UCLA
American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title
“Indians on Top”: Kent Monkman's Sovereign Erotics

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6z42j3vs

Journal
American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 39(4)

ISSN
0161-6463

Author
Scudeler, June

Publication Date
2015-09-01

DOI
10.17953/aicrj.39.4.scudeler

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"Indians on Top": Kent Monkman's Sovereign Erotics

June Scudeler

Kent Monkman, a Swampy Cree two-spirit filmmaker and visual/performance artist who is one of Canada's best-known indigenous artists, rewrites North American histories in a way that is both "kitsch and caustic."[1] Prominently featuring his two-spirit alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, and her colorful erotic encounters with nineteenth and early twentieth-century Eurowestern men, Monkman's art also has a serious purpose. Monkman stresses that he "play[s] with sexuality and gender to discuss power" and to counteract the erasure of two-spirit people from colonial narratives.[2]

In addition to reclaiming two-spirit traditions, Monkman's cultural productions construct both history and gender as fluid concepts. Moving through Monkman's work chronologically to show his artistic and intellectual development, I will demonstrate how Monkman's amalgamation of the historical and the urban insists that being Cree is not fixed in time and that Cree worldviews encourage shifts in history and gender.

To move beyond fixed official histories to affirm two-spirit narratives, Monkman updates nineteenth-century landscape paintings using "sympathetic mimesis—his ability to get so successfully inside his historical sources."[3] More importantly, he positions two-spirit people as the agents of their own histories. This repositioning is a means of "metaphorically reclaiming the land, and of exploring themes of racial and sexual oppression through alternative narratives of the art and mythology of the frontier."[4] Monkman reveals the "repressed desire and troubled fascination that have paradoxically contributed" to the shaping of official history—in Monkman's case, between two-spirit people and settler men.[5] Analyzing three of Monkman's works (the

June Scudeler (Métis) received her PhD in English from the University of British Columbia. Her work has been published in *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature* (University of Arizona Press), *Studies in Canadian Literature, Native American and Indigenous Studies* and *Performing Indigeneity* (Playwrights Canada Press).

Figure 1. *Kent Monkman as Miss Chief Eagle Testikle. Still from* Dance to the Berdashe *(2008), 12 minutes, 5-channel video installation with surround sound. Courtesy of Kent Monkman.*

2007 silent film *Shooting Geronimo*, the 2012 installation *Lot's Wife*, and the 2014 epic painting *Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation*, I illustrate how Monkman enacts what two-spirit Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill calls the "Sovereign Erotic" to foreground gender-diverse peoples in Turtle Island, both pre- and post-contact.[6]

The Sovereign Erotic is profoundly political in that it grounds healing and resurgence in indigenous ways of knowing. Driskill defines the Sovereign Erotic as "an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations."[7] In telling a counternarrative that displaces hegemonic colonial history, Monkman's pointedly political Sovereign Erotics better reflects landless and urban indigenous peoples, and particularly two-spirit people. The Cree concept that miyo-wîcêhtowin (good relations) leads to "healthy, strong, and stable nations, possessing the capability to nurture, protect, and care for and heal its people" also means that two-spirit people are an integral part of healthy and strong indigenous communities, whether urban or rural.[8] Although Monkman has received significant art historical criticism that situates him as rewriting the western art history canon, very little has been written on how he does so with a specifically Swampy Cree sensibility. Using miyo-wîcêhtowin, Monkman uses his art to expand the circle to foreground two-spirit stories. Alex Wilson, also two-spirit Swampy Cree, explains

how Cree people position an ethic of principled non-interference as a way of life, in which community members should not "interfere in any way with another person," providing a way for gender-variant people to be seen as an integral part of community, rather than as an anomaly.[9]

Monkman not only produces aesthetically pleasing paintings, films, and performances but also is connecting to his ancestors, especially his great-grandmother. Mark Rifkin defines erotics as a mix of desire, pleasure, wounding, and "interrelations with others, the land, and ancestors."[10] These sensations open indigenous peoples to a commitment to "collectivity and placemaking," which initially may not seem to be political.[11] Monkman uses aesthetic activism, what Dean Rader defines as "political and social activism that finds representation in the artistic realm . . . aesthetic activism implies social action on the plane of artistic discourse, such as poetry, painting, and film."[12] Monkman's cultural productions imagine "alternative kinds of indigenous being" that exist outside the "bureaucratic apparatus of self-determination," an important consideration for an indigenous artist whose family was forcibly displaced.[13]

Monkman repopulates settlers' idea of an empty landscape, or *terra nullius*. Significantly, Rifkin sees embodiment as agency; situating indigeneity as an erotics "offers an alternative vision of Native politics, and an attendant account of the effects of settler imperialism, by foregrounding embodiment as the entry point for representing indigenous political ontologies. Affect in this context is not only solely psychic but also somatic, indicating an indigenous philosophy and praxis in which the personal, natural, territorial, metaphysical, and political are not readily contradistinguished."[14] Monkman's embodiment of Miss Chief in performance, films, and paintings is not merely a performance, but also an embodiment of Monkman's familial loss of territory and an assertion of his presence as a contemporary, two-spirit Swampy Cree man.

Monkman's queer counternarrative is sexy and mischievous, putting Indians on top both sexually and politically. As he explains, "I decided at one point that . . . the Indian was going to be the top because this was about power and this was kind of a reversal of power so I was going to use this sexual metaphor to talk about colonial relationships and power relationships."[15] According to Miss Chief, European men love this role reversal because "I think they're largely submissive by nature."[16]

Informed by both his Swampy Cree ancestry and his sexuality, Monkman is not only asserting an indigenous version of history, but also creating new traditions in his art. Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard emphasises the importance of tradition to understand indigenous art: "Inevitably Indigenous artists confront the relationship to the philosophies or traditions that frame their cultural mapping with their artwork. . . . Tradition as resistance has served Indigenous people well as a response to contact and as a reworking of colonial narratives of the Americas."[17] Tradition is not static as artists negotiate the tensions between being respectful to traditions and creating new, path-clearing art. In addition to a two-spirit sensibility, by affirming a Swampy Cree view of the world in his art, Monkman embodies his family's history, including its Christianity. Monkman's upbringing in a Christian family makes him uniquely positioned to understand how Christianity negatively impacted indigenous peoples, especially two-spirit people. But Monkman appropriates Christianity to

highlight not only the discrimination two-spirit people withstand but also the ways indigenous peoples challenge Christianity.

As an urban indigenous person influenced by mainstream gay culture, Monkman situates Miss Chief as two-spirit, not as a drag persona. Gender theorist Judith Butler situates drag as a performative act in which "the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed," as in men dressing as women in drag queen shows.[18] However, Miss Chief is grounded in specifically indigenous ways of knowing. Of his performances as Miss Chief, Monkman emphatically states,

> [T]here's this perception that it's "just drag." I don't think of it as drag. I see Miss Chief as being two-spirit . . . So it's not about trying to be a female impersonator. I really like to distinguish what I'm doing from what is more commonly known as drag; I really am very careful about crossing that line and keeping it more rare.[19]

Miss Chief is not simply Monkman dressed as a woman, but rather as a two-spirit person who doesn't fall into a male/female binary—a cultural specificity that Butler's idea of drag does not take into account.

Rewriting (Personal) History

Monkman's political, vibrant, and sophisticated artworks have become highly valued in the art market. Dubbed the "rock star" of indigenous art in Canada by art historian Elizabeth Kalbfleisch,[20] Monkman's works are in the collections of the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the National Museum of the American Indian. He has produced, starred in, and at times also directed fourteen films. Among others, he has had solo and group exhibits at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, MASS MoCA, Massachusetts, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Grounding his international reputation are solo shows in New York City, Berlin, and London. Monkman calls his performance pieces at mainstream art institutions like the Royal Ontario Museum, the Warwickshire Gallery in England, and the home of the iconic modernist Ontario-based Group of Seven, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, "Colonial Art Space Interventions." Miss Chief describes these interventions as a response to the "obliteration of our cultures through this canon of art history. These museums have built their foundation on this period of art history that documents the colonization of North America."[21] Monkman is a celebrated member of the Canadian, and increasingly the American and European markets, yet one who is keenly aware of the museum as a colonial project.

While Monkman parodies or criticizes European and North American representations of Native peoples, he also clearly enjoys reproducing nineteenth-century painting styles. Monkman likes to show that he can paint as well as nineteenth-century artists—or even better. When asked why her paintings are so vivid and colorful, Miss Chief quips, "Well, it could be because I'm a superior painter!"[22] Monkman's appreciative appropriation of Western art does not make him an "inauthentic Indian," however. Mohawk artist and curator Greg A. Hill points out, "today, the work of Indigenous

performance artists draws on that multi-layered and multi-contested history; their art rebuilds and engages it, turns it on its head, is intertwined with it and honours it."[23] Monkman's art is not "against" Western art, but engages it on his own terms. In the words of José Esteban Muñoz, to deploy such disidentification is to both work within the public sphere and to "contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere, a space [in this case indigenous] outside of the dominant ideology."[24] In addition to Miss Chief's appearances in Monkman's paintings, she appears embodied in his performance pieces, which highlight his Sovereign Erotics.

Monkman's family has lived off-reserve for several generations and he firmly blames the assimilationist policies of the Canadian government for his lack of connection to the Swampy Cree language and to a particular reserve.[25] Monkman's family history includes not unusual experiences of colonization, Christianization, residential schooling, and language loss. The young Monkman was initially exposed to the Swampy Cree language through Christian hymns and prayers during visits to northern Cree communities where his father preached sermons in Cree. Both Monkman's father (Swampy Cree) and artistically inclined mother (Anglo-Irish) were evangelical Christian missionaries. Monkman notes that his family has been Christian for generations:

> I was interested in the direct impact that Christianity was having in our communities, but also in the complexities and conflict in this relationship. Christianity was introduced to my Cree family several generations ago; and to them it did not seem antithetical to being Cree. Yet there is this dark side to this relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal peoples that has been very oppressive.[26]

Monkman's ancestors were forcibly removed three times, a history which informs his work profoundly. Monkman is a treaty Swampy Cree man who is a member of the Fisher River First Nation in southern Manitoba. He was closest to his great-grandmother Caroline Everette, who mainly spoke Swampy Cree and died at the age of one hundred, when Monkman was ten.[27] He is particularly attached to his great-grandmother's birthplace of St Peter's, Manitoba, "on the river just north of the city. . . . That's a place I feel a strong connection to. That's where they were located from; they were picked up and moved off that piece of land."[28] Monkman emphasizes that "I was fortunate enough to have parents and grandparents who were very confident in knowing who they were and who were confident in their own culture. They knew that you can exist in the modern world and still carry your roots and your culture with you." Monkman's art expresses this same confidence.[29]

When he was two, Monkman's family moved to the middle-class Winnipeg neighborhood of River Heights, which didn't really welcome his Swampy Cree father. "There were people who wouldn't talk to my dad when he moved into the neighbourhood. It was hard for him to accept that, but he knew that putting his kids into better schools was going to give us a better shot down the road."[30] Monkman identified more with his Swampy Cree ancestry than his Anglo-Irish ancestry because of Swampy Cree relatives who were also living in Winnipeg and because he looked different from his white peers at school.[31] Being made to feel different inspired Monkman's attachment to that

difference, which would lead to the boldness of his artistic vision. He states "while I struggled with identity as a younger person in Winnipeg because of the racist climate there, as an adult I refused to see my aboriginality as a liability. How would things ever change if I did?"[32]

After studying illustration at Sheridan College in Toronto, Monkman worked as a set and costume designer in 1993–1994 for Toronto-based Native Earth Performing Arts, when Woods Cree playwright Tomson Highway was the artistic director. Monkman was drawn to designing for Native Earth Performing Arts because he noticed "they had Native actors onstage, they had Native writers and Native directors, but there wasn't yet anyone from the Native community who was designing for the stage."[33] Monkman's experience with Native Earth would inspire the theatricality of his performances as Miss Chief, as well as some of his films, including the eleven-minute faux-Western *Shooting Geronimo.*

Shooting Geronimo

In his silent black and white film, Monkman indigenizes the Hollywood Western by showing the actual reason that two Cree men agree to appear in a reductive, stereotypical movie titled *The Red Menace*: to help their starving community. The role of Blake Tenderfoot is played by Antony Collins (Pima/Maricopa) and that of Johnny Silvercloud by Quetzal Guerrero (Juanaño/Yacqui/Kambiwa). Tellingly, Monkman's *Shooting Geronimo* script does not reference the indigenous actors' actual names; we only know the performers by their *Red Menace* "savage" names. As *The Red Menace* is shot on location at a faux-Western movie set in Ontario, filmmaker Frederick Curtis (played by Yves Harrington) manipulates these reluctant Cree individuals to act as caricatures of the "savages" usually seen in Westerns.[34] Curtis has to teach these modernized indigenous men to act "more Indian" since they dress in contemporary nineteenth-century clothing and their acting is not sufficiently fierce. Eventually they look very alluring, bare-chested and in loincloths, which is Curtis's idea of how Geronimo and Sitting Bull would appear. Curtis lasciviously enjoys the Cree men's good looks and physiques.

Naming *The Red Menace* filmmaker Frederick Curtis is a reference, of course, to Edward Curtis (1868–1952), "a photographer hired by J. P. Morgan in 1906 to document the traditional cultures of the Aboriginal peoples. The resulting archive of more than 2,000 photogravures is one of the most significant and controversial representations ever produced."[35] Edward Curtis infamously supplied his subjects with "traditional" costumes to wear because indigenous people were deemed "too modern" to be photographed as historical artifacts, "even paying them to pose and dress in costumes he provided."[36]

The Cree actors are well aware of the ridiculousness of the film and act to subvert the genre with the help of Monkman's Miss Chief, who is the Lonesome Stranger in the film. Miss Chief takes umbrage at Curtis's inability to see the two Cree men as modern, rather than as relics from the past, and upstages the oblivious Curtis by employing her beguilingly tricksterish forces. When Curtis exhorts the two perplexed Cree men to perform "The Ghost Dance of the American Indian," Miss Chief has the

Figure 2. *Still from* Shooting Geronimo *(2007), 11:11 minutes, black-and-white Super 8, single and two-channel versions. Courtesy of Kent Monkman.*

Cree men do a hilariously out-of-place break dance instead. This disruption of the film's Hollywood stereotypes of the Indian is much to the consternation of a clearly aroused Curtis.

Shooting Geronimo is typical of the way in which Monkman's paintings, installations, and performance pieces actively change colonial history, showing that history, like a constructed backdrop, is more fluid than is usually imagined. While the historiography of past events cannot be changed, Monkman shows that the representation of these events can be rewritten and restaged. The painted backdrop for *The Red Menace* is inspired by the rock formation in *The Searchers* (1956). As Monkman explains, "The backdrop is part of the film's reclamations, taking these landscapes to tell the other side of the story."[37] He elaborates, "you can't change history, but you can get people to think again about what happened back then, and hopefully they will see the present in a different light."[38]

As a "mischief maker, a supernatural element, representing Aboriginal philosophy," then, Miss Chief uses her "mysterious force" to intervene and rewrite history.[39] Curtis is overcome by the Cree men's break dance, exclaiming in intertitles, "Good heavens how curious! But oh my! how exciting!" When Curtis, frustrated by the Cree men's presumed inability to perform, finally dons one of the wigs and acts the part of the fierce Indian, with one of the Cree as the cowboy, Miss Chief laughs lewdly. Indigenous dance was viewed as threatening by colonial governments, resulting in the potlatch ban in Canada from 1885–1951, and accordingly Miss Chief uses dance as one of the

most disruptive elements in the film.[40] Curtis, as the "Indian," is shot by one of the Cree men acting as "authentic Indians" under his direction: the prop pistol has accidentally been switched with a loaded gun. Upon Curtis's (un)timely death, the Cree men take charge of the movie. At this point Monkman uses Cree-specific markers, which is rare in his work. The intertitles now privilege those who can read Cree syllabics that appear above the English translations provided by Keith Goulet (Métis).

The Cree men decide to make their own film with the dead Curtis as General Custer. They exclaim: "Looks like General Custer has been shot by another whiteman." Johnny leans over Curtis' body: "The whiteman says he was definitely shot by another whiteman." The Cree men take a hasty bow from the soundstage saying, "The Whiteman thanks the two innocent Cree Indians for helping him make his picture show." They change back to western clothes but Johnny cries out, "Wait, the money!" but the money has disappeared. When Curtis shows the trunk full of gold in the beginning of the film to the Cree men, the shot of the trunk is glittering and unfocused. By making the gold a magician's illusion, Monkman confirms Curtis's duplicity, and by extension, that of colonial governments.

Like Curtis's "deal," the numbered treaties in Canada, signed between 1871 and 1921, were made with starving people who realized the buffalo weren't coming back. The Cree men have little choice but to act in the movie with the hope of helping their community. They are enacting wâhkôhtowin, or interrelatedness, by "hunting" for money in order to assist their community in a time of need. *Shooting Geronimo* is highlighting the deliberate starvation of First Nations people on reserve.[41] As Mohawk curator and artist Greg A. Hill notes, the Cree men put up with Curtis's impositions in order to feed their community: "Their willingness to participate can now only be seen in terms of a power dynamic that Curtis exploits to the extreme: his sexual advances and arrogant assertions about what is authentically 'Indian' are insults that the men must bear as they keep their goal in mind."[42] *Shooting Geronimo* explicitly shows that the Cree men, intending to use the money to feed their kin on the reserve, are highly aware of their objectification even as they focus on their community responsibility.

While Monkman doesn't explicitly identify the two Cree men as two-spirit, one clearly exhibits jealousy when Curtis grabs the other's ass, and his partner likewise shows anguish when the other Cree man leaves the set. Of course, this confusion is set into motion by the tricksterish Miss Chief. The actors can't see her as she shoots arrows across the set, "even taking control of the camera, laughing uncontrollably at [the shooting of Curtis] as if she may have had some 'mysterious control over it."[43] Vanishing as mysteriously as she arrived, Miss Chief ends the film by taking Curtis's spirit with her. As he is ignobly pulled behind Miss Chief on a donkey, however, Curtis is certainly no longer in a position of power—a fitting end for the arrogant filmmaker.

Lot's Wife

Monkman's 2012 installation *Lot's Wife* is his first piece to foreground the theft of his family's land. *Globe and Mail* art critic Sarah Milroy describes the importance of the piece to Monkman:

> Born in St Peter's in 1875 [Monkman's great-grandmother] stayed until 1907, ultimately bearing thirteen children, only three of whom survives to adulthood, before she and her family were forcibly relocated to less desirable land. The farm they had tilled was claimed by white settlers from the fledgling Anglican settlement, supported by the policies of the Canadian government. It was a story to be repeated in her life before she was finally able to make a permanent home, off-reserve, on Matheson Island, further north on Lake Winnipeg.[44]

Monkman's installation consists of a white mannequin of Miss Chief dressed in a white tunic holding a white beaded purse. This self-portrait is "placed in a plot of long grasses and wildflowers. Behind it, a baby deer finds sanctuary in the reeds."[45] The mannequin faces a screen upon which is projected a film of the Red River near St Peter's Manitoba, Monkman's great-grandmother's reserve, replete with a soundtrack of birdsong and the sound of wind in the grass. The whiteness of Miss Chief also represents how the Canadian government tried to make Monkman's great-grandmother white by removing her from her ancestral lands. Reflecting his family's history with Christianity, Monkman uses religious imagery to reclaim his family's land and to affirm their Swampy Cree ancestry.

Lot's Wife is one of Monkman's most multilayered and contemplative works as it addresses both his family's history of dispossession and Christianity's negation of two-spirit people. As Milroy comments, "a metaphor drawn from a Christian story is used to eulogize a way of life that Christianity unravelled."[46] Monkman is inextricably binding together his family's dispossession and its embrace of Christianity with the denigration of two-spirit people. But Monkman is also referring to the biblical story of Lot's wife, "who, despite divine threat of reprisal, turned back in her leave-taking for a final glance at Sodom, her former home. For her defiance, God turned her into a pillar of salt."[47] Monkman points out "the story of Lot's wife was always told to us as a story about how God destroyed gay people. But it was Christianity that did not accept homosexuality." In addition, Monkman underscores, "she is punished for remembering. We are not supposed to look back and remember where we are from."[48] Andrea Smith argues that Christian colonizers compared indigenous people to Canaanites because "both were worthy of mass destruction [because] they both personify sexual sin."[49] Smith goes on to note that in the Bible, "Canaanites commit acts of sexual perversion in Sodom" (Gen 19:1–29) and are the "descendants of the unsavoury relationships between Lot and his daughters" (Gen. 19:30–38).[50]

Monkman further complicates the story of Lot's wife by having Miss Chief sporting a very white, semi-erect penis, which is visible through her diaphanous, biblical style tunic. Like the histories of two-spirit peoples, Miss Chief's erection is both visible and invisible, as the viewer has to make a conscious effort to see it. Monkman is exposing

the supposedly homophobic aspect of the story of Lot's wife as well as its gender politics. Lot's daughters are offered to the mob outside their father's house and later have sex with their father to ensure he has heirs. In some interpretations of the story, the mob of men want "to know" the two strangers who stay in Lot's house in a sexual way, but on its website, the Anglican Communion argues that the story is "not even vaguely about homosexual love or relationships," but instead "about dominance and rape, by definition an act of violence, not of sex or love."[51]

What, then, prompts Miss Chief's erection? She is looking at her great-grandmother's land; her longing is physically manifested. Miss Chief is also Lot's wife, who is punished for looking back at the "sinful" city of Sodom after God had told Lot's family not to look back at the city's destruction. Lot's wife was supposedly contaminated by Sodom's depravity and is punished for disobeying God's edict. Similarly, Miss Chief is supposed to forget her family's land but her arousal signals erotic sovereignty; the two-spirit Miss Chief cannot forget her place both in history and on the land. She realises she has to establish her own sovereign homeland that will accept those outside of governmental and heteronormative structures. She remakes the connection between a lost land and the present in the city—one can retain these erotic and affective ties, even if it has been violently removed. Monkman honors his family's dispossession from their traditional territory, even as he realizes the opportunities in being an urban Indigenous person. Monkman's father's relocation of the family to Winnipeg meant access to the cultural life of a city, which was important to Monkman, as he knew he wanted to be an artist at a very young age. Monkman's family encouraged his artistic endeavors, so "there was never any question that I would do anything else."[52]

Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation

Monkman's works have become more thematically and artistically sophisticated, while still fusing humor with two-spirit subjects. He has shifted his focus to explicitly critique modern art. Monkman explains, "modernity espoused a wilful amnesia about the past."[53] Monkman counters this forgetting in his larger-than-life painting *Welcome to the Studio: An Allegory for Artistic Reflection and Transformation* (2014) shown at Montreal's McCord Museum.[54] Based on the McCord's William Notman (1826–1891) photography archive, Monkman reproduces a few of the vast collection's black-and-white photos, albeit in ways that Notman never envisioned.

In addition to Notman's photographs, *Welcome to the Studio* is also inspired by realist Gustave Courbet's painting *The Artist's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* (1885), which features a panoply of Courbet's influences, including writers Georges Sand and Charles Baudelaire, as well as different classes of Parisian society. Echoing Courbet, Monkman's painting includes wrestlers and high-society Montrealers among its thirty characters, as well as a portrait of Courbet, who is painting a portrait of the viewer. Lily Shaddick argues that "Monkman portrays himself in the place of Courbet, but in the garb and pose of William Notman's own famous self-portrait. Unavoidably, this compositional representation ties Monkman to

the two other men, while raising questions of his identity as an artist and an individual of Cree descent."[55] In placing himself in the center of the painting and in the place of two Western artists, Monkman is illustrating his comfort in being a Swampy Cree man in the dominant art world.

Moreover, in *Welcome to the Studio* Monkman strategically places indigenous people in his painting to center indigeneity and to satirize historical practices expressed in the work of Notman and Courbet. Some white-settler Montrealers are costumed as Indians in photographs taken in Notman's nineteenth-century photography studio. As artist Sarah Parsons argues, Notman's studio was "a space for identity performance . . . there was a whole retinue of people there to dress you in whatever persona you chose to take on."[56] Similarly, at the Chateau de Ramezay Ball in 1898, a fundraiser for the Women's Antiquarian Society, rich Montrealers enjoyed dressing up as Indians—a fascination that continues.[57] Shaddick finds parallel spatial positioning in Monkman's and Courbet's paintings, observing that "like Courbet's, Monkman's piece is split into three sections that present the viewer with his inner circle, those who define his identity on the right side, and those who willingly participate as spectacles on the left side and peripheries."[58] *Welcome to the Studio*'s left side depicts members of Montreal's high society dressed as Indians, while the right side includes Notman's portrait photograph of Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill. However, in Monkman's version, Sitting Bull is giving Buffalo Bill the finger.[59] At the same time, Buffalo Bill is looking askance at Sitting Bull and a white woman dressed as an Indian is also giving Sitting Bull a queasy look. To paraphrase Thomas King (Cherokee), this clearly isn't the kind of Indian they had in mind. As Monkman thus "hand[s] back the microphone to voices that colonialism once drowned out," indigenous people in his work again are disrupting colonial history in unexpected ways.[60]

Monkman's massive painting champions the visual artist. But as a studio painter who sometimes bases his paintings on photographs, he also acknowledges some visual artists' use of photographs. Depicting the late-nineteenth century rivalry between photography and painting for artistic supremacy, two Tsuu T'ina men in colorful regalia and roaches (a kind of feathered head gear worn by some male powwow dancers) to the right of Monkman act out the competition as one uses his paintbrush to "stab" the other, who is kneeling holding a digital camera. Monkman stresses that the two men are a "way of underscoring Aboriginal identity. . . . Even though these look like 'dead Indians' from the past, our cultures are very much alive. You go to a pow wow and everyone has cell phones and are taking pictures with digital cameras."[61] A pair of white women in late nineteenth-century clothing also echo the painting-versus-photography debate, one depicted with a painting and the other with a box camera. Monkman deliberately uses women and indigenous peoples to illustrate the debate because both groups have been left out of the dominant narrative of art history.

Monkman's use of the physical space of the McCord Museum, particularly the reflective glass vitrines, enacts the good relations of miyo-wîcêhtowin by encouraging people to become part of the painting. Monkman's self-portrait depicts him seated beside his portrait of the young and handsome Percival Molson (wearing anachronistic runners) as Ares, the Greek god of war. Clad in a fur-trimmed smoking jacket,

the languid Monkman seems to beckon the viewer with one hand, while he holds a very large paintbrush in the other. Monkman explains, "it was fun creating this painting with phallic references, which in a way can be more erotic than just showing a penis. . . . It's about having the biggest brush!"[62] A stool and easel are placed opposite Monkman's self-portrait to encourage viewers to take photos of themselves reflected on top of Monkman's self-portrait. While miyo-wîcêhtowin is part of *Welcome to the Studio*, viewers' selfies with Monkman's self-portrait will have different meanings. Are non-indigenous people, like the Montrealers in Notman's studio portraits, colonizing the painting? When Monkman was asked about how viewers should interpret the work, he "simply replied the viewing was up to the individual, that they could think upon the content and mediate it for themselves."[63]

Monkman pays tribute to the stories of two-spirit peoples that the colonizers tried to erase. Stressing the need to invite people in to learn about these stories, Monkman's art reflects the histories and narratives of indigenous people. Monkman locates his cultural productions as acts of sovereignty, an imaginative land claim for indigenous communities and for his Swampy Cree ancestors—an outstanding example of Gerald Vizenor's (Anishinaabe) affirmation that "Native imagination, experience, and remembrance are the real landscapes of liberty in the literature of this continent."[64] Monkman is asking all of us to remember and to honor Cree two-spirit histories.

Notes

The Monkman art works discussed in this article can be viewed at kentmonkman.com. Maarsii to Kent Monkman for permission to use images from *Shooting Geronimo* and *Dance to the Berdashe*.

1. Ariane De Blois, "Dancing with the Berdache by Kent Monkman," *Esse* (Winter, 2010): 56. I use "two-spirit" as an umbrella term for indigenous peoples who fall outside of Eurowestern gender binaries, including the terms gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, trans, or Nation-specific concepts.

2. Kate Morris, National Museum of the American Indian, "Making Miss Chief: Kent Monkman Takes on the West," http://blog.Kate.si.edu/main/2011/05/making-miss-chief-kent-monkman-takes-on-the-west.html.

3. Richard William Hill, "Kent Monkman's Constitutional Amendments: Time and Uncanny Objects," *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, ed. Michele Theriault (Montreal: Concordia University, 2012), 54.

4. Jordan Timm, "Landscape with Sexy Transvestite," *Maclean's* (December 31, 2007): 94.

5. Michele Thériault, "Preface," *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, 6.

6. Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirit/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 16, no. 2 (2004): 50–64, doi 10.1353/ail.2004.0020.

7. Ibid., 51.

8. Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000), 15.

9. Alex Wilson, "N'tacimowin inna nah': Coming into Two-Spirit Identities," PhD diss., Harvard, 2007.

10. Mark Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 39.

11. Ibid., 39.

12. Dean Rader, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 5.

13. Ibid., 39.

14. Rifkin, *Erotics*, 174.

15. Roland Maurice, *The Otherings of Miss Chief: Kent Monkman's "Portrait of the Artist as Hunter"* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2007), 91.

16. Catherine Mattes, "Interview with Miss Chief," in *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief*, David Liss, Shirley J. Madill, Gerald R. McMaster, Catherine Mattes, and David McIntosh (Hamilton: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2008), 107.

17. Jolene Rickard, "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (2011): 472, doi 10.1215/00382876-1162543.

18. Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversion," *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih and Judith Butler (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 111.

19. Leah Sandals, "Q&A: Kent Monkman on the Calgary Stampede, Castors and More," *Canadian Art*, August 12, 2013, https://canadianart.ca/features/kent-monkman-the-big-four/.

20. Shaamini Yogretnam, "Portrait of Ex-GG's Spouse a First," *The Ottawa Citizen* (December 15, 2012): A11.

21. Mattes, "Interview with Miss Chief," 108.

22. Ibid., 109.

23. Greg A. Hill, "Caught . . . (Red-handed)," *Caught in the Act: The Viewer as Performer*, ed. Josée Drouin-Brisebois (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2008), 163.

24. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 7.

25. Monkman was born in 1965 in the small town of St Mary's Ontario, his English-Irish mother's hometown, and then lived in the northern Manitoba Swampy Cree community of Shamattawa until his family's move to Winnipeg when Monkman was two.

26. Mike Hoolboom, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief," *Practical Dreamers: Conversations with Movie Artists* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 20.

27. Gerald Hannon, "The Pink Indian," *Toronto Life* 45, no. 9 (September 2011), 59.

28. CBC-TV, "Indigenous in the City," *8th Fire: Aboriginal Peoples, Canada and the Way Forward*, January 13, 2012, four-part series directed by Ryszard Hunka, produced by Coleen Rajotte, Charlotte Odele, and Griffin Ondaatje, http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire//2011/11/indigenious-in-the-city.html.

29. David Furnish, "Kent Monkman," *Interview Magazine*, March 2006, 37.

30. Timm, "Landscape," 95.

31. Ibid., 95.

32. Richard Burnett, "Three Dollar Bill: Gone with the Wind," *Hour*, June 14 2007, np, http://hour.ca/2007/06/14/gone-with-the-wind/.

33. David Liss, "Kent Monkman: Miss Chief's Return," *Canadian Art Magazine*, September 15, 2005, 80, http://canadianart.ca/features/kent-monkman-3/.

34. Monkman and crew shot the film at Docville, "one hour east of Toronto, where Doc has a western set on his farm that he rents out for films, parties or weddings. It has a general store, a saloon and a sheriff's office." Hoolboom, "Kent Monkman," 49.

35. David Liss, "Ken Monkman: The Wild West Lives Again!" in *The Triumph of Mischief*, 105.

36. Ibid., 105.

37. Hoolboom, "Kent Monkman," 49.

38. Ibid., 50.

39. Ibid., 49–50.

40. See http://www.umista.org/masks_story/en/ht/potlatch02.html. Amusingly, Miss Chief's dancing stunt double is Alejandro (Alex) Meraz (Puréhpecha), who is more famous for playing Paul, a member of the wolf pack in the *Twilight* franchise.

41. In 1883 a Cree Elder stated, "They did a lot to starve the Indians. The first thing they did was to fence the reserve in . . . The fence was to keep the people in . . . When the people came here they were starving already. So many people were sick that a doctor from Indian Head [Saskatchewan] was called. The doctor got mad at the agent and told him the people were starving." Maureen Katherine Lux, *Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 40–41.

42. Hill, "Caught . . . (Red-Handed)," 163.

43. Liss, "The Wild West Lives Again!," 100.

44. Monkman acknowledges that his grandmother decided not to live on reserve so her family lost her land after she died "because it was illegal at that time for a treaty Indian to own land off the reserve" (*8th Fire*).

45. Ibid.

46. Sarah Milroy, "Kent Monkman: Honouring the Dispossessed," *The Globe and Mail*, October 12, 2012, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/kent-monkman-honouring-the-dispossessed/article4609165/.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 10.

50. Ibid.

51. Anglican Communion, http://www.anglicancommunion.org/.

52. Hoolboom, "Kent Monkman," 18.

53. Sarah Milroy, "Historic Drag," *The Walrus*, May 2014, http://thewalrus.ca/historic-drag/.

54. See http://www.pfoac.com/assets/KM/images/inventaire/KM_Welcome_to_the_Studio_large.jpg. The massive twenty-four foot-long painting was displayed in a black room with glass vitrines, which reminded Monkman of a non-digital camera's interior. McCord Museum, "Welcome to the Studio," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7GKVeDBoZ4.

55. Lily Shaddick, "Revisionist Art," *The McGill Daily*, February 10, 2014, http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2014/02/revisionist-art/.

56. Milroy, "Historic Drag."

57. Ibid.

58. Shaddick, "Revisionist Art," np.

59. Of this gesture, Monkman has coyly remarked, "I thought he was maybe just stroking his rabbit skins" (Milroy, "Historic Drag").

60. Ibid.

61. "Discussion between Kent Monkman and Hélène Samson," *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYk2hRLiXag 23 September 2014.

62. Richard Burnett, "Kent Monkman Painting Takes Montreal Art World by Storm," *Daily Xtra*, Mon, Mar 31, 2014, np, http://www.dailyxtra.com/toronto/arts-and-entertainment/kent-monkman-painting-takes-montreal-art-world-storm-81638.

63. Shaddick, np.

64. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manner: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover: University Press of New England), 1994, 7.