Survivance: Daphne Odjig and the Visibility of Contemporary Indigenous Narratives

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Daphne Odjig (1919-2016) was a pathfinder and visual artist whose work advanced the visibility of Indigenous stories. Odjig was of Potawatomi decent from Wikwemikong (Manitoulin Island), Three Fires Confederacy, the ancestral land and unceded territory of the Odawa, Ojibway, and Potawatomi.[1] Odjig honoured her Indigenous heritage while at the same time "worked hard to earn respect simply as an artist", insisting that the status of contemporary Indigenous art was equivalent to that of European fine art.[2]

Daphne Odjig was and remains recognized for expanding Indigenous knowledge production, in part by creating visual artworks for private and public audiences in Canada and abroad. She actively participated in solo and group exhibitions at various locations across Canada and internationally beginning early in the 1960's until early 2000's.[3] Her first show was a group exhibition at the Wikwemikong Manitoulin Island National Indian Council in 1964, when the Government of Canada purchased all 110 submissions by various Indigenous artists.[4] Odjig's first solo exhibition took place in 1967 at the Lakehead Art Centre in Port Arthur, Ontario (Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1970) where she showed seventy-eight artworks.[5] A positive response at the show resulted in selling a number of pieces proving to inspire Odjig to continue creating artwork.[6] The style of artwork Odjig produced at this time consisted of pen and ink drawings representing local people and ways of life on the reservation of the Chemahawin Cree Nation in the town of Easterville, Manitoba where she was living at the time.[7] This particular place influenced Odjig's *Series of the North* (1967), prioritizing the relationality of human, non-human animals, spirituality

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[1] Devine, Bonnie, Robert Houle, and Duke Redbird. *The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2007), 22.
[2] Michelle LaVallee, *Professional Native Artists Inc.* (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 2014), 73.
[3] "Curriculum Vitae," Daphne Odjig, accessed March 25, 2021. www.Odjig.com.
[4] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 140.
[5] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 144.
[6] Daphne Odjig, R. M. Vanderburgh and M.E. Southcott, *A Paintbrush In My Hand* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1992), 51.
[7] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 50.

and land.[8] Odjig also created "legend paintings" during this period transforming various traditional Indigenous oral stories into visual artworks.[9] The significance of the "legend paintings" for Odjig was in how this type of artwork potentially reinforced Indigenous stereotypes that interfered with her desire to express emotions using her own stories and creativity.[10] Odjig retells her lived experience, arguing that, " I felt all along that I want to express myself as a person. I don't want to get on the bandwagon, this is an Indian, let's buy the paintings. I don't have to sit down and say I'm going to do an Indian legend to prove that I am an Indian and an artist".[11] At this time, Odjig was claiming her identity as an artist breaking away from what she observed as limitations in the category "Indigenous art".

Odjig's work received increasing attention. In 1974, a mural was commissioned from Odjig by what is now called the Canadian Museum of History (formerly named the National Museum of Man and then the National Museum of Civilization).[12] The commission request took place during one of several visits Dr. William Taylor, director of the museum, conducted at Odjig's shop and gallery space called the New Warehouse Gallery in Winnipeg, Manitoba.[13] As recalled by Odjig, Taylor encouraged her to paint "the biggest goddamn painting you can do…I don't care when you do it, you can do it tomorrow, you can do it in two years from now. Do any subject *you* want to!".[14] Entitled *The Indian in Transition* (1978), the finished work is monumental in scale and subject matter.[15] Spanning more than eight meters in length and two meters in height, the mural is emblematic of Odjig's style illustrating Indigenous visibility and perspective as "the first

[8] Daphne Odjig, "Series of the North", http://odjig.com/north.html.
[9] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 50.
[10] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 50.
[11] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 51.
[12] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 32.
[13] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 76.
[14] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 76.
[15] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 86.

commissioned piece by a Native artist to make a direct statement about the Canadian Indian".[16] The mural reveals a visual narrative of Odjig's standpoint, asserting the relationality of Indigenous and non-Indigenous settler colonialists, vividly rendered in a multicoloured assemblage of human and non-human figures.

The Indian in Transition was at first installed in the lobby of the National Arts Centre in 1978, a performing arts theatre in Ottawa, and later moved to the library at The Canadian Museum of History.[17] In 2006, the mural was subsequently relocated to its present-day gallery space in that museum where public viewing is unmistakably accessible in an open space with good lighting.[18] It is an original form of visual and cultural Indigenous knowledge produced in the mid-seventies while Odjig lived at her home on Lake Shuswap in the interior of British Columbia.[19] Odjig's exclaims the mural is "just facts, just history".[20]

The National Gallery of Canada additionally holds a collection of artworks by Daphne Odjig that have participated in various exhibitions within the gallery as well in galleries across Canada. Among the gallery's present-day collection are nineteen original artworks by Daphne Odjig consisting of paintings and drawings catalogued as purchases or gifts starting in 2001.[21] Of significance is *Theatre Queue* (1962), one of Odjig's earliest paintings qualifying Odjig for a membership in the British Columbia Federation of Artists after her sister Winnie persuaded her to submit artwork in a juried competition.[22] *Theatre Queue* (1962) was gifted to the gallery in 2011

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[16] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 86.
[17] Devine, Houle, and Redbird 32.
[18] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 32.
[19] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 85.
[20] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 86.
[21] "Daphne Odjig," The National Gallery of Canada, accessed March 23, 2021. https://www.gallery.ca/collection/search-thecollection?search_api_views_fulltext=Daphne%20Odjig&sort_by=search_api_relevance&f%5B0%5D=field_reference_artist%253Atitle%3ADaphne%20Odjig.
[22] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 46.

by Jennifer and Gary Scherbain, current owners of the Wah-Sa Gallery in Winnipeg, Manitoba and former hosts of Daphne Odjig's 1977 solo exhibition corresponding to the poster in my study.[23]

The Daphne Odjig collection at the National Gallery of Canada is shaped exclusively by artworks produced in the 1960's to late 1970's with the exception of one painting from 1958.[24] It is interesting the gallery's focus on Odjig's early artworks and emergent years as opposed to her later years when public attention expanded and her achievements as an artist were nationally acknowledged. The limited range of the gallery's collection suggests the strategic direction of the gallery is securing Odjig's early works. It could also demonstrate the gallery's lack of attention to and understanding of contemporary work by Indigenous artists at the time.

The limitations of the Odjig collection currently held in The National Gallery of Canada is symptomatic of the conditions Odjig faced as an artist and Indigenous woman in relation to established collection practices. The National Gallery of Canada first began purchasing Odjig's artworks in 2001, presumably in response to specific terms outlined in the Museums Act (1990). The Museums Act (1990) was sanctioned by the Government of Canada as a way of regulating public institutional policies by advocating in "preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada" for the purpose of "the collective memory and sense of identity for all Canadians".[25] The Museums Act (1990) also formalized Canada's responsibility to preserve historical and contemporary artworks as a source of knowledge production and participator in world history.[26] Further, present-day acquisition policies related to Indigenous art collecting at The National Gallery of Canada

[23] "Theatre Queue," The National Gallery of Canada, accessed March 23, 2021. https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/theatre-queue.
[24] "Daphne Odjig."
[25] Museums Act, S.C. 1990, c.3 Assented to 1990-01-30. Government of Canada, https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-13.4/page-1.html#h-353995
[26] Museums Act, c.3.

proclaims that it is striving for a "more complete(ly)" representation of "contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit artists from Canada".[27] The gallery's attention toward fulfilling an inclusive or "more complete" contemporary Indigenous artwork collection advocates for enlarging the representation and knowledge of contemporary Indigenous visual culture in Canada.

The National Gallery of Canada's current position on acquiring a comprehensive Indigenous collection fails to consider the extent of Odjig's artistic achievements beyond the 1970's. The invisibility of Odjig's artwork from the 1980's through to the early 2000's excludes her involvement in contemporary Indigenous art production in Canada despite her ongoing participation. Overlooking her work during this time period further illuminates institutional systems marginalizing Odjig's artistic talent at the time she was creating fresh new works. Based on the gallery's carelessness, it seems likely other contemporary Indigenous artists are invisible and underrepresented within the broader narrative of Canadian visual culture. Present-day challenges collecting Odjig's artwork will require the gallery's capacity to access her artworks determined by art market conditions associated with supply and budgetary constraints.

Daphne Odjig received substantial awards and honours for her artwork. Her accomplishments are too extensive to itemize in this paper, selected highlights include the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2007); she was also the recipient of an Eagle Feather from Wikwemikong Reserve (1978) and an Eagle Feather from SCANA (Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry) in 1993.[28] Odjig's artwork circulated nationally and internationally enriching visual culture for non-Indigenous and Indigenous audiences and patrons.

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[27] "Acquisitions Policy," The National Gallery of Canada, accessed March 25, 2021. https://www.gallery.ca/sites/default/files/upload/acquisitions_policy-eng.pdf.

[28] LaVallee, 73. For a complete listing of Daphne Odjig's Accomplishments, Awards and Honours, please visit http://odjig.com/profile.html.

She is now considered one of the best-known Indigenous artists in Canada to emerge from and converge in Canada's colonial structures during the mid- twentieth century. Daphne Odjig is respected for her artwork and visual story-telling style of creating narratives as an artist and Indigenous woman. Her reputation as an artist arose working in colonial conditions and systems of oppression associated with power and the intersectionality of race, gender and class.

This paper respectfully privileges the voice of Daphne Odjig by asserting her reputation as an Indigenous woman, visual artist and story-teller. It begins with an extended introduction to her and her work, indicating my efforts to recognize her position and authority, placing my voice in a secondary position. I will reflect on Daphne Odjig's solo exhibition poster *She Dances Alone* (1977) (Figure 1) as visual material that will assist in increasing my knowledge of her and her exceptional contribution to contemporary Indigenous art in Canada. I will approach learning about the poster from Odjig's standpoint and lived experience as an artist and Indigenous woman who refused to accept exclusion in predominantly Euro-Western art production in Canada.

The structure of my paper involves three sections. The first section acknowledges my positionality as a white colonial settler and describes how I came to owning an exhibition poster from Odjig's solo show in 1977. The second section centers on forming a respectful relationship with Odjig and her Indigenous heritage, learning about her childhood and discovering her connection to land and family. In addition, this segment considers Odjig's emergence as an artist in the 1960's and 1970's by linking some of her lived experiences that guided her as she navigated colonial structures. Finally, I will conclude by contemplating Odjig's 1977 solo exhibition poster as a culmination of the agency in her Indigenous identity and self-determination as a visual artist.

Several contemporary scholars and curators have worked with Daphne Odjig by writing about her artwork and lived experiences as an artist and Indigenous woman. *A Paintbrush in my*

Hand, published in 1992 involved Daphne Odjig collaborating with writers, Beth Southcott and Rosamond Vanderburgh to produce a book themed on the "life and art" of Odjig.[29] This is the earliest authoritative and semi-autobiographical publication transmitting Odjig's oral narrative into written form. Indigenous scholars Bonnie Devine, Robert Houle, and Duke Redbird have also contributed to expanding knowledge of contemporary Indigenous artists by writing in the exhibition catalogue for Odjig's solo retrospective show organized by The National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Sudbury. The book's title, *The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition* published in 2007 pays tribute to Odjig's authority and self-determination. At the same time, Odjig's retrospective show at The National Gallery of Canada is distinguished for being the first solo exhibition by an Indigenous woman.[30] Indigenous curator and writer Michelle LaVallee published the exhibition catalogue, *Professional Native Indian Artists Inc*. in 2014 for a show that opened at the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan and toured nationally.[31] Colloquially known as the "Indigenous Group of Seven," the *Professional Native Indian Artists Inc*. exhibition highlighted the work of seven individual Indigenous artists who organized an exhibiting group in the early 1970's.[32] Odjig held a pivotal role in the group's formation on account of the centrality of her shop in Winnipeg where Indigenous artists from various regions in Canada could come together in a place to gather, and as Odjig asserted, "my little shop became a drop-in centre".[33] Indigenous scholar, Lee-Ann Martin is also included in the exhibition catalogue extending her knowledge of contemporary Indigenous artwork in Canada.

[29] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 11.
[30] Daphne Odjig, accessed April 9, 2021. www.odjig.com.
[31] LaVallee, 13.
[32] LaVallee, 13.
[33] LaVallee, 49.

Daphne Odjig confronted colonial structures by negotiating persistent conditions that excluded contemporary Indigenous artwork and the transmission of Indigenous visual knowledge in Canada. I follow Linda Tuhiwai Smith's definition of negotiating as "working towards long-term goals… about respect, self -respect and respect of others" as well as "concepts of leadership".[34] Odjig's struggle negotiating colonial systems of oppression were shaped on the borderline of resistance, revival and the relevance of her artwork in the prevailing beliefs centering Euro-Western visual culture. The repercussions of her spirited negotiation beginning in the 1960's led a pathway for Indigenous artists to follow while holding truth to her heritage in "retaining a faith in the humanity of Indigenous beliefs, values and customary practices".[35] Her responsibility as an Indigenous artist is further claimed by Odjig, who said, "I feel fortunate I have a medium through which I can speak to non-Indians and Indian people alike…I feel I have a job to do".[36] The exhibition poster embodies Daphne Odjig's struggle for self-determination illustrating her standpoint negotiating in a colonized system. The poster additionally indicates visual knowledge production supporting her status as an artist and Indigenous women as well as opening a space previously bound by colonial structures.

Daphne Odjig's artwork inspires my research charting a pathway for learning through the power of her voice as a visual storyteller. I respectfully recognize the responsibility of my positionality as a white heritage-settler born and raised in Canada as I learn and think about Odjig and her artwork. My ancestors emigrated from Finland, Iceland and Scotland early in the twentieth century homesteading on the unceded land and ancient territory of the Coast Salish Peoples between Katzie and Kwantlen First Nation. My maternal grandfather worked in the West Coast

[34] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies (London: Zed Books, 2012), 160.
[35] Tuhiwai Smith, 161.
[36] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 105.

salmon fishing industry; first as a commercial fisherman and later as a business owner building commercial fishing boats. My paternal grandfather was a labourer in a lumber mill located and he also owned a few acres of farmland raising livestock and harvesting crops for family use. On both sides of my family, the Fraser River travelling through Coast Salish territory was connected to our way of life. As I have learned in my research, the Fraser River is a significant part of Indigenous culture, livelihood, spirituality, community and more.

My childhood involved two significant and memorable encounters with Indigenous Peoples in Canada and New Zealand. In 1973, my family moved to Gisborne, Aotearoa (New Zealand) where we lived for one year in a city populated by Māori and white colonial-settlers. While I am uncertain of the ratio of Indigenous and settler populations in the early 1970's, the present-day Māori population of Gisborne accounts for about 45% of its residents.[37] While living in New Zealand, I attended elementary school systematized by British education and was taught in a classroom alongside Māori students. I spent time exploring in my neighborhood and experienced watching the power of Māori war canoes and hearing the chants of the paddlers travelling the Waimata River located not far from my house. The visibility of Māori culture co-existed and conditions of colonization were maintained by nonexistent discussions and knowledge of racial and cultural differences.

In 1975, my family moved to the South Okanagan of British Columbia to farm and operate an orchard on land located across the road from the Osoyoos Indian Band reservation, presently affiliated with the Syilx Okanagan Nation Alliance.[38] While living there, I encountered a few children around my age who were Indigenous that relied on the school bus for transportation. Our

[37] "Gisborne," Government of New Zealand. Immigration New Zealand, Ministry of Business, Immigration and Employment, accessed March 25, 2021. https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/regions-nz/gisborne.
[38] Syilx Okanagan Nation Alliance. https://www.syilx.org.

communication was sparse while traveling on reserve land picking up and dropping off Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Beyond observing and travelling on reservation land along Black Sage Road in the South Okanagan, no Indigenous knowledge production or visibility occurred, except random social relations at school. Further, it is interesting for me to discover later in my adult life that some students who did not live on reserve land were of Indigenous heritage and attended high school classes with me. As peers, we shared certain classes, travelled together on field trips and played team sports.

Knowledge of difference by non-Indigenous adults constructed Indigeneity negatively as stereotypes. Colonization and racialized systems reinforced the invisibility of Indigeneity outside the reservation. The visibility of difference was perceivable on the reservation or in terms known as stereotypes. It is obvious to me now as I reflect on my positionality, that colonial supremacy penetrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the region at that time. The borderline separating reserve and non-reserve land operationalized the separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Thirty-five years after graduating from high school in the South Okanagan, the Osoyoos Indian Band hosted our reunion party on land situated on Osoyoos Lake. I am now reflecting on my settler colonial experiences, attempting to learn more about my participation in colonial structures in large part by listening to the voices of Indigenous women.

This study acknowledges Treaty 6 Territory as the place where I first learned of colonization and the visual artwork of Daphne Odjig and contemporary Indigenous visual culture. I currently live in Amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton) on Treaty 6 Territory where it has been my home raising a family for more than thirty-five years. Treaty 6 is an authoritative document that was accepted in 1876.[39] It reveals the history of a geo-political, economic and social relationship

[39] Treaty 6, "Copy," Roger Duhame, Queens Printer and Controller of Stationery, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1964, accessed March 25, 2021. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1581292569426#chp1.

between the Crown (Her Majesty The Queen) and Plain and Wood Cree Indians and Other Tribes of Indians.[40] One decisive and significance matter in Treaty 6 relates to the land agreement requiring Indigenous Peoples to "cede, release, surrender and yield" a specified area of land to the Crown.[41] The city of Edmonton, as part of Treaty 6, was founded on these arrangements.

As indicated early, my research was inspired by a poster of artwork by Daphne Odjig titled *She Dances Alone* (1977).[42] The title of the work is not indicated on the poster itself; it is recorded in the book, *A Paintbrush In My Hand*. A total of three hundred posters were produced for Odjig's solo show in 1977 and two hundred were personally signed by Odjig herself.[43] The poster came to me through my mother who was employed at Johnson Art Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta until the gallery closed in 2012 on account of Mr. Johnson retiring. The gallery was a family-owned business that emerged in Edmonton in the 1960's. It was known as a gallery that combined commercial space selling local artwork, studio space for certain artists to work and professional custom-made framing service. I made periodic visits when she was working and looked at original artworks by local Alberta artists. Most of the artwork displayed in the gallery were oil paintings and watercolours featuring landscapes or still-life. In addition, the gallery promoted local pottery as well as an assortment of rodeo and horse themed bronze sculptures.

The most memorable piece of artwork situated in the gallery was a brightly coloured abstract painting by Norval Morriseau. The painting was composed on a section of natural wood appearing as though it originated from a splintered tree branch. The piece was a sculptural painting measuring approximately twenty-five centimeters wide by a length of three meters. I examined the piece curiously while my mother commented that Mr. Johnson frequently supplied paint and

[40] Treaty 6.
[41] Treaty 6.
[42] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 159.
[43] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 159.

materials to artists. While I am uncertain of the precise story about how the gallery came about owning such a unique and original piece of artwork by Morriseau. I am curious to know if it was commissioned by Mr. Johnson or an offering from Morriseau himself. The presence of the artwork in the gallery suggests the possibility a relationship existed between the artist and gallery owner. My mother also mentioned the gallery was periodically visited by Alex Janvier and his young family in his early years as an emerging artist where he would meet with Mr. Johnson.

During the retirement sale my mother called me suggesting that I consider buying a framed Chagall poster found in the gallery's deep inventory. The Chagall poster attracted the attention of my mother who recognized the well-known name of the European artist and its significance as material culture. It was produced for an exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris. While viewing the Chagall poster I discovered the Odjig poster that is now part of my research. I discovered Odjig's poster leaning behind another counter in the gallery. The energy and expression of the poster's central figure immediately reached out to me and touched me emotionally. At the time, I did not plan to purchase it, however as I remained studying the poster in the gallery deliberating on my budget, it became my desire to purchase the poster and learn who Daphne Odjig was. Odjig's poster persuaded me to turn away from the superiority of European visual culture and begin learning about her and contemporary Indigenous visual culture in Canada.

I will now begin discussing Odjig's childhood and experiences as an Indigenous woman and artist who led a pathway negotiating colonial structures. Daphne Odjig's childhood dream while growing up in Wikwemiking was to become a teacher.[44] In her youth, Odjig played being a teacher by setting up a classroom instructing children from her neighbourhood in English and in the language of the Anishinaabe after her classes finished at the mission school.[45] Odjig was the

[44] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 31.
[45] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 31.

eldest of five children; her mother Joyce, an English war-bride and father Dominic, a Canadian soldier of Indigenous heritage.[46] The family's house on the Wikwemiking reserve was previously built by Odjig's grandfather, Jonas Odjig who remained living in the home throughout her childhood.[47] Odjig's home life involved working the land on the family farm raising livestock such as horses, pigs, cows and chickens as well as harvesting vegetable crops and apples from the orchard.[48] The Odjig family lived primarily as farmers with the exception of having to purchase dry goods such as "sugar, flour, oats, tea, prunes and raisons" and were comparatively prosperous on account of owning a team of horses.[49]

Two separate health complications took place during Odjig's childhood. In both instances Odjig contracted rheumatic fever resulting in several months convalescing at home where she experienced affectionate and caring relations with her mother and grandfather.[50] Odjig's fragile health led to her having to spend a considerable amount of time at home where she occupied herself by experimenting in drawing and painting alongside her grandfather, Jonas.[51] Jonas was a skilled artist known for his work as a professional gravestone carver making headstones for plots on the Wikwemiking reserve as well as plots located off the reserve.[52] The close relationship Odjig had with her grandfather was long-lasting and continued to influence her work beyond his lifetime. In an interview from the documentary film *The Colours of Pride* (1973), Odjig reveals the powerful connection she had with her grandfather when asked by Tom Hill if her grandparents had "any

[46] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 18.
[47] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 18.
[48] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 18.
[49] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 18.
[50] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 26.
[51] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 27.
[52] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 27.

influence" on her work.[53] Odjig responded by saying "my grandfather loved to paint…he and I used to sit many hours on the back porch to sketch".[54]

As a student at the mission school, Odjig enjoyed participating in art classes Friday afternoons commenting that art class were the most memorable part of her school week.[55] Her art class teacher encouraged students to create images mirroring the subject as that of the real thing however, Odjig preferred experimenting by conceiving images that expressed her feelings instead.[56] Recalling her experience in art class, Odjig said, "I remember the teacher saying 'You draw that tree as you see it'…and you'd draw the tree, not how you feel about it". [57] Mountains for instance embodied a powerful emotional response for her and Odjig was able to reproduced in her artwork.[58] Some of the artwork Odjig produced in class was kept by the art teacher and on one occasion she was asked by the teacher to make a second painting just like the first one for the teacher's friend. [59]

Odjig's enthusiasm creating artwork developed during childhood surrounded by family and taking art class at the mission school. In addition to being influenced by her grandfather, Odjig was also inspired by her mother's embroidery skills and her father's ability to draw portraits from photographs he collected of former fellow soldiers from the war.[60] Odjig's connection to visual culture began early in her life, merely by being close to her artistic family who shared with her certain creative energies and art supplies. Despite living in a home where creativity circulated,

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[53] Henning Jacobsen, *The Colours of Pride*. Produced by Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited (Ottawa), Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1973, (22:40). https://www.nfb.ca/film/colours_of_pride/.
[54] Jacobsen, (22:40).
[55] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 22.
[56] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 22.
[57] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 22.
[58] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 22.
[59] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 22.
[60] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 23.

Odjig did not experience pressure from her family to make artwork, "none of the adults urged Daphne to draw".[61]

After the death of her mother and grandfather, Odjig and her siblings moved off the Wikwemiking reserve in 1938 to live with Grandma Copagog, who was informally known as Grandma Peachy and lived in Parry Sound, Ontario.[62] This move was Odjig's first experience living off the reserve in a white community where she encountered racism and reshaped her identity as an Indigenous woman.[63] She worked in various jobs as domestic labourer and server in Parry Sound and changed her last name to Fisher before moving to Toronto with her sister Winnie in 1942.[64] Changing her last name to Fisher, the English version of Odjig, was in keeping with her uncle who had previously changed his name on account of persistent racism.[65]

While living in Toronto, Odjig did factory work and spent her leisure time visiting the Royal Ontario Museum and Art Gallery of Toronto (presently the Art Gallery of Ontario) as well as the Eaton's gallery at the College Street store in downtown Toronto.[66] The spaces in the galleries and museum invigorated Odjig with new experiences learning about European art and architecture.[67] Inspired seeing examples of oil paintings by prominent European artists and other known artists such as the Group of Seven, Odjig began in Toronto experimenting herself for the first time using oil.[68]

Odjig and her sister, Winnie moved to Coast Salish Nation on the South-West Coast of Canada in 1945 where she married her first husband Paul Sommerville; a descendant of Indigenous

[61] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 23.
[62] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 35.
[63] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 35.
[64] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 36.
[65] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 36.
[66] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 37.
[67] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 38.
[68] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 38.

and white settler heritage and a former member of the Royal Canadian Air Force.[69] While living on the Coast, Odjig gave birth to her son Stanley in 1948 and cared for Sommerville's son David from a previous marriage.[70] Odjig devoted her time to motherhood and family life in Coquitlam, BC while continuing to experiment in oil painting.[71] Odjig and her husband purchased land at Cultus Lake near Chilliwack, BC in 1958 with the plan to grow strawberries.[72] Prior to their first crop in 1960, Odjig's husband died from a "blood clot in his lung" after a car accident, leaving her to persevere on her own harvesting strawberries.[73]

Odjig painted seasonally and at intervals while growing and harvesting strawberries. While recollecting her experience farming and her trial and error approach painting in oil, she said, "painting was the only thing I felt sure in…it was a part of me, so I would naturally fall back on it".[74] She continued expanding her knowledge of European art by visiting the Vancouver Art Gallery.[75] Her determination to learn from works by European artists showing at the gallery inspired Odjig to create oil paintings that were later accepted in a juried competition in 1962.[76] The results of the competition permitted Odjig a membership in the British Columbia Federation of Artists.[77] The main determinant in Odjig's victory was her quality of work and to a greater extent complying with European standards of oil painting as a methodology of visual expression. From this perspective, Odjig participated in a system of colonization reinforcing understandings of authority in European art. It also provided an entryway and confidence in the possibilities for her to consider painting artworks based on her experience navigating the dominance of 'fine art'

[69] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 38.
[70] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 41.
[71] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 41.
[72] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 43.
[73] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 45.
[74] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 45.
[75] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 45.
[76] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 46.
[77] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 46.

for Euro-Western audiences. Further, it also brings attention to colonial structures associated with class and race with regard to decisions on who can participate and uphold conditions in place as a form of control.

Odjig's desire to produce artwork based on her perception of the superiority of European fine art was disrupted in 1964. This critical moment in Odjig's life occurred after she returned to the land of her birthplace on the Wikwemiking reserve and attended her first pow wow. The experience of the pow wow revitalized Odjig's appreciation for her Indigenous heritage and after reflecting on this particular event she said, "I had a rebirth of Indianism".[78] In a personal conversation with Bonnie Devine in 2000, Odjig recalled her experience reconnecting to her Indigenous culture at the pow wow and said, "But I began to dance to the drum. And I became an Indian".[79] At the pow wow, Odjig danced in the circle with her relatives while wearing a traditional ceremonial outfit her sister-in-law had presented to her.[80] Odjig embodied a sense of Indigenous revival at the pow wow after she "had spent more than half of her life trying to forget she was a Native woman".[81] It was also around this time Odjig returned to using her family's last name when signing her artwork instead of 'Daphne'.[82]

Three situations transpired in advancing the reclamation of Indigenous social, political and cultural identity in Canada during the middle of the twentieth century. First, the Government of Canada retracted the "Anti Potlatch Law" in 1951 that originated from the *Indian Act* legislated in 1884 prohibiting Indigenous Peoples to practice traditional cultural events involving social activities associated with gathering and celebrations.[83] Second, the Government of Canada

[78] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 59.
[79] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[80] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[81] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[82] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 36.
[83] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 21.

acknowledged Indigenous Peoples right to vote in 1960.[84] Third, Lester Pearson, the Prime Minister of Canada in 1964 attended the Wikwemiking pow wow and purchased all 110 pieces of original artwork by various Indigenous artists.[85] Notwithstanding Indigenous dispossession of land, culture and livelihood resulting from colonization practices that began at the start of European contact. The persistence of colonial structures continues today. These three historical junctures assisted the process of retrieving 'some' Indigenous identity and self-determination in the 1960's. Odjig and other contemporary Indigenous artists were a component of the strength in the futurity of Indigeneity.

The 1964 Wikwemiking pow wow brought about numerous positive outcomes including Odjig's thrilling experience dancing in the circle and returning to her Indigenous identity. It was Odjig's first-time experiencing a pow wow and Wikwemiking's fourth of its kind as a modern annual event in after the potlatch ban was lifted.[86] The modern-day pow wow ceremony is distinguished for cultivating Indigenous cultural repossession, rekindling ancestral caregiving and acknowledges a 'spirit' in futurity. The significance of the pow wow among Indigenous Peoples continues today as a powerful cultural event celebrating ancestral traditions and self-determination. The pow wow is a recurring theme in Odjig's artwork and a source of visual storytelling and knowledge production.

Around the same time as the pow wow in 1964, Odjig and her newly married husband, Chester Beavon, as well as Odjig's son, Stanely relocated to Grand Rapids, Manitoba from British Columbia after Beavon landed a job with the Manitoba Government as a Community Development Officer.[87] While the move brought Odjig closer to her relatives living in Wikwemiking and agreed

[84] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 21.
[85] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[86] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 21.
[87] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 46.

with her senses 'feeling' the scenery and painting landscapes, it presented challenges with respect to discriminatory tension in the community.[88] A year later, the family relocated to Easterville, Manitoba where Odjig began creating images in pen and ink drawings depicting local residents and lived experiences in the community.[89]

Odjig's pen and ink drawings, introduced earlier as her *Series of the North* gained traction around the same time she began creating her legend paintings. Her Legend Paintings emerged along with her Nanabush Series after conversations among Odjig's close relatives who gathered at the pow wow encouraged her to consider painting traditional Indigenous oral stories by making visible the ancient narratives that had been circulating in Indigenous culture for generations.[90] The style of imagery in Odjig's Legend Paintings recalled the forms and line work she learned from her grandfather.[91]

Some of Odjig's Legend Paintings became visual content in a collection of children's books Odjig and her husband collaborated on called *Nanabush Tales*.[92] The book series, published by Ginn and Co. in 1971, was released to the school system in Canada and not commercially available in bookstores.[93] This method of controlled distribution by the Canadian Government suggests selected schools and populations had access to the books as educational material. As an elementary school-aged child in Canada myself, at this precise time, I have no recollection of reading any book from her series. If the books were broadly circulated for elementary school education, there was no reverence or care for classroom instruction. The narrow distribution of Odjig's books might also suggest they were made for Indigenous children.

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[88] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 49.
[89] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 50.
[90] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[91] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[92] Devine, Houle, and Redbird, 22.
[93] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 51.

Odjig also created illustrations for an adult book entitled, *Tales from the Smokehouse*, published in 1974.[94] The book contained several erotic stories themed on human sexual encounters and was written by Dr. Herbert Schwartz, a non-Indigenous researcher working in the Northwest Territories.[95] These publications reveal Odjig's artwork and labour negotiating the border space linking colonial systems and Indigenous knowledge production. Odjig's children's books were a source of knowledge production and a method for 'teaching' Indigenous ways of being.

By 1971 Odjig and her husband moved to Winnipeg where they opened a retail space selling Indigenous prints and crafts.[96] Odjig set up an art gallery and a space supporting the printing business she and her husband started earlier called, Odjig Indian Prints of Canada Ltd., later naming it The New Warehouse.[97] The shop, known casually as "Odjig's" became a hub for Indigenous artists and the place of origin of the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. introduced earlier in my paper.[98]

The formation of the Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (PNIAI) is considered a watershed moment in the history of contemporary Indigenous visual culture in Canada. The group began around 1971-72 meeting in Odjig's shop and then later incorporating in 1974-75.[99] Beginning as a "grassroots" group of individual artists, "the PNIAI was the first self-organized artist alliance to push for the recognition of contemporary Indigenous art".[100] Odjig was a critical contributor establishing the group by creating space and a place for artists to sell works, access material, meet, and support one another. In a speech at the opening of *The Drawings and Paintings*

[94] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 51.
[95] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott 52.
[96] Lavallee, 49.
[97] Lavallee, 49.
[98] LaVallee, 49.
[99] LaVallee, 51.
[100] LaVallee, 49.

of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition (2009), at the Institute of the American Indian Arts Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Odjig said this about the PNIAI:

> We had no one to show our work so we had to do it ourselves. We acknowledged and supported each other as artists when the world of fine art refused us entry…Together we broke down barriers that would have been so much more difficult faced alone.[101]

The PNIAI collaborated by exhibiting together and taking an 'all or nothing' stance meaning, if one artist was called by a gallery to participate in an art show, then it was the whole group. This kind of strategy was a response to the indifference Indigenous artists experienced and a method of navigating discriminatory practices in colonial systems that supported race, gender and class inequities.

The PNIAI's first exhibition took place June 1974 at Eaton's downtown Winnipeg on the eighth floor.[102] The experience exhibiting together as a coalition assisted in generating public attention, exposure and knowledge of contemporary Indigenous artwork. Encouraged by the show's response, Daphne later enlarged the space in her print and craft shop in Winnipeg, renaming it The Warehouse Gallery.[103] Prior to the PNIAI's first exhibition together, the Winnipeg Art Gallery hosted the show, *Treaty numbers 23, 287, 1171: Three Indian Painters of the Prairies* in 1972 featuring the artwork of Jackson Beardy, Alex Janvier and Daphne Odjig.[104] The Winnipeg Art Gallery show was the "first exclusively contemporary First Nations art exhibition to be held in a public art gallery in Canada".[105]

I would now like to call attention to Odjig's international exposure and experience travelling abroad early in her career. In 1970, Odjig's artwork was selected to participate in a group

[101] LaVallee, 49.
[102] LaVallee, 55.
[103] LaVallee, 55.
[104] LaVallee, 55.
[105] LaVallee, 55.

exhibition for the Canadian Pavilion at Expo '70 in Japan.[106] She travelled to Yugoslavia in 1971 as part of a Canadian delegation of about twenty Indigenous Peoples who were invited to attend.[107] In 1973, Odjig was awarded a scholarship from the Brucebo Foundation and travelled to Sweden.[108] Odjig visited Israel in 1975 as a guest of the president of El Al Airlines of Israel after he discovered her artwork in Montreal.[109] While returning from Israel, Odjig visited the Louvre in Paris where she experienced historical paintings by distinguished European artists.[110] In reference to the expression of human emotion in the artwork she saw at the Louvre, Odjig later, recalled saying, "I wish I had the courage to put it into a painting as those people did…but do I have the courage?".[111]

Odjig respectfully honoured her Indigenous identity and self-determination as a visual artist. Her solo exhibition poster *She Dances Alone* demonstrates the agency of her struggle as an Indigenous artist and woman. The image equally suggests the possibility of a self-portrait illustrating Odjig's resilience and visibility confronting colonial structures. This visual knowledge is produced by the animated gesture of the central figure, suspended momentarily in motion and by the regalia she is wearing. The presence of the figure wearing regalia customarily worn for formal occasions such as pow wows is indexical knowledge of an Indigenous cultural event and Odjig's appearance at her solo show's entrance as a respected Indigenous artist. The formal quality of her costume is shown by the decorated headdress and the vibrate colour choices of the delicate fabric. The lavish colours and headdress suggest the woman is dressed for a special occasion wearing regalia. From this point of view, the image can be observed expressing the experience of

[106] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 64.
[107] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 64.
[108] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 75.
[109] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 76
[110] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 77.
[111] Odjig, Vanderburgh and Southcott, 77.

a pow wow similar to the first one she attended in 1964 where she reclaimed her Indigenous identity. The difference in this image however is that Odjig is asserting her identity as both artist and Indigenous by the didactics on the poster distinguished by her name on the poster with the image itself.

The gaze of the figure is held directly by the viewer who observes her passive, half closed eyes as a possible sign of exhaustion from working hard as an artist. Fatigue is equally evident by the arching horizontal lines on the forehead suggesting worrisome thoughts or tensions as the figure is overpowered by the movement of dance. The dynamic posture and fluidity of the body dancing while at the same time showing emotional signs of depletion is perceivable as a sense of survivance. The term survivance "accentuates the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity in resisting colonialism".[112] Odjig's image exemplifies the culmination of her experiences and survival as an artist navigating systems intending to reinforce Indigenous invisibility. The poster exemplifies her arrival at the border space of Indigenous and colonial relations and the strength of resilience.

Odjig's artistry is shown in the body of the figure described as Woodland School style "evident in the strong formline and x-ray animal and spirit forms." This style is illustrated in Odjig's work when looking at the interior space of the upturned animal face on the poster appearing as a bird and possibly a thunderbird providing her with spiritual strength. Additionally, Odjig's "calligraphic line is dominant" utilizing black to outline the sinuous curves she is known for in her work.[113] Below the image and occupying nearly one quarter of the bottom of the poster is textual information providing detail of Odjig's solo exhibition. The text is boldly rendered in all capital letters including Odjig's full name; Daphne Odjig, followed by the precise dates of the show,

[112] Tuhiwai Smith, 146.
[113] Devine, 23.

March 20 – April 4, and the name and location of the gallery, The Wah-Sa Gallery, 331 Donald Street. It is interesting to note the year of exhibition and city of the gallery are not communicated on the poster. I remain uncertain why this information was left out, however I suspect it may be due to the economy of space on the poster itself or possibly the city and year were inconsequential.

The Wah-Sa Gallery currently exists today as an on-line gallery selling prints and various Indigenous artworks produced in Canada. The Wah-Sa Gallery translates as "far away" in Ojibway and suggests the colloquial "far out" popularized in the seventies.[114] According to the gallery's website, its retail operation as a store front closed in 2017.[115] The current owners of The Wah-Sa Gallery purchased the gallery from Daphne Odjig and her husband Chester Beavon in 1976 before moving to Shuswap Lake in interior of British Columbia where she retired from the retail business to work as an artist full time.[116]

My analysis and process of learning methodology was centered on listening to Odjig's voice while reflecting on my subjectivity as a white colonial settler. It has allowed me to discover the context of relations and conditions of colonization. The process has made me realize the visibility of contemporary Indigenous visual culture despite colonial systems in place reinforcing Indigenous invisibility. My approach to learning included discovering the possibilities of forming new spaces in visual culture where differences are explored and celebrated regardless of the construction of physical and social borderlines between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in colonial systems. The dominance of colonial power reinforced separating difference however Odjig's contribution disrupted the invisibility of Indigenous visual culture.

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[114] Wah-Sa Gallery, accessed January 21, 2021. www.wahsa.mb.ca.
[115] Wah-Sa Gallery.
[116] Wah-Sa Gallery.

As disclosed earlier in my research, the persistence of power within the framework of colonization remained stable at the National Gallery of Canada due to the omissions of Odjig's important works at the height of her artistic career. Despite these collection practices at Canada's national gallery, Odjig heroically forged a route by negotiating to increase Indigenous visibility through her visual storytelling style. Having been a self-taught artist, Odjig forged a path for Indigenous artists to follow and offered words of encouragement. Writing to future Indigenous artists in 2009, Odjig said, "Trust that the Ancestors will speak through you. Know that they do not want you to be them. Create in your own voice".[117] Her wisdom and knowledge advocating for the visibility of contemporary Indigenous artwork and making space for Indigenous voices has been generous. She has shared her voice as a fine art artist and a caregiver in visual arts. As a visual storyteller, Daphne Odjig dedicated her life producing artwork using her own voice and experiences. Her achievements demonstrate her self-determination overcoming barriers she faced due to colonization. Odjig detected injustice in the art market between categories of contemporary artwork produced by colonial settlers and Indigenous artists. Her visual story work revitalized Indigenous visual culture. Her story is about survivance.

[117] LaValle, 73.

Appendix

Figure 1. Daphne Odjig, *She Dances Alone*, 1977. Serigraph poster, framed, 59 x 89 x 2 cm. Personal collection of Treva Swick. Photo by M. Swick.

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