

Simon Fraser University
School for the Contemporary Arts Master of Fine Arts Program

Graduating Project Proposal

Student: *Roxanne Charles*

Contact: Smoke Signals

Project Title: Completion Ceremony

Location: Date(s): January 11th, 2019

Senior Supervisor: *Steven Hill*

Committee Member: *Dara Culhane*

Main Supervisor Signature of Approval:

February 1, 2018

Location: The Audain Gallery Front Display Window Space- September 2017 Grad Show-Studio T. (OR possibly 4210) Completion Ceremony Friday – January 11th 2019 6:30-9:30pm Doors will open at 6pm

Dates: January – 11th 2019 (set up/take down January 9th-12th)

Directed Studies Supervisor: Steven Hill

Project Description/ Context:

My project will be a completion ceremony. The ceremony is grounded in my traditional teachings and has been informed by my experience within the space. Rather than theoretically question and theorize the role of indigenous art I would like to celebrate its complexities through ceremony.

In the early 1970s, I was an assistant curator at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia. One day Wilson Duff came into the museum with one of his graduate students, picked up a raven rattle, and showed it to me, saying, “isn’t it beautiful?” I agreed that it was. Then he asked, “but how do you read it?” Impatiently, I answered, “Wilson, I don’t read rattles, I shake them.” In this volume, I write as a shaker among many readers. To add to the challenge of this task, I speak Kwak’wala, a language that has no words for “art” or “artist.” There is a suffix, *-inuxw*, that tells you that a person is good at something, which could be carving, singing, fishing, or any other activity.

Gloria Cranmer Webster *The Dark Years*

Perhaps there is no project description at all. Or perhaps you can find a vague description metaphorically through its context.

Gloria was the narrator for a 1973 documentary film *The Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids Us Dance*, a very powerful film that illustrates the history of the banning of the potlatch. A line from the above passage was brought forward to me by Krystle Coughlin. While I

was giving my final presentation in class Krystle said it reminded her of an article she read and then shared that in the article the author said “I don’t read rattles, I shake them” this spoke deeply to me. I later went on to read Gloria Cranmer Webster’s article. Krystle explained the context of this line and how it reminded her of my frustration with trying to fit Indigenous art into this western box. The frustration of trying to fit a round peg in a square whole. The box that is the institution, that is this building, that is the theoretical frame work, that is the course requirements, that is this university, that is SFU Woodward’s, that is Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, that is this MFA program. That circular peg being myself, my practice, my being, my history, my experience, my understanding, my frustration.

This is a powerful passage that speaks to spirit and my work perhaps even more than Krystle may ever realize. Although Gloria is Kwakwaka'wakw, and I am Semiahme there are many parallels and connections I feel deep within in me. The more I learn, the more I know that Krystle was meant to share that passage with me. That there is still more I am meant to gather. Gloria also studied anthropology and is a passionate Indigenous rights advocate whom realizes there is still a lot of work to be done. Gloria played an instrumental role in the revitalization of language and the repatriation of many sacred objects. Gloria’s father was a ‘Namgis Chief by the name of Dan Cranmer, whom held a six-day potlatch on Village Island where 45 people were arrested and charged. Later 22 of them were jailed. The charges and convictions were for singing songs, dancing, making speeches, and carrying goods to recipients. It is said that during this time over 600 masks and rattles were seized. This was one singular event and is a powerful illustration of the horrendous theft, violence, and control the western world has thrust against Indigenous life and ways of being.

It is not my wish to go into the details of my completion ceremony here at this time. Rather, I wish to state that it will embrace many aspects of the celebrations that were once band and illegal on the lands we stand upon. I humbly recognize I am a guest on these lands and respectfully want to acknowledge the local nations to which these lands belong. I wish to bring this acknowledgement forward in a respectful way which invites members of these nations to participate in this ceremony which is being held on their lands.

Preparation:

I will share with you that a tremendous amount of preparation has been going into this project and that ceremony has been a huge part. I have entered into ceremony with the white paper (the academic writing in this space) to create a new space and engage with text in a way that feels authentic and culturally relative to me. The result of this process was a 100 page paper that I am still engaging with, an invitation for others to engage with text through ceremony. *The White Paper ~Non Neutral Space: An Acknowledgement of the need to continue cleansing this academic space for indigenous bodies* is something that I am still engaging with and have invited other indigenous peoples whom I admire to read

and respond to in whatever way feels appropriate to them. This is one step towards my completion ceremony. Other aspects of this completion have been to intentionally place my physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing at the forefront of this process. The paper will have numerous rounds of reengagement through ceremony. I will be spending a lot of time with the work both in digital and physical form and will be marking the text with medicines, my hand, the land, praying over it, keeping it close to me, treating it like a bundle, like the medicine it is, beading it and having this available during my Audain installation. Along with The Audain display window will house many of my ceremonial objects that will be placed in the window removed from their context, inviting the Western Gaze. This would meet the requirements of this degree, I have been told. However, these objects have a purpose and life that exists outside the gaze. It is my wish to honor them and those that have helped me survive the University space through ceremony. I am preparing for this ceremony for full year through the meditational creation of ceremonial objects, acquiring and expanding my traditional language skills. Gathering traditional foods and knowledge. Smoking fabrics. Discovering ways to alter the institutional space. Engaging with members of the three surrounding nations to see if there are ways they might want to be involved. Making regalia. Singing. Dancing. Drumming. Praying. Paddling. And most importantly listening to the world around me and following my heart.

These are some of the preparations I will be engaging in

Synthesis of previous and current MFA work:

My MFA work has focused on the body as a primary mode of communication as well as a vessel of living memory and historical document. The research I have conducted is lived experience, research as experience, research as ceremony, research as self-care, research as survival, research as intuition, research as embodied knowing; which is the result of 39 years of participant observation. My experience has led me to ceremony.

Previous Directed Study: Exploring Conversations Between Ceremony, Space, Place, Performance, and Indigenous Theatre

I explored the various conversations surrounding ceremony, space, place, performance, and Indigenous theatre. During this time, I met Steven Hill whom is my senior supervision and Dara Culhane whom is my co-supervisor for guidance through this process. I also attend four classes which each offered unique perspectives on various themes of performance such as:

Dara Culhane's: Culture, Politics and Performance Seminar.

Peter Dickinson's: Performance Art Seminar.

Lindsey Lachance's: Indigenous Theatre Class.

Sabine Bitter's: Laboratory Landscapes I & II

My intention was to use these classes not only for research but to also create a framework which informed my work. They allowed me numerous considerations to explore my body as a landscape, a site, living memory, spiritual being within the institution.

As an artist, living being, and Semiahme woman I am historian of my own cultural history. A history that has been distorted and dissected under a Eurocentric gaze for far too long. The employment of visual representation, sacred objects, orality, movement, ceremony, space, and the body have played a crucial role in the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and the documentation of our history. I wish to honor that through ceremony.

Methodology:

My research methodology has been done through lived experience, embodied knowing and what I have heard some Indigenous scholars refer to as intuitive logic. I have explored site specific locations and allowed myself to have embodied experiences which I reflect upon. My work reflects my experience.

Venue:

I will work with my cohort to coordinate and organize the MFA Grad Show for September 2018. I have already discussed with them my desire to show some of my work in the Audain Gallery at this time and I am extremely flexible and willing to accommodate their needs.

For my Completion Ceremony, I intend to use Studio T.

Target Audience:

Hmmmm????? Audience... Viewer... Witness... Participant... Guests... All of these wonderful humans are for whom I would like to share my work with. Everyone and anyone whom is respectfully and authentically interested. I feel that this work is quite open and not limited to a specific audience although some may be more familiar with ceremonial process and protocols than others. I will be hand delivering invitations elders, guests, family, faculty, staff, fellow students and friends which I presume will make up for a large percent of my guests. I will also be inviting the people whom have supported me through this process, along with members of the three nations, and calling forward witnesses as this is how Salish knowledge and history is respectfully transferred.

Required school resources:

Studio T.

Lighting

Projection for Video

Circular Seating in Studio T.

Tables for Food

Possibly some suspension of work

Sound

Budget: Roxanne Charles

Cedar Bark: For Weaving Objects

Wool: For Weaving

Silver: For Engraving

Clay: For Sculpting

Food: Salmon, Berries, Bannock, Tea, Dry Meat, Veggies

Honorariums: Door men, Speaker, Dancers,

Canvas

Cedar Paddles

Front of House

Technical Director (Student)

Video/Lighting Design (Student)

Individual programs

Prints of Paper

Book Binding

Will Speak to Kyla about developing a team to help

I do not anticipate any cost for installation and de-installation costs in the Audain Gallery outside of the collective associated costs