

The sky loves to hear me sing



Woodland Art in Transmotion



*The sky loves to hear me sing:
Woodland Art in Transmotion*

Works by
Norval Morrisseau
Andrea Carlson
Alan Michelson

&

Native Art Department International
(Maria Hupfield & Jason Lujan)

September 12 — October 29, 2024

List Gallery, Swarthmore College

As a community of learners at Swarthmore College, we acknowledge that our campus is situated in Lenapehoking — also known as the Land of the Lenape — past and present. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Indigenous people who stewarded it throughout the generations and who were driven from it by European and American colonizers. We commit to serve as responsible stewards of the land and to our shared, ongoing responsibility for community care. Consistent with Swarthmore’s commitment to social responsibility, we seek to build a more inclusive and equitable learning space for present and future generations through deliberate actions and collaborations.

No. 194. FRIENDLY SONG (c) (Catalogue no. 163)

Sung by WABEZIC'

VOICE ♩ = 116

DRUM ♩ = 116

(Drum-rhythm similar to No. 111)



Ci - cĭg ni - mĭ-no- ta - gwĭn



WORDS

Gi'cĭg..... The sky
Nimĭnota'gwĭn..... Loves to hear me

Woodland Native Art in Transmotion

Christopher T. Green

“The sky // Loves to hear me” is the translation of an Anishinaabe dream song recorded at the turn of the previous century by musicologist Frances Densmore and published in *Chippewa Music*, her lengthy study of Anishinaabe songs, singers, and dances.¹ Sung to Densmore by a man named Wabezic', an elder of the Pembina Band of Chippewa who married into the Red Lake Nation, the song is one of what Densmore identifies as “Friendly Songs” sung and drummed by visitors to demonstrate that they come as friends. The lyrics, “Gi'cĭg // Nimĭnota'gwĭn” in Anishinaabemowin, are thus an invitation to companionship and peaceful relations.

Gerald Vizenor, the eminent literary scholar and theorist of Native studies, understands the song to invite relations beyond the interpersonal. He completes Densmore's translation as “The sky loves to hear me *sing*” and calls the song a “heartened invitation to nature” for which the singer “listens to the turnout of the seasons, and then puts the words of his song directly to the wind and sky.” Beyond an invitation to friendly relations between groups of people, then, “The sky loves to hear me sing” is a call to relations with the other-than-human aspects of the world, the environment, and its varied inhabitant beings. It is, as Vizenor writes, a “a native tease of nature.”²

Such dream songs, for Vizenor, are “invitations to a world of natural motion” in which Native singers create visionary accounts of the world.³ “The sky loves to hear me sing” envisions a model for friendly reciprocal relations by implying that the singer does not just sing to the sky and the wind, but that the sky *loves to hear that song*, and actively responds to and takes part in this exchange with pleasure. Vizenor considers this, and other songs like it, to be vital, visionary revelations of natural motion, or a kind of unconstrained movement of bodies, ideas, and songs through time, place, and narratives—movement

that emulates the free motions and cycles of nature and the seasons. Songs and other narratives that envision and reveal such natural motion are emblematic of what Vizenor has coined *transmotion*, or “a spirited and visionary sense of natural motion and presence.”⁴ As an aesthetic theory, Vizenor postulates, transmotion provides a frame through which one can interpret the “modes, distinctions, and traces of sacred objects, stories, art, and literature” by Native creators. The theory of transmotion acknowledges their inherent sense of motion alongside the active and persistent presence and survival that he has called *survivance*.⁵

Taking its title from that same song, *The sky loves to hear me sing: Woodland Art in Transmotion* explores the rich potential of transmotion to form the basis of a way of looking, seeing, and analyzing Indigenous art and material culture. This exhibition draws on Vizenor's concept as the analytic framework for vibrant and dynamic forms of art and considers how movement and mobility coalesce visually as manifestations of Indigenous sovereignty and creativity across time. In so doing, this exhibition proposes an expansion of the dominant critical approach to Indigenous art, particularly in the contemporary field, for which critics, scholars, and curators have overly relied on Vizenor's essential concept of survivance without exploring his more explicitly aesthetic investigations. Transmotion, meanwhile, proposes that the sovereign assertion of movement through time, place, and visionary narrative can be visualized in concrete ways. This exhibition accordingly explores transmotion as an aesthetic theory and the capacity of images, styles, belongings, and artistic careers to contradict essentialized notions of place, belonging, and identity.

As a citizen of the White Earth Nation, many of Vizenor's writings and ideas are grounded in an Anishinaabe world view while remaining broadly relevant and applicable to Indigenous communities who have experienced similar cultural and socio-historical conditions. Accordingly, while transmotion as a concept is deeply pertinent for our under-

standing of global conditions of Indigenous cultural production, such as the contemporary art market and international exhibition circuit, this exhibition seeks to avoid overgeneralizations and instead considers how transmotion can serve as a useful framework for visualities that emerge from a specific place.⁶ Taking the Eastern Woodlands as an international and diverse region of shared environmental, cultural, and historic conditions, *The sky loves to hear you sing* uses transmotion as a frame through which to understand how dynamic aesthetic forms nonetheless maintain the capacity to reflect the specificity of Indigenous place-based knowledge.

The artists and works brought together in these pages and on view at Swarthmore College’s List Gallery reflect a range of mediums, forms, and tribal nations, including Anishinaabe, Haudeonsaunee, and Lenni Lenape artists and makers: Norval Morrisseau, Andrea Carlson, Alan Michelson, Native Art Department International (the collaborative partnership between Maria Hupfield and Jason Lujan), Nora Thompson Dean, Brent Michael Davids, and several not-yet-known Lenape and Haudenosaunee makers. The works by these artists are grounded in the different visual traditions of Woodland Native art, yet unmoored from entrenched ideological categories while roaming broad sites of aesthetic and historic inquiry. These artists explore and embody visual movement(s) throughout the international meeting places of the Eastern Woodlands, challenging static ethnographies, border regimes, and colonial prerogatives while asserting the right to artistic migration in its manifold manifestations.

The exhibition considers the ways that visual forms travel across temporal and geographic sites and features historic and contemporary works that demonstrate Indigeneity to be contemporaneous and mobile—not fixed and historic. These visionary forms are indicative of a continually evolving process that asserts both the sovereign autonomy and diversity of Indigenous peoples. Historic belongings, such as beaded floral whimsies, inlaid wooden boxes emulating quillwork, language lessons, and reproductions of wampum belts, are all

varied examples of Woodland aesthetics that reflect ancestral relations with place and environment. Such material expressions have been reconfigured and transformed into vibrant modernist forms in paintings, prints, and videos by the artists mentioned above, demonstrating the dynamic evolution of patterns and motifs over many generations.

Vizenor’s aesthetic theory of transmotion invites Native artists to respond not only to historic motifs and traditions, but also to contemporary materials and contexts. In distinct ways, the artists featured in *The sky loves to hear me sing* challenge essentialized notions of ethnicity and the stereotypes that have come to overdetermine contemporary Indigenous art. Against the false pretense of static cultural life, the most thrilling Indigenous art is understood for its capacity to *move* with its inherently vibrant and dynamic nature. Such art explores and embodies both physical and aesthetic movement throughout the Woodlands and reflects the artists’ vital and evolving aesthetic and personal investigations.

Visionary Motion

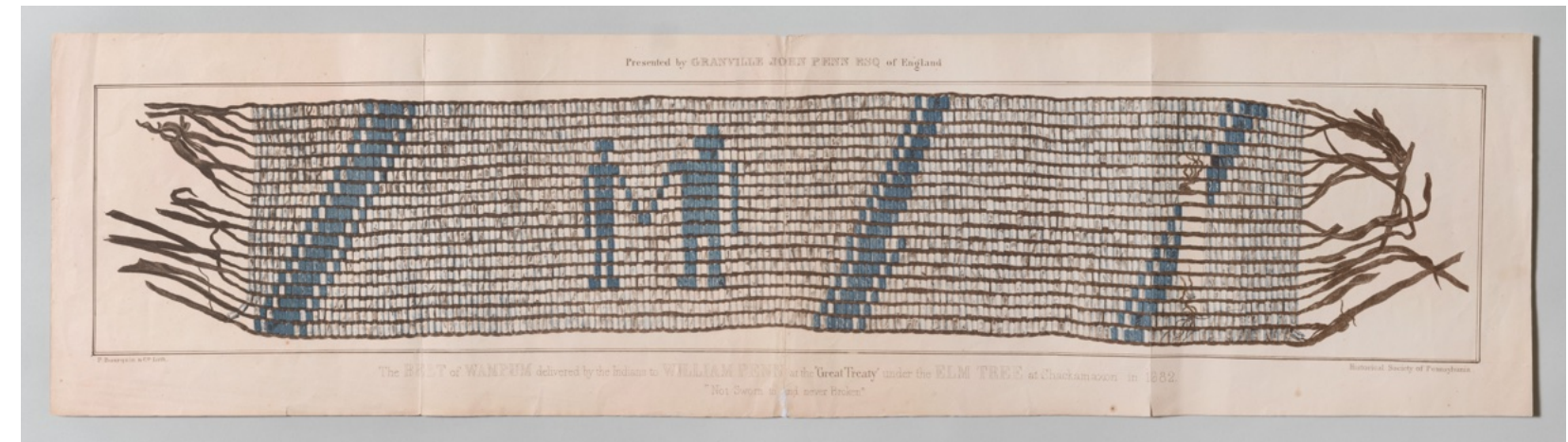
Vizenor’s concept of survivance—the assertion of an innovative, persistent, and active Indigenous survival and presence that resists sentiments of tragedy and the legacy of victimry—has been essential to analyses of contemporary Native American art.⁷ Yet, despite being underdiscussed in relation to visual art, Vizenor’s related concept of transmotion more thoroughly explicates a visual aesthetics of Indigenous sovereignty.⁸ First described in his book, *Fugitive Poses*, transmotion, “that sense of native motion and an active presence, is *sui generis* sovereignty. Native transmotion is survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty.”⁹ For Vizenor, survivance is an ongoing presence, while transmotion is a related assertion of sovereignty through the freedom of motion through both physical space and in the imagination.

Transmotion positions sovereignty as “tacit and visionary,” and as the right to real and metaphorical movement (not necessarily linear) across imagined boundaries and through time and ancestral territory.

As Vizenor describes in his essay in this catalog and elsewhere, transmotion offers an aesthetic theory through which to interpret visual art through the “traces of motion” similarly found in sacred objects, stories, and literature.¹⁰ Ledger art of the Plains is one of the first examples that Vizenor uses to demonstrate how visual art embodies transmotion. Visionary scenes of warriors and horses travelling across ledger pages communicate memory and consciousness and assert an active sense of sovereignty.¹¹ Plains narrative artists adapted visual forms to new materials and technologies of display in the face of colonial pressure; their adoption of colored pencils and ledger paper to continue their visual tradition of hide painting aligns with Vizenor’s definition of transmotion as a “visionary resistance to cultural dominance.”¹² This resistance is a claim to active presence and a sense of survivance by portraying the freedom of movement and motion. “Transmotion is the visionary

or creative perceptions of the seasons and the visual scenes of motion in art and literature,” Vizenor describes. “The portrayal of motion is not a simulation of absence, but rather a creative literary image of motion and presence.”¹³

Vizenor has deployed transmotion to great effect in exploring the genealogy of visual forms he calls *cosmototemic* art and narratives: ancient cave art and petroglyphs, as well as modern and contemporary Indigenous art works, that depict visionary scenes of natural motion, Native liberty, and presence.¹⁴ Cosmototemic arts “give rise to the theory of transmotion, an inspired evolution of natural motion, survivance and memory over time, and a sense of visionary sovereignty,”¹⁵ Vizenor writes, identifying the aesthetics of transmotion in the spatial movements of abstract shapes, patterns, and shadows of the arts ancestral artists. Vizenor has linked this ethos of cosmototemic art to modern Native painters, such as Oscar Howe, George Morrison, and Norval Morrisseau, whose works resist dominance, separation, and exclusion by the mainstream, as well as contemporary artists like Alan Michelson and Andrea Carlson.



F. Bourquin & Co., *The belt of wampum delivered by the Indians to William Penn at the "Great Treaty" under the Elm Tree at Shackamaxon in 1682*, c. 1857, lithograph, 36 x 8 ½ inches. Courtesy of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College

Transmotion can likewise serve to counter essentializing narratives about the work and careers of Indigenous artists working within contemporary international exhibition contexts. Vizenor deploys transmotion in a manner that situates motion and sovereignty explicitly outside of Westphalian conceptions of borders, boundaries, and territory. Accordingly, transmotion describes how creative Native acts and actors move in sovereign ways despite the imposition of national constructs and documents of control, such as passports and visas.¹⁶ Sovereignty, for Vizenor, is read beyond the concepts of diaspora, exile, or deterritorialization that typically structure conversations about global artistic movements. For Indigenous artists who frequently face outsider expectations that they adhere to a romanticized relationship to place and associated stereotypes, transmotion aligns with the realities of contemporary life and global circulation. The nomadic, circulatory, and transnational nature of the contemporary art world seems to run counter to essentialist readings of Indigenous art and identity that emphasize place-based land rights and locally-rooted relations. Yet transmotion as a concept emerges from the transcontinental migrations that are the basis of natural stories, dreams, and memories of creation and sustenance:

The presence of natives on this continent is obvious, a natural right of motion, or transmotion, and continuous sovereignty; in other words, natives are neither exiles nor separatists from other nations or territories . . . Native transmotion is an original natural union in the stories of emergence and migration that relate humans to an environment and to the spiritual and political significance of animals and other creations.¹⁷

Transmotion is the freedom of movement through physical as well as metaphorical and linguistic space. Therefore, transmotion exists outside of borders and categorizations, whether geographic, conceptual, or stylistic. As Vizenor notes of Oscar Howe, who in 1958 famously refused to be limited by

the Philbrook Museum’s definitions of what constituted “Indian art,” the movements of transmotion exceed *artistic* boundaries. Transmotion’s dynamic nature refutes such essentialisms while maintaining that land-based sovereignty can in fact be maintained through asserting the right to movement, travel, and trade.

The Eastern Woodlands

The free travel of goods, ideas, and people across the network that once extended throughout the hemispheric Americas is an example of what Vizenor calls “continental liberty.”¹⁸ And for millennia, the Eastern Woodlands—the deeply forested region between the Mississippi valley and the Atlantic Ocean, extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes and the boreal forests of the Canadian Shield—has been a crossroads of international movement, trade, and diplomatic relations. Present-day borders between the United States and Canada transect ancestral territories, but communities like the Mohawk



of Awkwesasne, a First Nation that straddles the St. Lawrence River, regularly cross such geo-political boundaries. Their assertion of the right to transmotion, or sovereign movement, reinforces the Eastern Woodlands as a place of ancestral bodily trajectories.¹⁹

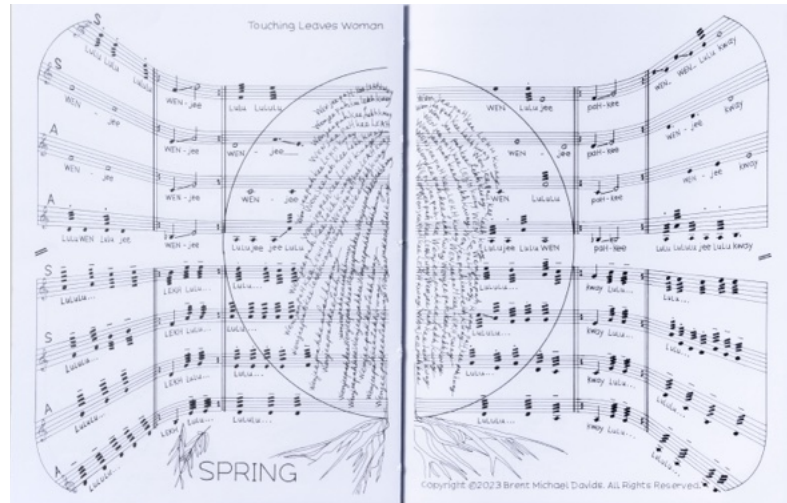
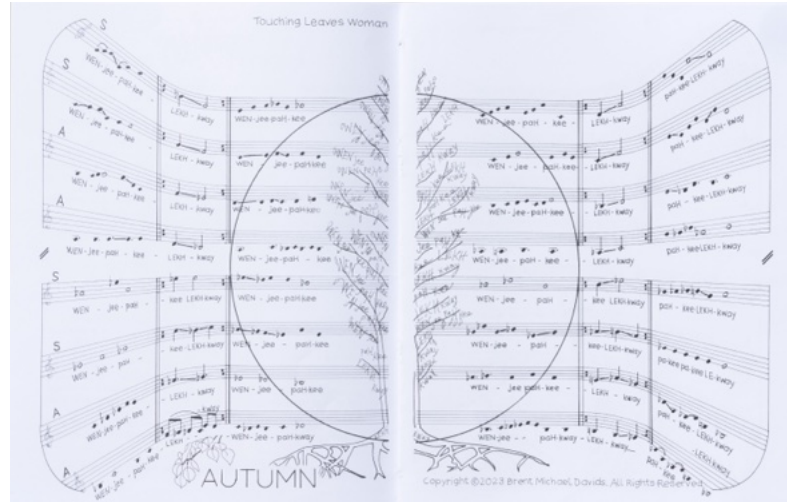
As Vizenor writes, “Natives have always been on the move, by chance, necessity, barter, reciprocal sustenance, and by trade over extensive routes; the actual motion is a natural right, and the tribal stories of transmotion are a continuous sense of visionary sovereignty.”²⁰ Scholars such as Ruth Phillips, Alan Corbiere, Jolene Rickard, David Penney, and many others have identified the Eastern Woodlands as a region full of such narrative, material, and aesthetic movements.²¹ Their work has traced art forms and meanings across times, media, and geographic strata within the Eastern Woodlands and beyond. Across Native North America, the exchange and trade of materials for artistic production, from shells to beads to tin jingle cones to ribbons and trade blankets, has always resulted in dynamic, hybrid forms. In the Woodlands in particular, this has manifested in extensive trade across waterways and overland trade routes, using vehicles such as birchbark canoes to rapidly spread stories, luxury goods, and innovative visual forms across international territories. When Europeans arrived and offered new forms of trade goods, such as glass beads, mirrors, the metal lids of snuff tins, and silver medallions, these items were quickly incorporated into Indigenous material traditions in order to operate within local world views and cosmological systems. George Hamell has identified this system as a “trade in metaphors” rather than the unequal exchange of capital that myths like the oft-told purchase of Manhattan for mere beads suggest.²²

Indeed, beadwork is an exquisite medium of transmotion. The trade of beads across oceans and territories followed extensive geographical movements, and the dynamic adaptation of beadwork across Woodlands aesthetic traditions speaks to the capacity of the medium for visual innovation. From shells and seeds to glass beads, from quillwork to ribbonwork, the visual

motifs of Indigenous decorative arts have travelled across medium and format. Early forms of beadwork and related design motifs appear on regalia, medicine pouches, and containers, and the post-contact incorporation of new trade materials resulted in innovative designs on beaded bandolier bags, birchbark boxes, and black ash fancy baskets. Such objects have been enmeshed in rituals of gathering, diplomacy, and kinship relations. Woodland material cultural practices and arts are, as Kevin Slivka notes, imbued with spiritual significance that is “constituted by bundles of relationships across time and place” in transmotive ways.²³ These bundles—objects or vessels of movement meant to be worn or carried—are resplendent markers of identity and heritage. Even tourist objects, beadwork, and other products made for the non-Native souvenir market in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries speak to the innovative movement of beadwork forms across material categories. For example, beaded whimsies by Haudenosaunee artists, such as stuffed pincushions and wall hangings, were produced as souvenirs for sale to non-Natives in popular locations like Niagara Falls, a site of rushing water and visiting tourists. These objects, made in the form of Victorian high-heeled shoes or tri-lobed hearts covered in delicate floral motifs and commemorative dates, demonstrate how Native artists adapted Woodland beadwork traditions to new audiences; in doing so, they also adapted to new cash economies that replaced subsistence ways of life.

The vitality and versatility of Woodland beading traditions shifted across time and tribal nations. Consider the *Penn Treaty Belt*, a wampum belt believed to have been made by Lenape women artisans to commemorate the Treaty of Shackamaxon that supposedly took place in 1682 between William Penn and Chief Tamanend. The treaty meeting, essential to the founding of the colony of Pennsylvania, was arguably more myth than factual event. But such wampum belts, made of precisely manufactured and arranged wampum (whelk and quahog shell) beads, are material records of diplomatic relations. As mnemonic devices, they need to be held up and spoken by the wampum keeper in order to be used to recall treaty agreements

8 Lenape artist, once known, wooden box with imitation quill work inlay, late-18th c., wood and metal, 12 x 8 x 6 inches. Courtesy of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College



and peaceful relations, as visualized by the two figures holding hands within the field of white and purple beads. For the Lenape makers, wampum was, and must still be, a living record.²⁴



classes and handmade craft wares through her mail-order catalogue business, Touching Leaves Indian Crafts. Through beadwork, jewelry, garments, instruments, and other offerings, Dean continued to create Lenape art and material culture that travelled along postal routes and distribution networks. Her language lessons were initially transmitted through cassette tapes (pages 28–29), but they can now be heard as the basis of the online Lenape Talking Dictionary.²⁵ Dean regularly travelled to Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in the 1970s and 1980s, visiting ancestral Lenapehoking with Leonore Hollander, a Quaker member of the Lenape Land Association and the Society of Friends Indian Committee of Philadelphia.²⁶

As Frances Densmore recorded, mnemonics for songs like “The sky loves to hear me sing” were often recorded on birch-bark scrolls in the form of pictographic imagery of interconnected figures, animals, and floral and geometric motifs. “The Indian picture preserves the idea of the song, while our printed page preserves the words which are supposed to express the idea but which often express it very imperfectly,” she noted of the challenges in transcribing Indigenous songs.²⁷ Brent Michael Davids (b. 1959), a composer and member of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community of Mohican and Munsee-Lenape, more deeply connects the visual and musical in *Touching Leaves Woman* (2023, opposite), a transformational score dedicated to Nora Thompson Dean. The visually rich score, composed in four parts, is centered around the form of a tree changing over the four seasons. Dean’s Lenape name fills the branches of the score’s tree as sung and spoken foliage. The piece, which visualizes the seasonal movement of music and language, is scored for four vocalists and birdroars, an instrument that is whirled around the performer’s head to produce imitation bird calls. As Vizenor notes of “The sky loves to hear me sing,” the song evokes a Native singer who “listens to the turnout of the seasons, and then directs the words of his song to the natural motion of the wind and sky.”²⁸ Dean’s Lenape name flows across the score, evoking the dynamism of the performance and capturing the natural motion of the seasons.

Nora Thompson Dean (Delaware Tribe of Indians, 1907–1984) was a Lenape cultural teacher and traditionalist from Bartlesville, Oklahoma who dedicated her life to preserving Lenape language and artistic forms. Named *Weënchipàhkkihèlèxkwe*, or Touching Leaves Woman in the Unami Lenape language, Dean offered Lenape language

10 Brent Michael Davids, *Touching Leaves Woman*, 2023, musical score. Courtesy of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College

Photographer once known, photograph of Nora Thompson Dean, ca. 1979. Courtesy of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College

The Woodland School



Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007) was one of the most influential Indigenous artists of the twentieth century. Combining Anishinaabe visual heritage and narratives with Euro-American modernist styles and materials, Morrisseau created an aesthetic language to express deep cultural knowledge in new ways for both his community and a non-Native mainstream audience and artworld. Morrisseau pioneered a style that would become known as the Woodland School for its dynamic fusion of Anishinaabe imagery and stories with expressive color and bold black interconnected lines of relational power. This energetic expression, which broke institutional and aesthetic boundaries, exemplifies transmotion for its mobile, dynamic deployment of visionary narrative and form.

Born in Fort William, Ontario, Morrisseau grew up with his maternal grandparents in Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (Sand Point First Nation). He was dually raised by the Anishinaabe stories and teachings of his grandfather, Moses Potan Nanakonagos, and the Catholic upbringing of his grandmother, Veronique Nanakonagos. He was sent to St. Joseph’s Indian Residential School in Fort William, Ontario at age six, where he faced sexual, psychological, and cultural abuse, but left after two years.²⁹

Morrisseau never received formal art training. Instead, he drew inspiration from the pictographic lexicon of Anishinaabe tradition, including ancient rock art of the Great Lakes and the birchbark scrolls of the *Midewiwin*, the Grand Medicine Society to which Morrisseau’s grandfather belonged. Encouraged by early patrons, Morrisseau adopted this imagery and combined it with the flat planes and delineated figures of modernist paintings by the likes of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. He created the style of art that would become the basis of the Woodland School practiced by other First Nation artists from the Great Lakes, such as Daphne Odjig, Alex Janvier, and Carl Ray. As Vizenor notes in his essay for this

volume and elsewhere, Morrisseau was a visionary artist who “created radiant scenes of natural motion” and whose “buoyant figures and patterns, meticulous curves and contours, abstract silhouettes of marvelous fish, totemic bears, eagles, wolves, and other birds and animals” exemplify the aesthetic of transmotion.³⁰ Vizenor has frequently turned to Morrisseau’s work, noting that he painted “contours of shamanic forms, transparent animals and creature transmutations,” and linking Morrisseau’s art to his visionary cosmototemic forebearers as a kind of dream or Legend painter as he is known within his community.³¹

Morrisseau’s late painting *Thunderbird and Canoe in Flight, Norval on Scooter* (1997, opposite) depicts numerous figures in transformation and transmotion. The scene is executed in his typical Woodland School style and filled with powerful *manitou*, or spirit figures central to Anishinaabe narratives and world views. Three human figures ride a brilliant *animikii*, or thunderbird, across the top of the painting. Their colorful bodies, wings, and limbs are compartmentalized and filled with internal organic structures and patterns typical of Morrisseau’s X-ray style, adopted from Northwest Coast formline design and Australian Aboriginal painting. The interconnected black outlines merge figures, creating a corporeal ambiguity. Below, two figures likewise fly, but in an orange birchbark canoe, their paddles pushing through an atmospheric river, led by a school of fish swimming rightward with the visual current across the canvas. The yellow-grounded landscape of the right half of the canvas is filled with mountains, trees, small blue pictographic ancestor figures, and long-stemmed plants brimming with bright berries. The berries transmute above into a constellation of starlike floating circles of power. In the bottom left corner, a split circle combines a moon and sun motif with a *miigis*, or cowrie shell, a recurring symbol of power in Morrisseau’s oeuvre and within Anishinaabe material belief.

The movement here is across spiritual realms of water, earth, and sky, and all of the figures, including various other-than-human beings, partake in this dynamic motion across

universal zones. Morrisseau's bright palette energizes the "bold hues of natures," as Vizenor notes.³² Morrisseau visually connects his subjects through the thick black contours of the composition and his coloration alike; reds, purples, blues, and bright cadmium yellow reflect across plants, animals, people, and landscape. These movements also take place across time; Morrisseau visualizes the simultaneity of contemporary and ancestral elements among the *manitou* and figures. A small car drives through the yellow landscape, an antennae pennant whipping back with the wind. And central to the scene is a small self-portrait of Morrisseau, driving directly ahead of ancestor figures in the motorized scooter he adopted after suffering a stroke in 1994. His unabashed use of motorized technology to aid natural motion is a survivant act, one of transmotion. And Morrisseau's refusal to limit his art to particular modalities, materials, or imagery demonstrates not only his modernity as an artist but also the dynamism of his practice.

Woodland Boogie Woogie

The style pioneered by Morrisseau is set into a different kind of motion by Native Art Department International (NADI), a long-term collaboration between Toronto-based artists Maria Hupfield (b. 1973) and Jason Lujan (b. 1971). NADI seeks to circumvent easy categorizations and their collaborative practice takes place through diverse forms, including actions, installations, videos, and, most recently, paintings that upend the static conceptions of contemporary Indigenous art that so often reduce and define artists within stultifying boundaries.

As a collective, NADI is transnational. Hupfield and Lujan began working and showing together in Brooklyn, New York, before moving to Toronto, Canada, where the artists now live and work. Lujan is of Chiricahua Apache and Mexican descent and from the dry desert city of Marfa, Texas, while Hupfield is from the forested lakeshores of Wasauksing First Nation, an Anishinaabe community on Georgian Bay, Lake Huron.

Despite this regional distance, their recent collaborations cohere on canvas, strategically deploying abstraction in the name of liberatory movement.

In paintings such as *Woodland Boogie Woogie #03* (2022, opposite), vortexes of flat color and black lines punctuate and intersect with curvilinear organic geometries. To the familiar eye, the work slowly reveals the vestiges of its inspiration from the forms of the Woodland School, to which the title refers. The color palette and stylistic motifs are recognizable from Morrisseau's work, and NADI describes that they abstract "the iconic colours and forms used by the Woodland School in order to expand the visual language and continue the cultural conversation."³³ Yet the thick black outlines, X-ray-style interiors, interconnecting spirit lines, and split circular purple *migis* forms have not just been adopted as pastiche. Rather, the style of Morrisseau and his Woodland School peers has been transformed through a collaborative painting process. Hupfield and Lujan focus upon and reconfigure the inspirational colors, forms, and other essential elements of the Woodland School style, submitting them to an abstracting operation. When working on their recent series of paintings, the artists take turns working on the same canvas, moving through a series of open-ended iterations until they are both satisfied with the result.

This painterly collaboration began with NADI's *Double Fake Double Morrisseau* series in 2021, for which the artists each painted one half of a canvas with quotations from Morrisseau paintings, blind to what the other was doing. In this play on the Surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*, the juxtaposition of contrasting segments of floral motifs and bisected transforming figures examines the plastic nature of the Woodland School style and the way it has been extracted and commodified by the Canadian art market. The alienation of Woodland painting from the Anishinaabe legends and cosmological worlds that serve as the movement's ontological foundation has of late been reinforced by high-profile reports of non-Native artists appropriating the Woodland style and the extensive forgery



market that exploit Morrisseau’s style and legacy for financial gain.³⁴ Hupfield and Lujan developed these dually-executed paintings as a means of navigating the commercial and increasingly commodified space of contemporary Indigenous art following their relocation to Toronto. The series and related works, thus consider how the Woodland School has transformed into both a style and signifier for something detached from Indigenous practitioners.

NADI paintings reflect a sovereign sense of self capable of transnational and transhistorical movements and inquiries. They also unmoor the Woodland School aesthetic and put it into conceptual motion. The swirling, visually strident abstractions encourage investigations of land-based knowledge, power-etched socio-economic relations, and personal explorations of formal and painterly processes. In works like *Double Shaman* (2023, page 31) from the *Hidden Shaman* series, the cropped details of shamanic (what Vizenor would call cosmototemic) figures are transformed and concentrated through aesthetic operations that have long been the purview of the Euro-American art and modernist institutions. The figures are extracted, condensed, and concentrated until only a swirl of bodily lines and colors exist around the central eye of the subjects.

The title of the *Woodland Boogie Woogie* series alludes to the legacy of Western abstraction, namely Piet Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-43), an homage to the pulsing movements and rhythm of New York City, which NADI also knows intimately and lived in for many years. These rhythms are expressed by Mondrian through his structured Neo-plastic visual logics. But rather than the grid of rectilinear divisions and primary colors that defined Neo-plasticism—a movement dedicated to the distillation of the natural universe into the pure plastic form through opposing binaries of horizontal and vertical lines and abstract color—NADI’s *Boogie Woogie* paintings are curving and expansive. Close looking reveals referents from Woodland paintings that populate the Anishinaabe and Woodlands natural universe: here and there,

one can make out a yellow eye, an *animikii* wing, or a berry. NADI’s co-painted canvases are communally self-determined, relying on close relations through which line and body emerge in swirling color. But instead of relying upon a Euro-American modernist approach to individualistic autonomy, these paintings embody mutually respectful relations, self-determination, and creative collaboration.

Waabigwan Composition, (2023, page 30), titled after the Anishinaabemowin word for flower, takes plants, berries, and the rich floral motifs of Woodlands art as its subject. Like in nature, nothing here is monotone, and this extension of the *Woodland Boogie Woogie* series evokes more than Morrisseau’s plant and berry motifs. It also responds to the broader Woodland School, including Daphne Odjig’s subdued pastels which frequently depict powerful female figures and matriarchal lineages. The essential referent is historic Anishinaabe floral beadwork, which Hupfield has explored in her own practice through creating sculptural felt constructions of bandolier bags and leggings, and which, like Morrisseau’s *Midewiwin*-derived imagery, connotes medicinal properties. Thus, NADI’s work abstracts and elaborates motifs that have already been adapted and transformed across centuries: first by creators of quillwork and beadwork, then through Morrisseau’s bold modernist paintings, then through NADI’s own swirling, abstract, conceptually unmoored, and transmotive compositions. Their paintings visualize the right to sovereign movement, real and metaphorical, across imagined aesthetic boundaries and treaty territories.

Rolling Lakeshores

Whereas NADI unfastens the Woodland style from essentialization and commodification through coauthored abstract operations, Andrea Carlson (Grand Portage Ojibwe/European descent, b. 1979) recontextualizes images to confront and reframe history as a battle for land and the ways

it is imagined. Her paintings and prints reproduce seemingly disparate images, objects, and textual references across recurring horizons and shorelines. Her referents meander through these visual territories as roving characters inquiring into the tension between forced colonial absence and the deeply etched presence of a land base.

In densely layered prints, such as *Exit* (2018, page 32) and *Anti-Retro* (2018, page 25), visual referents move across these turbulent landscapes. Diverse images—including mica, hand, and talon forms disinterred from ancient Woodland earthworks; horses and cowboys; masks from the 1962 exploitive documentary film, *Mondo Cane*; shells such as *miigis*; bent land-marker trees; and Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Oaks* project—fill these prints to draw attention to histories of erasure and dispossession. Many of the objects and references evoke the movements that have taken place in stories and migrations across ancestral territories. Other objects, such as those in *Anti-Retro*, recall the violence against Indigenous communities inherent in Western films or, as in *Exit*, the destruction of Indigenous monuments and earthworks through the construction of highways like I-94. Throughout, Carlson examines the settler impulse to erase past histories in order to make long-inhabited land appear otherwise unoccupied when taken over, redeveloped, and consumed.

Carlson’s works are frequently organized around a consistent horizon line. Some of these landscapes are based on the Lake Superior shoreline and her home in northern Minnesota, *Gichi Bitobig*, or “Great Double Bay,” in Ojibwemowin, also known as Grand Marais. Other landscapes are imaginary. Her play of shifting, layered imagery unfolds to the viewer over time. She builds her compositions gradually through multiple layers, evoking temporal and geological strata. “Land changes, it has to change,” Carlson declares, and her prints contain not only symmetries, but also resplendent variety, shifting “like the wake behind a boat or waves on a lake.”³⁵ The prints organize space, but also break up static and stereotypical depictions of land, peoples, and cultures. The shining mica hands in *Exit*,

for example, printed with a pigment that contains mica silicate dust, are held up as if to indicate “STOP.” Pictorially, they interrupt the linear recession into the horizon line and deny the viewer easy entry into the visual space, suggesting these layered landscapes require permission, or at least contemplation, to access.

For Carlson, printmaking is a medium that can be responsive to the fear of the loss of land, life, and livelihood that undergirds Indigenous communities. In their seriality and multiplicity, prints are resilient to loss and counteract acts of dispossession and erasure.³⁶ As she recently described for the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, “I use the iteration to give it some movement, to give it a multiple existence in the same space. You can’t hold it all in your head at the same time. You are forced to make decisions with what you are looking at in a way where you are not able to possess it all at once.”³⁷ Her landscapes are thus what scholar Kate Morris describes as “anti-invitational”—layered with imagery that is neither easily digestible nor accessible to occupation by the viewer.³⁸ Indeed, not only do the prints unfold over time, but Carlson sometimes embeds private communal meanings within her work, intended only for insiders.

In her new print, *Rolling Head* (2024, page 33), Carlson references a figure common to Woodlands and Plains narratives, a woman from the early history of the world known as “Rolling Head,” who was one of the first victims of domestic violence on Turtle Island. After being discovered committing infidelities with a snake or, in the Ojibwe version of the story that Carlson knows, a woodpecker, the woman is decapitated by her husband. Her head continues to roll through the world, chasing her children, either to be with them in an act of endless love or, in some tellings, out of a cannibalistic hunger to consume them.

Two headless female forms fill the center of the print in front of turbulent lake waters: the *Nike of Samothrace* and the blue imprint of a woman’s nude body from Yves Klein’s

Anthropométries series (1960), a “living paintbrush.” The bodies frame both the name, “ROLLING HEAD,” and the words “Orion just outside my window” at the center of the print. The textual reference to the Orion constellation, named after another mythical perpetrator of sexual violence against women, but nonetheless heroized in the stars, notes that even the sky is full of imagined misogynists.³⁹ Carlson thus deploys varied imagery to show that the origins of such narratives of violence against women can be located anywhere, even as they follow Indigenous communities into the present. Yet two woodpeckers also fly forth from the bodies as if emerging from their necks. Ecologically, woodpeckers are known as healers for their ability to quickly and efficiently clear invasive insects from stands of trees. Here, their wings echo those of Nike and the out-flung arms of the headless blue *Anthropométrie*, suggesting the possibility of freedom or an escape from such cycles of violence.

In prints like *Rolling Head*, Carlson is thus engaged in a form of storytelling that takes place across narrative and temporal space, moving through cultural referents to find a shared language. Her approach to visual space and itinerant art historical motifs match pictorial and narrative movement. As Vizenor notes in this catalog, “Carlson creates great layers of conceptual scenes, silhouettes of cultural absence and presence, and converted landscapes of time, space, and course of memories.”⁴⁰ Images are redeployed to new memorial functions as their place in such narratives shift conceptual positions. Thus, the shifting nature of Carlson’s visual treatment of images and their layers are, as she describes, “alive and ever-changing or ever shimmering.”⁴¹

The shimmer of image is much like the shimmer of light on her roiling waters. As Vizenor further notes, this shimmering optical and conceptual effect is rooted in a relationship to her home and connected to the influence Carlson has described from the Anishinaabe painter George Morrison, whose later abstract canvases were also organized around a constant horizon line. Vizenor describes that Carlson “was swayed by the ab-

stract expressionism and the spectacular shimmer of horizon lines in later paintings by George Morrison” and she “creates conceptual layers of abstract horizons with a sense of Native memories and futurity.”⁴² Whereas Morrison’s shimmering horizon lines create a sense of visual movement and endless space through their layers of color, Carlson’s horizons present a dense optical field of shifting images that challenge the viewer to work through tumultuous visual and cultural relations to locate her future visions.

Carlson’s imagined futures are set up in contrast to the colonial impulse to consume and replace Indigenous culture. Carlson’s *VORE* series, begun in 2008, considers the idea of cultural cannibalism as “a metaphor for the assimilation and consumption of cultural identity.”⁴³ This idea of cannibalism and “consuming the other” is linked, for Carlson, to assimilating Indigenous people “into the colonized body” through institutions like boarding schools, where language and culture are forcibly removed in favor of alleged “civilizing” programs targeting communities who have historically been accused of “cannibalism and savegry.”⁴⁴ Vizenor provides the series an Anishinaabemowin name, *wiindigoo*, for the winter cannibal monster from Algonquian lore.

Cultural consumption is the subject of Carlson’s painting, *New Shroud* (2024, page 27). There, two moose quoted from an early Norval Morrisseau work meet head-on, their outlines filled with a complex multicolor pattern of chevron and diamond motifs that references arrow or *l’assomption* sashes worn by Anishinaabeg and Métis in the nineteenth century. Like the “dazzle” camouflage used to hide war ships during the First and Second World Wars, the pattern shrouds other figures within the moose’s silhouettes. Bodies and skeletal forms seem to emerge, disappear, and writhe within the shimmering optical complexity of the patterning, contesting for visibility.

Carlson states that she’d “like to dazzle folks. Things that are challenging to me, things that are hard to explain or frustrating are the source of much of my creativity.”⁴⁵ The titular shroud

here of dazzling camouflage pattern is a reference to layers of cultural cannibalism that Carlson sees linking Morrisseau and the Woodland School and false claims of Métis identity playing out in northeastern Canada and the United States. Like NADI, Carlson sees the mass market of Morrisseau forgeries and the use of the Woodland style by non-Native artists as another way in which settler society has commodified and consumed Anishinaabe art and culture in a cannibalistic act. Similarly, the claim to indigeneity through false claims to Métis status threaten Indigenous sovereignty through acts of becoming. Appropriately, then, cannibal figures are hidden, or shrouded, beneath the visual field of pattern. The leftmost figure is lifted from an image of *The Cannibal*, a 1st century Roman sculpture of a youth shown biting the limb of another now-lost figure with whom he is quarrelling. The other figure is based on German sculptor Leonhard Kern’s *Menschenfresserin* (*Female Cannibal*, c. 1650). Both of these figures appear in another VORE work from 2024 titled *Perpetual Genre*, but here they have been altered with abstracted forms (including



architectural plans) that emerge from their backs like monstrous appendages. Such past works have used similarly patterned blankets as “showcases” and framing devices for the “opportunistic, gaping-mouthed predators [that] congregate on the banks.”⁴⁶ Here, like in her prints, the shroud of optical pattern refuses easy entry for the viewer. Unlike her prints, though, the painting is singular. With Carlson, then, there is an irony to the “uniqueness” of painting as a medium being used to comment on the forging, copying, and consuming of Indigenous art and identity—what Vizenor identifies as an element of “cultural and museum mockery.” There is a vulnerability to that singularity of painting, though, and Carlson ultimately seeks to move the viewer toward justice.

Walking the Treaty Line

For over thirty years, Mohawk artist Alan Michelson (Six Nations of the Grand River, b. 1953) has developed a critical site-specific practice that investigates, unearths, and retrieves the repressed colonial histories of local landscapes. His installations and multi-media works frequently combine historical documents, maps, found footage, and panoramas, often projected onto sculptural or materially loaded surfaces in order to call attention to the truths buried within the strata of place. In his new video installation, *Ye hurry walk* (2024, pages 4, 21, 36), Michelson applies this critical approach to the founding myth of Pennsylvania, the 1683 Treaty of Shackamaxon between William Penn and Chief Tamanend of the Lenni Lenape, and the ways that this colonial origin legend was warped to justify the unscrupulous actions of Penn’s sons in the infamous Walking Purchase.

The video begins with the famous oil painting depicting the agreement, *Penn’s Treaty with the Indians* (1771-72) by Benjamin West, the prominent British-American artist born in Springfield (now Swarthmore), Pennsylvania, and whose historic birthplace is located on Swarthmore College’s

campus.⁴⁷ It is projected onto an off-white antique wool blanket that matches the dimensions of the original canvas. The stitching and draping of the blanket lend a physical presence and subtly soften the surface of the projection, as if in a dream or vision. The painting depicts the legendary meeting between Penn and various Lenni Lenape figures under the Treaty Elm of Shackamaxon, an event arguably more myth than fact, as little in the record supports a singular treaty signed by Penn in 1682 or 1683. Indeed, West took many liberties in his depiction of the diplomatic gathering of Quaker, Lenape, and British merchants said to be cementing what Voltaire called “the only treaty never sworn to, and never broken.” The Lenape are depicted wearing and wielding a smorgasbord of inaccurate regalia, clothing, hairstyles, and belongings lifted from studio props and illustrations of other Indigenous peoples.

In the video, the West painting is slowly taken over by historic documents that fade in and out of view, including the land charter granted to Penn by King Charles II and a circa 1710 map depicting “the Improved Part of the Province of Pennsylvania [sic].” These documents of Quaker land claims and the assertion of a gridded urban plan onto the landscape, manifesting the famous “Portraiture of the City of Philadelphia” designed by surveyor Thomas Holme for Penn in 1683, announce the building rush that is already taking place in the background of West’s painting as new structures rise of the shoulders of the treaty makers.

Over time, the Lenape figures in the video are cut and washed out of the painting. Michelson fills the neatly excised contours of their silhouettes with historic script and signatures. This writing belongs to the handwritten deed of the 1737 Walking Purchase, a land swindle in which William Penn’s sons, John and Thomas Penn, tricked the Lenape out of 1.2 million acres of land north of Philadelphia. The fraudulent deed, falsely representing an old unsigned treaty draft from 1686, claimed that the Penn family was owed all the land in which a man could walk in a day and a half. When four Lenape sachems, said to

include Lappawinsoe, Tishcohan, Nutimus, and Menakihikon, agreed to acknowledge the purported treaty, the Penns hired the three fastest men in the colony to run a straight-line relay at marathon speeds, tripling the amount of land covered in that time. Despite protestations and appeals to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy to intervene, the Lenape were forced to vacate the territory.

Within the shadowy outlines of the painting’s Lenape figures, Michelson then projects a roving satellite view of the land taken in the Walking Purchase as it appears today, an aerial panorama that moves northward from Wrightstown, Pennsylvania to the town of Jim Thorpe. The greenery of forested landscapes is punctuated and overtaken by yellow farm fields, strips of grey highways, and the black-and-white grids of residential and industrial developments and parking lots. The bird’s-eye views offer another perspective on how the ideology of settler colonialism manifests itself over time: it is a top-down view of what the buildings being erected in the background of West’s painting will become, as the land is further and further developed and ordered according to the rectilinear grid seen in the 1710 map of the planned colony. The digital artifacting of the satellite imagery turns the landscape into discrete pixels, digital beads that can be seen as units of exchange for a deceitful land grab.

The work’s title, *Ye hurry walk*, is from the name given by Lenape interpreter Moses Tetemie for the Walking Purchase, or “what ye Indians call ye hurry walk.”⁴⁸ “On paper it is a walk, but in actuality they yield to the hurry,” Michelson notes of both the Walking Purchase and the colonial expansion of the United States as it unfolded over time. “In the end, it is not a walk in the park, it is a land rush.”⁴⁹ By projecting this land grab onto a blanket, an item of diplomatic exchange that is the focal point of West’s painting and depicted as being offered to cement the Treaty of Shackamaxon, Michelson confronts the viewer with the ludicrous proposition of trading land for wool, beads, or any other material wealth incomparable to the value of ancestral territory. *Penn’s Treaty* was itself commissioned from West, an

already acclaimed artist who would later become president of the Royal Academy in London, by Thomas Penn as one of many attempts to deflect criticism regarding their mismanagement of the colony and a land theft that was controversial even in its own time. Michelson calls attention to the role of West’s famed history painting as a work of colonial propaganda, entering it into the material—and colonial—record. And while the Treaty of Shackamaxon and Walking Purchase were between the Quakers and the Lenape, Michelson’s approach to this subject also reflects on the complex relationship of his own Haudenosaunee heritage to the Lenape and Lenapehoking. Around the time of the Walking Purchase, William Penn’s sons invited Haudenosaunee leaders to Philadelphia and granted them land as a site upon which to build diplomatic fire, known as Wampum Lot, in order to leverage them as allies in support of their continued land grabs. This paid off when the Haudenosaunee later sided with the Penns against the Lenape appeals for aid regarding the Walking Purchase grievance, though the complex international Haudenosaunee, Lenape, and British-American relations in the Woodlands would not remain static.⁵⁰

Michelson puts West’s painting into motion, unmooring it from a fixed, propagandistic telling of Pennsylvanian history. He puts the painting, its encrustation of political myths, and frozen-in-time stereotypes into visual and historic motion, shifting the ways such histories can and should be remembered. Vizenor has accordingly described Michelson as one of a select group of artists who create “scenes of natural motion, shamanic figures afloat, and transparent animals in the collage of ancestral remembrance and survivance.”⁵¹ And when Michelson excises the Lenape figures from the painting, he does not leave them empty, like husks. Rather than an absence, these silhouettes are filled, are set into motion, and become like shadows. Vizenor has theorized that shadows “are a natural presence in stories and artistic scenes. Shadows reveal a vital motion, visionary and animate, and create a sense of presence. The Anishinaabe word *agawaatese*, for example, is translated as a shadow of flight, a totemic image of presence, not the mere

absence of light, or a passive cast of the source. The traces of shadows are a presence in stories and art.” Michelson’s silhouettes of Tamanend, Lenape warriors, and women and children are indeed given a *shadow of flight* as the landscape moves through them, or rather as their shadows are filled with the movement of flight across and over the landscape. Michelson traces the path of the Walking Purchase, but, in so doing, he reaffirms the potential of Native perception to assert sovereignty through such movement.



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Endnotes

¹ Frances Densmore, “Chippewa Music,” *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 45 (1910), 204.

² Gerald Vizenor, “Haiku Traces,” in *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 263.

³ Gerald Vizenor, “Presence in the Book,” *World Literature* (May/June 2023), 44-45.

⁴ Gerald Vizenor, "Literary Transmotion: Survivance and Totemic Motion in Native American Indian Art and Literature," in *Twenty-First Century Perspectives on Indigenous Studies: Native North America In (Trans)Motion*, edited by Birgit Däwes, Karsten Fitz, and Sabine N. Meyer (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 18.

⁵ Vizenor, “Literary Transmotion,” 17.

⁶ On transmotion and global contemporary Indigenous art, see Christopher T. Green, "Retracing colonial choreographies in contemporary Native American art," in *Art and migration: Revisioning the borders of community*, edited by Bénédicte Miyamoto and Marie Ruiz (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2021), 88-112.

⁷ Gerald Vizenor, ed. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

⁸ Transmotion has been engaged by scholars primarily in the field literature, though some recent studies of visual arts, dance, and performance have drawn upon the concept. Mique’l Dangeli, for example, has examined what she terms the “transmotion of protocol” in Northwest Coast dance as a process of negotiating and asserting protocol before movement. She notes that "dancing sovereignty is a practice of survivance where the transmotion is movement, song, and oratory enacted through negotiations of protocol." Mique’l Dangeli, “Dancing Sovereignty: Protocol and Politics in Northwest Coast First Nations Dance,” (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia 2015). Kevin Slivka further examines transmotion in Anishinaabeg arts and material cultural practices. See Kevin Slivka, “Places of Transmotion: Indigenous Knowledge, Stories, and the Arts,” *Art Education*, 69, no. 5 (2016), 40–48. For transmotion in photography, see Alison Turner “Photos in Transmotion: Images of Survivance in Ledfeather,” *Transmotion* 8, no. 2 (2023), 1–26.

⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁰ Vizenor, “The Unmissable: Transmotion in Native Stories and Literature.” *Transmotion* 1, no. 1 (2015), 65.

¹¹ Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 178-79.

¹² Vizenor, “The Unmissable,” 65.

¹³ Vizenor, “The Unmissable,” 69.

¹⁴ Gerald Vizenor, “Native Cosmototemic Art,” in *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, eds. Greg A. Hill, Candice Hopkins, and Christine Lalonde (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2013), 42-52.

¹⁵ Gerald Vizenor, “Native Cosmototemic Art,” 42-43.

¹⁶ Tol Foster, “Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies” in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008). 265–302; J.D. Miles, “The Postindian Rhetoric of Gerald Vizenor,” *College Composition and Communication* 63, no. 1 (2011), 44.

¹⁷ Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 181-83.

¹⁸ Vizenor, “Native Cosmototemic Art,” 51.

¹⁹ In this way, Vizenor’s concept of transmotion aligns closely with Jolene Rickard’s concept of visual sovereignty. See Jolene Rickard, “Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensor,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 465-86.

²⁰ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press., 1999), ix.

²¹ Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998); David Penney, ed., *Great Lakes Indian Art* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1989); Jolene Rickard, *Indigenous and Iroquoian art as knowledge: in the shadow of the eagle* (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1996); David W. Penney and Gerald McMaster, *Before and After the Horizon: Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, 2013); Jolene Rickard, Trudy Nicks, Ruth Phillips et al., *Across Borders: Beadwork in Iroquois Life*, travelling exhibition organized by the McCord Museum, Montreal, and Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, NY, June 18, 1999-October 13, 2002; Gerry Biron, *A Cherished Curiosity: The Souvenir Beaded Bag in Historic Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Art* (Saxtons River, VT: privately published, 2012).

²² George Hamell, “Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads,” in *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference*, edited by Charles F. Hayes (Rochester, NY: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1983); Joe Baker, Hadrien Coumans, and Chelsea Kimura, “Myth of the Purchase of Manhattan,” in Joe Baker et al, *Lenapehoking: An Anthology* (Lenape Center; Brooklyn Public Library, 2022), 23-37.

²³ Kevin Slivka, “Places of Transmotion: Indigenous Knowledge, Stories, and the Arts,” *Et Education* 6, no. 5 (2016), 43.

²⁴ Kerr Houston, “Re-reading Wampum: The Penn Treaty Belt and Indeterminate Iconographies,” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.17266>.

²⁵ The Lenape Talking Dictionary, <https://www.talk-lenape.org/>.

²⁶ Leonore Hollander Papers, SFHL-RG5-329, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

²⁷ Densmore, “Chippewa Music,” 15.

²⁸ Vizenor, “Literary Transmotion,” 18.

²⁹ On Morrisseau’s art and life see Greg Hill, *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006); and Carmen Robertson, *Norval Morrisseau: Life and Work*, Art Institute of Canada, 2016, <https://www.aci-iac/art-books/norval-morrisseau/>.

³⁰ Gerald Vizenor, “Native Art and Visionary Motion: Rock Art Shamans, Cubism, and Expressionism,” in *The sky loves to hear me sing: Woodland Art in Transmotion* (Swarthmore, PA: The List Gallery, 2024), 24.

³¹ Vizenor, “Literary Transmotion,” 24; “Native Cosmototemic Art,” 49.

³² Vizenor, “Literary Transmotion,” 24.

³³ Native Art Department International, “Woodland Boogie Woogie 6,” Projects, Native Art Department International, accessed August 20, 2024, http://nativeartdepartment.org/pages/woodland_boogie6_markham.html.

³⁴ The Canadian Press, “Toronto gallery cancels exhibit of white artist’s paintings over complaints of cultural appropriation,” *National Post*, May 7, 2027, accessed August 20, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/toronto-gallery-cancels-exhibit-of-white-artists-paintings-over-complaints-of-cultural-appropriation>. On the ongoing investigations into Norval Morrisseau forgeries, see Luc Rinaldi, “The ‘Multi-Multi-Multi-Million-Dollar’ Art Fraud That Shook the World,” *The Walrus*, April 5, 2024, accessed August 20, 2024, <https://thewalrus.ca/norval-morrisseau/>.

³⁵ Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, “Andrea Carlson: Shimmer on Horizons,” 2024, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 4:57, <https://vimeo.com/994132402>.

³⁶ Andrea Carlson, communication with the author, November 29, 2023.

³⁷ Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, “Andrea Carlson: Shimmer on Horizons.”

³⁸ Kate Morris, *Shifting Ground: Landscape in Contemporary Native Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

³⁹ Andrea Carlson, communication with the author, August 9, 2024.

⁴⁰ Vizenor, “Native Art and Visionary Motion,” 27.

⁴¹ Noah Berlatsky, “How Artist Andrea Carlson Heals Landscapes By Dismantling and Reassembling Them,” *Observer*, August 13, 2024, <https://observer.com/2024/08/interview-artist-andrea-carlson-shimmer-on-horizon-mca-chicago/>.

⁴² Vizenor, “Native Art and Visionary Motion,” 27.

⁴³ Andrea Carlson, “An Artist Statement on VORE Works,” Andrea Carlson (Blog), March 27, 2017, <https://www.mikinaak.com/blog/vore-works>.

⁴⁴ Berlatsky, “How Artist Andrea Carlson Heals Landscapes.”

⁴⁵ Andrea Carlson, quoted in “Meet the Artist: Andrea Carlson,” *Made Here Minnesota*, August 4, 2014, <http://madeheremn.org/blog/meet-artist-andrea-carlson>.

⁴⁶ Andrea Carlson, “An Artist Statement on VORE Works.”

⁴⁷ This connection to the local site of the exhibition is a key element of Michelson’s work: “My work is very much grounded in the local, in place, and place can be fraught when you’re Indigenous.” Alan Michelson, quoted in Alan Michelson and Chrissie Iles, “Alan Michelson History Is Present: A Conversation with Chrissie Iles,” *Aperture* no. 240 (2020), 101.

⁴⁸ Steven Craig Harper, *Promised Land: Penn's holy experiment, the Walking Purchase, and the dispossession of Delawares, 1600-1763* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2006), 46.

⁴⁹ Alan Michelson, communication with the author, September 12, 2024.

⁵⁰ For example, at the end of the eighteenth century the Haudenosaunee of present-day Six Nations of the Grand River would host Lenape refugees fleeing the violence of the American Revolution. Such complex relations have previously been examined by Michelson, as in his installation *Midden* (2021) which reflects on Lenape ecological relations and presence in New York Harbor and incorporates a recording of Akwesasne Mohawk singers performing the stick dance, also known as the Delaware skin dance, a song and dance gifted to the Haudenosaunee in recognition of their kindness in taking them.

⁵¹ Vizenor, “Native Cosmototemic Art,” 51.

⁵² Vizenor, “Literary Transmotion,” 20. See also Vizenor, “Native Cosmototemic Art,” 42.

NATIVE ART AND VISIONARY MOTION Rock Art Shamans, Cubism, and Expressionism

Gerald Vizenor

The creative scenes of visionary motion, or *transmotion*, in Native abstract expressionism, cubism, surrealism, futurism, resistance and ironic portrayals are modes of survivance that outwit treaty separatism, churchy censors, and conservative museum curators.¹

The concept of *transmotion* is evident in petroglyphs, the silhouette of spirits, shamanic gestures, and the natural motion of totemic animals, cranes, winged creatures, and mystical figures, painted and engraved on the faces of rocks and on the walls of caves around the world: scenes of bears and horses in natural motion at the Chauvet Cave on the Ardèche River and Lascaux Cave in France, bison figures at the Cave of Altamira in Spain, the dreamy rock art figures in visionary motion at the Cave of Swimmers in Egypt, and ancient images in Canaima National Park, Venezuela, and in Tocantins, Brazil. The rock art exhibitions in Arizona, California, Texas, Minnesota, and Ontario, Canada, are the most celebrated in North America.

Selwyn Dewdney and Kenneth E. Kidd reviewed the portrayals of shamans, animals in natural motion, and the signature handprints of presence depicted on rock faces throughout the Great Lakes. The granite galleries of red ochre images are comparable to the figures on the birchbark scrolls of dream songs by the Anishinaabe. Dewdney declared that the “aboriginal artist was groping toward the expression of the magical aspect of his life, rather than taking pleasure in the world of form around him.”²

The tease of creation in Native trickster stories, modern literature, abstract expressionism, and the entire mode of Native artistic irony and mockery has commonly been misconstrued and denied by various scholars and museum curators.

The ethos and modes of *transmotion* are rightly perceived in the abstract, expressionistic, conceptual, and satirical paintings of countless Native artists, including Norval Morrisseau, Oscar Howe, George Morrison, Fritz Scholder, Alan Michelson, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Emmi Whitehorse, Rick Bartow, David Bradley, Andrea Carlson, Carl Beam, Daphne Odjig, Jane Ash Poitras, and Robert Houle.

Norval Morrisseau, a visionary painter from the Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabeg, or Sand Point First Nation, created radiant scenes of natural motion, buoyant figures and patterns, meticulous curves and contours, abstract silhouettes of marvelous fish, totemic bears, eagles, wolves, and other birds and animals.

Morrisseau matured in the presence of Native shamans and healers of the *Midewiwin*, or Grand Medicine Society, with a sense of artistic survivance. He endured wanton separatism at a residential school in the priestly caste and shadows of the Catholic Church in Canada. Later, he painted several images of Jesus Christ with a shamanic hood, and another with the robes of a Native healer. Indian Jesus Christ was the most controversial of his ironic creed creations. “Jesus Christ died for the white man, not for Indians,” declared Morrisseau.³

“Morrisseau was interested in local petroglyphs and birchbark scroll images, but he never received any formal art training,” wrote Carmen Robertson, Professor of Contemporary Indigenous Art History at Carleton University. “He wanted to draw things he had heard about or seen . . . but community members and relatives discouraged him, as Anishinaabe cultural protocols forbid the sharing of this ceremonial knowledge.”⁴

The Pollock Gallery in Toronto sponsored the first public display of paintings by Morrisseau in 1962. He was about thirty years old at the time and the exhibition sold out on the first day. Three years later, eleven of his paintings were purchased by the Glenbow Foundation in Calgary. Five years later,



“Morrisseau was one of nine Indigenous artists commissioned to create work for the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal,” wrote Carmen Robertson. “His large-scale exterior mural showed bear cubs being nursed by Mother Earth, and when organizers raised concerns about the unorthodox image, Morrisseau decided to leave the project rather than censor his drawing.”⁵

Oscar Howe (Yanktonai Dakota, Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota) was born more than a century ago. He graduated from the Pierre Indian School, a federal boarding school, during the Great Depression and continued his studies at The Studio School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with Dorothy Dunn. Howe served in the Second World War and later earned a Master of Fine Arts at the University of Oklahoma.

Howe entered the annual art competition at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1958. His abstract entry, *Umine Wacipi (War and Peace Dance)*, a sublime floating circle of elegant, elongated dancers, was rejected because the painting was not considered traditional or “Indian” by the jurors.

“Who ever said, that my paintings are not in the traditional Indian style, has poor knowledge of Indian art indeed. There is much more to Indian art, than pretty, stylized pictures,” Howe wrote to the curators at the Philbrook Museum. “We are to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated as the Indian has always been, put on reservations and treated like a child, and only the White Man knows what is best for him.”⁶

Dorothy Dunn directed Native students at the Studio School to create two dimensional traditional patterns and not to be distracted by the modes of modern art. Dunn was apparently not aware that Native spiritual leaders never granted permission to depiction of certain ceremonies.

“Dunn believed that there was an ‘authentic Indian’ way to

paint,” observed Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips in *Native American Art*. “She encouraged the students to derive their inspiration from the great artistic traditions that were their heritage.”⁷

Fritz Scholder, a descendant of the La Jolla Band of the Luiseño Mission in California, was born in Breckenridge, Minnesota. He studied art with Oscar Howe in South Dakota, earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Arizona, and taught advanced painting for five years at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. Scholder depicted Natives, or the “Real Indian,” with beer cans, flags, and weary horses, and with no trace of cultural sentiments, consumer pride, or victimry.⁸

Scholder created ironic portrayals with a bold scrutiny of Native posture, presence, and motion, and with the distinctive grace of abstract contours, heavy traces of colors, temper, gestures, conversions, and distortions.

Scholder easily overturned the conservative dimensions of traditional art nurtured by Dorothy Dunn, and since then “the single most important institutional force in the development of modernist Native American art was the Institute of American Indian Arts,” declared Berlo and Phillips. Scholder was one of the most “influential teachers, inculcating ideas of individual freedom, and training many of the most notable American and Canadian Native artists,” for more than a generation.⁹

George Morrison was born at Grand Portage Reservation, Minnesota, more than a century ago, studied at the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts, and The Art Students League in New York, and was influenced by expressionism, cubism, surrealism, and by artists such as Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Willem de Kooning. Morrison was revered as an abstract expressionist and his paintings were exhibited with the most distinguished artists in New York and Europe. Yet, curators would not accept his abstract paintings in exhibitions. His style was not considered “Indian,” an unintended irony.¹⁰

Andrea Carlson, a citizen of the Grand Portage Reservation, was swayed by the abstract expressionism and the spectacular shimmer of horizon lines in later paintings by George Morrison. Carlson creates conceptual layers of abstract horizons with a sense of Native memories and futurity. “I see the horizon as the future,” she told Noah Berlatsky.¹¹

“George Morrison’s life and work had a profound impact on my own art career,” declared Carlson in “Called Back: On George Morrison, Land Acknowledgement, and Returning Home” for the National Gallery of Art.¹²

Carlson explained that the *wiindigoo*, the cannibal monster in stories of the Anishinaabe, is a series of paintings that “tackles the idea of cultural consumption with imagery that focuses on Western appropriations of Indigenous bodies, ideas, and forms of cultural expression,” wrote Olivia Murphy. The sense of uneasiness “present in these landscapes reflect the tumultuous relationship between Western museums and Native peoples.”¹³

Carlson creates great layers of conceptual scenes, silhouettes of cultural absence and presence, and converted landscapes of time, space, and course of memories. Her singular manner of abstract art conveys the future in bold horizon lines of cultural and museum mockery.

“This is our art . . . and here is where we are making our last stand . . . The least we can do is to fight this last battle, that Indian Culture may live forever,” Oscar Howe declared more than sixty years ago.¹⁴

Gerald Vizenor is Professor Emeritus of American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a citizen of the White Earth Nation, and has published more than thirty books, novels, cultural studies, and poetry. *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity*, a collection of essays, is one of his most recent publications.



Andrea Carlson, *New Shroud*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 44 inches. Courtesy of the artist

Lesson 1 Part 2	Greetings In Lenape	Lesson 2 Part 1	Common Phrases
Lenape Expression	English Translation	Lenape Expression	
Hè	Hello! or Hi!	tēmike	
Kpaihàkwina <u>k</u> wsi	I have not seen you in a long time		
Kulamàlsi hač	Do you feel well? (kulamàlsi by itself means 'you feel well', but the hač makes it into a question)	lēmata <u>h</u> pi	
Kulamàlsihēmo hač	Do you (plural) feel well? (Eng. is not clear as to many people are being asked but Lenape makes a clear difference between 'you' (one person) and 'you' (plural))	měšake	
Nulamàlsi	I feel well	pahsùkwi	
Ku mayay	Not quite (well) (this is the standard answer to Kulamàlsi hač if you do not)	amwi	
Kèku hač kēmikēndàm	What are you doing?	wēndaxa	
Kèku hač kēmikēndàmuhēmo	What are you (pl.) doing?	nuwi	(note translating marker it does is just of the word)
Xu làpi knewēl	I will see you again xu - 'future marker' làpi - again knewēl - I see you	ikalia	
Làpi knewēlč	I will see you again (here the ending -č is the 'future marker')	palia	
Làpič knewēl	I will see you again (here the -č is attached to làpi, showing how it can be moved in Lenape)	mitsi	
		mitsikw	
		mitsitàm	
		utèning atàm	
		kòčëming atàm	



Endnotes

- ¹ Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance" in *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).
- ² Selwyn Dewdney and Kenneth E. Kidd, *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 20.
- ³ Norval Morrisseau, quoted in Henning Jacobsen Productions Limited, *The Paradox of Norval Morrisseau*, directed by Henning Jacobsen and Duke Redbird (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1974), documentary film, 28 min.
- ⁴ Carmen Robertson, "Biography," *Norval Morrisseau: Life and Work*, Art Institute of Canada, 2016, <https://www.aci-iac/art-books/norval-morrisseau/biography>.
- ⁵ Carmen Robertson, *Norval Morrisseau: Life and Work*.
- ⁶ Alexandra Harris, "An American Modernist: Oscar Howe Fractured Stereotypes of Native Art," *American Indian* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2022), <https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/Oscar-Howe>.
- ⁷ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 217.
- ⁸ Joshua Brockman, "Indian Or Not? Fritz Scholder's Art and Identity," All Things Considered, aired December 24, 2008, on National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/8/12/24/98694678/indian-or-not-fritz-scholder-art-and-identity>.
- ⁹ Berlo and Phillips, *Native North American Art*, 223.
- ¹⁰ Gerald Vizenor, "George Morrison" in *Native Liberty*, 207.
- ¹¹ Noah Berlatsky, "How Artist Andrea Carlson Heals Landscapes By Dismantling and Reassembling Them," *Observer*, August 13, 2024, <https://observer.com/2024/08/interview-artist-andrea-carlson-shimmer-on-horizon-mca-chicago/>.
- ¹² Andrea Carlson, "Called Back: On George Morrison, Land Acknowledgement, and Returning Home," Art and Society, National Gallery of Art, accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.nga.gov/stories/west-to-east/andrea-carlson-called-back.html>.
- ¹³ Olivia Murphy, "Truthiness, Alternative Facts, and Ersatz Truths, Andrea Carlson's Exploration of Settler Colonialism," *Ethnic Studies Review*, University of Oklahoma, 2023, Volume 46, Issue 3, 56. See also Andrea Carlson, "An artist statement on VORE works," Mikinaak.com, last modified 27 March 2017, <https://www.mikinaak.com/blog/vore-works>.
- ¹⁴ Peter Schjeldahl, "A Frequently Misunderstood American Master," *The New Yorker*, July 4, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/07/11/a-frequently-misunderstood-indigenous-american-master-dakota-modern-oscar-howe>.

Opposite: Nora Thompson Dean, *Touching Leaves Indian Crafts: Lenape Language Lessons One and Two* [detail], 1979, booklet
Above: Nora Thompson Dean, *Touching Leaves Indian Crafts: Lenape Language Lessons One and Two*, 1979, cassette tape and catalogue
Nora Thompson Dean, *Touching Leaves Indian Crafts* catalogue, no. 6, 1974, catalogue. All objects courtesy of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College









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—Andrea Packard
Director, Swarthmore College Art Collection and
List Gallery Curator

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Cover image: Norval Morrisseau, *Thunderbird and Canoe in Flight*, *Norval on Scooter*, 1997, acrylic on canvas, 42 x 62 inches.
Courtesy of Westerkirk Works of Art. © Norval Morrisseau

Inside front cover: Norval Morrisseau, *Thunderbird and Canoe in Flight*, *Norval on Scooter* [detail], 1997, acrylic on canvas, 42 x 62 inches.
Courtesy of Westerkirk Works of Art. © Norval Morrisseau

