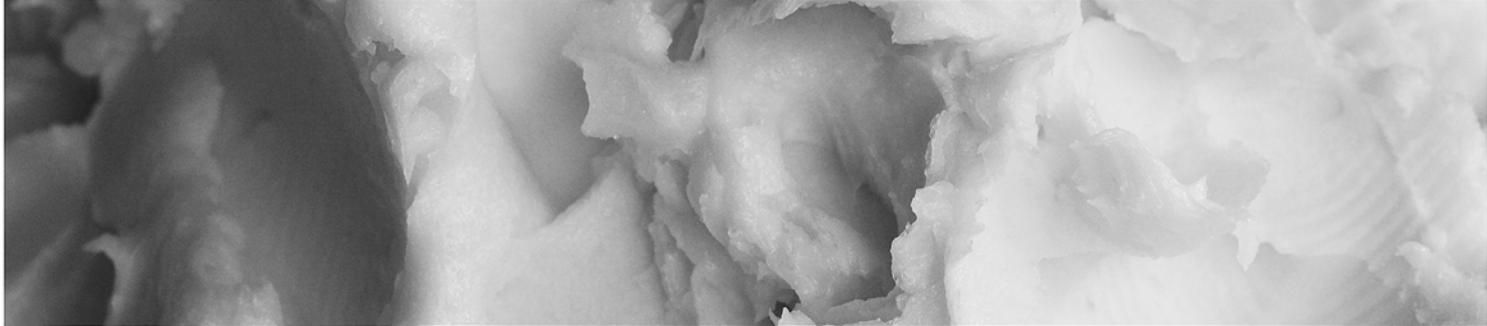
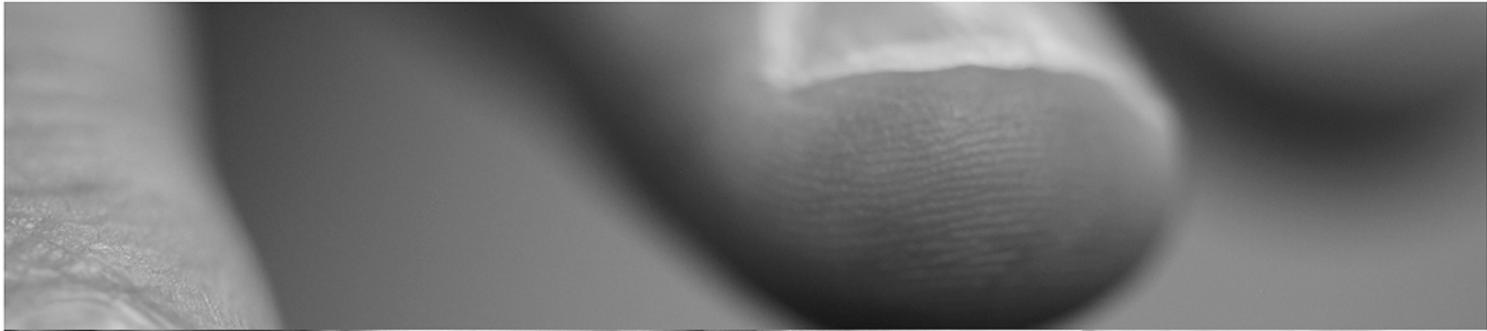
The global reverberations of colonization, ongoing colonialism and the dietary transitions they have incurred are made evident in this series of photographs, which depict Aboriginal Australians whom Adams met during a residency in Australia in 2011-12.

The work was initially prompted by a 2010 UN article that noted that 50 per cent of Indigenous peoples worldwide suffer from Type 2 diabetes. *Legacy* emerged from KC Adams's desire to recognize, record and honour Indigenous peoples suffering from or lost to the disease as knowledge-carriers.

The eyes, skin, bellies and toes of people are some of the first body parts to show the effects of Type 2 diabetes. In *Legacy*, Adams interlaces images of these body parts with photos of sugar, lard and white wheat flour—three ingredients introduced into the diets of Indigenous peoples through the process of colonization and known to contribute to the disease.

What is at stake here are the lives of millions of individuals, whose histories speak beyond their time on this earth, who are family, friends and kin—spanning hemispheres.







# Deanna Bowen

**sum of the parts: what can be named** (2010)

HD video, 19 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Vtape

**Rev. Andrew Risby, Pearl (Risby) Sneed, Rev. Albert Risby and Rev. Dorothy Sneed** (c. 1940, Edmonton, Alberta)

Gelatin silver print mounted to board

**Rev. Albert Risby with daughters Eldith and Leora (Deanna's mother)**

(c. 1944, Amber Valley, Alberta)

Gelatin silver print

**Rev. Albert Risby (middle), Eunice (Bowen) Holmquist and an unknown man** (c. 1955, Vancouver, British Columbia)

Gelatin silver print

**Rev. Albert and Jean (Bowen) Risby, Bowen's grandparents, at Standard Church of America bible camp** (c. 1985, Newbrook, Alberta)

Dye coupler print

These images are made by unknown photographers and appear courtesy of Deanna Bowen.

In this video, Deanna Bowen recounts her family history, from the birth of her great-great-great-grandfather “somewhere in Africa” to her great-grandfather’s migration from Oklahoma to Amber Valley, Alberta, in 1909.

Bowen inserts key moments in Black history into this chronology, including the 1911 passing of a Canadian law banning the entry of “immigrants belonging to the Negro race.” By collapsing time and space, she reveals the ways in which government policies shaped her family’s history of displacement and migration, and fixes Blackness in Canada’s national imaginary, interrupting a narrative that considers it only a recent arrival.

References to the Bowen family’s movement through “Indian Territory” and the 1885 hanging of Métis leader Louis Riel in Regina complicate narratives of their search for a land to call their own—they remind us of what had to occur for this land to be made available to them. Mentions of “great grandma Genie [who] was half Black and half Cherokee,” on the other hand, make less clear the boundaries between Blackness and Indigeneity and recall the existence of those who live at their intersection.







*George Joe  
Mary*



*Deanna Jean Bowen*



*Bowen Hillis  
Gemie*

# Roxana Farrell

## **600,000 lbs. per weak** (2016; 2020)

Nylon rope, hand-painted t-shirts, fishing lures, fishing line, fishing weights, metal hooks and anchor, wood, screws

Courtesy of the artist

Until the mid-1990s collapse of cod stocks and fisheries, cod was the foundation of Newfoundland's economy. It was also the linchpin of the British colony's commerce in the transatlantic slave trade, as teased out by Roxana Farrell's installation, *600,000 lbs. per weak*.

The poorest-quality Newfoundland cod was shipped to the Caribbean, where it was sold to plantations in exchange for sugar, rum and salt. A low-cost source of protein, salted cod was valued for its ability to feed thousands of enslaved Africans who were made to work 16 hours a day.

Drawing on her training as an architect, Farrell situates her installation on the gallery's pillars and balcony, highlighting the architecture as symbolic of the structures of colonial power that uphold systems of exploitation.





# Roxana Farrell

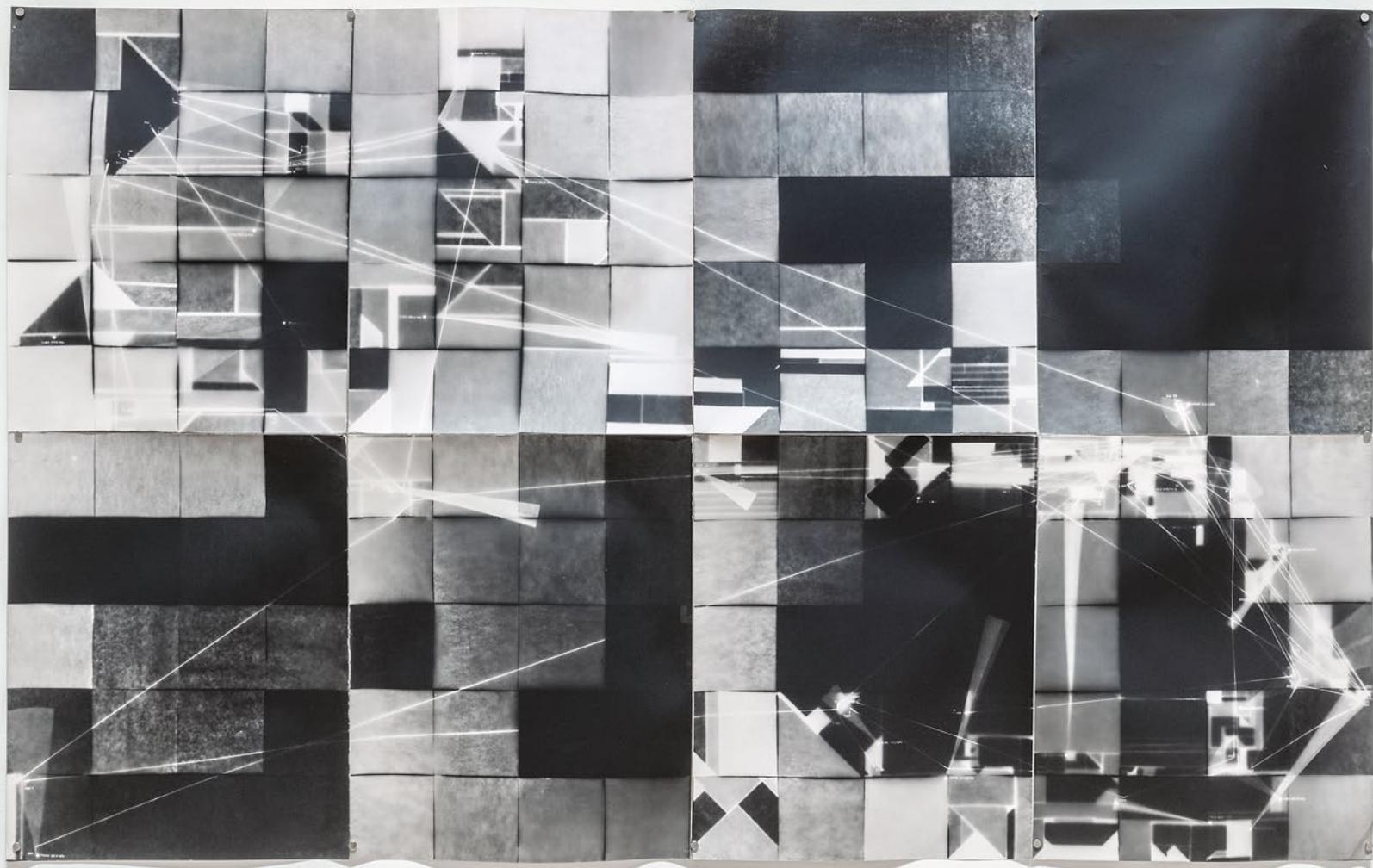
## **Quenching Thirsty Waters** (1997)

Black and white photographs, adhesive tape

Courtesy of the artist

Created over two decades ago, Farrell's collage of black and white contact prints examines the navigational mapping systems that enabled the movement and trade of people and the products of their labour as commodities for mass consumption.

Together, *Quenching Thirsty Waters* and *600,000 lbs. per week* reveal the connections between trade and labour and render their tendency toward exploitation and domination visually and viscerally.



# Bushra Junaid

**Two Pretty Girls** (2016)

**Sweet Childhood** (2017)

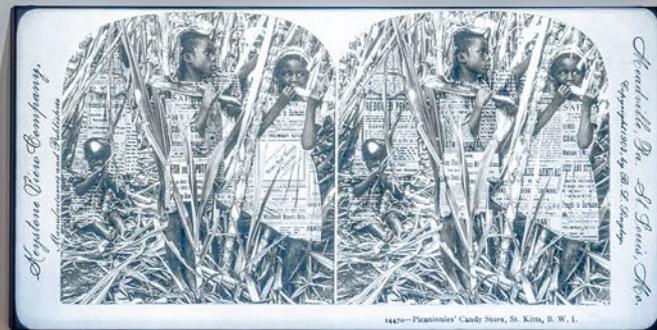
Archival photographs and archival texts printed on backlit fabric panels

Courtesy of the artist

*Two Pretty Girls* and *Sweet Childhood* feature enlarged stereoview images of Black women and children in sugarcane fields in St. Kitts and the British West Indies. In the early 1900s, such images enabled “armchair travellers” in Europe and North America to glimpse people they deemed “exotic” in faraway lands.

In each of these images, Bushra Junaid has superimposed contemporaneous ads for sugar and molasses from the St. John’s *Evening Telegram* onto the clothes worn by the women and children. In so doing, she exposes the hidden links between Newfoundland and the Caribbean, while drawing a parallel between the mass consumption of images of blackness and the products of black labour.

For Junaid, who is of Nigerian-Jamaican descent and grew up in Newfoundland, these women and children are more than nameless figures: they are kin. Junaid treats these images like family photos, offering an alternative engagement that preserves and foregrounds their subjects’ humanity.





Keystone View Company.

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Woadville, Pa. St. Louis, Mo.  
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14470—Picaninnies' Candy Store, St. Kitts, B. W. I.

# Bushra Junaid

## **Oglios or Pepper Pots (2020)**

Ink jet print and audio featuring Canute Anderson reading from Charles Leslie, *A new history of Jamaica: from the earliest accounts, to the taking of Porto Bello by Vice-Admiral Vernon. In thirteen letters from a gentleman to his friend... With two maps, 1740*)

Courtesy of the artist

## **Sucking Salt (2020)**

Ink jet print and audio featuring Rhoma Spencer reading from Mary Prince's autobiography

Courtesy of the artist

Two new works by Bushra Junaid further nuance the historical ties between Newfoundland and the Caribbean and their current day legacies.

In *Sucking Salt*, a voice actor reads from the autobiography of Mary Prince, a British abolitionist born into slavery in Bermuda and forced to work in the salt ponds of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Prince's detailing of the visceral impacts of salt production on Black bodies reveals the true cost that was paid for such goods.

*Oglios or Pepper Pots* draws from Charles Leslie's *A New History of Jamaica* and reveals how enslaved Africans adopted and adapted Newfoundland salted cod—a survival food meant to merely keep them alive. In so doing, it alludes to the adaptiveness that enabled the combination of salted cod with ackee—a plant indigenous to West Africa and transported aboard slave ships—to create what is now Jamaica's national dish: saltfish and ackee.



I am remarkably fond to work on the soil  
with the rest of the negroes. The work  
was perfectly new to me. I was given a  
bag, shovel and a shovel, and felt it odd  
to my bones in the winter, from first  
to last. In the morning all night when it  
was from your shovels were taken in with  
what we were obliged to shovel at first  
to us for the job. The men shovels were  
in and most of the soil. It was then called  
up in our hands and worked through the  
heat of the day. The sun flaming upon our  
heads like fire and raising soil. Shovels in  
their hands which were not completely covered  
from this and legs from shoveling in the soil  
with the in many hours and became full  
of sweat and dirt which ran down in some  
places in the very long, splitting the  
backbone with great strength. All leaves, heads  
of grain, all our grain being raised, planted,  
we had to be cold, and sweat, sweat in  
our employment all day at night.  
We had shovels of the soil. In large bags,  
we were down to the soil, where we worked.  
The pits for our hands and cleared the  
ground and shovels from the soil.  
Just as returned to the house, our mouths  
felt as though our shovels of our Indian  
men, which we founded in a garden  
and sold in places for our support.



The Servants seldom are allowed any fresh Provisions, but feed on *Irish* salt Beef, which sometimes is exceeding coarse. The Negroes have Herrings and salt Fish at very easy Rates. The Island is well furnished with salt Cod from *Newfoundland*, which have lately been so cheap, as to be sold for 10 s. per hundred Weight. With these they make their Oglie's or Pepper-pots, which some here are exceeding fond of; they take Callilu, which is the Top of a small Root, and boil it with beaten Maiz or *Indian* Corn, (which they call *Fu Fu*) Herring, salt Fish, and red Pepper, and, when 'tis ready, eat it as we do Broth. The Negroes make a hearty Feast

### Oglie's or Pepper Pots

Reading by Canute Anderson

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From Charles Leslie, *A New History of Jamaica: From the Earliest Accounts to the Taking of Porto Bello by Vice-Admiral Vernon* (1739)

## Sucking Salt

Reading by Rhoma Spencer

I was immediately sent to work in the salt water with the rest of the slaves. I was given a half barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, from four o'clock in the morning till nine, when we were given some Indian corn boiled in water, which we were obliged to swallow as fast as we could for fear the rain should come and melt the salt. We were then called again to our tasks, and worked through the heat of the day, the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which ate down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment. We came home at twelve; ate our corn soup, called blawly, as fast as we could, and went back to our employment till dark at night. We then shoveled up the salt in large heaps, and went down to the sea, where we washed the pickle from our limbs, and cleaned the barrows and shovels from the salt.

From *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself. With a Supplement by the Editor. To Which is Added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa, a Captured African* (1831)



I was immediately sent to work in the salt water with the rest of the slaves. This work was perfectly new to me. I was given a half barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, from four o'clock in the morning till nine, when we were given some Indian corn boiled in water, which we were obliged to swallow as fast as we could for fear the rain should come on and melt the salt. We were then called again to our tasks, and worked through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment. We came home at twelve; ate our corn soup, called blawly, as fast as we could, and went back to our employment till dark at night. We then shoveled up the salt in large heaps, and went down to the sea, where we washed the pickle from our limbs, and cleaned the barrows and shovels from the salt. When we returned to the house, our masters gave us each our allowance of raw Indian corn, which we pounded in a mortar and boiled in water for our supper.

# Amy Malbeuf

## **Cream and Sugar** (2017)

Caribou hair tufting, inherited objects (china and wood shelf)

Collection of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

For *Cream and Sugar*, Amy Malbeuf has repurposed a china cream and sugar set that belonged to her Scottish grandmother and was gifted to her by her aunts. Placed atop a decorative red corner shelf, the set is adorned with floral designs that appear, at first glance, to be hand-painted.

In reality, Malbeuf, a Métis artist from Rich Lake, Alberta, has mimicked the painted designs by tufting them with caribou hair that has been dyed pink. Embroiled in this work are multiple kinds of inheritance, which speak not only to the coming together of different cultures, but also to a quiet tension and fine balance between adaptation and assimilation.





# Amy Malbeuf

**A Woman And This Bannock That She Made For You** (2015; 2020)  
Photographs by Eagleclaw Thom documenting Malbeuf's 2015 performance, reproduced as ink jet prints on adhesive fabric; 800 lbs of sugar  
Courtesy of the artist

As with *Cream and Sugar*, themes of adaptation and assimilation are explored in *A Woman And This Bannock That She Made For You*, presented here as documentation from a past performance and a mound of 800 lbs of sugar—the average amount consumed annually by a family of five.

Bannock—a form of fried bread made using lard, wheat flour and sugar—originated in Scotland (the Gaelic word for “morsel” is bannach).<sup>\*</sup> Indigenous communities on Turtle Island adopted bannock as a survival food; it was easily made using the rations of sugar, lard, salt, flour and cream that the Canadian government provided to reserve communities.

Malbeuf complicates our understanding of what has become a traditional comfort food, making visible sugar's contribution to rising rates of Type 2 diabetes, and the unbearable weight the disease represents for so many Indigenous families.

<sup>\*</sup>Other types of bannock also existed, pre-contact.









# Meryl McMaster

## **Edge of a Moment** (2017)

Chromogenic print flush mounted to aluminum composite panel  
Collection of Museum London. Purchase John H. and Elizabeth Moore  
Acquisition Fund, 2017

Meryl McMaster's *Edge of a Moment* was created at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta, a site where bison were sustainably hunted by Indigenous peoples of the Plains for over 6,000 years. In the 1880s, they were hunted to near-extinction in the westward movement of settlers.

The famine that ensued among Indigenous peoples of the region precipitated and facilitated the treaty-making process, which eventually saw them removed from their land by the Government of Canada and placed onto reserves, away from their traditional hunting grounds.

Locating herself in this territory, McMaster reminds us of the importance and use of this territory by Indigenous peoples and the ways in which her ancestors have long stewarded and in turn been nourished by the land.



# Meryl McMaster

## **My Destiny is Entwined with Yours (2019)**

Chromogenic print

Collection of Jacques Toupin

In *My Destiny is Entwined with Yours*, McMaster is pictured at the top of the Conglomerate Cliffs at Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan.

Undamaged by the glacial activity of the last Ice Age and fed by numerous springs that emerged along the hillsides, this territory features waterways and trails used for millennia by Indigenous peoples of the Plains to reach their hunting and gathering areas, sacred sites and seasonal meeting places.

The title of McMaster's photograph evokes the entwined destinies of nature and humanity. Speaking to the impending climate crisis resulting from the exploitation of natural resources, McMaster foregrounds our reliance on nature—its ability to nurture, enable and shape our lives—and its sovereignty. These lands existed long before us and will endure long after us.



# Cheyenne Sundance

## **Dogwood, English Ivy and Sweet Peas (2020)**

Dogwood, English ivy, peas, soil, compost, earthworms, plastic container, twine, light. Table by Gilles Gaudet  
Courtesy of the artist

In *Dogwood, English Ivy and Sweet Peas*, Cheyenne Sundance, a Toronto-based urban farmer, identifies in nature patterns that speak to the unseen and undervalued labour and land stewardship of Indigenous and Black people.

In this installation, dogwood—a type of wood native to Turtle Island—houses and supports English ivy and sweet pea vines. Neither the ivy nor peas are from Turtle Island, but English ivy is known to take over and envelope, while peas grow in a symbiotic relationship with soil-dwelling bacteria and earthworms.

Planted in the margins of the planter, the peas will send up shoots and climb the ivy as they grow, providing nourishment to both soil and those who consume them.

In a country where Black and Indigenous peoples are alienated from their ancestral lands in different ways and now face the highest rates of food insecurity, the act of growing food on the land that we now share is a radical form of justice and sovereignty, pointing to sustainable and decolonial futurities.



# Katherine Takpannie

*Katinniaqtugut* (2020)

Ink jet prints

Courtesy of the artist

In *Katinniaqtugut* (Inuktitut for “several of us coming together”), Katherine Takpannie, an Ottawa-based Inuk artist, captures intimate exchanges around the sharing of food during a gathering of Black and Indigenous women and two-spirit people that took place in Ottawa last fall.

The series includes images of a *qulliq*—an oil lamp made of soapstone and traditionally used by Inuit women to cook and create warmth and energy in the home. The use of the *qulliq* for the event speaks to the expansion of who can be considered part of one’s family and with whom this light and warmth can be shared. Gestures of care were similarly extended by the sharing of *bissap*, a traditional West African drink made using hibiscus, a plant native to the region, offered to family and friends as a form of hospitality.

Underlying this event are questions requiring further exploration: what does it mean to understand Indigenous people and people of African descent as indigenous to their own lands and displaced from it in very different ways? What are the ways in which we can hold space together?





















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Front cover: Amy Malbeuf, *A Woman And This Bannock That She Made For you* (detail of Eagleclaw Thom photograph).

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