Ri'pin'tsas ílti skvílhta, ílti spl’úkwa muta7 i skcúsa.
Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears:
Reclaiming Indigenous Identity Post Sixties Scoop

By

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Abstract

Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears is a personal exploration through research/praxis that investigates ways of re-connecting to oral storytelling and land-based forms of knowledge that were ruptured by the Sixties Scoop. My praxis involves the unfolding of an intergenerational narrative that is presented: both my mother, Maria Mae Pascal, and my late grandmother, Theresa Attsie Pascal of the Líl̓wat Nation are survivors of the Sixties Scoop which was the mass apprehension of Aboriginal children from their families into the child welfare system that began during the 1960's and is said to have continued until the 80's, but I believe it continues still today as our children are still being taken. This thesis is a response to the profound losses left from this part of my colonial history; the land-based elements are representations of these places of disconnection and reconnection. It is an MFA journey that grapples with the intergenerational effects of cultural genocide but is also a story about the reclamation of ancestral heritage. This thesis support document tracks the forces and processes of my research and final MFA project. It is a multi-sensorial installation that invites viewers to inhabit the space and feel the loss and hope that is being evoked through the work.

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Acknowledgments

Kukwstum̓ckál̓ap (Thank you) to my Líl̓wat family and community who have always been there with open arms, always there to help, support, and encourage me when I need it most. To my momma Attsie, my grandmother, whom I miss dearly, whose strength and perseverance brought us back home. To my mom, dad, and little brothers who have made me laugh or gave me reassurance when I needed it. To Dallas, who has selflessly put an immeasurable amount of time to being there for me and helping any artistic visions I have come to life alongside me. To Mara, who is a friend that has become family, and whose teachings and knowledge have led me to such a beautiful side of life I never thought I would experience. To Martina Pierre and Heather Joseph, my Ucwalmícwts language teachers who have helped me translate my grandmother's words into our language, it has brought another dimension of healing and meaning to myself and my work. To my cohort, whose loving and caring presence and generosity throughout this journey I will never forget. Thank you to my internal reviewer, Rita Wong and external reviewer, Tarah Hogue, who have taken the time to experience my work and give their perspectives and share their thoughtful feedback. Kúkwstum̓ckacw (Thank you) to Sara Osenton, whose skills and positive energy have supported me through the process of writing this written document. Kúkwstum̓ckacw, to my supervisor Mimi Gellman, whose guidance and helping hand throughout this MFA has been unwavering and used with care, kindness, and wisdom. And kukwstum̓ckál̓ap to the Host Nations whose unceded territories I have been a guest upon while creating this body of work. I aspire to continue sharing the knowledge I have with the Indigenous communities around me.

The ache of remembering how it was, the wishing of how it should have been.

The research for this work, *Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears* draws on a personal journey of unearthing, the unearthing of unspoken stories and truths of my late maternal grandmother, Theresa Attsie Pascal, and my mother, Maria Mae Pascal. In my early adulthood, it was revealed to me that both my grandmother and mother were victims of the Sixties Scoop, one of the many tactics of cultural genocide within Canada's colonial history. Aboriginal children were apprehended en masse from their families and communities and given to non-Indigenous families. After my mother revealed her story to me, she gave me permission and asked me if I would share her story with the world. The repercussions of removing my mother from her family and community in 1965, by the Children's Aid Society of the Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, BC, continues to reverberate within our family, and across generations until this day.

My familial research is derived from letters and poetry written by my grandmother; stories and knowledge shared by my Líl̓wat family and community; archival footage and photographs; and learning our Ucwalmícwts language. In including some of these sources such as written family responses, poetry and Ucwalmícwts language that weave together the intergenerational voices and reflections of our Líl̓wat stories, I move this thesis support document beyond the formal colonial text format while still conforming to it. This thesis support document ties the threads that connect my family's stories of the past and present with the application of Indigenous methodologies that include oral storytelling, video, ceremony and hide tanning.

My final thesis work, an immersive installation comprised of two videos, a painted elk drum, brain tanned elk and deer hides, tea tanned salmon skins, and a driftwood bench explores the power of breathing life into land-based practices and relationships. I am interested in bringing land-based pedagogy and methodologies into both educational and art institutions and to

illuminate how land-based practices differ from and challenge colonial domination. I believe that these land-based practices confront the effects colonial institutions have had on Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy, and in combining film and sound with the traditional practice of hide tanning, I am creating an experience in which I can grieve and heal with the land. Through this work, I process the intangible traumas of colonialism that help inform my own perspective of history and how I navigated my own identity after the passing of my grandmother Attsie, in 2018.

“Pal7míntwal i ucwalmícwa múta7 ti tmicw” The land and people are together as one.

Figure 1 My grandmother Attsie and her friend getting arrested while protesting on the Duffy Lake Road, 1990. Photo courtesy of my family.

The Líl̓wat peoples have a reputation for being fierce land protectors, as is shown in the above photograph. My family history is key to my practice and my relationship to the Líl̓wat peoples’ resistance and fight for their rights and the land.

My grandmother Attsie dedicated a large part of her life to protecting the land and she believed in the Líl̓wat peoples sovereign rights to everything that is within our valley and territory. One of those events included the 1990 Duffy Lake Road Blockade, where St’at’imc people opposed the clearcut logging of Mount Currie reserve land for the building of Highway 99, the Sea to Sky Road. It was said to be the longest First Nations’ protest in Canadian history. My grandmother also spoke of our great-great-grandfather Chief William Pascal, whom she loved dearly.

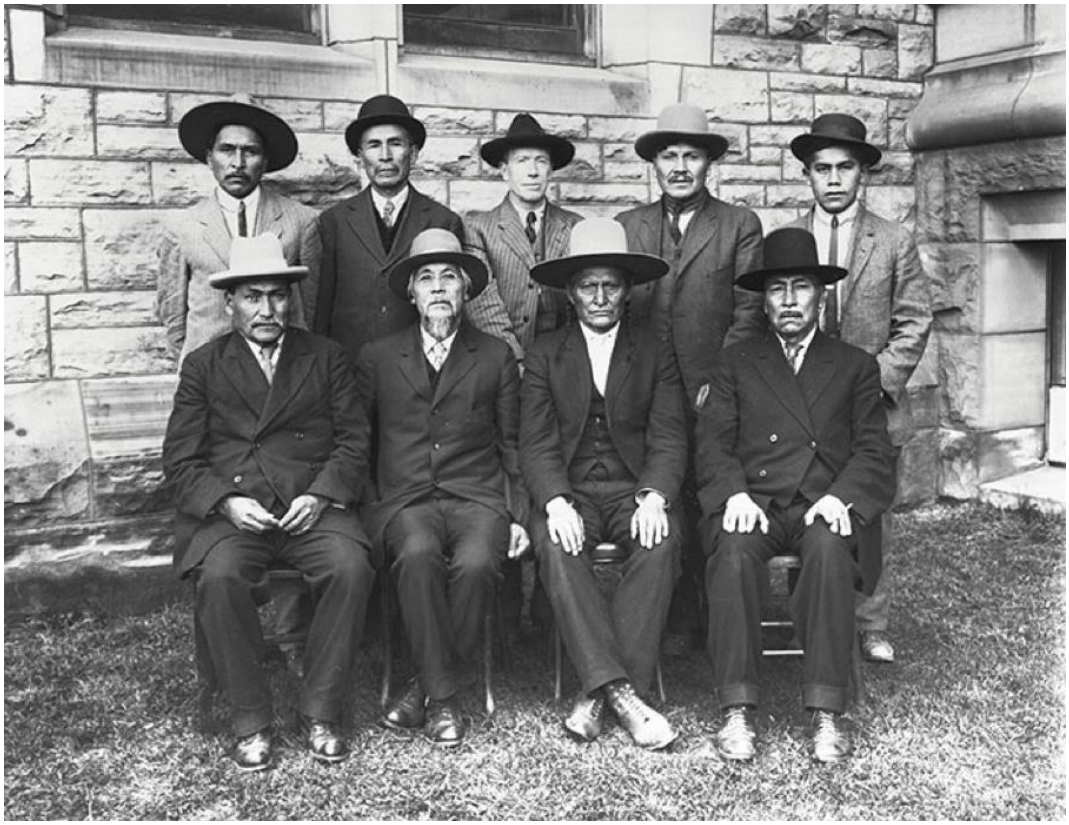

Figure 2 Indian Rights Association Delegation to Ottawa. Standing at the far right is my great-great-grandfather, Chief William Pascal, May, 1916. Photo courtesy Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa (negative no. 36002).

In 1911, sixteen chiefs of the Lillooet tribe came together and signed the Lillooet Declaration, a document that asserted their sovereignty, which my great-great grandfather Chief William Pascal was the interpreter for:

> To Whom It May Concern:
>
> We the underwritten chiefs of the Lillooet tribe (Being all the chiefs of said tribe) declare as Follows: We speak the truth, and we speak for the whole tribe, numbering about 1400 people at the present time.
>
> We claim that we are the rightful owners of our tribal territory, and everything pertaining there to. We have always lived in our country; at no time have we ever deserted it, or left it to others. We have retained it from the invasion of other tribes at the cost of our blood. Our ancestors were in possession of country centuries before the whites came. It is the same as yesterday when the latter came, and like the day before when the first fur trader came. We are aware the B.C. government claims our country, like all other Indian territories of B.C.; But we deny their right to it. We never gave it or sold it to them. They certainly never got the title to the country from us, neither by agreement nor conquest, and none other that us could have any right to give them title. In early days we considered white chiefs like a superior race that never lied nor stole and always acted wisely and honorably. We expected they would lay claim to what belonged to themselves only. In these considerations we have been mistaken, and gradually have learned how cunning, cruel, untruthful, and thieving some of them can be. We have felt keenly the stealing of

our lands by the B.C. government, but we could never learn how to get redress. We felt helpless and dejected; but lately we begin to hope. We think that perhaps after all we may get redress from the greater white chiefs away in the King's country, or in Ottawa. It seemed to us all white chiefs and governments were against us. But now we commence to think we may get a measure of justice.

We have been informed of the stand taken by the Thompson River, Shuswap, and Okanagan tribes as per their declaration of July 16th 1910. We have learned of the Indian Rights association of B.C. and have also heard the glad news that the Ottawa government will help us to obtain our rights. As we are in the same position in regard to our lands, etc. and labor under the dame disadvantages as the other tribes of B.C., we resolved to join with them in their movement for our mutual rights. With the object, several of our chiefs attended the Indian meeting in Lyton on Feb. 13th, 1910, and again the meeting at Kamloops on the 6th Feb. last, when the chief of the Lillooet bands resolve as follows:

First – That we join the other interior tribes affiliated with the Indian Rights Association of the Coast.
Second- That we stand with them in the demand for their rights, and the settlement of the Indian Land question.
Third- That we agree unanimously with them in all the eight articles of their Declaration as made in Spences Bridge. July 1910.

In conclusion, we wish to protest against the recent seizing of certain of our land at "The short Portage," by white settlers on authority of the B.C. government. These lands have been continually occupied by us from time out of mind, and have been cultivated by us unmolested for over thirty years. We also wish to protest against the building of railway depots and sidings on any of our reservations, as we heard is projected. We agree that a copy of this Declaration be sent to the Hon. Mr. Oliver, the superintendent of Indian Affairs, the secretary of the Indian rights association, Mr. Clark, K.C., and Mr. McDonald, inspector of Indian agencies.

Signed

JAMES MRAITESKEL, Chief Lillooet Band
JAMES STAGER, Chief Pemberton Band
PETER CHALAL, Chief Mission Band
JAMES JAMES, Chief Seaton Lake band
JOHN KOIUSTGHEN, Chief Pasulko band
DAVID EKSIEPALUS, Chief No 2. Lillooet band
CHARLES NEKAULA, Chief Nkempts Band
JAMES SMITH, Chief Tenas Lake Band
HARRY NKASUSA, Chief Samakwa Band
PAUL KOITELAMUGH, Chief Skookum Chuck Band
AUGUST ASTONKAIL, Chief Port Douglas, Band
JEAN BABTISTE, Chief No. 1 Cayuse Creek Band
DAVIS SKWISTWUGH, Chief Bridge River Band
THOMAS BULL, Chief Slahoos Band
THOMAS JACK, Chief Anderson Lake Band
CHIEF FRANSOIS
THOMAS ADOLPH, For La Fountain Indians

Spences Bridge, B.C. May 10th, 1911

My great-great grandfather, Chief William Pascal was also a part of a group of leaders who traveled to Ottawa in 1916 and again in 1927 to dispute the lack of federal acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty and land rights, including those of the St'át'imc Nations (Pickering 2022). My grandmother always wished we could have met him, but I am glad to be able to live vicariously through the stories that my family shares about him. She always made sure we knew who we were as Interior Salish, even though I didn't necessarily know what that meant until later.

Figure 3 Sydney Pickering, film photograph of an s7ístken (traditional Líl̓wat house) that my cousin is building in the forest on our territory, 2023.

A journey of navigating loss, healing, and reclamation through hide tanning

Figure 4 Sydney Pickering, digital photograph of a room at my uncles where we would work on hides by the wood stove, 2020.

Hide tanning has given me a glimpse into a way of life that my ancestors lived and what it means to have a reciprocal relationship to the land and its beings. It has provided me a space to heal and a place where I could pour my energy into transforming an animal's hide and breathe life into it once more before it returns to the earth. Land-based practices helped me cultivate relationships to the land and animals that I was unable to experience in urban society.

Hide tanning has been a method to tell my grandmother and mother's story within my art practice. It gave me a different perspective on the cycle of life and how something beautiful can be transformed even after death. In Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she goes into greater detail about how we are beholden to one another. "Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them. If an animal gives its life to feed me, I am in turn bound to support its life. I want to honor

these animals by transforming them one last time before returning to the earth" (115). I want viewers to be able to experience and appreciate the energy and care that is put into the animal hides that were gifted to me and understand my relationship to these animals as an Indigenous person is different than how animals are treated in our capitalist, consumerist society.

The first time I was introduced to hide tanning was with a group of Indigenous women during an art residency in Demmitt, AB at the end of summer 2018. It was the first time I had been immersed in community outside of my own family after my grandmother Attsie's passing just a couple of months prior. She was the first great loss I had experienced up to that time and since then I have had to navigate the learning of the Líl̓wat part of me without her protection and guidance. Some of the skills that were shared with me in Demmitt were, honoring and processing a moose that had just been hunted and leaving nothing to waste, moccasin making, and beading. We spent just over two weeks together on the land and even though I was in the midst of grieving my grandmother I felt I was where I was supposed to be, because it wasn't just a transmission of knowledge that was being shared but a place where kinship and care was cultivated that encouraged me to delve deeper into my own identity and culture.

After that summer in 2018, I moved to Vancouver from Edmonton where I continued my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Emily Carr University. It was from there that I dedicated myself to learning more about hide tanning, with the help of my hide tanning teacher and mentor Mara Cur. It transformed my visual art practice and became a significant part of my visual story-telling practice. In a conversation with Cur, we shared our thoughts on hides being used as a multi-purposeful medium in my visual art practice. She explained how art is much more than the actual physicality of the piece, and in this context of storytelling, the hide becomes a vessel for story.

Figure 5 Sydney Pickering, digital photograph, Indigenous women hide tanning workshop lead by Mara Cur, Sunshine Coast, 2023.

In the context of my work with animal materials, it is important to understand the relationship Indigenous people have with animals and the land. It is one of respect and reciprocity. Gathering and making together with land-based materials, which take time, kindles meaningful relationships, which are the center of my practice. I am thankful to have a friend and teacher such as Mara Cur who has taken the time to teach me about hide tanning and has generously let me take part in her workshops with other communities in BC. Those experiences have allowed me to make and witness the making of such connections and relationships that have been the essence of my healing.

Figure 6 Digital photograph, framed elk hide being softened after being smoked during a hide workshop in Mount Currie, 2023. Photo credit: Dallas Tremblay

Hide tanning is the creation of animal-based textiles through the transformation of skin to fabric. Brain-tanning hides is one of the oldest methods of transforming animal hide into buckskin, a soft, resilient, preserved textile that can be used in many forms, one common form being clothing. I call it brain-tanning while others may also refer to this method as smoke-tanning. Prior to an animal hide being emulsified with fat and smoked, it is in the state called raw hide. The stiff material is ideal for drum and rattle making. Cur describes the braining and softening as mechanically transforming the skin into a piece of art, while smoking a hide chemically transforms it (27). A mixture of animal brains, emulsified fat and water are used to permeate into the pores of the hide. When the smoke rises and connects to the lipid molecules in the hide, they react with the aldehydes in the smoke that then turns the hide into a soft textile.

Figure 7 Sydney Pickering, digital photograph, Mara Cur holding deer brain during that was later used as an emulsifier in the tanning process at a workshop in Mount Currie, 2019.

Through my MFA material explorations, I have been transforming the animal hides into raw-hide and into buckskin that will take on visual art forms symbolic of cultural resurgence and environmental justice. These traditional tanning practices have been a pathway to strengthening connections with family, community, and land-based pedagogy. It has given me a deeper appreciation of the effort and time our ancestors put into honoring and respecting the animal by utilizing it in its entirety.

Land Matters

Figure 8 Sydney Pickering, digital photograph, My first year at fish camp in summer, 2022.

For me land-based pedagogy is an education that embraces learning from the land. Land-based knowledge sustained Indigenous peoples since time immemorial, yet now I feel we are brought up in a way that exploits the land that we should be caring for. As my grandmother once said, she always believed in our Lil'wat people's rights to everything within the Pemberton Valley and our territory. Though these rights haven't been respected, we are still here on the land, practicing Nt̓ákmen (Our Way).

In Leanne Simpson's *As We Have Always Done*, she says, being engaged in land as pedagogy as a life practice inevitably means coming face-to-face with settler colonial authority, surveillance, and violence, because this practice places Indigenous bodies in between settlers and their money (166). What impacts the land impacts the people. Researchers in a project in

collaboration with the Karuk community, a Native American tribe whose traditional territory is along the Klamath River in northern California, said the data indicated that the natural environment strongly influenced the Karuk people's emotional experiences which played a role in shaping their sense of identity, their social roles, and their resistance to racism and ongoing colonialism. The data also indicated that Karuk Tribal members felt intimate connections with the Klamath River, a sense of kinship with other life forms, and joy from being out in nature. With the decline of the river, they experienced grief, anger, hopelessness, and shame. Some of their anger related to their children not having the same opportunities for experiencing the salmon as their ancestors had. They felt shame in not being able to provide for their children and their elders as they had in the past. This reminds me of my nation and the decline in numbers of salmon. I have heard stories from my Líl̓wat community, and my uncle once told me how only a

Figure 9 Sydney Pickering, digital photograph of someone drying their salmon at fish camp, 2022

few decades ago the river would be black from the abundance of salmon as if you could walk across the water on the salmons backs. It is an image many Líl̓wat people have described from their childhood. An image our generation may never see again. Salmon are an integral part of our culture and who we are as Líl̓wat people.

Our community works hard to ensure future generations will have their given right to this important part of our culture, but it is not our people that are causing this steep decline of wildlife. In a fishery notice to the community it showed the numbers of our Birkenhead Salmon counted 228,817 sockeye salmon 2011, in 2019, they counted 3,058. The summers of 2019 and 2020, our community agreed that no one would fish in hopes that it would help increase our salmon numbers leaving our community without one of their staple foods. Non-Indigenous fisheries who fish beyond their means for capitalism are not considering the environmental impacts alongside the cultural impacts it has on Indigenous communities and food security for future generations.

My work draws on these losses of cultural connections because of colonialism and their explicit implication in the destruction of the land. The hides in this installation are representative of that connection that ties me back to who I am as Líl̓wat, where I come from and my community.

I am but a student, a sapling, a minnow, forever searching for how life should be.

Figure 10 Sydney Pickering "Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears", 2023, view of installation.

In my final MFA installation, a raw elk hide is strung with artificial sinew in a wooden frame that leans against the wall adjacent to the sculpture and the bench. Beside the framed elk hide is an elk drum with a painted hummingbird with a quote by my grandmother below that says, "The ache of remembering how it was, the wishing of how it should have been.", and a brain-tanned sculpture made of tea tanned salmon skins and brain tanned elk and deer hides sits on the driftwood bench. The smoked hides in this installation emit a smoky smell that is strong enough to lure viewers across the room. Smell has an important role in relation to memory within this installation.

Figure 11 Sydney Pickering "Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears", 2023, elk hide drum, acrylic paint.

Laura U. Marks explains in greater detail in her book *The Skin of the Film*, "Olfaction has a neural pathway that leads from the nose (strictly speaking, the olfactory bulb) to the cortex. This means that smell is processed cognitively while it awakens deep-seated, precognitive memories. Memories of smell endure much longer, even after a single exposure to an odor, than visual or auditory memories" (Marks 205). I have had hides that are several years old that when left out in the open air long enough, over time its odor will fade, but a fresh buckskin for me emits a smell of home and of fire. Smell is an effective tool in transporting people to places of memory and this sculpture is an open invitation for viewers to interpret in their own way. It was created to play the role of transporter and witness. It is a witness to the viewers and their reflections of the installation that surrounds them. Its presence reflects another time within history and a feeling that is best described by words my grandmother wrote "The ache of remembering how it was, the wishing of how it should have been".

Figure 12 Sydney Pickering "Raised in mud, wood smoke, and tears", 2023, detail of brain tanned elk and deer hide and tea tanned salmon skins.

The hides are unique to themselves and traverse landscapes. They each come from their own place. Each of these hides were gifted to me by my friend and hide tanning teacher Mara Cur and each hide had multiple hands in the process of their transformation as they travel to different places. Cur further explains how having modern, industrial, and colonial constraints keeps us from being as together with nature and the land as we would be if we lived in an intact way. When you honor an animal by bringing the textile into your life, the animal isn't just providing for you, but you are giving it a world it never has been a part of before, like clothing, shelter, and being in the human community (2023). This is their second story, they are conduits to help tell my story, assert Indigenous presence and their resilience as a practice and material.

Figure 13 Maureen Gruben "We all have to go someday. Do the best you can. Love one another.", (2019)

The way in which hides travel and contribute to community is evident and can be seen in Maureen Gruben's *We all have to go someday. Do the best you can. Love one another (2019).* Her title comes from a quote from her late father, Eddie Gruben. Similarly, I include several quotes from my grandmother Attsie to title and contextualize the work and sections throughout this thesis. It is important for me to have her voice present throughout the work whether it be the titles of sections in this written document or in the installation, because she is inspiration behind the work and the reason I can express myself as a Líl̓wat woman. In Gruben's work, a deer hide is strung onto an aluminum frame that has stitching and grommets and a series of holes that represent an angiogram of her father's heart. In an interview with Tarah Hogue, curator of *Transits and Returns*, Hogue describes the work. "When you look at it, you can see the way it

maps the blood vessels of the heart, but it also elicits caribou migration patterns across the land. The work is in conversation with other pieces in the exhibition that draw upon the importance of kinship and relationships with the land" (2020). It is similar in my work as the hides were created to reflect the beauty of cultivating relationships across territories, with the body, animals, and community. My experience of hide tanning has been one of cultivating culture and community with different nations. The hides that are exhibited in this installation have come from and have travelled many places from when the animals were harvested to becoming vessels for story.

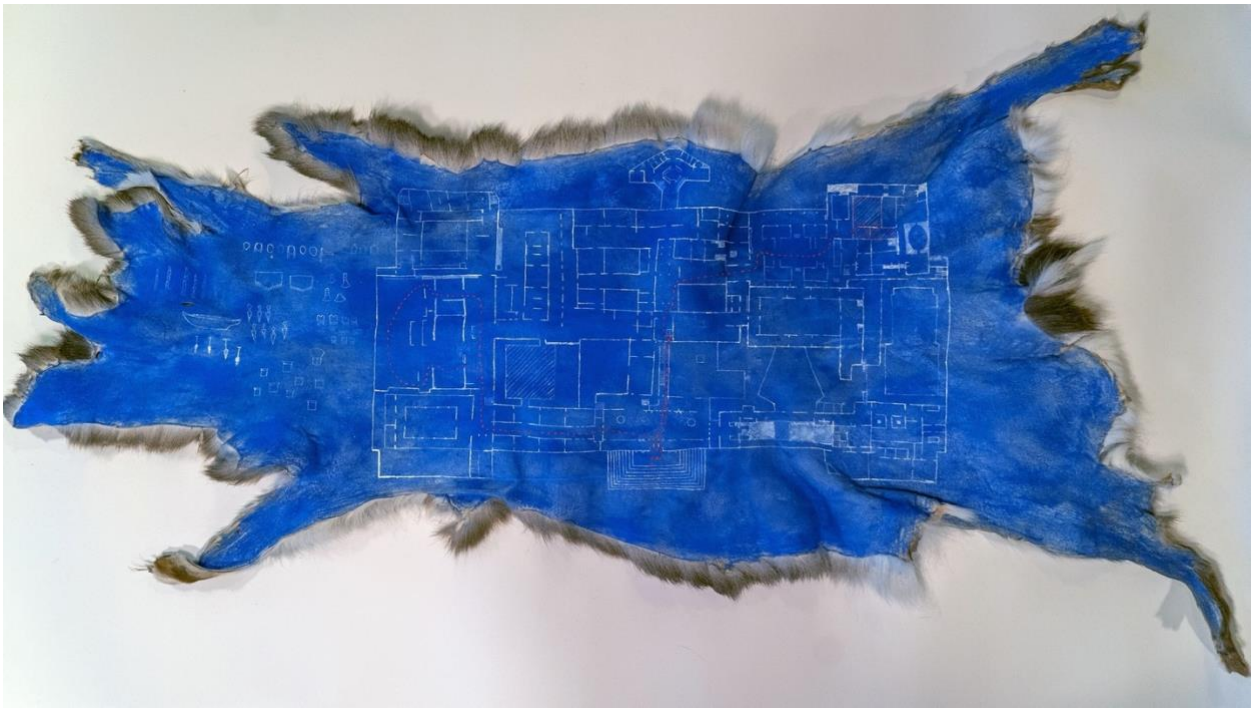

Figure 14 Nicolas Galanin "Architecture of Return, Escape (Metropolitan Museum of Art)", 2020 Deer hide, pigment, and acrylic (30 x 63 inches). Installed at Peter Blum Gallery, NYC, NY. Used by permission of the artist.

Tlingit and Unangax̂ multi-disciplinary artist and musician from Alaska, Nicolas Galanin, created this first in a series of hide paintings that is an escape route for Indigenous remains and objects held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He explains in an artist statement how "The objects themselves are unwilling visitors to the museum, and the painting builds a route for escape and vision for reunification of cultural inheritance with community." While Galanin's hide is a guide for escape and reunification, I want my hides to occupy the space to show how

my cultural inheritance of this traditional knowledge is still alive despite the interruptions created by colonialism along the way. In contrast I don't want my work to be permanently kept in an institutional prison, but as Galanin continues to say, to serve as a reminder of the past, and as a plan for a good way forward.

Remembering these things, carry them with you.

Figure 15 Sydney Pickering "ńáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a (i am going to meet my daughter)", process shot.
Photo credit: Dallas Tremblay

I came into this program knowing I wanted to explore video as a means of Indigenous storytelling. I find video to be an effective method for me to tell story because of its ability to immerse viewers into an auditory and visual experience. What I didn't predict was how I would end up inserting my own body into the video and using performance to navigate the stories I wanted to tell. I find spaces that can stimulate multiple senses at once offer different ways for viewers to connect with memory. It was important for me to start performing in my own videos to assert my autonomy in this intergenerational narrative I am sharing. Performance in this work are acts of remembrance, resistance, and reclamation. It is an opportunity for me to share my perspective as an intergenerational Sixties Scoop survivor and what it looks like to mend and recreate bonds that have been ripped across generations. I don't believe my work is a remedy to colonial wounds but an example of how I have been navigating breaking through my own cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Although within the context of this installation I don't consider my videos to be film, I take much inspiration from film's contribution to Indigenous space. Part of that contribution is informed by Fischer, Kiendle, Cherer's reflections on the legacy of Alanis Obomsawin, activist, artist, singer, and one of the most acclaimed Indigenous directors in the world:

> What does it take to create an Indigenous counter-space and the space for counter-stories within a country such as Canada, formally just over 150 years old? What does it mean to work among the colonial newcomers and settlers of other tongues who have constructed a way of life that is in crisis because it depends categorically on the destruction of relations between lands, waters, air, animals, peoples, and spirits? What does it mean to take the camera and, with that very instrument of anthropological gaze, create other ways of looking, listening, speaking, sounding, imagining, and storytelling? What body and soul, what strengths and dreams, can hold a collective imagining for the nation-state to change?

With those questions in mind, I think about how this video installation creates the capacity for an Indigenous worldview to sit in within the institutional gallery space, as said above, a counter-space. A space that reclaims teachings and practices of the past, while also grieving a way of life that sustained us for thousands of years. As my grandmother's words are displayed on the wall, it is "The ache of remembering how it was, the wishing of how it should have been.". Other Indigenous artists that grapple with the effects of colonialism that have inspired and continue to influence my work today include asinnajaq, Cheyenne Rain LeGrande ᑭᒥᐊᓂ, and Rebecca Belmore.

In asinnajaq's film *Three Thousand*, she parses the complicated cinematic representation of Inuit; The National Film Board article "Spotlight on Three Thousand" describes how by embedding historic footage into original animation, she conjures up a vision of hope and beautiful possibility. Carla Taunton describes Belmore's *Vigil,* a performance in Vancouver's

Downtown East Side at the corner of Gore and Cordova Streets, as one is which she engages with the history of violence against Aboriginal women in both local and national contexts. Ashlyn Chand explains how LeGrande's video performance *Grieving with the Land* "reminds us, in a haunting and calming portrayal, how our bodies carry the harm we do to the land and the immense grief [LeGrande] and her ancestors feel while the earth is being destroyed" (Chand), while my videos, *distance* and *ṅáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a (i am going to meet my daughter)*, engage with an intergenerational perspective on the effects of the sixties scoop. While Chand uses the term 'we', I don't think it should be used as a universal 'we' because for time immemorial Indigenous people lived in a reciprocal and harmonious relationship with the land while the colonial and capitalist state have managed to put the earth in a state of emergency in a blink of an eye.

There are two videos that play on a loop in this installation that capture performance. *distance* is a 6 minute video that was shot on Musqueam territory and *letting you go* is an 11 minute video that was shot in Mount Currie. I incorporate the videos, a contemporary form of storytelling, as a method of immersing viewers into the landscapes that I engage with in my performances. The landscapes in these two videos are markers that refer to events from my grandmother and mother's life. It is my own interpretation of the oral knowledge, stories, and memories that were shared with me of the events I contemplate in the videos. Video art in this installation is a method of capturing my performances with the land that are acts of remembrance and of reclamation. In Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*, she defines the archive as a form of memory that can exist as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, while the repertoire enacts embodied memory, which includes performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing-in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge (19-20 Taylor). Video becomes my form of archive while performance is where I explore embodied memory. In Carla J Taunton's

thesis *Performing Resistance/Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Women's Performance Art in Canada*, she responds to Diana Taylor's words and at one point says, "The act of performance by Aboriginal artists can arguably displace colonial and settler narratives, which have throughout colonization attempted to systemically render such types of meaning and history making/writing invalid" (156 Taunton). I want to replace the colonial and settler voices with our own, to assert our sovereignty over our stories and experiences. In holding up and bringing Indigenous voices forward, I want to share, with their permission, the voices of my mother and my brother Daniel. A poem by my brother Daniel and writing by my mother, whose personal reflections on time, memory and our bodily ties to water is part of the weaving of intergenerational narratives and perspectives that are layered throughout this document in response to the land, water, and grief.

From Water and Warmth

by Daniel

Disassembled then dissipating as what was borrowed is returned. Relinquishing the force of will, and coherence of thought to be kneaded into the mantle below the mud, lost to the searing summer breeze, lazily drifting with the motes on the early morning beams, I'll lay under the covers of dust on an empty bed and rest for a while.

From water and warmth to my original form, subsumed to the dirt and the dew.

The scattered particles may remember me from time to time, the memories in the matter recalled like a lightning flash of humming life. Assembled molecules that walked and spoke, arranged into thoughts that grew and changed, a vibrant moment of sensation and consumption brought to yield the way every living being concedes.

Destined and doomed to forget it all.

Beholden to transform then wash away as all things that come to an end will do in time.

A poem by my mother Maria

Hard to believe I was so close and yet so far away
from a mother that was reaching out to find me.

A body of water separated us.
I couldn't hear her or feel her.
That makes me sad today.
I can't imagine if I couldn't hear or feel my children today.
My heart breaks for my mother's pain.
Her pain is my pain.
Not sure how to stop that!
How to stop the tears…

Deep breaths, Deep Breath, Breathe

I feel we are still in search for peace and healing

-Maria

distance

Figure 16 Sydney Pickering, still from "distance", video, 2022

distance is about memory and my relationship to water as I contemplate the reverberating effects from the broken bonds caused by the colonial state. Throughout the video I call out across the waters that are between Musqueam and Vancouver Island. Musqueam territory encompasses what is currently called Vancouver, where the Children's Aid Society of the Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver took my mother and Vancouver Island is where she would end up spending her childhood in a foster home. The Children's Aid Society promised my grandmother that she would receive pictures of her baby, my mother, as she grew up, but she never received any. My grandmother fought for the right to contact her daughter Maria through the Ministry of Human Resources. They lied and told my grandmother that Maria didn't want any contact, but the truth was that they never even told Maria that her mother was looking for her in the first place. In response to this, my grandmother prepared a formal charge of cultural genocide under

the UN charter and went onto BCTV news showing my mother's birth certificate in hopes of her seeing it. Towards the end of my grandmother's interview with BCTV News Series *Blood Ties*, one of the last things she says, in hopes that her daughter would see and hear it, was that she loved her and how anxious she and the family was to see her.

Figure 17 BCTV news series 'Blood Ties', 1990, still of my grandmother Attsie

Throughout *distance* I repeat the sentence "stéxwkan ṫu7 wa7 xáṫmintsin" which translates to "I love you" in English. Inserting the Ucwalmícwts in the score of the video is reclamation. I never heard my grandmother speak Ucwalmícwts, but after she passed away, I was told by a family member that there were times they had heard her speak and when she did, she spoke the language perfectly. Our nation described Ucwalmícwts as the first spoken language when telling the stories that bind the people to the land. It is the language that connects the people to their true spirit – to the very essence of being Liḷwat7úl (Líḷwat).

Figure 18 Cheyenne Rain LeGrande "Grieving with the Land" Projection of the lands back home. Used by permission of the artist.

Nehiyaw Isko artist, Cheyenne Rain LeGrande ᑭᒥᐊᓐᓯ, from Bigstone Cree Nation's *Grieving with the Land*, has made a video where she describes the failures of the English language, and how our Indigenous languages are deeply intertwined with our body and the land. She says, "It's so difficult for me to try and find the English words to express how I feel. How it feels to grieve. How it feels to grieve with the land. When I think about my Nehiyaw language, I think about how it might be to speak it. To be able to fully express my feelings, from my heart and spirit (LeGrande)."

I deeply resonate with LeGrande's words about language. I have found learning Ucwalmícwts both difficult and rewarding. Our language is derived from the land, yet we only occupy 0.004% of our traditional territory since colonization. As more developments encroach on the little land we have left, I wonder what would happen if we lost all the land, how would our language exist? It is the thread that ties us to our ancestors, a time I can only picture in my

mind. It is difficult to imagine that only a few decades ago we were forbidden to speak our languages, yet I am lucky to say that is not the case for me. I am living in a time where there are immersion classes available to our young ones and I heard with my own ears the language being spoken by them, and what a beautiful sound.

I find cross connections between the loss of autonomy and connection to kinship, culture, and language in relation to the issue Carla Taunton brings forward in the section of her thesis *Aboriginal Women: Identities, Representations, Marginalization, and Agency*:

> The historic attempts by the state and its colonial apparatus of power to control, regulate, define, undermine, and mediate Indigenous women's bodies and identities, as well as their cultural and political authority gives urgency to self-determined acts by Indigenous women—and specifically in relation to this study of acts of performativity. As Julia Emberley argues, "From early on, colonial policies were implemented to regulate the bodies of Indigenous women by controlling their sexual, reproductive, and kinship relations (34).

The intergenerational experiences of Indigenous women shared throughout this thesis challenges the colonial narrative while embodying resistance and restoring our truths in the historical archive. In his book *Black Water*, David A. Robertson captures what I am trying to realize in this piece. He states "Reconciliation in the context of healing, is an act of remembering. We learn more about today when we know about yesterday. Who you are, your identity, is informed by your own experiences and the experiences of those who came before you were born. If you want to understand yourself, take the initiative to seek out what came before you" (62).

ẖáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a (i am going to meet my daughter)

Figure 19 Sydney Pickering "ẖáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a (i am going to meet my daughter)", video, 2023

In *ẖáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a*, I re-enact my grandmother's birthday traditions for her then missing daughter, my mother Maria with a food offering. In the BCTV news video *Blood Ties,* 1990, my grandmother explains to her two younger daughters about wishing their then missing older sister a happy birthday on October 25th, so that she would know that they were remembering her. It is through this piece where I can bridge the gap where the colonial state tried to permanently keep my family from our culture and community by apprehending my mother at birth. I think about internationally recognized multidisciplinary Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore's performance *Vigil,* where she commemorates the Indigenous women who have gone missing in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. I think about how my mother's story is rare and while she was able to return home, many never did. During the BCTV news series the news anchor reminds the audience that after my mother was reunited with her community that 96 other children were still missing from Mount Currie. One mother shared on the BCTV news that after

much searching, she found her then adult child sick in Vancouver's Downtown East Side after escaping their foster home. In the making of this video, I contemplate feelings of grief for the time lost between my mother and grandmother, while also feeling grateful that my mother was found. Belmore's performances have been described as rememberings of Indigenous experiences and traumas (Taunton 176). In this video I contemplate my family's stories and experiences of the past while trying to find space to welcome the future as I move from spaces of grief to ones of hopefulness.

In *The Skin of the Film*, Marks examines the tentative process of creation that begins at the time of grieving. "This process describes the movement from excavation to fabulation, or from deconstruction dominant histories to creating new conditions for new stories. It is the holding on to artifacts of culture, including photographic and filmic images, in order to coax the memories from them. It is the attempt to translate to an audiovisual medium the knowledges of the body, including the unrecordable memories of the senses" (105).

Figure 20 Rebecca Belmore's Vigil, 2002.Video Credit: Paul Wong https://www.rebeccabelmore.com/vigil/

The footage was captured along Lillooet Lake because it was one of the first places my grandmother and mother visited when they were reunited. The video moves viewers from the immensity and boundlessness of the landscape to an up-close segment where I am re-enacting my grandmother's act of remembrance for my mother. I do this by building a circle of rocks by the lake to home a fire. During family feasts in Mount Currie, we would put plates of food out by the fire to share with the ancestors, a spirit plate. I am making an offering using black forest cake, my mother's favorite, to my grandmother as a symbol of recognition for what she did for my mother. The cake symbolizes the grieving for the twenty-five years my mother missed with her mother and now the time we miss with my grandmother since her passing five years ago.

The video is layered with sound from the BCTV news series *Reunion,* audio from the original recorded footage, as well as found underwater sound clips. The clips of audio from BCTV news include conversations between my grandmother and mother when they first met as well as other Líl̓wat members who voice their ability to relate to my mother's situation of not growing up with a mother and culture because of forcible acts of removal that also included children being taken to residential and boarding schools. The score presents a story that is filled with uncertainty and anxiety intertwined with feelings of relief and love. At the end of the video the welcome song that was sung for my mother when she reunited with her mother plays as the view of Lillooet Lake expands and I stand on the edge of its waters with the spirit plate by the fire.

I find interconnections with Inuk filmmaker, visual artist, and writer asinnajaq's film *Three Thousand* where she takes you on a visual and auditory exploration through time that affirms the resilience of the Inuit people in their resistance to past and present colonialism. It was one of the first films I had ever experienced created about Indigenous people by an Indigenous person. asinnajaq says, our understanding of the past is always evolving, and the representation of Indigenous Peoples has changed dramatically over the decades. You get these government-

Figure 21 asinnajaq "Three Thousand", short/animation, 2017. Used by permission of the artist.

sponsored films from the '50s, subtly or not so subtly racist, that promote residential schooling. And then you'll find recent footage by Inuit filmmakers that presents a completely different perspective. It's a fantastic resource for artists. It conjured a series of imaginings of what my own story could look directed by myself and how important it is for our own people to be telling our stories (2017). In *The Skin of the Film* written by Laura U. Marks states that "It is more recent that intercultural artists are in a position to interrogate the historical archive, both Western and traditional, in order to read their own histories in its gaps, or to force a gap in the archive so that they have a space in which to speak" (5). Video is what reunited my grandmother and mother. The video archives that hold glimpses of our family's history are integrated into my current video work as a continuation of our story present and future.

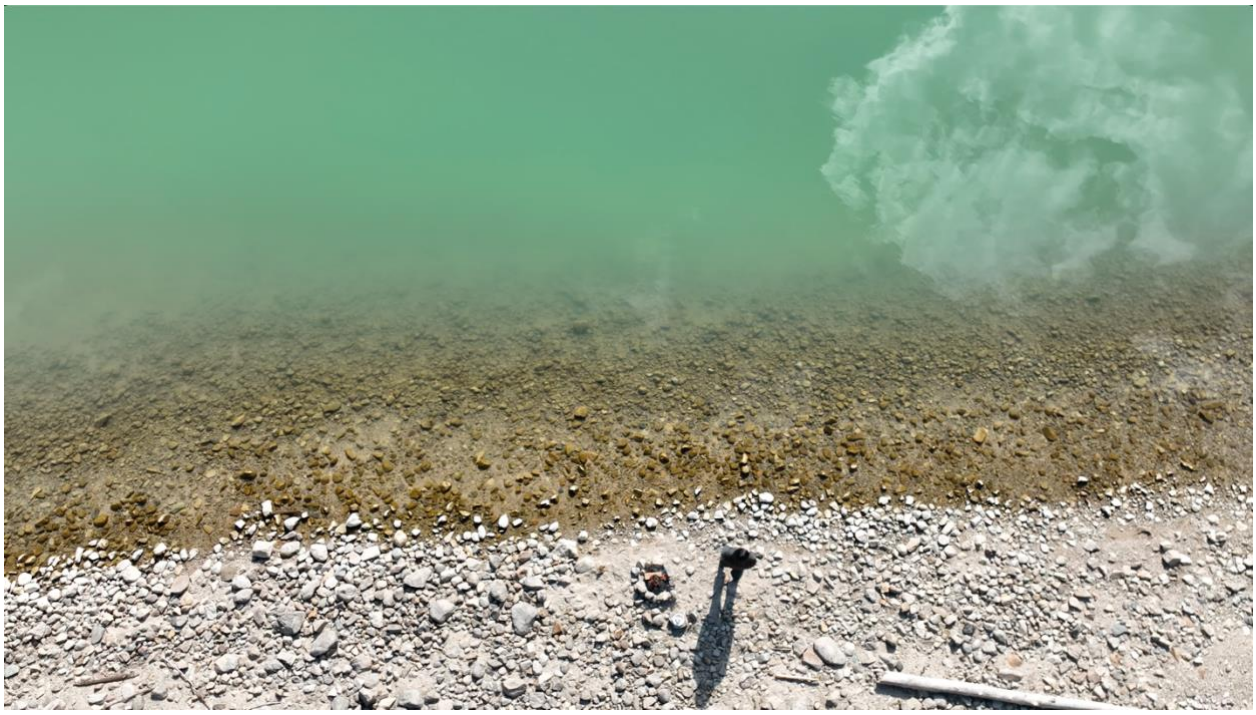

Figure 22 Sydney Pickering "ńáskan nwálhen ni nskúz7a (i am going to meet my daughter)", video, 2023

Conclusion

This MFA work has culminated in an immersive installation that combines different hide tanning methods and natural elements that connect people and places that work alongside two videos. I had to go home to Mount Currie with my family and community to begin to understand the fierce love and fight my grandmother had for our Líl̓wat land and culture. It was the time I spent at home and on the land that I could listen to the stories of our people and begin to reclaim and learn our Ucwalmícwts language. It was on the land that I could be part of the resurgence of some of our traditional hide tanning practices and begin to understand our relationship with animals. It is within these spaces I witnessed and experienced the building of respectful and reciprocal relationships between communities where traditional and oral knowledge was shared.

In combining video and sound with the traditional practice of hide tanning, I created an experience where I search for cultural kinship and a space where I can immerse myself with the land and the water to grieve and heal. Being able to showcase hides in gallery and educational

institutions is a symbol of cultural continuance in the face of colonialism's explicit hand in the earth's environmental degradation, which is in direct correlation to Indigenous vitality.

I want this installation to be an Indigenous space that asserts my presence as a Líl̓wat person with the goal of honoring my family's story with the integration of traditional hide tanning practices, sound and video that display my performances with the land as methods for decolonizing the future. For non-Indigenous viewers, the installation opens the opportunity to experience a different world view: to connect with the land through sight, smell and to hear the Líl̓wat voices in the video pieces. In experiencing the beauty of the land and land-based pedagogy, viewers will be confronted with the impact of colonialism's systems of extraction and cultural genocide that put the life of that land and its people in danger to this present day. The land is at the core in understanding Indigenous identity and what my grandmother had fought so fiercely for as a warrior woman. This document is a contribution to Indigenous activism and honoring of my grandmother's footsteps that have brought me to creating this work. I want this work to embrace Indigenous people from my generation who are feeling anxieties or afraid to delve into themselves and their culture and to express it in a way that is theirs.

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