

KC Adams

Seven Generations

November 21, 2024 to February 14, 2025

The Knowledge of Materials

Essay by Becca Taylor

Last June, my niece danced at her Grade 6 celebration. That morning, we braided her hair and sorted through decades of beaded hair pieces and earrings collected by me and her other aunties. She carefully searched through beaded barrettes, hair ties, earrings, and headbands that had been gifted to or made by us over the years. An hour before the afternoon Grand Entry, I showed up to help her get into her regalia and put on all of her carefully curated accessories. I watched her hands run over her regalia as she stood in line for Grand Entry, her hand smoothing over the textures of beads, velvet, satin and the cool metal of the jingles. It seemed to bring her comfort and ease her anxiety before she started to dance. The materials and accessories used to construct and adorn the regalia she wore hold the memories and knowledge systems of her ancestors and communities. Their presence helped carry her forth while she danced and celebrated her milestones and achievements as she prepared to leave elementary school and start a new journey in Jr High in the fall.

Métis scholar Sherry Farrell Racette has described Indigenous peoples' intimate relationship to materials as animate, "often believed to be living and potent", and the gestures of stitching to be "deeply personal and meditative."¹ Our relationships to materials are built within the reflective selection and tactility of making. These relationships and systems of knowledge passed down through generations are embedded into regalia and objects. The intention of the maker is carried on through the regalia to the wearer whose body is adorned with their work. Indigenous regalia, adornment materials and technologies have changed over time, from quillwork and hides, to beading and stroud cloth, to sequins and ribbons. The knowledge systems, though, have moved within materials, transferring from traditional or "ancient" forms onto new objects. Farrell Racette states: "Language, symbolism, and continuity of practice 'grandmothered' ancient meanings on to new forms; rather than marking a decline in material culture, they illustrate the important work of women in the creation and synthesis of knowledge systems."²

Materiality and technology are common themes within KC Adams' creative practice. Her work often explores technological systems, whether through new digital technologies such as photography and film, or older technologies such as Indigenous quillwork, beading, birchbark biting and clay vessel-making. She often uses the old and new together to bridge gaps and mirror our deep relational work with the materials we use. Her recent conceptualization of the term "Relational Maker" showcases this deep relationship to materials. Using the phrase Relational Maker in place of the word "artist" to explore her creative practice embodies a method of deep listening, reflection, respect and learning within the making process. As a Relational Maker, Adams holds a responsibility to transmit knowledge to others and to invite dialogue and relations not just between herself and her peers, but also with ancestors and future generations. She views Relational Making as "the skillful production of objects, new media, or performances by an Indigenous person that infuses Indigenous epistemologies such as relational, locational, spiritual, communal, and holistic understanding." Further, she writes that, "Relational Making reflects Indigenous worldviews within the creative process and allows for a bonding experience with the ancestors and the knowledge they carry, regardless of whether the material is land-based or a new technology."³

In her exhibition *Seven Generations*, Adams' exploration of the material legacy of adornment and regalia demonstrates the impact of knowledge, storytelling and

1 Sherry Farrell Racette, "Tuft Life: Stitching Sovereignty in Contemporary Indigenous Art", *Art Journal*, 76:2 (2017), 114-123.

2 Sherry Farrell Racette, "My Grandmothers Loved to Trade: The Indigenization of European Trade Goods in Historic and Contemporary Canada," *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, No. 20 (March 2008): 77.

3 KC Adams, "Relational Maker," *BlackFlash Magazine*, 40:3 (February 2024).

intentionality transferred through generations. Throughout the exhibition she honours the concept of the seven generations by paying homage to the past, present and futures of Indigenous peoples carried through material practices. Her photo series *We are Still Here* fills the gallery walls, featuring portraits of twelve Indigenous children with scans of historical floral and geometric beadwork and quillwork designs framing their smiling faces. Adams originally created this work in response to the discovery of the remains of 215 children found at the Kamloops Indian Residential school in 2021. Since then, thousands of remains have been found at different residential school sites across Canada. Through *We Are Still Here*, Adams uses the images of children to bring forth teachings of truth and to reflect on the resiliency, knowledge and joy of Indigenous peoples.

In the middle of the gallery are the original ancestral beadworks and quillworks that Adams scanned and incorporated into *We are Still Here*. On loan from the Manitoba Museum's Hudson Bay Company Collection, these ancestor creations were produced by Indigenous makers well before Adams' time and come from different regions throughout Canada. The ancestral work is surrounded by the smiling young faces of the future which further speaks to the resilience and continuity of creative practice by Indigenous peoples.

On a large screen at the back of the gallery is Adams' newly commissioned short film, *Relational Making*, which brings conversations around regalia making and their intentions to the present. *Relational Making* also brings the conversation closer to home for Adams. She interviews young mothers of powwow dancers from Fisher River Cree Nation, where her own matrilineal ancestors originate. In the film, we see close-ups of the regalia as the mothers share their intentions behind making the regalia and accessories, describing where each piece comes from. This heartwarming dialogue demonstrates the time, care and commitment that goes into creating regalia for our children and loved ones. Adams' film also shows that each piece of regalia holds information about land-based knowledges, communities, love and joy. As we watch and listen to this film, we learn that one person's regalia is often created by multiple makers, so there are several series of knowledges and intentions embedded in the materials adorning a single dancer.

Throughout this exhibition, Adams tells us stories and actively reminds us of the powerful presence of Indigenous relationality and deep ancestral connections within our material practices. She uses regalia and adornment to transmit the knowledges of trust, love and care we carry through generations as Indigenous peoples.



KC Adams, *Relational Making*



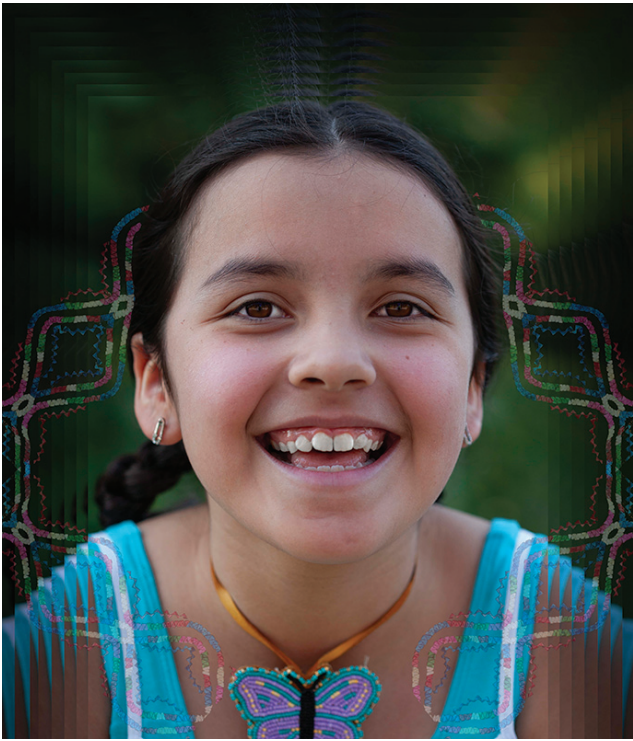
KC Adams, *Relational Making*



Nehiyawak artist once known, *Pipe bag*



Dene artist once known, *Wall Pocket*



KC Adams, *Ava*



KC Adams, *Mac*

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Relational maker KC Adams, or Flying Overhead Eagle Woman, is of Ininew, Anishinaabe and British heritage. She is a registered member of Fisher River Cree Nation living on Treaty One Territory in Winnipeg. Adams has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Concordia University and a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies (Curatorial Practices) from the University of Winnipeg where she graduated with Highest Distinction. As a relational maker, she creates work that embeds Indigenous knowledge systems. She is also an educator, activist, community member and mentor. KC has had numerous solo and group exhibitions and residencies across Canada and internationally and she has presented her work in three biennales, including the PHOTOQUAI: Biennale des images du monde in Paris, France. Twenty pieces from her Cyborg Hybrid photo series, which address racism toward people of mixed Indigenous/European ancestry, are in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada, and her *Birch Bark Ltd* sculptural installation is held in the collection of the Canadian Consulate of Australia. Adams has received several awards for her work, including the Winnipeg Arts Council's Making A Mark Award, Canada's Senate 150 medal, the University of Saskatchewan's Ohpinamake Prize for Indigenous Artists, and a Quill & Quire 2019 Book of the Year Award for *Perception: A Photo Series*, a project combatting anti-Indigenous racism. KC was the scenic designer for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's 2019 production *Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation*. Her recent public art commissions at The Forks and Red River Polytech honour Indigenous ways of knowing and inspire Winnipeggers to pursue reconciliation. Her photo-portrait series of Indigenous youth, entitled *We Are Still Here* was first presented as a virtual exhibition with the Portrait Gallery of Canada.

ABOUT THE ESSAYIST

Becca Taylor (Cree/Irish/Scottish) is an artist, curator and writer. She is a registered member of Fisher River Cree Nation and was born and raised in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton). Becca investigates kinship and the constellations of relationships that make up Indigenous communities, with particular interest in food sovereignty, harvesting, and witnessing through deep listening, conversation, and making. Becca has curated exhibitions and written accompanying texts for Walter Phillips Galleries Satellite Space, Urban Shaman, TREX Alberta, Blackwood Gallery and Mitchell Art Gallery. Notably, she also co-curated La Biennale d'art contemporain autochtone (BACA) in 2018. Becca was the Inaugural Director of Ociciwan Contemporary art Centre in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), AB. Her writing has been published in *Canadian Art*, *BlackFlash* and *also as well too press*, among others.

LIST OF WORKS

Works are listed on the wall in order of their appearance, beginning with photographs along the east side of the gallery and continuing clockwise. All works by KC Adams are collection of the artist. All ancestor works are from The Manitoba Museum, Hudson's Bay Company Collection.

KC Adams, *Kaleeya* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Elijah* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Cacee* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Ruby* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Ava* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Warren* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Relational Making*, 2024, film. Run time: 6 minutes, 22 seconds.

KC Adams, *Ebany* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Joe* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Mac* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Isaiah* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Dakota* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

KC Adams, *Felicia* (from the series *We Are Still Here*), 2021, digitally enhanced photograph, 85.1 x 64.8 cm.

Ancestor works in display case:

Dene artist once known, *Wall Pocket*, early 20 th century, velvet, cotton fabric, satin ribbon, beads, 44 x 59.7 cm.

Plains artist once known, *Bag*, late 19 th -early 20 th century, wool, cotton muslin, cotton twill, beads, 34.5 x 20 cm.

Athapaskan artist once known, *Game Bag*, late 19 th century, caribou and moose hide, quills, velvet, twill tape, cotton cloth, beads, wool, sinew, cotton thread, dimensions?.

Dene artist once known, *Belt*, hide, cotton fabric, quills, beads, early 20 th century, 75.7 x 5.1 cm.

Dene artist once known, *Belt*, hide, cotton fabric, quills, beads, early 20 th century, 75 x 4.7 cm.

Nehiyawak artist once known, *Pipe Bag*, late 19 th -early 20 th century, moose hide, beads, quills, sinew, wool, cotton thread, 45.7 x 16.8 cm.

EXHIBITION HOURS

Monday - Friday between 12:00 and 4:00 pm from November 21, 2024 until February 14, 2024. Open until 6:30 pm on November 21 and until 8:00 pm on November 28. Closed December 23, 2024 until January 3, 2025. Viewing also available by appointment outside of these hours.

AFFILIATED EVENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Indigenous Makers Market: Thursday, November 28, 12:00 – 8:00 pm
Featuring the work of 20 makers!

Panel discussion: Monday, January 13 at 4:00 pm

Workshop: TBA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gallery 1C03 is located on Treaty One Territory, heartland of the Red River Métis, and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Ininew, Anishininew, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline. We acknowledge that our water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

Gallery 1C03 acknowledges financial assistance provided by the Manitoba Arts Council. We are grateful for the support of the University of Winnipeg's indigenous Summer Scholars Program, Office of Indigenous Engagement, Indigenous Student Services Centre, Indigenous Students Association, Curatorial Practices Graduate Program, and the Oral History Centre. We express our appreciation to The Manitoba Museum for lending the ancestral works and to the United Church Archives for lending artwork frames.

We are immensely grateful to artist KC Adams for sharing her powerful work and the teachings they hold. We also wish to thank the youth who participated in KC's *We Are Still Here* photo series and the moms and youth who participated in her *Relational Making* film. We greatly appreciate the words shared by essayist Becca Taylor to enrich our understanding of the exhibition. We express our gratitude to Elder Sharon Pelletier for opening the exhibition in a good way, and we thank Gibson, Laila, Mason and Sons of the Drum for dancing and drumming at the exhibit reception. Thank you to University Art Gallery and Collections Technician Jamie Wright for installing the exhibition, to Kent Davies for technical production assistance, Alysya Baraniuk for additional technical support and her work on the exhibition research guide, Margaret Firlotte for co-organizing the Indigenous Makers Market, and to the gallery's student attendants for welcoming visitors and leading youth workshops.

Gallery 1C03

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