

# **Indigenous Art Book Publishing in Canada: Conversations & Considerations**

by

**Mélanie Anna Ritchot**

Bachelor of Journalism, Carleton University, 2020

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Publishing

in the

Publishing Program

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Mélanie Anna Ritchot 2023

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2023

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

## **Declaration of Committee**

**Name:** **Mélanie Anna Ritchot**

**Degree:** **Master of Publishing**

**Title:** **Indigenous Art Book Publishing in Canada:  
Conversations & Considerations**

**Committee:**

**Scott Steedman**  
Supervisor  
Senior Lecturer, Publishing

**Heidi Waechtler**  
Committee Member  
Director, Sales & Distribution  
Figure 1 Publishing

**Mauve Pagé**  
Committee Member  
Senior Lecturer, Publishing

## **Abstract**

This report investigates and documents the current landscape of Indigenous art book publishing in Canada as a niche category of the industry, and a space where Indigenous artists' work encounters two historically colonial institutions: book publishing and museums. Based on my work at Figure 1 Publishing, catalogue research, and conversations with gallery curators, publishers, artist, editors, and authors, I have compiled some current practices, considerations, and examples of extra care to be taken when publishing Indigenous art books. My hope is that this work starts conversations in the realm of Indigenous art publishing, leads to creative approaches to address power imbalances, and serves as a marker for future progress in Indigenous art book publishing.

**Keywords:** Indigenous; publishing; art book; art monograph; art catalogue; gallery publication

*For my family*

## Acknowledgements

For the support, mentorship, and teachings I received throughout this research and writing process, I am grateful to:

- Lisa Frenette, Kün Jaad (Dana Simeon), Liz Barron, Dempsey Bob, Neil Christopher, Alan Sheppard, Karen Duffek, Chris Labonté, Michael Leyne, and others who were so willing to share their time, knowledge, and stories.
- Heidi Waechtler, for her invaluable feedback as my industry supervisor and for her mentorship throughout my work placement.
- The rest of the team at Figure 1 Publishing for welcoming me and creating space for me to learn and explore my interests.
- Scott Steedman and Mauve Pagé for their insightful feedback on this report.

I also thank my father for instilling a love of art, and my mother for sharing her love of books.

I am endlessly thankful to my partner, Cedric, for his support and encouragement throughout the process of this research and my pursuing of this degree.

# Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Positioning.....	3
Scope of work .....	3
Limitations .....	3
<b>Chapter 2. Recent History .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 3. The Current Landscape .....</b>	<b>8</b>
How we got here .....	8
Avenues of art book publishing .....	9
Who is publishing Indigenous art books.....	10
<b>Chapter 4. Where Galleries and Publishers Intersect .....</b>	<b>14</b>
The art book publishing process .....	14
A co-responsibility .....	14
<b>Chapter 5. Conversations .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 6. Considerations.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>31</b>

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Art books make up a category that stands apart from general trade publishing, and there are a select few Canadian publishing houses producing them. This presents unique opportunities and challenges, including the limited venues for these books to be distributed, reviewed and sold, and a limited market compared to literary titles. Books in this category can serve the cultural purpose of disseminating artists' work, preserving and transmitting intergenerational cultural knowledge, and engendering an appreciation for the art featured. They can also be seen as a way of legitimizing an artist's work in the industry. Large hardcover art books—the most common format—are often associated with prestigious artists and well-known movements, resulting in the format itself consecrating the artist within institutions of art dissemination.<sup>1</sup> It also lends legitimacy to the artist in the eyes of the public and the media. The decision to publish artists' catalogues in hardcover can be viewed as a symbolic endorsement by a gallery.<sup>2</sup> The category of Indigenous art books is growing in Canada, following a trend across genres. In the Canadian book publishing industry, sales for titles with Indigenous content increased 527 percent from 2012 to 2021, signifying a rise in readership.<sup>3</sup>

Within the sub-category of Indigenous art book acquisition and publication, there is extra care to be taken and additional ethical responsibilities at play, especially when considering that most books in this category are being published by non-Indigenous-run companies at this time. In this report I investigate these additional responsibilities through the perspective that Indigenous art book publishing is a space where Indigenous artists or their work simultaneously encounter the historically colonial institutions of book publishing and museums. This presents a unique set of considerations throughout the publishing process in the pursuit of culturally appropriate, respectful, and productive collaboration. With many art galleries and museums doing important repatriation work across the country and exhibiting Indigenous art in new ways, and Canadian readers picking up more Indigenous titles, Indigenous art books can be seen as an opportunity for publishers to focus on culturally appropriate publishing practices for Indigenous authors and content, by combining efforts and resources, and sharing knowledge within in the art and

---

<sup>1</sup> Camacho Henao, Natalia "Lessons of the Backlist: A Curatorial and Editorial Analysis of the Vancouver Art Gallery's Catalogues 1967–2022." Simon Fraser University, 2023. <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/35969>.

<sup>2</sup> Camacho Henao, "Lessons of the Backlist."

<sup>3</sup> "Indigenous Books in Canada: Subjects, Sales, and More," BookNet Canada, June 20, 2022. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/research/2022/6/20/indigenous-books-in-canada-subjects-sales-and-more>.

publishing industries. For the purposes of this report, “Indigenous art publishing” refers to the publishing of illustrated books containing art by an Indigenous artist, including monographs, exhibition catalogues, and self-published titles, although I recognize definitions of art and of Indigenous publishing are subjective.

This report is laid out in two parts. In the first, I provide an overview of the current landscape of art book publishing, including who is publishing these books, the financial models behind them, and their intended audiences. In the second part, I summarize interviews I conducted with publishing professionals, gallery curators, Indigenous editors, and Indigenous artists, among others, to provide insight into current practices, challenges, and personal stories. I then suggest five considerations to be taken when publishing Indigenous art books. These considerations are not intended to be interpreted as rules or prescriptive guidelines, but as ideas and approaches to consider when working on books in this category. My intention is for these considerations to be complementary to existing Indigenous style guides like *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples* by Gregory Younging, and to be specific to publishing Indigenous art books. I approached the conversations included in this report with the intention to learn and gain insight into the industry of publishing Indigenous art books from multiple perspectives. In addition to Indigenous artists, family members, editors, and authors, I have interviewed settlers with knowledge and experience in publishing Indigenous art books, to reflect the composition of the workforce behind this category.

In October 2023, I completed a six-month work placement with Figure 1 Publishing, a hybrid illustrated book publisher based in Vancouver that includes Indigenous Art and Culture as a core category, alongside Art and Photography, Architecture and Design, and Food and Drink. This experience helped me learn about the industry and the publishing process, and access a network of gallery curators, Indigenous artists, and authors. Before pursuing work in the book publishing industry, I worked as a reporter in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Through my work in journalism, I have been entrusted with Indigenous stories from various communities, and I have worked to convey those stories in a way that honours the storyteller. I have taken a similar approach in this work, conducting open-ended interviews in a way that may more closely resemble journalism than academic research. Those interviewed had the opportunity to review sections of this report based on their interviews. My hope is that this work starts conversations in the realm of Indigenous art publishing, and that the Indigenous individuals who generously shared their time and experiences with me feel I properly conveyed their thoughts, stories, and ideas.



## **Positioning**

My name is Mélanie Anna Ritchot. My father is a Red River Métis carver, and my mother is a settler with German heritage. My brother and I were raised in southern Manitoba where we grew up hunting with my father and fishing with my grandparents. We learned French, and attended school where we became familiar with the name Louis Riel and wore *ceinture fléchées* during Festival du Voyageur. As a child, I understood we were Métis, but did not know exactly what that meant. When I moved to Ottawa to study journalism at Carleton University, on the traditional Territories of the Nehiyahwak, Nahikawe, Dakata, Lakota, Dene, and Métis peoples (Treaty Six territory), I became more inquisitive about my heritage and learned there is a language (Michif) that maybe, would things have been different, could have been passed down to my grandmother, to my father, and to me. I am reconnecting, and I am still learning.

## **Scope of work**

The definition of what qualifies any book as “Indigenous” is subjective, but for the purposes of this report I have researched illustrated (photo- and art-based) books with content relating to Indigenous art and artists. I recognize this scope does not include books featuring other categories of art that have been written, edited, or designed by Indigenous individuals. This research was also limited to titles published by Canadian companies since 2013. The titles researched were limited to those discoverable online on publishers’ and retailers’ websites and catalogues. I identified titles by keywords, publishers’ categorization, and interviewee recommendations. These parameters resulted in titles that are not listed online being excluded.

## **Limitations**

While I reference gallery catalogues produced by in-house publishing programs in this work, I have not attempted to count or create an exhaustive list of these publications. I have endeavoured to include Métis, First Nations, and Inuit perspectives in this work, but I recognize the list of people I interviewed reflects my own network and the networks of those I spoke with. I also recognize that artists and publishing professionals who have worked with Figure 1 Publishing (most of whom are on the Northwest Coast of Canada) were more accessible to me because of my work with the company. There were time limitations with this research and I would like to acknowledge Indigenous Peoples whom I was unable to include in this work within this time frame. I hope to continue this research in the future and to approach it on a more flexible timeline.

I have worked to include perspectives from a variety of positions involved in publishing art books, including artists, authors, publishers, editors, and gallery curators, but there are viewpoints not represented in this work, such as artists who have self-published books in this category. I also recognize this report emphasizes acquisition and editorial work, and I did not conduct comprehensive research into areas such as marketing, sales, and design, although there are considerations to be made specific to those elements of the publishing process. I also want to acknowledge that this work does not look in depth at the way Indigenous art has been portrayed in art books, an important topic that I hope to research more in the future.

Throughout this report, I refer to art and artists from the land that is now commonly called Canada as “Canadian” and “Canada-based,” but I recognize Indigenous art is not inherently part of the “Canadian” art canon, and some Indigenous Peoples don’t identify with being Canadian at all.

## Chapter 2. Recent History

Many art books published pre-2000s do not have a digital footprint, but a 1994 essay in *Art Documentation* gives insight into which exhibits, and subsequent art books, were released thirty years ago. Jo Nordley Beglo wrote on behalf of the National Gallery of Canada that “Canadian” art flourished between 1990 and 1993: “These have been years enriched by publications marking special occasions, such as 125 years of Confederation, 350 years since the founding of Montreal, and 500 years of exploration in the New World.” He highlights exhibition catalogues such as *Lucius Richard O’Brien: Visions of a Victorian Canada*, *First Impressions: European Views of the Natural History of Canada from the 16th to the 19th century*, and “*Our Own Country Canada: Being an Account of the National Aspirations of the Principal Landscape Artists in Montreal and Toronto 1860–1890*.”<sup>4</sup> In the same period, books that more closely resemble titles published today, like *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives*; *Canada’s First People: A Celebration of Contemporary Native Visual Arts*; and monographs on Daphne Odjig and Alex Janvier, were released. While the 90s are not far off in relative history, these titles represent the Eurocentric focus of both “Canadian” and Indigenous art in the public sphere at that time.

In 1996, the last federally operated residential school in Canada—places that symbolized the violent suppression of Indigenous art, language, and cultural expression—closed its doors.<sup>5</sup> Nearly three decades later, book publishers, art galleries and museums—which have their own colonial legacies—are operating in a time when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has made specific Calls to Action, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNRIP) has received royal assent in Canada.<sup>6</sup> As cultural institutions, art collectors and book publishers have a responsibility to respond to TRC calls and UNDRIP Articles. UNDRIP maintains that Indigenous Peoples have the right to strengthen their distinct cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the cultural life of the state. It specifies that Indigenous Peoples have the right to practice and

---

<sup>4</sup> Nordley Beglo, Jo “Canadian Art Publishing, 1990–1993: An Overview of Monographs and Exhibition Catalogues,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 13, no. 1 (1994): 19–26.

<sup>5</sup> “A Timeline of Residential Schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” *CBC News*. May 16, 2008. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-timeline-of-residential-schools-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-1.724434>.

<sup>6</sup> “Backgrounder: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act,” Department of Justice, Government of Canada, April 12, 2021. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html>.

revitalize their cultural traditions and customs, including the right to maintain, protect, and develop the past, present, and future manifestations of their cultures, such as artefacts, designs, and visual arts and literature.

In a 2020 Yellowhead Institute report, *A Culture of Exploitation: “Reconciliation” and the Institutions of Canadian Art*, Jas Morgan (Métis–Cree–Saulteaux) considered the historic relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the institutions of Canadian art, and conducted a series of interviews with cultural workers. The subsequent report states the relationship between Canadian cultural institutions such as art galleries, museums, funding agencies and collections, and Indigenous Peoples has always been a contentious one: “The theft of Indigenous bodies and objects by these institutions is an ongoing feature of colonialism in Canada and even as Indigenous art broke into mainstream Canadian consciousness, the relationship was beset by tokenism and inequality.”<sup>7</sup>

Morgan says it was only during a period of activism in 2017 (or the “reconciliation year”) that these institutions started to express a commitment to reconciliation, and initially, the result was increased representation and support, but that during the COVID-19 pandemic, “commitments have begun to evaporate.” Morgan’s interviews revealed a “renewed exploitation” of Indigenous cultural workers’ labour and their works during the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Morgan lays out 15 Standards of Achievement and recommends a “helpful re-start” of the relationship with renewed attention to existing recommendations and Calls to Action, and reinforced listening to the ideas of a contemporary generation of Indigenous cultural workers.<sup>9</sup> Two of Morgan’s Standards are most notable in relation to art book publishing:

“Always centre care, capacity, realistic timeframes, and meaningful responses when addressing the concerns of Indigenous employees, and only request those perspectives with the expressed consent of employees.”<sup>10</sup>

And:

---

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, Jas, “A Culture of Exploitation: ‘Reconciliation’ and the Institutions of Canadian Art,” Yellowhead Institute, accessed October 21, 2023. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/a-culture-of-exploitation-reconciliation-and-the-institutions-of-canadian-art/>.

<sup>8</sup> Jas, “A Culture of Exploitation”.

<sup>9</sup> Jas.

<sup>10</sup> Jas.

“Indigenous publications, organizations, galleries, and other cultural institutions should immediately recruit Indigenous editors and department heads, if these positions are still held by non-Indigenous peoples. This might mean investing in mentorship processes and understanding that Indigenous qualifications can look different than non-Indigenous qualifications. This may require re-considering the concept of ‘quality’, production schedules, and other tools for organizational structure and workplace culture.”<sup>11</sup>

In 2021, BookNet Canada, a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to address systemic challenges in the Canadian book industry, described how TRC Calls to Action—which the Association of Canadian Publishers endorsed in 2017—apply to the book industry.<sup>12</sup> For example, BookNet interprets Call 92. i. (“Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before proceeding with economic development projects”) as an opportunity for non-Indigenous members of the book industry to commit to Indigenous author care; collaborative work between Indigenous- and non-Indigenous-led industry organizations like the Canadian Federation of Libraries Association’s Indigenous Matters Committee or the Indigenous Editors Association; and other relationships built with Indigenous communities through publishers’ work.<sup>13</sup>

My intention in selecting these reports and recommendations with overlap in the art and publishing worlds is not to provide a comprehensive set of resources or rules for art book publishers, but to provide a brief recent history of some ongoing conversations related to these institutions and how they can work towards reconciliation.

---

<sup>11</sup> Jas.

<sup>12</sup> “About BookNet Canada,” BookNet Canada. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/about-us>; Canadian Publishers endorse Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action,” Association of Canadian Publishers. Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://publishers.ca/canadian-publishers-endorse-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-calls-to-action/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Taking Action towards Reconciliation in the Book Industry.” BookNet Canada, accessed August 26, 2023. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/6/21/taking-action-towards-reconciliation-in-the-book-industry>.

## Chapter 3. The Current Landscape

### How we got here

When documenting and reflecting on the current state of art book publishing in Canada and Indigenous art book publishing, it's important to look at how we got here. In 2018, Black Dog Press, a UK-based art and architecture book publisher, declared bankruptcy, leaving art institutions across the country without their go-to publisher. Thanks to a promise of low printing costs and book distribution in Europe, Black Dog had published exhibit catalogues with the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Musée des beaux-arts de Montreal, and the Dunlop Art Gallery, among other Canadian galleries.<sup>14</sup> News outlets questioned whether Black Dog shutting down operations meant the end of Canadian art book publishing, but that didn't seem to be the consensus.<sup>15</sup>

Art journalist Leah Sandals wrote in *Canadian Art* that with the instability of digital archives, paper is vital to the record of how art is remembered and made, but publishing scholarly, well-designed, and well-printed monographs is not getting any easier: "Printed matter accompanying an exhibition or illuminating an artist's practice still defines the machinery of the art world."<sup>16</sup> In an interview with Sandals, Jonathan Middleton, now the director of Art Metropole in Toronto, said the collapse of Black Dog didn't mean art books are not financially viable or worth publishing, but that they are not always viable in the conventional trade market: "Much like art, they're an odd economy unto themselves."<sup>17</sup> Robin Metcalfe, then-president of the Canadian Art Museum Directors' Organization, said the popularity of events like the New York Art Book Fair and the growth of related events in Canada were indicative of a continuing interest in art books, and compared "the often proclaimed death of the art book" to "the death of painting and the death of photography—various things that have been claimed to die without actually dying."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Sandals, Leah, "Art Book Publishing in Canada Takes a Hit," *Canadian Art*, accessed October 23, 2023. <https://canadianart.ca/essays/black-dog-publishing-bankruptcy-canada/>.

<sup>15</sup> Whyte, Murray, "Does Black Dog's Bankruptcy Spell the End to Canadian Art Book Publishing?" *Toronto Star*, April 2, 2018. [https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/does-black-dog-s-bankruptcy-spell-the-end-to-canadian-art-book-publishing/article\\_9a0306d0-2949-55af-9422-26180fdc7407.html](https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/does-black-dog-s-bankruptcy-spell-the-end-to-canadian-art-book-publishing/article_9a0306d0-2949-55af-9422-26180fdc7407.html).

<sup>16</sup> Sandals.

<sup>17</sup> Sandals.

<sup>18</sup> Sandals.

With Black Dog out of the picture—momentarily, before the company’s assets were purchased the same year—despite a sustained interest in art book publishing in Canada, domestic publishing houses that were already publishing art books, such as Figure 1 Publishing and Goose Lane Editions, could lean into the category.<sup>19</sup>

## **Avenues of art book publishing**

Due to large trim sizes, high paper and printing costs, the prominence of special production features for added artistic value, protective elements like shrink-wrapping, and high shipping costs, art books are expensive to produce. Most Canadian-published illustrated books are printed overseas to lower production costs. Where literary publishers typically strike deals with authors, pay for book production, then pay out royalties if enough copies sell, hybrid publishers, traditional publishing houses and internal gallery publishing programs may take a different approach to cover high costs and make a profit. Art book publishers often operate under different funding models than literary publishers or combine elements of hybrid and traditional publishing models as needed to make a project viable.

Many art books published in Canada are financed by grant funding provided through Canada Council for the Arts or provincial art funding programs, which allows traditional publishers to pursue these projects, often in partnership with galleries.

The hybrid model is used in art book production to publish high-quality illustrated books about subjects that a publisher or gallery deems worthy of publication but might not have a large enough retail market to recover the costs of production or bring in a profit. This is sometimes called co-publishing or partnership publishing. In this scenario a hybrid publisher partners with a gallery or museum that pays a portion of the production costs in exchange for books—effectively buying books upfront to cover costs—and the publisher handles some or all of the editing, design, printing, marketing, sales, and distribution processes. In these arrangements, the partner gallery, museum, or other funder typically has its stock of books to sell however they like, often in a gift shop and online, and the publisher distributes their print run into the trade market.

---

<sup>19</sup> “Canadian Art-Book Publishers Reach out to Galleries and Authors after U.K.’s Black Dog Publishing Declares Bankruptcy” *Quill and Quire*, March 19, 2018. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/canadian-art-book-publishers-reach-out-to-galleries-and-authors-after-u-k-s-black-dog-publishing-declares-bankruptcy/>; “Black Dog Publishing assets bought by St James’ House,” *The Bookseller*, Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/st-james-s-house-buys-black-dog-publishing-733616>

Alternatively, some galleries like the Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art in Winnipeg have publishing staff and associated programs. In this scenario, a gallery or museum would arrange for in-house or freelance editors, designers, and authors to produce the book, would arrange printing themselves, then sell copies in their gift shop, and sometimes distribute copies to be sold by other galleries.

The lines between hybrid, traditional and internal gallery publishing can be blurred depending on funding, resources, and the level of control an artist or gallery wants over book production. For example, a gallery might produce a book in-house and partner with a traditional publisher for distribution in the retail market. A gallery might partner with a hybrid publisher for select elements of the process like editing, printing, marketing and distribution, but design the book in-house. The Vancouver Art Gallery commonly does this with Figure 1. Some institutions, like the Museum of Anthropology at UBC (MOA), partner with a hybrid publisher for certain titles that have more retail sales potential—see *Where the Power Is: Indigenous Perspectives on Northwest Coast Art*—but publish internally if a book has more narrow appeal and won't be profitable in the retail market.<sup>20</sup>

Other avenues such as self-publishing are also available to artists, as recently exemplified by Métis artist Jason Baerg's self-published catalogue *Tawâskweyâw Cĭ·ᑎᑭ·ĭᑦᑦ / A Path or Gap Among the Trees*.<sup>21</sup>

## Who is publishing Indigenous art books

Figure 1 Publishing and Goose Lane Editions—both non-Indigenous operated—currently publish the majority of Canadian-based Indigenous art books for the trade market. Other publishers that don't specialize in art books, like Inhabit Media and university presses such as UBC Press and McGill-Queen's University Press, also have market share, with occasional releases in this

---

<sup>20</sup> Duffek, Karen, Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest at the Museum of Anthropology, UBC. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 30, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> *Tawâskweyâw Cĭ·ᑎᑭ·ĭᑦᑦ / A Path or Gap Among the Trees*," Art Metropole, accessed November 1, 2023. <https://artmetropole.com/shop/14651>.



category.<sup>22</sup> Two not-for-profit organizations, the Magenta Foundation and the Art Institute Canada, as well as some international publishing companies also publish Métis, Inuit, and First Nations' art books that have Canadian distribution.

**Figure 1 Publishing** was founded in 2012 in Vancouver, British Columbia and put out its first Indigenous art book, *Susan Point: Works on Paper*, in 2014. Publisher and co-founder Chris Labonté said it was always the intention to continue the work Douglas & McIntyre (D&M) had been doing in Indigenous publishing, but in a different way, one of those differences being as a hybrid publisher. D&M was once one of Canada's largest independent publishing houses, but filed for bankruptcy in 2012 after 42 years of operations.<sup>23</sup> Labonté, who was the company's associate publisher and acquiring editor, then launched Figure 1, a hybrid publisher, originally slated to be an imprint of D&M, with two other former D&M employees, to produce high-end niche books, including art books.<sup>24</sup> Figure 1 is now one of the main publishers of Canada-based Indigenous art books entering the trade market and one of the only publishers in Canada that specializes in art books. It has published acclaimed monographs for Indigenous artists like Beau Dick, Susan Point and Dana Claxton. Of over 200 books published, about 10 per cent of Figure 1's titles are in the Indigenous Art and Culture category.

The company's list has a Northwest Coast art focus, and in 2022 included *Echoes of the Supernatural: Graphic Art of Robert Davidson*, a second edition of *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of Northwest Coast First Nations*, *Glory and Exile: Haida History Robes of Jut-ke-Nay Hazel Wilson*, and *Dempsey Bob: In His Own Voice*.<sup>25</sup> In the Fall 2023 publishing season, Figure 1 released *Early Days: Indigenous Art from the McMichael*.<sup>26</sup> Figure 1 titles are

---

<sup>22</sup> "Adult Books," Inhabit Media. Accessed November 2, 2023. <https://inhabitmedia.com/books/adult/>.

<sup>23</sup> "Innovative New Services Born from the Bankruptcy of Douglas & McIntyre" *Quill and Quire*, September 11, 2017. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/innovative-new-services-born-from-the-bankruptcy-of-douglas-mcintyre/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Innovative New Services Born from the Bankruptcy of Douglas & McIntyre" *Quill and Quire*, September 11, 2017. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/innovative-new-services-born-from-the-bankruptcy-of-douglas-mcintyre/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Indigenous Art + Culture Archives," Figure 1 Publishing, accessed November 1, 2023. <https://www.figure1publishing.com/category/indigenous-art-culture/>.

<sup>26</sup> Devine, Bonnie and Milroy, Sarah. *Early Days: Indigenous Art from the McMichael*. Figure 1 Publishing, 2023.

distributed by Raincoast Books in Canada, Publishers Group West in the United States, and Ingram Publisher Services internationally.<sup>27</sup>

**Goose Lane Editions**, Canada’s oldest independent publishing house, has also put out a significant portion of the Indigenous art books published in the Canadian trade market. While Figure 1 is largely focused on illustrated titles, Goose Lane publishes fiction, poetry, and non-fiction in addition to their illustrated art, architecture, and Indigenous titles. Based in Fredericton, New Brunswick, the traditional publisher’s list has an Ontario and East Coast Indigenous art focus, and in 2022 included *Wabanaki Modern | Wabanaki Kiskukewey | Wabanaki Moderne*, a book on art by the “Micmac Indian Craftsmen” of Elsipogtog, which incorporates English, Mi’kmaw and French text.<sup>28</sup> In 2024, Goose Lane has a forthcoming Indigenous art title, *Mohawk Warriors, Hunters & Chiefs | Kanien’kehá:ka Ronterí:ios, Rontó:rats & Rotiiá:ner*, with English and Mohawk translations.<sup>29</sup> Goose Lane’s titles are distributed by University of Toronto Press Distribution.<sup>30</sup>

**The Art Institute of Canada’s** (AIC) open-access digital art library, the Canadian Online Art Book Project, was founded in 2013 to publish art books in French and English on artists who have “contributed to the nation’s art history,” available for free online.<sup>31</sup> Their online library contains more than fifty art books, among which nine are about Indigenous artists, including Pitseolak Ashoona, Robert Houle, and Norval Morriseau.<sup>32</sup> In 2019 the Canadian Art Library, the print imprint of the Canadian Online Art Book Project, was founded to publish up to four books in print per year. Print versions of *Shuvinaí Ashoona: Life & Work* (2019) and *Kent Monkman: Being Legendary at the Royal Ontario Museum* (2022), among others, have since been published by AIC.

---

<sup>27</sup> “Figure 1 Signs Art Book Distribution Deal with Prestel,” Figure 1 Publishing, Accessed February 2, 2016. <https://www.figure1publishing.com/figure-1-signs-art-book-distribution-deal-with-prestel/>.

<sup>28</sup> “*Wabanaki Modern | Wabanaki Kiskukewey | Wabanaki Moderne* (English/Mi’kmaw/French),” Goose Lane Editions, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://gooselane.com/products/wabanaki-modern>.

<sup>29</sup> “*Mohawk Warriors, Hunters & Chiefs | Kanien’kehá:Ka Ronterí:Ios, Rontó:Rats & Rotiiá:Neer* (English/Mohawk),” Goose Lane Editions, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://gooselane.com/products/mohawk-warriors-hunters-chiefs-kanienkeha-ka-ronteri-ios-ronto-rats-rotiia-ner-english-mohawk>.

<sup>30</sup> “Goose Lane Editions Winter 2024 Catalogue,” Goose Lane Editions. Accessed through [bnccatalist.ca](http://bnccatalist.ca) November 2, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> “The Canadian Online Art Book Project,” Art Canada Institute - Institut de l’art canadien, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books>

<sup>32</sup> “The Canadian Online Art Book Project”

**The Magenta Foundation**, a non-profit arts publishing house based in Toronto, released *Bloodline*, a monograph of Canadian Plains Cree artist Meryl McMaster, in 2023, although their list does not have an Indigenous focus.

**Inhabit Media**, an Inuit-owned company that was originally founded to create culturally relevant children's books and educational material for Inuit, has branched into other areas of publishing to fill gaps in books made for Inuit.<sup>33</sup> In 2015, Inhabit published *My Name Is Arnaktauyok: The Life and Art of Germaine Arnaktauyok*, and in 2017 released *Reawakening our Ancestor's Lines: Revitalizing Inuit Traditional Tattooing*.

Some Canada-based Indigenous art books are being published internationally. **Pomegranate Communications**, an Oregon-based company specializing in fine art products like books, puzzles, calendars, and other gift items, has published numerous books featuring Inuit artists from Kinngait (formerly known as Cape Dorset), Nunavut, in partnership with Dorset Fine Arts. *Ningiukulu Teevee: Drawings and Prints from Cape Dorset* (2019), *Tim Pitsiulak: Drawings and Prints from Cape Dorset* (2018), and *Kananginak Pootoogook: Drawings and Prints from Kinngait* (2023) are among these titles. Los-Angeles based **Inventory Press** released *Breaking Protocol*, edited by Maria Hupfield and featuring other Canadian and North American Indigenous artists, in 2023, although they don't seem to be venturing into the category otherwise.

This is not an exhaustive list of publishers who have put out Indigenous art books, or of all books in this category, but is meant to give a general idea of which entities are actively publishing Indigenous art books, and in which formats and languages.

---

<sup>33</sup> Christopher, Neil, co-founder of Inhabit Media. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 17, 2023.

## Chapter 4. Where Galleries and Publishers Intersect

### The art book publishing process

When an art book is acquired by a publisher, or a gallery partners with a publisher to produce a catalogue, the book's publication often coincides with an exhibition. This helps the publisher assess that there is an audience for the art, and therefore, the book. It also increases potential sales, marketing, and publicity opportunities for the title as there is something timely to pique the interest of the public, collectors, and media. This exhibition-first scenario results in books being secondary to exhibitions, which differs from other categories of publishing where a book is typically a stand-alone product, or the primary product.<sup>34</sup> Art books that don't coincide with a specific exhibition or event are still published, but these generally feature artists who are well-known enough to garner sales regardless of timing or news coverage, as seen with *Echoes of the Supernatural: The Graphic Art of Robert Davidson*. Hybrid publishing is an exception to this, with makes it more viable for non-exhibiting artists who are not necessarily well known to have a book published.

### A co-responsibility

As historically colonial institutions, museums and galleries have responsibilities to take action towards reconciliation as they conduct their work, and to ensure that these involve true respect, collaboration, and consultation.<sup>35</sup> Where museums have represented the theft of Indigenous objects, and book publishing companies have historically failed to represent Indigenous Peoples with verisimilitude, extra care is required as the two institutions work to reconcile these harms.

Hybrid publishers sometimes work directly with an artist without a gallery involved, but in gallery-publisher partnerships a gallery curator or curatorial team has typically already been working with the artist on an exhibition for a significant amount of time before a book contract gets signed. The contractual agreement to produce a book is between the publisher and the

---

<sup>34</sup> Labonté, Chris, Publisher and President of Figure 1 Publishing. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 24, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Morgan, Jas, "A Culture of Exploitation: 'Reconciliation' and the Institutions of Canadian Art," Yellowhead Institute, accessed October 21, 2023. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/a-culture-of-exploitation-reconciliation-and-the-institutions-of-canadian-art/>.

gallery, and not between the publisher and artist directly, contrary to a traditional author-publisher book deal. The artist's agreement would be made directly with the gallery and typically includes the book's publication as a feature of the overall exhibition contract.<sup>36</sup>

When publishers take on exhibition catalogues, they often join these projects in the later stages, when the works of art that will be shown, how they will be displayed, and the captions accompanying them have already been decided. This timeline means that to a certain extent, museums' consultation and reconciliation work (or lack of) will carry through into the book publisher's work. The publisher can also be seen as having an informal accountability role, if they choose to review how the work and relationship-building with the artist and their community has been done leading up to the book deal.

Both parties have the responsibility to do well by the artist and their community, and to improve on past museum and publishing practices, and many improvements have been made in recent years. At the Winnipeg Art Gallery, for example, Inuit ceremonies like lighting a *qulliq* (a traditional oil lamp made of soapstone) were incorporated in the opening of Qaumajuq, the world's largest public collection of contemporary Inuit art in the world, housed at the WAG. Julia Lefrenière, the head of Indigenous Initiatives, has since cleansed a three-storey glass vault of carvings with sage, cedar, tobacco, and sweetgrass on a monthly basis after a Knowledge Keeper told her the Inuit art was sad for its homelands, to help care for it while it is on Treaty 1 Territory in Winnipeg.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Barron, Liz, Indigenous Protocols Program Manager. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 10, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Ritchot, Melanie. "Home and Away," *Block Magazine*, September 2, 2021.

## Chapter 5. Conversations

To learn more about Indigenous art book publishers' current practices and what considerations can be taken during the publishing process to ensure books in this category serve Indigenous artists and communities, I spoke with nine people with experiences in the Canadian book publishing industry, including artists, artists' family members, editors, curators, authors, and publishers. I asked these individuals about their experiences working with Indigenous art and books, lessons learned, sticking points, and changes in the category they've noticed over time. The goal for this section of my research was to gather stories, ideas, and advice, that those who generously spent their time speaking with me wanted to share. As these considerations are meant to be complimentary to *Elements of Indigenous Style*, I limited mentions of current practices and suggestions that are already featured in Younging's guide. These interview excerpts have been edited for clarity and to avoid repetition across conversations. Those interviewed have had the opportunity to review the section of this report based on our conversation and to provide feedback or corrections.

### **Lisa Frenette on community connections and breaking stereotypes**

Lisa Frenette is a freelance Mi'kmaw editor who worked for *Inuit Art Quarterly (IAQ)* for about four years as a copy editor and then as associate editor. She now works for Portage & Main Press in Manitoba and is working on an Indigenous art book that has not yet been publicly announced. In her experience, she said communicating with artists when writing about them or publishing their work has been of utmost importance to forging connections and to avoid a scenario that feels extractive for artists. "That's not always done in publishing," she said. "Artists can be put at arm's length, as is sometimes experienced if there's an exhibition or gallery curator in between." When writing, Frenette said it's important to present the meaning behind art works in the artist's own words, and to use direct quotes and language used by the artist, which is only possible when you take the time to connect with them or their community. A challenge here, especially when looking to speak with Inuit artists who are older and live on their traditional territory, can be a language barrier, she said. At *IAQ*, Frenette worked with translators or found other ways to connect with people when possible, with the goal of centring artists and not just using art to benefit the publication. This includes being flexible to accommodate for variations in art-related terminology and spelling depending on the artist, region, and traditional versus colonized ways of spelling, regardless of house style.

A challenge when working with art publications is trying to serve multiple audiences. Art magazines and art books, in many instances, need to appeal to art collectors (who drive sales and donate to non-profits like the Inuit Art Foundation, which publishes *IAQ*) as well as Indigenous communities and artists. “It’s definitely a challenge when it comes to navigating language and representation, and putting Indigenous Peoples and the artists first, while you still have to operate within the parameters of the industry.” Gallery catalogues and art publications are often viewed as marketing tools for artists, but Frenette said this sentiment depends on the artist themselves. “There can be this extractive feeling that can be challenging for Indigenous artists, where on the one hand, they’re being seen and their art is being shared, but on the other hand they worry about being taken advantage of.”

Art publications can play a role in countering stereotypes, Frenette said. “When Inuit art was first brought down south, many artists were encouraged to make dancing bears, or Inuksuks, and that was brought into the market,” she said, “and there’s still a perpetuated stereotype that these carvings are all Inuit art is, but it’s so much wider.” Publications can disrupt the narrative that Inuit artists aren’t just sculptors but painters, photographers, textile artists, and creators of so many other kinds of art, if they are intentional about presenting art and artists in a different way. Still, the demographic of the “older, seasoned art collector” wants to see sculptures. “It’s straddling the line of the modern reality, and what people want to see,” Frenette said.

To make the publication more accessible, *IAQ* offers a discounted subscription for Inuit artists. Taking broadband connectivity limitations into account, the Inuit Art Foundation website has a low broadband option for those in remote communities who want to purchase a subscription or browse content online. Frenette said this is something book publishers could be doing. “That’s really important because a lot of times these are family members’ and ancestors’ artworks highlighted and it’s nice for the next generations to have access to that.” Frenette said she has seen a movement towards respecting and understanding Indigenous ways of being and expression in book publishing over the last couple of decades, and that now, books are more writer- and artist-centred. “It is a tricky thing to navigate because books themselves are very colonial and very linear, and certain stories or artworks don’t fit in that box.”

### **Kün Jaad (Dana Simeon) on selecting an author for her mother's book**

Kün Jaad (Dana Simeon) is Haida; the daughter of the late textile artist Jut-ke-Nay (Hazel Wilson). She is a Knowledge Keeper of Haida and worked with editor Michael Leyne through the publishing process of her mother's book *Glory and Exile: Haida History Robes of Jut-ke-Nay Hazel Wilson*. Hazel passed away in 2016 before the publication of the book, which showcases a series of fifty-one of her robes that tell the stories of Haida History. Dana says the book was her mother's dying wish. It was published by Figure 1 in partnership with the Haida Gwaii Museum in 2022.

When first discussing the book with her mother, Dana said they both knew they wanted the book to be told with a beginning, a middle, and an end because when non-Indigenous people publish a book, different narratives can often get introduced at different times. "Then the whole story is gone," she said.

Robert Kardosh is the main author of the book, but originally a different author was on the project. "What she wrote isn't for you to expand on," Dana said.

When Dana was later asked who she had in mind to write the book, she said she and Hazel wanted Kardosh, the director of the Marion Scott Gallery in Vancouver. He and his family had worked closely with Hazel and her mother, Grace Bell Wilson DeWitt, as well as with Dana and the baby of the family Avis. His grandmother, Marion Scott had been adopted into Hazel's family by her mother Grace over 30 years ago. "My mom trusted Bob completely ... she felt safe," said Dana.

Kardosh wrote in the book that "Wilson would have been at the centre of the editorial process had this book been published in her lifetime. In her absence I have relied a great deal on members of her family for their advice and active input." The book includes notes about the blankets handwritten by Wilson, which Dana helped explain. She said Kardosh was able to expand on the notes without reducing anything that Jut-ke-Nay wrote, and what she wanted people to know and learn.

Dana said when she first read a PDF copy of the book, it felt like her mom's voice.



### **Michael Leyne on and editing *Glory and Exile* and translation**

Michael Leyne is Figure 1's Editorial Director and is a settler. He edits many of Figure 1's Indigenous art books and has acquired books in this category. He received the Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence in 2022 for his work on *Where the Power Is: Indigenous Perspectives on Northwest Coast* and was shortlisted for the award in 2023 for his work on *Glory and Exile*. When working on *Glory and Exile*, Leyne said he, Kardosh and Taa.uu 'Yuuwans (Nika Collison), Executive Director and Curator of the Haida Gwaii Museum, discussed at length how they could feature Wilson's voice prominently in the book after she had passed away. The notes Wilson had written about her work became a big part of that. Since the notes were written in English, which was not Wilson's first language, a lot of thought went into how best to edit and present them in the book.

"We had a lot of false starts where we would agree on an approach and I would start working on the notes, then I'd start to feel like it wasn't working, like I was editing them too much," Leyne said. He then further consulted with Collison and they decided to edit things that were distracting, things that may look like typographical errors, and things that could make it difficult to read the texts, like apostrophes in the wrong place. They decided not to edit things like unconventional syntax, since that was authentic to Wilson's written voice. "Especially with her not around to approve any edits, we didn't want to have too heavy a hand," Leyne said.

Executing this plan got tricky, Leyne went on, as there were times when he wasn't sure whether Wilson had made an error or if it was her manner of expression. There were also spelling inconsistencies across the notes, like one geographic location on Haida Gwaii she spelled five or six different ways. Since place names can differ depending on Haida dialect and other factors, Leyne used Wilson's most spelled version for consistency, then provided the other spellings in a note to be transparent about the process. Leyne said at times he worried they were erring on the side of under-editing, then other times worried the notes were being over-edited. He paraphrased an *Elements of Indigenous Style* passage that says if an editor is too hands off, they are doing a disservice by not presenting Indigenous Peoples' writing in the strongest possible light. In the book, some of Wilson's notes were typeset, and others were scanned and incorporated so Wilson's words remain exactly as she wrote them.

Another consideration while editing *Glory and Exile* was the incorporation of Haida language. Leyne said that initially, the hope was to translate the titles of all fifty-one robes into Haida. Upon discussing with a Haida translator, it became clear how big of a task this would be, especially with many of the English-written titles not having direct translations into Haida. The translator, whose work on Haida Gwaii relates to language revitalization and language capacity, brought up questions of audience and the goal behind translating all the titles. “She very rightly pointed out to have the titles appear in Haida in the book would be symbolic more than anything, and it wouldn’t help anyone learn the language,” said Leyne. This part of the project got scaled back, and the titles of book sections were translated, instead of the numerous artwork titles.

A similar consideration came up when working on *Reside*, a forthcoming architecture book. An Indigenous architect was originally going to be featured, but decided against participating in the anthology. “She correctly determined that this book would not really be benefiting her community,” Leyne said, adding that this was a loss for the book, but made perfect sense. “Those two episodes have definitely stuck with me ... to be mindful of what the ask is, where people’s priorities are, and whether the idea is something that is good for our book, but is not as much of a benefit for the person we’re asking to do this work.”

### **Neil Christopher on audience and early consultation**

Neil Christopher co-founded Inhabit Media with Louise Flaherty and his brother, Danny Christopher. He is the English-language publisher and Flaherty is the Inuktitut-language publisher. Christopher is a settler who spent years working in Nunavut as an educator, author, and filmmaker. He has worked with many community members to record and preserve traditional Inuit stories, and promotes Northern stories and authors through his work at Inhabit. The company has recently ventured into book distribution under the name Inhabit Books.

Inhabit’s roots are in educational content and illustrated children’s books, but they occasionally publish Inuit art books. The company does not partner with galleries or other institutions to fund these publications, but is willing to take a financial loss on one or two books per year on titles they deem significant to the community. Sometimes those are costly art books. Their target audience is Inuit and Nunavummiut (people who live in Nunavut) first, but with art books, the goal is also to showcase Inuit art to the rest of Canada and the world.

Now, Inhabit’s educational publishing sister company Arvaaq Press is creating a series of art books geared towards Inuit children (7–10 years old) to pass on stories about the lives and art of

renowned Inuit artists, starting with *The Life and Art of Ningiukulu Teevee*, released in October 2023 in English and Inuktitut. These educational titles combine elements of children’s books and high-level art books. “You shouldn’t be teaching an art curriculum from another cultural perspective ... it’s so important to recognize cultural representations in art,” Christopher said. “We’re trying to get young kids to recognize these are Nunavut heroes.”

At Inhabit, consultation starts at the acquisition phase and titles are not accepted for publication unless people within the Inuit culture determine the project is valuable to the community. “It all goes to Louise—ultimately we’re representing her culture,” Christopher said. When a Nunavut story is pitched, Inhabit has connections in every Nunavut community to consult with and will ask questions like whether the story is based on traditional stories or aligns with their lived experience. While the company publishes contemporary reinterpretations of traditional stories, as a rule they will publish the original story first to ensure the traditional narrative is published prior to re-imaginings.

Inhabit publishes books from across Inuit Nunangat (where Inuit live), including books by authors from Greenland, Labrador, and Nunavik. Christopher said there has been a push for the company to publish authors from the Northwest Territories, but they don’t have the cultural knowledge to edit those books or to know which stories should and shouldn’t be published. They are currently working on creating an editorial board representing different groups within NWT to help review manuscripts and make publishing decisions: “We don’t want to do it unless we can do it well.” Neil said other publishers often come to them after a book is complete, requesting a “quick” cultural review, which the company no longer does. “We have a very short amount of time, we have Elders and knowledge holders passing away, we have language loss happening.” Especially if the book is for a southern audience and not for Inuit, it is not the company’s priority to review the work for the sake of checking a consultation box.

Inhabit is Inuit owned, but has many non-Indigenous staff and illustrators working on books. Christopher said some think this isn’t the best system because non-Inuit are involved, but Flaherty has told him she sees this as being part of reconciliation. “This is part of inviting other people and their talents to support our community ... they’re giving us a gift, they’re helping us reclaim and decolonize,” Christopher said, paraphrasing Flaherty.

## **Alan Sheppard on EPUBs for art books and gallery relations**

Alan Sheppard has been Goose Lane Editions' production editor for about six years. He is a settler and has worked on numerous Indigenous art books on the publisher's list.

Goose Lane publishes Indigenous art books for two audiences. Sheppard says the goal is to get them into the hands of the general art book audience, but they also want to make sure books are getting to Indigenous communities. Goose Lane has been publishing multilingual books, like *Wabanaki Modern* (English, Mi'kmaw and French) or *Itee Pootoogook* (English, Inuktitut), with part of the impetus being that the books may contribute in a small way to help preserve and strengthen Indigenous languages.

Goose Lane doesn't typically create EPUB versions of art books, which is the norm in the industry due to high time-related costs and the visual format not being as conducive to online viewing as text-based books. But they have ventured into EPUBs for Indigenous art books lately to make the books, which are typically expensive to purchase and ship, more accessible to Indigenous communities. *Qummut Qukiria!* (2022), which features Inuit and Sámi art from across the circumpolar Arctic, will be coming out in EPUB format in 2024 to make it more readily accessible throughout Sápmi and Inuit Nunangat. Goose Lane aims to create accessible reflowable EPUBs, meaning a significant amount of time goes into writing alt text for the hundreds of images in art books. Sheppard said doing this is a balancing act, since alt text is usually quite short, but for art images, the copy still needs to be sufficiently descriptive.

As a small publishing house, Goose Lane commissions most of its editing work to freelancers. Sheppard said they try to ensure there is an Indigenous editor involved when working on Indigenous art books, but this is not always possible. He said in the past, he's received feedback from Indigenous authors and curators saying they appreciated being paired with an Indigenous editor. "Non-Indigenous freelance editors are all pretty well-acquainted with *Elements of Indigenous Style*, but I think having lived experience gives you a different perspective on it." He said when hiring Indigenous editors, the editorial team tries to ensure that they are from the same region as the author or the art being featured.

Sheppard agreed that in a publishing partnership scenario, the publisher's ability to produce Indigenous art books properly can depend on the earlier work done by the gallery, and that it's important to ensure care is being taken by both parties when acquiring titles. This is why Goose Lane often co-publishes with galleries they already have good working relationships with. "I

think as publishers, we can use our knowledge of the industry and current norms and expectations to push galleries.” With *Wabanaki Modern*, for example, Sheppard recalled Goose Lane pushed the partner gallery to ensure a formal copyright agreement was drawn up with Elsipogtog First Nation, which aligns with Younging’s principle of correctly assigning copyright.<sup>38</sup>

### **Liz Barron on Indigenous art protocols and artist remuneration**

Liz Barron is a registered member of the Manitoba Métis Federation who has been self-employed in the arts for the last 25 years. She owns Raven and Associates Cultural Consulting, managed the Indigenous Protocols Program, and has worked for Canada Council of the Arts. Barron is one of the original founders of Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg, and project managed one of the largest Indigenous contemporary exhibitions in Canada, *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years*, which featured more than thirty Indigenous artists and had an accompanying catalogue published.

In 2021, Canadian Artists’ Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) published *Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts*, a guide for respectful engagement with Indigenous Peoples.<sup>39</sup> It provides information on existing legal protections for artists and ethical and moral considerations for working with Indigenous Peoples and using Indigenous cultural material. It is geared toward art institutions more than publishers, but calls on all businesses to develop policies to follow Indigenous Protocols (laws and customs) as they relate to the use of visual art and cultural expressions. “If there is an Indigenous component, you’d have to know what the protocols are around engaging those specific Indigenous artists, or how as a publisher, you’re going to ensure you are actually allowed to tell those stories and what that process would be,” said Barron.

The CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule is recognized as the national standard for payment of visual and media artists in Canada. These payments include royalties for exhibitions and reproduction of an artist’s work, such as in a book.<sup>40</sup> Barron says these are the minimum standards and galleries can, of course, pay artists more. She said the onus is on the gallery, and not on the publisher, to ensure Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts and

---

<sup>38</sup> Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*. Brush Education, 2018. pp 40.

<sup>39</sup> “Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts,” Canadian Artists’ Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens, 2021, <https://www.indigenousprotocols.art/resource-guide>.

<sup>40</sup> “CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule,” CARFAC-RAAV, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://carfac-raav.ca/about/>.

CARFAC-RAAV minimum requirements are being followed in the contract between a gallery and artist that precludes a book agreement. I make note of this in this report to recognize that artists' payments and royalties are a step removed from the publisher in Indigenous art book publishing, compared to traditional author-publisher deals.

### **Dempsey Bob on community ownership of stories**

Dempsey Bob is a renowned Tahtlan-Tlingit Northwest Coast carver. In April 2022, the catalogue *Dempsey Bob: In His Own Voice* was published to accompany his first solo museum exhibition. The book is based on extensive interviews with the exhibition's co-curator, Sarah Milroy, and presents the story of his life, family history, and career from his perspective. Bob, who has been creating Northwest Coast art for decades, described how difficult it was for Indigenous artists to get recognized, have their art shown, or receive grant funding when he started out. "We weren't even allowed to have stuff in museums or art galleries until the 80s," he said. "People don't realize we had to build that [Northwest Coast art] market ... we fought for that." The touring exhibition *Wolves* (named after his matriarchal clan) was the first time such a large number—over 100 pieces—of Bob's carvings, many of which belong to private collectors, were exhibited together.

Bob said he wanted the book published to recognize his teachers and his ancestors, including the long line of artists who came before him. He also wanted it to advance the art form, be a resource for teaching it, and provide a method of passing it on. "Art has to evolve—it's going to evolve—but it has to come from history and tradition," Bob said of the importance of keeping stories alive. This sentiment came from his grandparents: "They told me 'if I teach you, you got to teach our people.'"

In writing the book, Bob dictated stories to Milroy, who then edited them for print. When reflecting on working with non-Indigenous curators and publishers (Figure 1, in this case), he said he recognizes there's interest in Northwest Coast art and that many are knowledgeable on the topic, but it's not the same as personal experience. "I did my homework, I studied it, live with my people, and I learned our traditions, our songs," he said. "I understand it in a whole different way." If others want to represent his story accurately, Bob said they need to take time to get to know him and to have discussions. "You can't go to university to get a degree in what we know, it's a lifetime of learning that has been passed down."

Bob was selective with which stories to include in the book, knowing some should stay within his community. “After a while people will take them and they won’t be our stories.” Some stories, he recorded before realizing he wanted them omitted from the manuscript. “They belong to my sisters, they belong to family, and I didn’t want them out there,” he said. Instead, he gave the recorded stories to his grandchildren. He also didn’t want to discuss his family’s experience with residential schools in the book to avoid re-traumatizing them. “We lived that,” he said.

When asked about collaborating with a non-Indigenous publisher, Bob said every business has its own culture, and does things a certain way. “You can’t really change them,” he said.

### **Chris Labonté on book categories and artist-led publishing**

Chris Labonté is Publisher and President of Figure 1 Publishing. He is a settler and has worked in the book industry for more than two decades. Labonté worked on Indigenous art titles in his previous position at Douglas & McIntyre (D&M) and now leads a publishing program dedicated to producing high-quality illustrated titles, including books in Figure 1’s Indigenous Art and Culture category. He says the title of the category was chosen to illustrate how inseparable art and culture are in Indigenous communities. “I don’t think we quite understand it in Western culture in the same way, so that’s why it’s always been ‘art and culture,’ but maybe that’s not even accurate enough.” Figure 1 didn’t initially have a separate category for Indigenous art books, and Labonté said categorizing Indigenous books within traditional book categories has always been questionable, since artists and authors have differing opinions on whether Indigenous books should be in a stand-alone category or incorporated into general categories like art and photography.

Labonté said Figure 1’s publishing practices were naturally informed by things learned at D&M, but when launching the new company he wanted to approach publishing Indigenous books differently. Instead of the publisher being in control of the narrative, he wanted to collaborate with artists and take an artist-led approach: “Our entire model is predicated on partnership with individuals or institutions who themselves want to produce a book.” He said that more and more, rather than institutions deciding to publish a book on a particular artist, art institutions and publishers are ensuring artists have a voice at the table, “and not just a marginal voice.” The artist is there to establish what story will be told and how, and in recent cases especially, as exemplified in *Dempsey Bob: In his Own Voice*, the artist’s voice is the main one featured. “We’re there to help shape, advise, and augment [as publishing professionals], but we’re not there to just take the art and show it to the world without their involvement.”

Labonté said the shift to artists playing a more active role in the publishing process has been gradual, and acknowledgement that publishers don't necessarily know how it should be done is an important step. "Then we talk to Elders, and we talk to people who have worked in the space and have good connections with Indigenous artists to ask, 'what is a better way of doing this?'" Labonté said talking to people who have existing relationships with Indigenous artists has played a role in bridging understanding. "Then when you have more trust directly with those artists, you can actually work more closely with them and learn more."

Labonté said choosing the right co-publishing partners who are also consulting, listening, and having the right conversations is imperative when working on Indigenous art books. Figure 1 has partnered with institutions like MOA, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Haida Gwaii Museum, among others. "As a publishing company that promotes a distinct Indigenous art book publishing program, it is incumbent on us to evaluate the publication plans and processes of any potential gallery partners. In reality, he said, Figure 1 is often learning from gallery curators, and vice versa, throughout the publishing process.

#### **Karen Duffek on museum practices and "the bible"**

Karen Duffek, Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest at MOA, is a settler and works closely with Indigenous knowledge holders. She co-authored *Where the Power Is: Indigenous Perspectives on Northwest Coast Art* with Bill McLennan and Jordan Wilson (2021). The book features contemporary Indigenous knowledge holders' perspectives on historical Northwest Coast Indigenous objects and belongings. The book, in part, critiques museums' colonial histories and where all the "artifacts" came from, she said. "We wanted to really foreground that instead of thinking that critical discourse has no place in a beautiful 'art book' like that." A variety of perspectives were intentionally included, she explained, including Indigenous individuals who feel distanced from their traditions, some who were just starting to learn their ancestral languages, and others who were seeing pieces of art by family and community members for the first time during the interview process. "I think all of those things have been quite refreshing for me, for the participants and many of the readers, because there aren't too many art-oriented books that are doing that." To make the book, which retails for \$65 and weighs in at nearly three kilograms, more accessible, Duffek said forty copies were sent to Elders, First Nations cultural centres, schools, and other organizations, courtesy of the book's main funder, the Doggone Foundation.



Duffek said she has seen Indigenous art books like this serve the Indigenous artist community, in addition to appealing to tourists and art collectors. *The Transforming Image*, for example, is in demand by generations of Northwest Coast artists, she said, adding that many call it “the bible” due to its importance as a reference on Northwest Coast painting. “There’s such a need to have access to images of the old pieces.” In response to the demand for access to such images over time, Duffek said MOA recently released a new edition of the book (Figure 1 Publishing, 2022) and has been digitizing over 3,000 infrared photographs that are part of MOA’s Image Recovery Project on which the book is based. MOA will be launching a website to make them accessible to researchers and artists—an initiative she would consider a third ‘edition’ of the book, in a way. “The artists need to be able to zoom in on these images so that they can really study them,” she said.

## Chapter 6. Considerations

Based on the above conversations, these five considerations and questions can be used by publishers when acquiring, editing, and otherwise working on Indigenous art books.

### 1. How can stereotypes about Indigenous art be countered when publishing Indigenous art books?

As mentioned in Lisa Frenette's example of Inuit art stereotypes, it's important to identify and recognize past and ongoing stereotypes about Indigenous art forms to consciously counter them in publications. This comes back to the question of audience as well, since stereotypical art may be more recognizable for collectors, while disserving Indigenous audiences and artists.

### 2. How can Indigenous art books be made more accessible to Indigenous Peoples in general, or an artist's community specifically?

- Consider donating copies to community-based organizations and libraries.
- Consider offering a discount to Indigenous artists or community members.
- Consider creating an EPUB despite it being unconventional for the category, or costly.
- Consider creating a low-broadband website option for finding information about the book, buying it, or accessing an EPUB version.
- Ask artists where books should be available and be prepared to spend extra time and money getting copies to these regions.

### 3. What is being asked from an Indigenous person (translator or other), and is this work beneficial for them and their community, or symbolic for the sake of the book's optics?

As seen in Michael Leyne's example of initially requesting translations for all works in *Glory and Exile*, it's important to reflect on what is being asked and the purpose of the work, and to be prepared to scale back such requests when they don't benefit the Indigenous person doing the work, or their community.

**4. Has a potential co-publishing gallery, museum, or organization done meaningful consultation, collaboration, and reconciliation work leading up to a book partnership?**

As described by publishers who commonly partner with institutions, a gallery or museum's work preceding a publisher's work greatly impacts the resulting publication. This means publishers have a responsibility to ensure partner organizations are committed to reconciliation, and to query their approach. To this end, publishers can consider discussing potential projects with artists before signing book deals with partner institutions to increase communication and consultation from the beginning of the process.

**5. Can direct quotes and language used by the artist to describe their own work be used in a publication instead of relying on institutional language?**

As exemplified in the interview-based writing in *Dempsey Bob* and the handling of handwritten notes in *Glory and Exile*, publishers should pursue creative ways to share stories and information in the way Indigenous artists intend, and to recognize traditions of oral storytelling.

## Conclusion

By the end of these conversations, I felt that most considerations brought up were related to two questions: Who are these decisions being made for, and how can they be adjusted to benefit the artist's community more directly? Whether the issues involved are about translating portions of an English book into Indigenous languages, breaking stereotypes about Indigenous art, or ensuring Indigenous communities can access the book itself, publishers can ask themselves these two questions when working to decolonize their practices.

Another key takeaway is that in addition to *Elements of Indigenous Style* and other publishing-specific resources, publishers can familiarize themselves with resources and guides for art institutions like *Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts* to inform partnership decisions and advocate for Indigenous artists and authors if needed, despite being at arm's length from authors in art book deals.

These conversations were fruitful in terms of knowledge sharing and stimulating thinking about what publishers can do to help decolonize Indigenous art book publishing. This project is just a start of that conversation, and more research could be done into topics like designing, translating, printing, marketing, distributing, and selling Indigenous art books, to name a few.

I feel hopeful and energized by the conversations I had throughout this project. While framing this category of books as a space where two colonial institutions are at play, creating challenges, I want to make clear this also presents a unique opportunity for collaborative work towards decolonizing practices, subverting power dynamics, and centering Indigenous Peoples.

## References

- “A Timeline of Residential Schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” *CBC News*. May 16, 2008. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-timeline-of-residential-schools-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-1.724434>.
- “About BookNet Canada,” BookNet Canada. Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/about-us>.
- “Adult Books,” Inhabit Media. Accessed November 2, 2023. <https://inhabitmedia.com/books/adult/>.
- “Backgrounder: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act,” Department of Justice Government of Canada, April 12, 2021. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html>.
- Barron, Liz, Indigenous Protocols Program Manager. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 10, 2023.
- Bob, Dempsey, Tahtlan-Tlingit Northwest Coast carver. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot November 17, 2023.
- Camacho Henao, Natalia “Lessons of the Backlist: A Curatorial and Editorial Analysis of the Vancouver Art Gallery’s Catalogues 1967–2022.” Simon Fraser University, 2023. <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/35969>.
- “Canadian Art-Book Publishers Reach out to Galleries and Authors after U.K.’s Black Dog Publishing Declares Bankruptcy” *Quill and Quire*, March 19, 2018. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/canadian-art-book-publishers-reach-out-to-galleries-and-authors-after-u-k-s-black-dog-publishing-declares-bankruptcy/>.
- “CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule,” CARFAC-RAAV, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://carfac-raav.ca/about/>.
- Christopher, Neil, co-founder of Inhabit Media. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 17, 2023.
- Devine, Bonnie and Milroy, Sarah. *Early Days: Indigenous Art from the McMichael*. Figure 1 Publishing, 2023.
- Duffek, Karen, Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts and Pacific Northwest at the Museum of Anthropology, UBC. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 30, 2023.
- “Figure 1 Signs Art Book Distribution Deal with Prestel,” Figure 1 Publishing, Accessed February 2, 2016. <https://www.figure1publishing.com/figure-1-signs-art-book-distribution-deal-with-prestel/>.

- Frenette, Lisa, Mi'kmaw editor. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot, October 17, 2023.
- “Goose Lane Editions Winter 2024 Catalogue,” Goose Lane Editions. Accessed through [bnccatalist.ca](https://bnccatalist.ca) November 2, 2023.
- “Indigenous Art + Culture Archives,” Figure 1 Publishing, accessed November 1, 2023. <https://www.figure1publishing.com/category/indigenous-art-culture/>.
- “Indigenous Books in Canada: Subjects, Sales, and More,” BookNet Canada, June 20, 2022. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/research/2022/6/20/indigenous-books-in-canada-subjects-sales-and-more>.
- “Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts,” Canadian Artists’ Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens, 2021, <https://www.indigenousprotocols.art/resource-guide>.
- “Innovative New Services Born from the Bankruptcy of Douglas & McIntyre” *Quill and Quire*, September 11, 2017. <https://quillandquire.com/omni/innovative-new-services-born-from-the-bankruptcy-of-douglas-mcintyre/>.
- Labonté, Chris, Publisher and President of Figure 1 Publishing. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 24, 2023.
- Leyne, Michael, Editorial Director of Figure 1 Publishing. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 19 2023.
- “*Mohawk Warriors, Hunters & Chiefs | Kanien'kehá:Ka Ronteri:Ios, Rontó:Rats & Rotiia:Ner* (English/Mohawk),” Goose Lane Editions, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://gooselane.com/products/mohawk-warriors-hunters-chiefs-kanienkeha-ka-ronteri-ios-ronto-rats-rotiia-ner-english-mohawk>.
- Morgan, Jas, “A Culture of Exploitation: ‘Reconciliation’ and the Institutions of Canadian Art,” Yellowhead Institute, accessed October 21, 2023. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/a-culture-of-exploitation-reconciliation-and-the-institutions-of-canadian-art/>.
- Nordley Beglo, Jo “Canadian Art Publishing, 1990–1993: An Overview of Monographs and Exhibition Catalogues,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 13, no. 1 (1994): 19–26.
- Ritchot, Melanie. “Home and Away,” *Block Magazine*, September 2, 2021.
- Sandals, Leah, “Art Book Publishing in Canada Takes a Hit,” *Canadian Art*, accessed October 23, 2023. <https://canadianart.ca/essays/black-dog-publishing-bankruptcy-canada/>.
- Sheppard, Alan, Production Editor of Goose Lane Editions. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot October 18, 2023.
- Simeon, Kün Jaad Dana, Knowledge Keeper of Haida. Interviewed by Mélanie Ritchot, November 1, 2023.

“Taking Action towards Reconciliation in the Book Industry.” BookNet Canada, accessed August 26, 2023. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2021/6/21/taking-action-towards-reconciliation-in-the-book-industry>.

“*Tawâskweyâw ᑕᐱᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃᐃ / A Path or Gap Among the Trees*,” Art Metropole, accessed November 1, 2023. <https://artmetropole.com/shop/14651>.

“The Canadian Online Art Book Project,” Art Canada Institute, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books>.

Whyte, Murray, “Does Black Dog’s Bankruptcy Spell the End to Canadian Art Book Publishing?” *Toronto Star*, April 2, 2018. [https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/does-black-dog-s-bankruptcy-spell-the-end-to-canadian-art-book-publishing/article\\_9a0306d0-2949-55af-9422-26180fdc7407.html](https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/does-black-dog-s-bankruptcy-spell-the-end-to-canadian-art-book-publishing/article_9a0306d0-2949-55af-9422-26180fdc7407.html).

“*Wabanaki Modern | Wabanaki Kiskukewey | Wabanaki Moderne* (English/Mi’kmaw/French),”

*Goose Lane Editions*, accessed November 2, 2023. <https://gooselane.com/products/wabanaki-modern>.

Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*. Brush Education, 2018.