

Touch Me skeena reece

What an honour this is to speak to you. Creator, guide my words so that I am clear in my intention and that my message is received in this good way.

Touch Me is a solo exhibition of work from 2004 to present. The title is from the video *Touch Me* released in 2013 for the *Witnesses: Art from Canada's Residential Schools* show at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery. This is one of the seven pieces on display at the Comox Valley Art Gallery April 6 – May 12, 2018. This exhibition features the works of other artist contributors including Sandra Semchuk, Bracken Hanuse Corlett, Collin Elder, Nathalee Paolinelli, and Gord Hill. Most of the works have travelled together from Montreal (Oboro Gallery 2017) to Winnipeg (Plug In-Institute of Contemporary Art 2018) and now, here at the Comox Valley Art Gallery.

Three solo shows and the Hnatyshyn Award in the past year have been overwhelming and of course rewarding. It is important to say that I am a mother of two small children and this informs the way I make and share work. I started working as a performer over 20 years ago. I quit my day job to make performance art in 2009 and started producing media art and installation soon after. Following, I would like to give you insight into each of the works in the exhibition.



The video *Touch Me* was my response to the curatorial intention of the exhibition *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools* at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery. Imagine your voice being included in such an important group show amongst artists you've known and loved: Rebecca Belmore, Beau Dick, and Sandra Semchuk to name a few. What an honour. What a huge responsibility. I am a second generation residential school survivor and the effects of this phenomenon go deep. This is how I approach a lot of difficult subjects. I make art in place of my voice that wavers, stutters confusedly and reaches for the words that are too big to mouth.

The video has been well received and described by many writers. The opening scene is a dark room with a well-lit tub. Sandra and I approach the tub. I extend my hand to help her get into it. The cameras are set wide and a second cameraman follows our movements closely. Without speaking I bathe her gently, her hands, her face and pour water over her with a small copper pot. We do this for several minutes and eventually break our silence with a short dialogue where we shed some tears. My bathing Sandra is a gesture of care. Showing the ability to love, to respect and take care of others. From one generation to another, junior artist to senior artist and native woman to white woman. My response to this painful history is to share the continued ability to show reverence, respect, care, and love. Not despite our colonial history, but as a continuation of this strength that has been passed on since time immemorial. Speaking to my people I am saying that these abilities are not lost on me. Speaking to others I am saying this is 'our' resilience. I believe the context of the first showing informed how the work was received. This video was shown at the end of a long walk through a broad range of works addressing the effects of residential school. There was a bench to sit and rest. The images in the video are a welcome sight. Gentle.



This leads me to the piece, *The Time It Takes*, an adult-sized cradleboard. Where better to focus than on a bag made to comfort, support and protect. This moss bag and cradleboard artwork started within the context of a *The Fraud That Goes Under the Name of Love* a group exhibition at the Audain Gallery in Vancouver in 2016 as a performance. I also performed this at the Musée d'Art Contemporain for the group show *Piriti: Scene Contemporain*

Autochtone in 2017. The piece evolved into an installation for Oboro and Plug In ICA respectively. The cradleboard component was built by Theo Simms, a Visual Artist and Head Preparator at Plug In and was intended to become a part of a living room style environment. In my family—after a baby grows out of their moss bag—it is displayed in a living room setting. It is a beautiful reminder of this time of growth and incubation that lends comfort in our day-to-day lives. I created this piece to fit an adult, which is now over 7 feet. A looming, but positive manifestation of the sentiment that even though we are grown we still continue to have needs. These needs vary from person to person. I believe we need to exercise our abilities to put ourselves and others back on the right path when we veer off. Institutions are created to 'deal with' these problems, but too often they do not hit their mark and they are so far removed from the issue that it's difficult to 'fix'. Any worker on any front line, including parents, instinctively knows what needs to be done in certain situations. But what happens when we don't know? As adults where do we go for the teachings and how does this contribute to a heightened sense of fear and anxiety? I created this as a reminder that we are always growing and everything that we are experiencing is as it should be, despite the pains that may go with it.



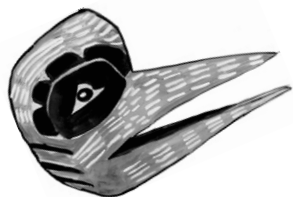
staff allowed me to open the windows of the space to 'let the bird' out, where it belonged. Afterwards we had a long discussion about this and the audience left with a better understanding of the pieces in the exhibition and the contentious history in how they were acquired and then later became objects available on the open market. The Tsimshian peoples could only afford one of the 80+ objects available for sale – a spoon. Fast forward to 2018, I felt this subject was still relevant and that my thoughts on a new piece were that the practice of buying and selling our artifacts is still misguided. Like a toddler uses stickers depicting benign domestic imagery they place them on walls and windows with no forethought. I am showing the degradation of the cultural artifacts true meaning and giving the perpetrators room to grow.



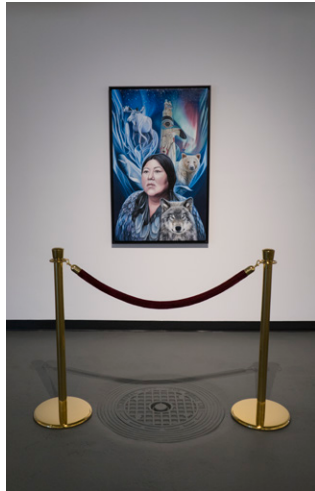
These three shows, including the one at CVAG, are giving me room to grow as an artist. *We Still Know* is a photo project that I did in 2010 and is an ode to the photos we all have of our Fathers and Grandfathers in their prime stored somewhere in a box in the bottom of our closets. Victor Reece, Tsimshian Master Carver, left us in 2010 before he could see the project to completion. It marked an in-between time after residential school and when young adults were integrating into society. Seen in this photo series is the able-bodied vibrancy of youth unfraught with the anxiety of the times. Two young men, perhaps filled with optimism, gazing into the camera or caught in this place in time. As time goes on, children come into their lives, work becomes more daunting and the reality of being provides testaments of difficult histories. To put it diplomatically, they're transformed into those struggling to 'keep up' and to 'deal with'. This Ode is also a depiction of strength, vigour, life, wisdom and resistance. We do 'Still Know' and what happened continues to NOT be okay. As life goes on the signifying effects of residential schools is prevalent in our communities and it is debilitating. For many it was a death sentence, a slow and gradual murder. Defiantly my work resists the loss of our true history of contact, but it also nods to the accountability that we must have in order to go forward in this society.



Stekyawden Syndrome offers another way to look at the anxiety of Canadian and Indigenous relations. Stekyawden is a mountain in Hazelton, home



The sticker project, *We Are All One; Actually These Are All Mine* (2008-2018) is a testament to this notion. The stickers are an implication that museum practices can be improved and that the unethical handling of our cultural property is done by a misguided system. I was approached by the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in Vancouver to respond to the "Treasures of the Tsimshian from the Dundas Collection," a four-stop tour which was ending at MOA. I created a story by commissioning a hummingbird mask (carved by Simon Reece mentored by Phil Gray), writing a narrative and using multi-media installation, dancers, and musicians to express it. The audience saw a relationship build between a hummingbird spirit and a berry picker. An unexpected aspect was that one of the security guards agreed to be in the performance. I wanted a character to remove the mask from the dancer to interrupt the life force of the masked dancer. There were levels of the story that simply unpacked my criticisms for the audience to consider. Essentially the dancer had their mask returned and the museum



to my Great Grandmother Edith MacDougal on Gitksan Territory. The “Painted Goat” is a story that was told to me growing up. A story essentially about bullying those who are unable to defend themselves. The project was a commission of Bracken Hanuse Corlett, a (Wuikinuxv/Klahoose Nations) muralist/painter/writer/singer/songwriter. I asked him to design and paint a mural that speaks to my charge that the problems that exist with reconciliation are that native people have Stockholm Syndrome and that in order that we may heal we must acknowledge the power imbalance that exists between Canada/Crown and Indigenous peoples here in North America. We cannot function and move forward in a captor/captive relationship. This charge is up for discussion, which was what I intended to provoke. Are we captives? I say that we are. I believe that until we break free of this relationship can we CANNOT grow and heal. Respectfully, I acknowledge the injustices we are witnessing in the media on Indigenous men and women. The billy goat is off centre to the left and the mountain goat is more centred with red paint on its neck. Please read the story at the gallery to learn more about the relationship I am trying to depict.

As an Indigenous member of the society we call Canada, our native histories are either written by others or entirely exempt. I speak through the photo project *Entitled* and *Un-Entitled* 2018 to this statement. As an Indigenous woman the images that ‘represent’ me are romantic and deliberate in nature. In the news another native woman loses a child, dies of a drug overdose or sits unnaturally in front of a mise-en-scene compromised of any animal you can fit on the canvas. Her Anglo-Saxon shaped face is capped by a headdress staring longingly at the impossible universe. I asked Collin Elder, an accomplished painter, if he would be interested in a commission to disrupt these kinds of paintings with a painting of ‘my’ own. He agreed and started on a Mao-esque poster with my big Indian face as the centre, surrounded by images with their own difficult histories. I asked for a dumb bear, a bored wolf, the 2010 Olympics Inuksuk, the beluga that died at the Vancouver Aquarium and the northern lights. He also added a feathered cape and an albino moose. I called it *Entitled* because this kind of representation is something put on me by those entitled to do so and continues to be emboldened and accepted.




Un-Entitled is multi-layered in that I bring forward four images that correlate and contradict. As a mother I was confronted with my own issues of violence and it prompted me to question – How do I contribute to this atmosphere of aggression? How do we make it stop? I asked Gord Hill, aka Zig Zag, a Kwakwaka’wakw artist/writer and resister, if he would be interested in a commission. His work is so recognizable and iconic to me and I wanted people to look more into his work. His comics and his politics have inspired me, fuelled me and enabled me to have a voice and to question the status quo in my early twenties and with my work with the Native Youth Movement Vancouver Chapter. This was the actual physical embodiment of history for me; a first contact soldier storming over my shoulder, a West Coast warrior standing ready in my skin, the Oka standoff image of soldiers facing off on my breasts and a mother and child. The constants are of both war and essentially peace.

So there it is. Hopefully you have an understanding of my intention. There are several in depth writings about my work and you can get a list from the Gallery. I would like to thank my contributing artists, mentors and funders: BC Arts Council, Hnatyshyn Foundation, Canadian Museum of History, Cleo Reece, Victor Reece, Dana Claxton, Sandra Semchuk, Josh Olson, Jenifer Papararo, Claudine Hubert, Theo Simms, Angela Somerset, Denise Lawson, Sharon Karsten, Glen Sanford, Angela Bedard, Alun Macanulty, Krista McAllister, Amy Kazymierchyk, Bracken Hanuse Corlett, Gord Hill, Collin Elder, Ora Cogan, Trevor Carroll, Neil Eustache, Lorna Brown, Nathalee Paolinelli, Sven Boecker, Brett Simms, Pete Hagge, Ian Barbour, Aaron Pollard, Sarah Nesbitt, and Glenn Alteen.

– Skeena Reece



- p. 1 *Un-Entitled*, 1 – 4 series, 2017
- p. 2 *There Is Time For Love*, 2015 – 2017
- p. 3-8 *We Are All One; Actually These Are All Mine*, 1 – 8 series, 2018
- p. 5 *I’m Telling You*, 2007 / 2017
- p. 6 *Entitled*, 2017
- p. 9 *Un-Entitled*, 1 – 4 series, 2017

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1

Un-Entitled, 1 – 4 series, 2017

commissioned drawings by Gord Hill, 8.5" x 11"

2

Entitled, 2017

commissioned oil painting by Collin Elder, 31" x 50" (framed).
limited edition colour print, 24.75" x 39"

3

I'm Telling You, 2007 / 2017

digital print, 5" x 7" from the digital photo series *We Still Know*, 2007

4

Un-Entitled, 1 – 4 series, 2017

four digital photographs, commissioned drawings by Gord Hill, 36" x 36"

5

We Are All One; Actually These Are All Mine, 1 – 8 series, 2018

printed vinyl stickers, commissioned watercolors by Nathalee Paolinelli, various sizes
from the performance: *We Are All One*, 2008
in response to the exhibition *Treasures of Tsimshian People* at University
of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology

6

There Is Time For Love, 2015 – 2017

fabric, cedar, moss, 3' x 8'. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery
purchased with funds from the Canada Council for the Arts.

7

Becoming Tree, 2004 – 2018

collaboration between Sandra Semchuk and James Nicholas,
digital colour print, 30" x 35", taken near Lytton, British Columbia.

8

Touch Me, 2013

single channel HD video with Sandra Semchuk, 8 min
courtesy of Skeena Reece and the Morris + Helen Belkin Art Gallery

9

Mountain-Goat Myths

"Totem Poles", Bulletin no. 119, Volume I, Marius Barbeau, 1950, excerpts
Canadian Museum of History, Anthropological series no. 30, Pp. 392-398
Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History / Musée Canadian De l'Histoire

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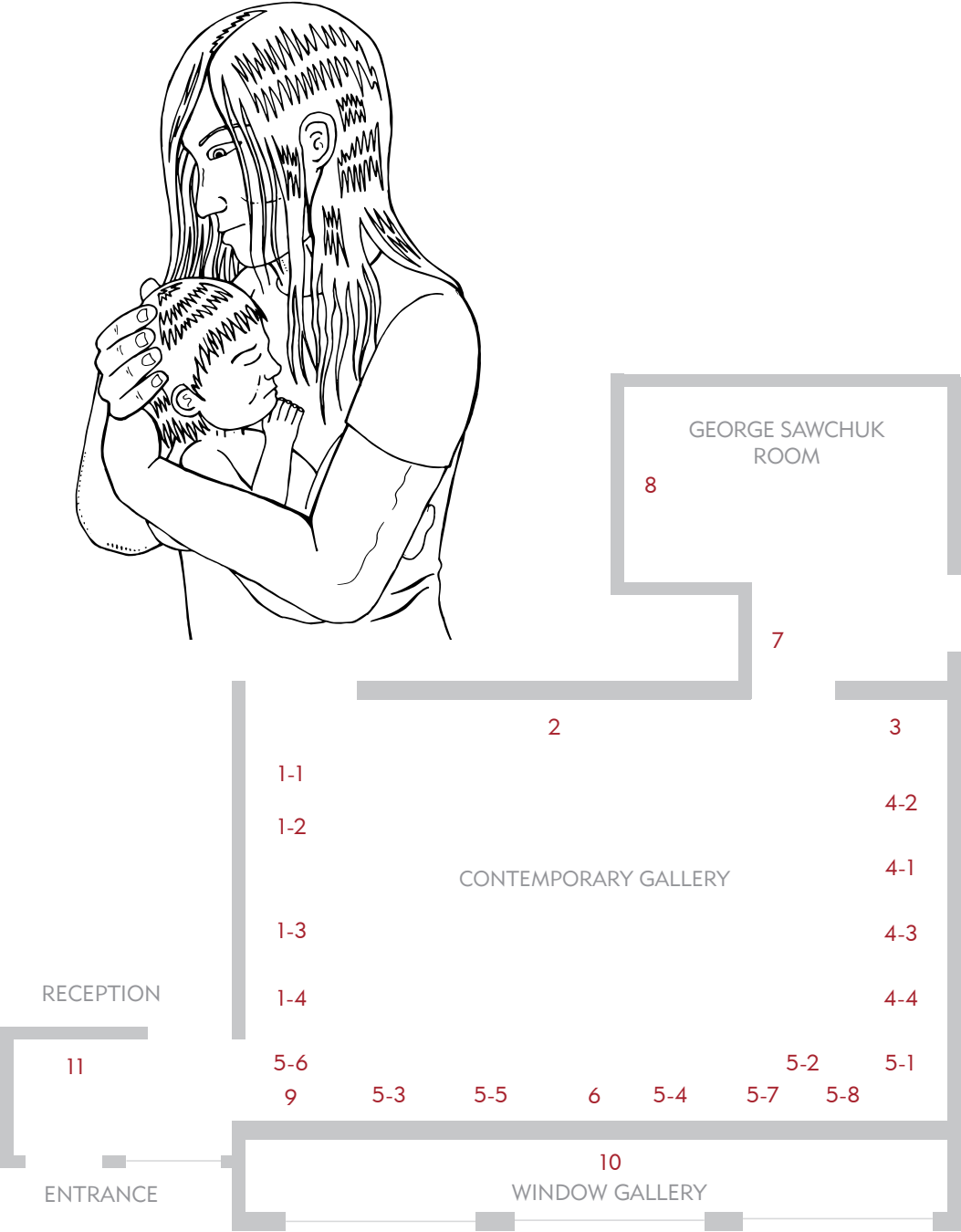
Stekyawden Syndrome, 2018

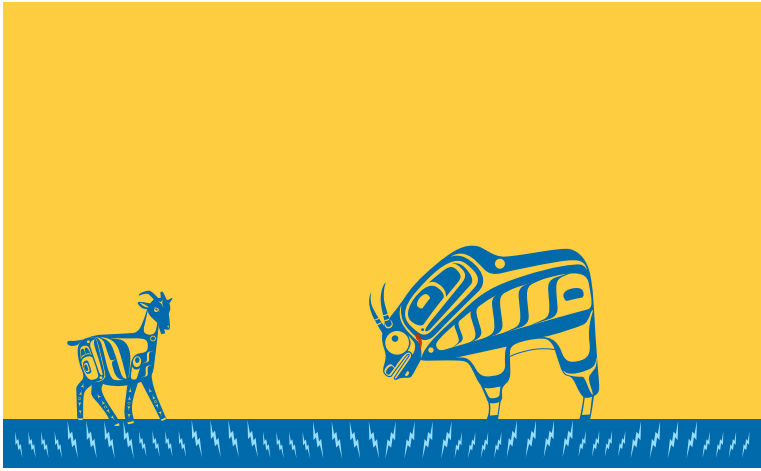
commissioned painted mural by Bracken Hanuse Corlett, 40' x 10'

11

Artist Statement – Skeena Reece, 2018

graphite on painted wall, 84" x 66"





Bracken Hanuse Corlett is an interdisciplinary artist hailing from the Wuikinuxv and Klahoose Nations. He began working in theatre and performance in 2001 and eventually transitioned towards his current practice that fuses painting and drawing with digital-media, audio-visual performance, animation and narrative. He is a graduate of the En'owkin Centre of Indigenous Art and went to Emily Carr University of Art and Design for a B.F.A. in Visual Arts. He has studied Northwest Coast art, carving and design from acclaimed Heiltsuk artists Bradley Hunt and his sons Shawn Hunt and Dean Hunt and was a recipient of the 2014 BC Creative Achievement Award for Aboriginal Art. He has recently received public art commissions from the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Mural Festival and maintains an everyday practice in the confines of his studio in the Downtown Eastside with frequent escapes to a home in the woods.

Some of his notable exhibitions, performances and screenings have been at Grunt Gallery, Museum of Anthropology, Unit PITT Projects, Vancouver International Film Festival, Vancouver Art Gallery (FUSE), Three Walls Gallery, Paramount Theater, Ottawa International Animation Festival, SAW Gallery, Royal BC Museum, Open Space, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Urban Shaman, Mackenzie Art Gallery, ImagineNative and Toronto International Film Festival.

Bracken Hanuse Corlett
Photograph courtesy Red Works Photography

Stekyawden Syndrome, 2018
commissioned painted mural by Bracken Hanuse Corlett, 40' x 10'



Sandra Semchuk is a second generation Canadian Ukrainian and Polish artist from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. She is a storyteller, photographer and video artist who often works collaboratively using the familial, autobiography, and dialogue across generations, cultures and species.

She worked collaboratively for fifteen years with her late husband, James Nicholas, Rock Cree actor and orator, to consider potential conciliations within the self and between the indigenous and non-indigenous. Their dialogue was grounded in experience—in the primary knowledges of place—land, flora and fauna and weather—and in human stories. The wider-than-human is the larger context. In her most recent 3D stereographic video poems she collaborates to resuscitate familial connections with the tree and forest.

Sandra worked with internee descendants—largely Ukrainian Canadian—and their stories from WW I to integrate memories with possible effects of the internment on identity and cross-cultural learning in Canada. Her resulting book, *The Stories Were Not Told: Stories and Photographs from Canada's First Internment Camps, 1914-1920* will be published by the University of Alberta Press in 2018.

Still from film *Trading Lens a Sandra Semchuk Portrait*
Director/Producer Anthony Grieco; Director of photography Jon Thomas;
Editor Ornelia Sinigalia. Canada Council for the Arts; 4 min 33 sec

Still from *Touch Me*, 2013
single channel HD video with Sandra Semchuk, 8 min
courtesy of Skeena Reece and the Morris + Helen Belkin Art Gallery

Becoming Tree, 2004 – 2018
collaboration between Sandra Semchuk and James Nicholas,
digital colour print, 30" x 35", taken near Lytton, British Columbia.

Skeena Reece is a Tsimshian/Gitksan and Cree artist based on the West Coast of British Columbia. She has garnered national and international attention most notably for *Raven: On the Colonial Fleet* (2010) her bold installation and performance work presented at the 2010 Sydney Biennale as part of the celebrated group exhibition *Beat Nation*. Her multi-disciplinary practice includes performance art, spoken word, humour, “sacred clowning”, writing, singing, songwriting, video and visual art. She studied media arts at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and was the recipient of the British Columbia Award for Excellence in the Arts (2012) and The Viva Award (2014) and the Hnyatshyn Award in 2017. For her work on *Savage* (2010) in collaboration with Lisa Jackson, Reece won a Genie Award for Best Acting in a Short Film, the film won a Golden Sheaf Award for Best Multicultural Film, ReelWorld Outstanding Canadian Short Film, Leo Awards for Best Actress and Best Editing. Recent exhibitions include: *The Sacred Clown & Other Strangers* (2015) a solo exhibition of her performance costumes and documentation at Urban Shaman Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Winnipeg and *Moss* at Oboro Gallery, Montreal (2017) and *Sweetgrass and Honey* at Plug In ICA (2018), and at the Comox Valley Art Gallery (2018).

Touch Me skeena reece

06 April – 12 May 2018

EXHIBITION

06 April 7pm

ART OPENING / PERFORMANCE

07 April 11am – 1pm

ARTIST TALK + MAKE ART PROJECT: STORIES STONES

Skeena Reece with Sandra Semchuk



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HOURS TUES–SAT 10–5

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CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY
MUSÉE CANADIEN DE L'HISTOIRE



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