



European journal of American studies

21-1 | 2026

Special Issue: Indigenizing the Normal, Normalizing the Indigenous: Native American Literature, Art, and Activism

As the Land Lays Dying: Normalizing Indigenous Environmental Art Resistance

Aitana Monzón-Blasco



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/25970>

DOI: 10.4000/166g6

ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher

European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference

Aitana Monzón-Blasco, "As the Land Lays Dying: Normalizing Indigenous Environmental Art Resistance", *European journal of American studies* [Online], 21-1 | 2026, Online since 07 April 2026, connection on 13 May 2026. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/25970> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/166g6>

This text was automatically generated on May 13, 2026.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) may be subject to specific use terms.

As the Land Lays Dying: Normalizing Indigenous Environmental Art Resistance

Aitana Monzón-Blasco

All nature speaks and sings and is musical
Ernesto Cardenal

1. Introduction: Towards a Visual Sovereignty

- 1 Landscapes and their nonhuman population have been, throughout millennia, a source for human exploration and depiction. Linked to a natural interest in recognizing the environment we inhabit, art has served as a graphic document about the passage of time and human footprint in their deforesting, exploitative, and polluting eagerness inflicted on the earth. This article examines the pictorial interest on the land through a Métis and Cherokee lens as a claim for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice. To that end, I will center my analysis in the idea that the increasing need to decolonize the universality of Western *aesthesis* (Mignolo) has led Native American artists to advocate for sovereignty, given the historical disregard and condescension received from federal institutions. It is through the endless possibilities which painting offers that these painters do reconnect with land and earth in nondominating ways of existence, taking their place-thought as a stance for Indigenous sovereignty legitimation (Coulthard and Simpson). Over the course of my research on the work of Cherokee painter Kay Walkingstick and Métis artist Christi Belcourt, I wondered about the limitations of my Westernized approach to concepts such as relationality and the blurring of ontological and epistemological frontiers between Eurocentrism and Indigenous philosophies. However, I intend to offer an analysis that could involve, in Wanda Nanibush's words, "a centring of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and loving" in order to "assert sovereignty, no longer asking for recognition of it" (25). Thus, I will delve into Walkingstick's "intuitive" approach to nature and Cherokee memory (Abbott 271), as well as Belcourt's ecological activism through the reinterpretation of

traditional Métis craftsmanship. Both artists portray the landscape as a vast and sacred habitat compelled by the nonwritten Native American ontological view upon generosity, solidarity, and care. In so doing, I may resort to Dan Shilling's notion of traditional ecological knowledge based on the following premises:

- Reciprocity and respect define the bond between all members of the land family.
- Reverence toward nature plays a critical role in religious ceremonies, hunting rituals, arts and crafts, agricultural techniques, and other day-to-day activities.
- One's relationship to the land is shaped by something other than economic profit.
- To speak of an individual owning land is anathema, not unlike owning another person, akin to slavery.
- Each generation has a responsibility to leave a healthy world to future generations. (12)

- 2 In this analysis, I will resort to the term *visual sovereignty* to contextualize artistic practices. Such concept has become a paradigmatic instrument within the discussion around decolonial studies. Coined by Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora) in 1995 in her article "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," it aims to serve as a place-based action to expand Indigenous sovereignty into the arts field. From here, I also consider what has been developed by authors such as Michelle Raheja in her 2007 article "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*." As an extension of Rickard's proposal, Raheja theorizes sovereignty in Indigenous filmmaking with the aim of challenging visual stereotypes that have been falling upon Native American peoples in a systematic and stigmatizing way. For her, visual sovereignty deconstructs "white-generated representations of indigenous peoples" as it advocates for "indigenous cultural and political power both within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence" (1161). In terms of governance, sovereignty "has transformed into a signifying decolonial gesture that pushes beyond nation-centred imaginaries to redefine an Indigenous present and future" (Rickard "Diversifying" 82). But more than a legal categorization, Indigenous sovereignty has been key to the relational process of bringing together the conceptualization of borders and art. For this reason, Rickard's term aligns with Karen Ohnesorge's idea on the fostering of *artistic sovereignty*, which seeks to prove that Native American artists "decolonize the theory and method of landscape within the broader context of visual art" (43). Furthermore, we may take into account Lucy Lippard's notion of *esthetic sovereignty*, which encompasses "Issues of modern life and art, like appropriation, post-colonial theories, crossing boundaries and cultures, and relationship to the mainstream or dominant culture" (1).
- 3 For decades, "scholars and artists have struggled to determine what defines American Indian art" (Seaton 38). All these decolonizing attempts in art criticism made over the last decades stress the need for an Indigenous place-thought discussion on the historically acknowledged colonial genre of landscape painting. It is not my commitment to detail this from a white, European-based perspective. However, this issue has raised over the past decades an unfolding dialogue on the ghettoization of the Native American art community (Hughes 180). It is a fact that only a minority of scholars introduce the term *sovereignty*, as Rickard argues, in their analyses ("Diversifying" 83). This lack of consideration has undermined the complexities and diversities of Native American artistic practices. Because Indigenous art has been rejected from the hegemonic canon for centuries, a conversation around the necessity of a specifically American Indian visual sovereignty may be at the service of criticism to

ensure intersectional practices around issues such as decolonization and Indigeneity based on place-based ontologies. To hold on to the discussion of sovereignty in American Indian art, we may resort to the self-definition of an Indigenous ethics/aesthetics and on whether there is a single Indigenous aesthetic or whether it depends on the territorial context. While, as Walter D. Mignolo states, we must delink ourselves from coloniality (Mignolo and Nanibush 25), Anishinaabe, Cherokee or Mapuche art cannot be judged with the same resources. Although they are expressions of an Indigenous self-determination, each community is sustained by independent symbols, rituals and imaginaries. For Mignolo, this delinking from decoloniality considers “the enunciation in which knowledge is fabricated and managed (languages, institutions, actors) to legitimize dispossession and control in all the domains of the instituted (politics, economy, knowledge, racism and sexism, and the ontologization of nature, all of which impinges on land dispossession)” (25).

- 4 As a renowned author within the ongoing discussion on frontiers and dewesternization, Mignolo’s view on “decolonial *aesthesis*” (Mignolo 10) may serve to analyze how contemporary Native American painters subvert the European concept of *aesthetics* acknowledging that the classical Greek term *aisthēsis* did not belong to the Aristotelian concepts of *poiesis*, *mimesis* or *catharsis*, but was preserved in an interdependent philosophical sphere, etymologically attached to the “perception from the senses” (Vichnar and Armand). This semantic shift can presumably be traced back to 18th century German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, and subsequently to Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke’s articulation of the term into the colonial appreciation and judgement of what is to be considered beautiful and sublime. Taking this context as a departure, Mignolo argues that all decolonial aestheses share a profound colonial wound (11). Since oppression and dissolution have been erected as the colonial logical procedure to erase Indigenous cultures from the Western public gaze, decolonial practices “consist in bringing both the colonizing and the colonized parties out of their repressed places, also showing the imperial characteristics of ‘denial’” (18, my translation).

2. Relational Environments and Indigenous Activism

- 5 Under the premise that Native American art functions as a counter narrative that engages with activism on Indigenous rights and resilience, I propose two different contemporary views that confirm the legitimacy of visual sovereignty as a signifying discourse on “renewal and resistance” (Rickard, “Visualizing” 467). My aim thus is to trace Cherokee painter Kay WalkingStick’s hypnagogic landscapes (Abbott 271) in their archival aim to depict, on the one hand, the historical tracks of Indigenous land removal and, on the other hand, the ever-flowing nature of the American plains, canyons, and waters exposed to erosion, sedimentation, and climate crisis. Furthermore, I will analyze Métis artist Christi Belcourt’s floral landscapes as a medium to denunciate environmental degradation in her claim for Indigenous resurgence. Both representations base the space available to them on the spatio-temporal contextualization of Indigenous thought to articulate, from there, traditional ecological knowledge through the sense of community and relationality between human and non-human beings, human responsibility for the preservation of the natural environment, the idea of the seventh generation as the objective and starting point of Indigenous

environmentalism and, finally, the humility with which human beings must address their environment (McGregor 112). With these ideas as the backbone of their work, Belcourt and WalkingStick build their own worldview based on Indigenous resurgence, which, in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's words, consists of re/creating "the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the wellbeing of our contemporary citizens" (51).

- 6 Considering decolonial aesthetics as an integrating part of the narrative of the intersectionality of art, the hybridity presented by Native American works should be prioritized as an intrinsic feature of such an aesthetics. I am referring to the free inclusion of motifs both belonging to the Cherokee and Métis cultural and historical imaginary—in the case of the authors I am going to study—together with the recurrence or formal integration of apprehended Eurocentric art techniques and pictorial genres such as landscape painting, the Hard Edge and Minimalist styles in the case of Walkingstick, or social poster art in the case of Belcourt. While this hybridization is inevitable and usually necessary for the development of contemporary Indigenous art, there are many artists who propose new approaches to traditional—largely textile and ornamental—American Indian art. Tradition, here, is understood as a form of resistance to the settler consumerist production state or the perpetration of colonial symbols and motifs. As Rickard notes, "Indigenous artists confront their relationships to the philosophies or traditions that frame their cultural mapping with their artwork. If these philosophies or traditions are not understood, the artwork is typically narrowly confined to thin interpretation based on old-fashioned identity politics" ("Visualizing" 472). The question remains, however, whether the reinterpretation of tradition is necessary in a transmodern, capitalist, globalized and technological world. Borrowing Rickard's claim, "Artfully deployed within Indigenous communities, traditions are a reinvestment in a shared ancient imaginary of self and a distancing strategy from the West" (472).
- 7 As will be seen in the descriptions of space made by Belcourt and WalkingStick, the only way of dewesternizing the artistic practices of our transmodern society begins with an understanding of the contextual relationship between the landscape and the Native American artist's place-thought. The land is a sentient entity, endowed with spirituality, memory, and a regenerative character. From this idea, we will see how in the case of WalkingStick, of Cherokee ancestry, the land is called "elohi" (Burkhart 28), due to its active agency capable of reproducing the core idea that human and non-human life is based on two intrinsically related concepts: "being-in-the-land and being-from-the-land" (28). Beneath this assumption we may find an ethics of respect based in the belief that every being has a spirit, ensuring thus the communal approach between humans, non-human creatures, and the land. A sense of responsibility and relationality should therefore be manifested in the humbleness with which we humans interact with the environment, but also with a generational concern, acknowledging the fact that previous "generations left a legacy and we have a duty to pass on that legacy as far as the seventh generation" (Trosper 67).
- 8 In our decolonial context, consideration for the natural medium is essential for breathing creatures, or, as Corine Pelluchon argues, "The feeling of being an inhabitant who shares its *oikos* with other humans and non-humans," is what should make us "protect environments whose resilience [we measure] at the same time" (271, my translation). In this sense, the relationship between the people and the land has always

been a key aspect, not just from the ecological point of view, but also as a symbol of resistance against settler colonial rule. It is not solely the contemplation of the land that makes decolonial aesthetics foster understanding and communion between human and nonhuman epistemologies, but its active engagement in cultural and sociopolitical activism in a time of ecological crisis (Mitchell 5). Indeed, the depiction of landscape throughout North American history has resignified the natural scenery as something belonging to European settlers, thus erasing the Indigenous trace or reducing it to a mere ridiculization/generalization. To counterargument colonial depictions of nature, WalkingStick and Belcourt's work succeed at portraying the land as a sacred body encompassed in a relational experience between the haunting memory of a traumatic colonial past, the continuing disappearance of children and women, and the loss due to ecological devastation. In an attempt to mitigate these effects, activist organizations have been held in the post COVID-19 years to face climate action and to promote transformative change. Some of these include the 2022 National Tribal and Indigenous Climate Conference, as well as the 3rd National Climate Gathering organized by the Assembly of First Nations. With the aim of building communities with strong ties outside and inside the reservations, innovative leadership has been a key discussion in both conventions, for the sake of "rapid environmental changes at local, regional, national, and international levels" (Assembly). However, still in 2025, First Nation peoples continue to struggle due to "the desecration of sacred lands" (Ash-Milby and Phillips 12). It is for these reasons that

A global ecocritical art history adequate to its image must be a collaboration of many who are committed to an expanded intersectionality—one premised on ecological as well as sociopolitical thriving as constitutive of Black and Indigenous justice alongside the self-determination of other communities and societies violently impacted by the white supremacist, colonial, and capitalist logs instantiated in the origins of the Anthropocene. (Horton)

- 9 As Horton argues, the conscient presence of landscape in Indigenous North American visual culture should be taken into consideration, not just as an aesthetic choice leading to an Emersonian contemplation, but as a sociological and political tool. While the Earth is still alive, Indigenous practices can help minimize the impact of destructive processes such as deforestation, toxic spill, or the use of non-renewable sources, among others. Relationality, then, plays a pivotal role in our post-pandemic society, for, as activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs wrote, "The only way to survive is by taking care of one another" (2010).
- 10 This ecological awareness inspires much of Christi Belcourt's oeuvre, as we shall see. Taking as a reference the braiding that links the land to historical and collective memory, the Métis artist has focused much of her 2010-2020s work on the development of social posters with the aim of denouncing the health crisis that plagues the Ojibwe First Nation, Grassy Narrows, as a result of the contamination of its river systems due to toxic dumping. Belcourt's *Water Is Life* (2018), a poster in silk-screened ink on card stock, shows the image of an Indigenous woman carrying a bird in her womb which needs water and contact with its fellow creatures, that is, animals and clean nature, to be born. In a context marked by peace movements against nuclear arms led by the Canadian Voice of Women (VOW) activist group in 1961, alongside First Nations' fight for political representation in the 1960 Federal Elections (Leslie), more than 10 tonnes of mercury effluent had been dumped between 1962 and 1970 by the Dryden Chemical Company as a result of its paper-bleaching operations (Mosa and Duffin E214). Not only

did this incident have an irreversible impact in the Grassy Narrows First Nation aquatic ecosystem (Leslie), but it also reached human population, grounding serious damages in their nervous systems provoked by an excess of methylmercury. According to the National Library of Medicine, this organometallic substance can be easily “dissolved into freshwater and seawater, condensed through the food chain, ingested by humans, and consequently affects human health” (Hong et al. 354). Its neurotoxicity has been discovered because of mercury poisoning incidents similar to the one in Grassy Narrows, leading local artists such as Christi Belcourt to stand up against environmental injustice and political negligence.

3. Kay WalkingStick’s Spiritual Land Escapes

- 11 Raised with the “idea of Indianness” (Abbott 274), although brought up in Syracuse, New York, by her non-Indigenous mother, Kay WalkingStick (b. 1935) has always dug into her Cherokee ancestry as a way of investigating the meanings of what she considers sacred and elevating for her creative soul. Over the past six decades, WalkingStick has established herself as a key figure in contemporary US painting. As a matter of fact, she is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as a Full Member in the National Academy of Design, NY. She has also been awarded by the New York Foundation for the Arts Hall of Fame, receiving the New York Historical Society History Makers Awards and, most recently in 2024, the Benjamin West Clinedinst Memorial Medal. In addition, her work and artistic thought has been published in catalogues, monographs, articles, and magazines, among others, *Kay WalkingStick: an American Artist*, edited in 2015 by Kathleen Ash-Milby and David W. Penney; *In American Waters: The Sea in American Painting*, edited in 2021 by Daniel Finamore and Austen B. Bailly; and *Making their Mark: Art by Women in the Shah Garg Collection*, edited in 2023 by Mark Godfrey and Katy Siegel.
- 12 In her article “Native American Art in the Postmodern Era,” WalkingStick denounces the habitual lack of art criticism concerning American Indian productions. For her, the main reasons behind this ostracism are due to the insufficiency of the postmodern discourse, which does not take Native American art seriously enough, claiming that “‘universal art values’ are twentieth-century Eurocentric art values” (15). What WalkingStick’s statement opens is the door for 21st-century critics to acknowledge that in our palimpsestic, global context, it is high time that we shift the focus to a transethnic aesthesis, decolonizing and overcoming the aesthetic premises that have been imposed long since leading colonial powers such as Spain, Italy or France established the logics of rectitude and neoplatonic equilibrium. WalkingStick’s roots are found in Mardsen Harley’s Modernism, Édouard Manet’s Impressionism, Duccio’s gilded Trecento, and Western landscape painting from the 16th to the 19th century, among many other influences. This tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds has often led art critics to comment on the “contradictory, unstable, plural, and mutable” nature of WalkingStick’s career (Ash-Milby 17), which, albeit solitary, is deeply concerned with environmental activism and the trauma of Native American dislocation. WalkingStick’s dual nature expounds the multilayered American spirit of an artist engaged with the postmodernist art movement from the last two decades of the 20th century, which led her to introduce her art in *The Decade Show*

multicultural framework, finding solace with painters such as Henry Fonseca, Emmi Whitehorse, or Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.

- 13 Concerned with the use of “indigenous materials” (Ash-Milby 17) and centring her artistic practice in the depiction of eternal spaces (Houle 101), WalkingStick envisions the American land as a mythical place, interweaving the concepts of human absence, historical memory, and loss through the display of vistas in her most recent artwork with the aim of proclaiming wilderness as interconnected with empathy, solidarity, and affect. The artist’s transcendental quest through landscape painting has much to do with what Vine Deloria¹ addresses as “sacred places” (273), that is, “locations where we have perceived that something specifically other than ourselves is present” (273). This seems to appeal to WalkingStick’s decolonial aesthetics, for her sensing of place, displayed as visual lyrical glimpses, gives the illusion of atmospheres sinuously expanded into their secular, dynamic and panoramic presence (Preston 87).
- 14 Although recent oil paintings such as *Galena Pass* (2023) and *Salmon River Valley* (2023), exhibited at La Biennale di Venezia, share a figurative style, the author’s inclination towards abstract expressionism has shaped her artistic and spatial consciousness as if reaching a spiritual approach with which to grasp the unknown. For her, “that notion of art being transcendent is certainly a large part of what I’m doing. I think the spiritual quality in my work—if one is turned in at all—is picked up” (Abbott 277). Her work has covered a range of different styles, from 1950s realistic paintings to 1970s minimalistic abstract panels in which the concrete and the punctual gaze on landscape entails a creative process literally made by the artist’s hands. Over the decades, WalkingStick’s purpose has been to investigate on the earth’s constant change and movement due to natural sedimentation and erosion. This has not just reached a material experimentation but has fostered the author’s will to contribute to Native American historical material memory by depicting the American land as a space remote from the consequences of mass tourism, environmental damage, and settler land removal, slaughter, feminicides, and child abduction over the last centuries.
- 15 WalkingStick’s hypnagogic or “intuitive” approach to nature (Abbott 271) centers her concept of grounding knowledge through the representation of mystic presences embodied by sublime terrestrial and marine ecosystems. By grounding knowledge, I refer to Christopher Preston’s suggestion that “the very cognitive processes with which we contemplate our place in the world are themselves *derived from* and *wedded to* our physical locatedness” (xv). Indeed, Preston goes further when stating that “part of the feeling of attachment to place is quite literally an attachment of a portion of our cognitive architecture to the lands we inhabit” (xv). Aware of her Cherokee ancestry and place-based thought, WalkingStick’s connection to the land falls into a personal category of the mythical, “if one understands myth to be, that which expresses the unknown, the inexpressible, or the incomprehensible” (17). Her enduring aim has been to forge resonant, intuitive connections among these distinct, yet mythically interconnected perspectives, acknowledging that the land contains spirit. In WalkingStick’s words, “Painting, landscape or otherwise, is not a metaphor for God, or for religion either. It is a dialogue with the mythic, the spiritual, with that which transcends our bittersweet daily lives” (Hillwood 9). And in this light, she goes on saying that she sees “our earth as sacred, as life giving, as all Native Americans do. It is this earth that I want to be everlasting” (Nilsen C2).

- 16 Arranged along 40" x 80" diptychs, as she has been doing for the last two decades, WalkingStick's most recent productions explore the tension between the terrestrial and maritime ecotone by painstakingly configuring the frontiers of Native American land as a blurred interstice between geographical, political, and identitarian limits. WalkingStick's largest exhibition up to date was held at the New York Historical Society between October 2023 and April 2024,² working as a counter and complementary narrative to the 19th century Hudson River School's production (Allen). Curated by Wendy N. E. Ikemoto, the choice of bringing together more than forty artworks, which included a pair of WalkingStick's directly inspired paintings by the Romantic group, engaged with the representation of the American land "in order to re-assert an Indigenous presence long erased in European settlers' depictions of North America as a pristine and unpopulated wilderness" (Allen). In this light, WalkingStick's acknowledgement of the landscape as a vast and sacred habitat compelled by the nonwritten human laws of appraisal, solidarity, and care shares bonds with Native American ontology, following Dan Shilling's view on traditional ecological knowledge (12).
- 17 In WalkingStick's own words, "I want [spectators] to feel that it's important to preserve our beautiful planet. Our little blue planet at the edge of the cosmos is perfect for us We ought to try to save our perfect place" (Allen). The painter's approach to climate crisis has often been depicted as guileless (Ash-Milby 37). Nevertheless, the New York painter circumscribes her environmental commitment bearing in mind that "the idea of people seeing the earth as sacred is really important because we are really destroying it" (Abbott 275). There is a decolonizing zeal in WalkingStick's creative purpose. She is aware that traditional colonial landscape art such as the one produced by the Hudson River School establishes, as Lawrence Abbott notes, "an analogous aesthetic structure for the dominant culture's political and economic system" (275). WalkingStick maintains that "painting strictly for the market leads to the loss of an Indigenous pictorial viewpoint, or prevents the development of one" (15). However, upholding an Indigenous aisthesis correlate that could be well articulated among a transcultural canon is not that simple, for "paintings that arise out of this mass-culture value include works that utilize generalized and stereotypical symbols which white culture has identified as Indian, as well as nostalgic and fantasized depictions of Indians" (15). As a result, WalkingStick argues that such practices perpetuate "the control of the Indian by the dominant culture, which, of course, is the one that buys Indian art" (15). Following this idea, the author reflects on her personal attachment to the land in the following terms:
- I see our lives as part of the continuum of life, that reaches back into history to the beginning of time, but also stretches forward to the unknown future. And I see the earth that way. The abstract proportions of the paintings are about that quality of the earth, that continuum of the earth, that long-term memory that goes back eons but forward eons as well. Also, they have a very mythic relationship. Myth is the way we understand that which we cannot understand. It is that which explains the great mysteries. (Abbott 278)
- 18 During the post-pandemic years, following with her 2010s production, WalkingStick has centered her work on the portrayal of inhospitable places that highlight the evident absence of human footprint, reinforcing the expressiveness of a wild nature that makes its way without human intervention. Still, it is not simply the absence of the human trace that obsesses the painter, but the indelible representation of the non-appearance

of Indigenous peoples in the great showcase of post-colonial North American culture.³ Recent oil paintings such as *Aquidneck, After the Storm* (2022) unfold on the panel the incessant potentiality of the waves as intermediary agents between two complementary habitats such as water and the earth. Arranged in the form of a diptych as is usual in WalkingStick's work, the sea is offered to us as a common landscape in the decolonizing experience, capable of converging Cherokee spirituality and the abyssal contemplation inherited by the Romantic heritage. We are introduced, then, to a liminal experience between the flowing nature of water and the hieratic rocks, not devoid, however, of the continuous transformation of its ecosystem. These eroded elements are displayed on both sides of the bay, as well as on the malleable and porous shore, symbolically alluding to the confluence of both contrasting components.

- 19 Whereas integrated on the shore or exposed to the air on the sand, rocks and stones show evident traces of lichen and moss on their surface. The painting is composed, to a great extent, of cool tonalities that oscillate between ultramarine and turquoise undertones, as well as the lushness of an overcast sky, reminder of stormy weather. The horizon line, in a dense navy blue, is complemented by the winding trace of water on the sand. We are introduced, therefore, to three spaces altered by the tempest that has visited this steep beach: the sky, the sea, the sand. Aquidneck is the original Indigenous name given to Rhode Island, located along Narragansett Bay and founded as a colony in 1638 by a group composed of personalities such as Anne Hutchinson, theologian, and John Clarke, a Baptist minister who had participated the previous year in the Antinomian Controversy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Bicknell 38).
- 20 It is precisely this Indigenous trace erased five centuries ago by the European settlers that WalkingStick vindicates. As usual in many of her diptychs, a tribal pattern belonging to the original geographic site, the Wampanoag and the Narragansett, stands out in the lower left half of the painting. Such inclination may respond to the painter's longing to redefine and delve into her own biracial identity, as well as to converge opposing elements. The inner and the outer, the known and the unknown, Christian elements and tribal traces, what is seen and what is unseen, what can be touched and what remains untouched shape an imagery that stands for unity and reinforces her belief on the earth as a solidary agent capable of bringing together the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous, which finally are at ease in spite of environmental changes or natural catastrophes. Although the pattern's brownish and blue colors assimilate the physical interweaving of the ecotone, its geometric and static nature reinforces the original idea of the composition: that natural forces, whether hieratic or malleable, define North American landscapes and endure through time, indicating that men and women passed through there in the company of other microscopic beings, and that memory, be it Indigenous or colonial, unifies in an ecosystem that is continuously transforming itself. While it is true that WalkingStick's post-pandemic landscape paintings lack animals and human forms, there are two compositions that help relocate Indigenous memory through the depiction of a herd of buffalo. The author's decision to include these animals in the landscape appeals to Native American grounding knowledge and its sense of place. From a solidary, non-dominating position (Coulthard and Simpson 254), they stand as a lively and ongoing Native American presence. These 2020 oil and turpentine twin representations, *Wyoming Buffalo I* and *Wyoming Buffalo II*, displayed in 22,5" x 45" gessoed paper, should not go unnoticed, for it is the first time in WalkingStick's current output that such a symbolic being occupies the same starring

role as the surrounding ecosystem without resorting to geometric ethnic motifs to remind spectators of Wyoming's historical memory.

4. Christi Belcourt's Indigenous Art Grievability

- 21 Christi Belcourt (b. 1966) is a Métis visual artist acclaimed for her environmentalist and social justice engagement. Together with Anishinaabe storyteller Isaac Murdoch, she is the cocreator of the Onaman Collective, an institution founded in 2014 with the aim of “helping social justice movements including the reclaiming Indigenous land-based arts and language” (Onaman Collective, “Who We Are”). As an independent Canadian creator, she has based her oeuvre in the assimilation of traditional Indigenous craft as it can be traced in her pictorial floral landscapes, stained glass installations and environmental posters, either as an individual artist or in collective exhibitions. Belcourt has so far been bestowed with the Premier Arts Award (2016) and the Governor General's Award for Innovation (2016). In addition, the Ontario Arts Council granted her the position of Aboriginal Arts Laureate (2014). More recently, in 2023, she has received the Honorary Doctorate in Visual Arts from Algoma University, as well as the Doctor of Letters recognition from Wilfrid Laurier University.
- 22 In an online lecture delivered for West Chester University on October 14th, 2020, Belcourt wondered about the implications of Indigenous North American Art in environmental activism and sustainability. Raising awareness about the urgency for politics against climate change is not, in her words, something “comfortable and convenient” (Di Giovine). According to her,
- [North American] Indigenous people have endured 400 years of genocide, murder, dispossession and the theft of our lands, oppression, colonialism, racism, thousands of children stolen, and a total breakdown of families and communities, forced assimilation, sterilization and sickening medical experiments and torture on Indigenous children. Most Indigenous languages are now in a state of national emergency in both countries—Canada and the United States How can we have a relationship if the majority of people who have settled here don't understand who we are, what the original places were named on this continent, or how our ancestors created beautiful worlds for us to inherit? Of course, we share this type of naming and play understanding of place and who we are to the land. My nation shares that with other Indigenous nations across the continent. Before colonialism shattered our communities and dispossessed us from our lands, we relied on the buffalo for almost everything. We recognized the buffalo as a nation. (Di Giovine)
- 23 An activist of the Canadian movement MMIWG2S (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People), as well as the #NoMoreStolenSisters movement (Martínez-Falquina), and the community based commemorative project and art installation WWOS (Walking with Our Sisters), Belcourt actively promotes, through the involvement and social impact of her work, awareness of violence against Indigenous women and girls in North America, as well as the violence and stigma suffered by Two Spirit people. According to data collected by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, “Homicide is the third leading cause of death among Native girls, women aged 10 to 24, and the fifth leading cause of death for Native women aged 25 to 34” (Bachman et al.). Whether historical or contemporary, North American socio-political context conditions the work of Indigenous artists such as Belcourt, who understands the natural space, as well as the creative one, as the place where kinship relations based on relationality and reciprocity converge. In previous paragraphs, I

mentioned Belcourt's commitment to the environment. Over the past decade, the artist has embarked on social and artistic projects via her artwork with the aim of denouncing environmental neglect in Indian Reservations (Fields). Such is the case of the Grassy Narrows incident, considered one of the most devastating health crises in the history of Canada. Works like *Water Is Life (Thunderbird Mom)* (2017), *Water Has No Flag* (2017), and *The Fish are Fasting for Knowledge from the Stars* (2018) evoke the struggle of human and non-human species to combat the infertility of their land and its inability to regenerate itself. Belcourt's art, as well as her constant denunciation of political negligence on social networks such as X, formerly *Twitter*, are aimed at getting help for the repair of a soil poisoned by a mercury spill. As the artist wrote in July 2024, "Governments have decided almost overnight to fund things like the purchase of the Kinder Morgan pipeline, etc. But for 50 yrs people of Grassy Narrows have been waiting to help from mercury poisoning when a local paper mill discharged 10 tonnes of mercury waste into their river" ("Governments").

- 24 To date, the Canadian artist's work has been focused on the recovery of ancestral knowledge for the protection of nature. A multidisciplinary visual artist, her oeuvre is expressed through different supports where floral motifs and Métis symbology abound to highlight a decolonial aesthetics of her own and, at the same time, express the safeguard of natural resources. For Belcourt, an enrolled member of the Métis community of Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta, "the use of historical references in a Métis artist's work is done partly as a means of reclaiming of one's own personal history and an expression of the individual identity of each artist" ("Purpose" 143). Indeed, for the development of her pictorial works, generally symmetrical compositions that reinforce the idea of nature as a balanced order, the artist resorts to the idea of Indigenous resurgence advocated by Leanne Simpson in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*. In Belcourt's case, the memory of the Métis people, known as "The Flower Beadwork People," is recovered to preserve and update original floral patterns characteristic for their high quality craftsmanship since the 19th century. Since then, Métis designs have represented the natural environment through floral, plant and animal motifs, always connected "by either stems or tendrils" (Barkwell 2). As Lawrence Barkwell notes,

Metis beaders often use the Ojibwa constructs by always representing four parts of the plants. Floral patterns usually include 'four states of vegetation,' seed, leaf, bud, and fruit or stem, leaf, bud and flower. This cycle of four corresponds to myriad other 'four quarters,' 'four directions' and 'four stages of life' analogies in Ojibwa/Chippewa thought. (2)

- 25 Acrylics on canvas such as *The Wisdom of the Universe* (2014) and *The Earth is My Government* (2018), show Belcourt's committed self not only in denouncing settler colonial practices that go against the environment, but in tackling the importance of solidarity and communion among human beings to elevate nature to its sacred character. The choice of the acrylic is not accidental, for there exists a link between form and message, creating the effect of traditional Métis beadwork, achieved through the density and light of the thermoplastic material, giving the sense of a bright and patterned bead design hypothetically stitched by a knitting needle. These compositions, which sow the seed for her most recent production, follow a pointillist style that celebrates and commemorates the importance of material memory as far as craft is concerned. In fact, it is Belcourt herself who acknowledges and honors her ancestors' cultural heritage taking up and continuing a legacy that, like the seventh-generation concept, must endure:

In the 1800's, the Métis began creating large quantities of beaded items to support their families and, because of this, we became known as 'the flower beadwork people.' Flower beadwork is one the artistic legacies left to us by our ancestors. What began in 1993 as a simple attempt to transfer beadwork aesthetics into canvas with paint has become the artistic journey I've been on since. This journey has led me into the depths of understanding my own culture, our worldview, and our spirituality as it relates to the natural world We are not separate from anything, we are born connected to the earth, with the capacity to love, to be kind, to be generous, to be gentle. As Odawa Elder Wilfried Peltier taught, 'Everything we need to know is already inside of us.' (Belcourt "Metis Artist")

- 26 Belcourt's art is inspired by traditional indigenous beadwork "to assert that Métis people have survived Canadian colonial assimilation policies" (Berkes 57). Continuing with the discourse of naturalistic balance that has been going on since the 2010s, *The Night Shift* is one of Belcourt's most recent and salient pieces. Produced in 2023, it is a 76" x 102" acrylic on canvas which seeks to represent the interconnectedness of all living beings following a pointillist style in the manner of traditional Anishinaabe beadwork. It is a rectangular composition symmetrically divided by an imaginary vertical axis that offers the optical effect of an anabatic movement, that is, the spectator's gaze tilts from the bottom to the top. The display of a nocturnal nature across the width and length of the canvas reveals an exquisite botanical, lepidopterous, and ornithological diversity, as is usual in Belcourt's work,⁴ reinforcing her Indigenous place-thought. For Belcourt, showing the roots of the blue trees in the painting is not only an aesthetic decision, but evidence of her commitment to the land as a sacred space from an indigenous ontological position. According to her, "there is more to life than what we see" (Belcourt "Metis Artist"). Within the composition one is introduced to more than ten different types of tree leaves, some of them bipinnate, whilst others lanceolate, but also pinnatifid and hastate. Such shapes belong to hawthorns, raspberries, maples, oaks, and sweet cherries, all of them, together with the fern, occupy a higher space, and are rippled by the wind. On the other hand, we encounter different classes of insects such as caterpillars climbing up and down the thin branches of the trees; some rounded, others spiky and hairy, they all strive to become the butterflies and moths that flutter around them. The leaves of the trees, as with more than twenty types of flowers, have medicinal, ceremonial, and ornamental purposes. So do the fruits: raspberries, strawberries, apples, gooseberries. In Belcourt's words,

By painting flowers that emulate beadwork, I attempt to raise awareness of the Métis nation. I am providing commentary on the ignorance that exists in mainstream Canada when it comes to the Métis nation I am trying to put out history at the forefront, and I choose to use a traditional Métis art form as the basis of my work I want to offer a counter-balance to the overwhelming negative forces of destruction, despair, violence, and death to which we are exposed on a daily basis. I want to offer respite for tired eyes and weary minds. In this way, the objective of achieving something beautiful to look at is a conscious decision. ("Purpose" 147-148)

- 27 Resting on the branches, coming to the fruit or flying over the flowers, the ten lepidoptera⁵ correspond to American lady and swallowtail butterflies. Nocturnal beings, fireflies and moths also acquire great prominence in the scene: folded or deployed, they show off their brown, pink and yellow tones. As one looks down, spider webs can also be seen, as well as turtle doves and frogs. Each animal fulfills a function; each knows its role in the cycle of nature. Moreover, the vegetation, sprouting from two thin roots stuck in the center of the lower base, gives meaning to the composition. We find, in the

soil, several specimens of *Amanita Muscaria*, as well as larvae that will become butterflies. In addition, small microorganisms support the soil, as do minerals and water. Around each element, uniting the species, spirits appear, either symbolized by circles of light, or by quick and subtle brushstrokes. In pink, blue, orange or brown spots, they, according to Belcourt, surround and help us (“Metis Artist”). Each animal, each flower, each leaf, root, insect, or fruit contains a spirit, and the sum of all of them gives rise to the union in nature. There are spirits in all natural elements. These, likewise, are surrounded by tiny dots that represent the totality of the universe. Impelled by the continuous presence of the cosmos in her paintings, Belcourt acknowledges that the stars “are a reflection of how to live on earth” (“Metis Artist”). For her, heavenly bodies and terrestrial, non-human bodies, which in their unity, provide all humans “with a sacred path to follow here on earth” (“Metis Artist”). This impetus of the Canadian author to seek union between complementary and contradictory forms coalesces with WalkingStick’s vision of nature and the *plus ultra* zeal of her decolonial aesthetics. Belcourt’s painting, beyond the mere representation of a given habitat, symbolizes the past and the present, but also envisions what is to come. The idea that the seven past generations determine present acts, and that men are to safeguard the land for the next seven generations is latent in Belcourt’s work and honours, in that way, Indigenous memory.

5. Conclusion

- 28 Cherokee designer Lloyd Kiva New’s prophetic statement that “Indian art of the future will be in new forms, produced in new media and with new technological methods” (Hughes 179) has come to prove the versatility and agency of contemporary Native American art, as demonstrated by pivotal figures such as Kay WalkingStick and Christi Belcourt. Both artists fight a white Anthropocenic discourse through their own decolonial gaze. Hence, Walter Mignolo’s earnestness when claiming that the decolonization of the term aesthetics must be pursued by Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens. It is not representation or participation that Indigenous artists and curators are fighting for, but sovereignty, leadership and agency. In short, democratic rights accessible to any transmodern, transcultural, globalized citizen. In this light, as Rasheed Araeen states, “The struggle of the colonized for liberation is also for the liberation of the colonizer” (370). The role of indigenizing Western discourse is not simply an act of white solidarity or a repayment of historical debt; rather, it involves recognizing a culturally diverse society that has long surpassed essential matters such as cultural appropriation, gender and ethnic equality, and human rights, while refusing to relinquish its relational connections and moral duties towards the land, its peoples, and the devastating polycrisis currently shaking the world. Indigenous sovereignty, therefore, ought to function “as an overarching concept for interpreting the interconnected space of the colonial gaze, the deconstruction of the colonizing image or text, and Indigeneity” (Rickard “Visualizing” 471). Moreover, it “is the border that shifts indigenous experience from a victimized stance into a strategic one” (Rickard, “Sovereignty” 51). For Indigenous Peoples, the struggle for sovereignty shapes their bonds with settler relationships to the land, federal organization, and environmental wellbeing. It is, in their words, “a way of life,” for it entails “to be free from the

influence of anything outside ourselves, ... a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives” (Warrior 124).

- 29 Pictorial narratives like those of WalkingStick and Belcourt, aimed at disrupting canonical white media and colonial discourses by their Indigenous place-based solidarity, become fruitful in their deliberate belief that, as an artistic expression, painting can act as a force of change (Morris 37). Yet, punctual inclusions of Indigenous North American artworks into public cultural exhibitions are not enough, for they do not “respond or resolve the decolonizing critiques expressed in the works of many contemporary Native American artists” (Ash-Milby 36). As visual archivists, WalkingStick and Belcourt provide future spectators with proof that the earth was a sacred place, common to all species and in constant change due to the inclemency of the weather and the colonial settler rule. Taking the consideration that Indigenous painting serves as a stance of resistance against colonial memory, their work offers a pictorial library capable of preserving “potential historical knowledge, providing opportunities to know first-hand how most of the people who had ever occupied the planet felt about themselves and their world” (Nash 260).
- 30 The continuous movement of the earth, its transformation independent of the hand of humans, and the spiritual and physical union of matter is one of the tropes that constantly appears in contemporary artistic or literary Indigenous discourse. For this reason, I want this article to end with a quote from a conversation between Walter Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush around decoloniality: “It is through our bodies that reconnecting to land and earth is possible and necessary. It is imperative to delink from the principles of a civilization that trained us to block our bodies in order to give privilege to our minds, simultaneously with land conceived and instituted as private property” (25).

Acknowledgement

- 31 This research is part of a project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, the Spanish State Research Agency (MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033) and the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER, EU) (code PID2021-124841NB-I00), together with the Government of Aragón and the European Social Fund (ESF) (code H03_23R). This article was written during a research stay at the Université Toulouse II – Jean Jaurès in December 2024, and I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr Isabelle Keller-Privat, to the remarkable Centre for Anglophone Studies (CAS), and to my PhD supervisor Prof Silvia Martínez-Falquina, whose generosity and support made this work possible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Lawrence, ed. *I Stand in the Center of the Good: Interviews with Contemporary Native American Artists*. U of Nebraska P, 1994.

Allen, Jessica. "Kay WalkingStick's Landscape Paintings Highlight the Absence of Indigenous Groups." *Artsy*, 10 Nov. 2023. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-kay-walkingsticks-landscape-paintings-highlight-absence-indigenous-groups>. Accessed 15 May 2025.

Araeen, Rasheed. "Art and Postcolonial Society." *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, edited by Jonathan Harris, Wiley Blackwell, 2011, pp. 365-374.

Ash-Milby, Kathleen, and David W. Penney, editors. *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist*. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2015.

Ash-Milby, Kathleen, and Ruth Phillips. "Inclusivity or Sovereignty? Native American Arts in the Gallery and the Museum since 1992." *Art Journal*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2017, pp. 10-38.

Assembly of First Nations. "3rd National Climate Gathering: Catalyzing First Nations Climate and Conservation Leadership for Transformative Change." 10 Oct. 2024, <https://afn.ca/events/3rd-national-climate-gathering>. Accessed 15 May 2025.

Bachman, Ronet, et al. "Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and the Criminal Justice Response: What is Known." *U.S. Department of Justice*, 2008, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/223691.pdf>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

Barkwell, Lawrence. "Characteristics of Metis Beadwork." *The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*, June 2012, <https://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/13489.Characteristics%20of%20Metis%20Beadwork.pdf>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

Belcourt, Christi (@christi_belcourt). "Description of Painting 'The Fish are Fasting for Knowledge from the Stars.'" *Instagram*, 12 Mar. 2018, https://www.instagram.com/christi_belcourt/p/BgNKRKNhLeb/. Accessed 10 June 2025.

---. *The Earth is My Government*. 2025, screen print, 28 x 19.6 in. *Christi Belcourt*, <https://christibelcourt.ca/collections/prints/products/the-earth-is-my-government>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

--- (@christibelcourt). "Governments have decided almost overnight to fund things like the purchase of the Kinder Morgan pipeline, etc. But for 50 yrs people of Grassy Narrows have been waiting for help from mercury poisoning when a local paper mill discharged 10 tonnes of mercury waste into their river." *X*, 4 Jun. 2024, <https://x.com/christibelcourt/status/1798045719699571038>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

---. "Metis Artist Christi Belcourt Discusses Painting 'My Heart is Beautiful.'" *YouTube*, 5 May 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwNHNm9dw6Y>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

---. *The Night Shift*. 2023, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 in. *Christi Belcourt*, <https://christibelcourt.ca/products/copy-of-tree-spirits-leaving-before-the-fire>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

---. "Purpose in Art, Métis Identity, and Moving Beyond the Self." *Native Studies Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2008, pp. 143-153.

- . *Water Has No Flag*. 2017, screen print, 17 x 26 in. *Christi Belcourt*, <https://christibelcourt.ca/collections/prints/products/water-has-no-flag>. Accessed 10 June 2025.
- . *Water Is Life*. 2018, screen print, 17 x 26 in. *Christi Belcourt*, <https://christibelcourt.ca/products/water-is-life>. Accessed 10 June 2025.
- . *The Wisdom of the Universe*. 2014, acrylic on canvas, 171 x 282 cm. *TVO Arts*, <https://www.tvoarts.org/works-of-art/christi-belcourt-wisdom-of-the-universe>. Accessed 10 June 2025.
- Berkes, Emily. *Continued Presence: The Art and Activism of Christi Belcourt and Chelsea Kaiah*. 2023. University of Colorado Boulder, MA thesis.
- Bicknell, Thomas Williams. *The Story of Dr. John Clarke*. The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2005.
- Boggs, Grace Lee. "Detroit Activist, Philosopher Grace Lee Boggs: 'The Only Way to Survive Is by Taking Care of One Another.'" *Democracy Now!*, 2 Apr. 2010, https://www.democracynow.org/2010/4/2/grace_lee_boggs. Accessed 10 July 2025.
- Burkhart, Brian Yazzie. "Be as Strong as the Land that Made You: An Indigenous Philosophy of Well-Being through the Land." *Science, Religion and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2019, pp. 26-33.
- Cardenal, Ernesto. *Love*. Crossroad, 1981.
- Coulthard, Glen, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity." *American Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2016, pp. 249-255.
- Deloria, Vine Jr. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Fulcrum, 2003.
- Di Giovine, Michael A. "Christi Belcourt: Indigenous Environmental Activism through Art." *WCU Museum Publications and Presentations*, 14 Oct. 2020, https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/moaaa_facpub/1/. Accessed 10 July 2025.
- Fields, Hannah. "Water Is Life: Christi Belcourt and Isaac Murdoch Make Art for Grassroots Movements." *ArtsHelp*, 2022, <https://www.artshelp.com/water-is-life/>. Accessed 10 June 2025.
- Finamore, Daniel, and Austen B. Bailly. *In American Waters: The Sea in American Painting*. U of Arkansas P, 2021.
- Godfrey, Mark, and Katy Siegel, eds. *Making Their Mark: Art by Women in the Shah Garg Collection*. Gregory R. Miller, 2023.
- Hillwood Art Museum. *Kay WalkingStick Paintings: 1974-1990*. Long Island UP, 1991.
- Hong, Young-Seoub, et al. "Methylmercury Exposure and Health Effects." *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2012, pp. 353-363.
- Horton, Jessica. "Ecocritical Art History for a Palimpsest Planet." *British Art Studies*, coordinated by Sria Chatterjee, 2020, <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-18/artsenvironmental-justice-ecological-crisis>. Accessed 10 July 2025.
- Houle, Robert. "Art History's Tangled Legs." *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist*, edited by Kathleen Ash-Milby and David W. Penney, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2015, pp. 145-148.
- Hughes, Ted. "Three Views of Contemporary Native North American Art." *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2014, pp. 177-183.
- Leslie, Keith. "Grassy Narrows Supporters Dump Mysterious Liquid Outside Ontario Legislature." *National Observer*, 23 June 2016, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/06/23/news/grassy-narrows-supporters-dump-mysterious-liquid-outside-ontario-legislature>. Accessed 10 July 2025.

- Lippard, Lucy. "Esthetic Sovereignty, or Going Places with Cultural Baggage." *Path Breakers*, U of Washington P, 2003, pp. 1-12.
- Martínez-Falquina, Silvia. "Missing Is Not a Destination: Bringing the Indigenous Woman Home in MMIW Literature." *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, vol. 37, 2022, pp. 103-123.
- McGregor, Joan. "Toward a Philosophical Understanding of TEK and Ecofeminism." *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability*, edited by Melissa K. Nelson and Dan Shilling, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 109-128.
- Mignolo, Walter. "Aesthesis decolonial." *Calle14*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2010, pp. 10-25.
- Mignolo, Walter, and Wanda Nanibush. "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, vol. 45, 2018, pp. 24-29.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "Imperial Landscape." *Landscape and Power*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell, U of Chicago P, 2002, pp. 5-34.
- Morris, Kate. *Shifting Grounds: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art*. U of Washington P, 2019.
- Mosa, Adam, and Jacalyn Duffin. "The Interwoven History of Mercury Poisoning in Ontario and Japan." *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 189, no. 5, 2017, pp. E213-E215.
- Nash, Roderick Frazier. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Yale UP, 2014.
- Nilsen, Richard. "Painting the Native Soul: Mother Earth 'Talks' Through Artist's Work." *The Arizona Republic*, 16 Sep. 1991, p. C2.
- Ohnesorge, Karen. "Uneasy Terrain: Image, Text, Landscape, and Contemporary Indigenous Artists in the United States." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2008, pp. 43-69.
- Onaman Collective. "Who We Are." *Onaman Collective*, 2026, <https://onamancollective.com/who-we-are/>. Accessed 10 July 2025.
- Pelluchon, Corinne. *Éthique de la considération*. Seuil, 2021.
- Preston, Christopher J. *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place*. U of Georgia P, 2003.
- Raheja, Michelle H. "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2007, pp. 1159-1185.
- Rickard, Jolene. "Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2017, pp. 81-84.
- . "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand." *Aperture*, no. 139, 1995, pp. 50-59.
- . "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 110, no. 2, 2011, pp. 465-486.
- Seaton, Melynda. "Native American Art Today in the Great Plains: An Overview of the Exhibition 'Contemporary Indigeneity: Spiritual Borderlands.'" *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2017, pp. 37-56.
- Shilling, Dan. "Introduction: The Soul of Sustainability." *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability*, edited by Melissa K. Nelson and Dan Shilling, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 3-14.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011.

Trosper, Ronald. "Traditional American Indian Economic Policy." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1995, pp. 65-95.

Vichnar, David, and Louis Armand. "Aisthēsis." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literary Theory*, 27 Feb. 2017, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780190699604.001.0001/acref-9780190699604-e-104>. Accessed 10 July 2025.

WalkingStick, Kay. *Aquidneck, After the Storm*. 2022, oil on panel, 40 x 80 in. *Kay WalkingStick*, https://kaywalkingstick.com/art/canvas_wood/fullsize/2022/aquidneck-after-the-storm.html. Accessed 10 July 2025.

---. *Galena Pass*. 2023, oil on panel, 40 x 80 in. *Kay WalkingStick*, https://kaywalkingstick.com/art/canvas_wood/fullsize/2023/galena-pass.html. Accessed 10 July 2025.

---. "Native American Art in the Postmodern Era." *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 3, 1992, pp. 15-17.

---. *Salmon River Valley*. 2023, oil on panel, 40 x 80 in. *Kay WalkingStick*, https://kaywalkingstick.com/art/canvas_wood/fullsize/2023/salmon-rivervalley.html. Accessed 10 July 2025.

---. *Wyoming Buffalo I*. 2020, oil and turpentine on gessoed paper, 22.5 x 45 in. *Kay WalkingStick*, <https://kaywalkingstick.com/art/paper/fullsize/2022/wyoming-buffalo-I.html>. Accessed 10 July 2025.

---. *Wyoming Buffalo II*. 2020, oil and turpentine on gessoed paper, 23 x 46 in. *Kay WalkingStick*, <https://kaywalkingstick.com/art/paper/fullsize/2022/wyoming-buffalo-II.html>. Accessed 10 July 2025.

Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. U of Minnesota P, 1994.

NOTES

1. Curiously enough, and related to American Indian palimpsestic art creations, "Vine Deloria Jr. has written that every culture has a curse, and that the particular curse of Indian culture is anthropology" (Preston 81).
2. The past exhibition, entitled "Kay WalkingStick/Hudson River School," can be traced here: <https://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/kay-walkingstick-hudson-river-school>.
3. I avoid in this case the representations of Native American settlements, as well as the representations of *the Indian warrior* so popular in mid-nineteenth century paintings. I am referring to titles such as *The Lost Track*, by Charles Ferdinand Wimar (ca. 1856, oil on canvas; 49.5 x 77.5 cm), or *Setting up Camp, Little Horse, Montana*, (n.d.; oil on canvas; 30.5 x 45.7 cm), by Joseph Henry Sharp, as both contribute to the exaltation of the settler colonizer, and the perpetration of the trauma of Indian dislocation and Indigenous land removal.
4. There are precedents in the work of the Canadian artist. Developed in 2012, *My Heart is Beautiful* is composed of a total of 250,000 dots and with an estimated completion time of four months. The composition also stages a night scene of fauna and flora in its splendour, with a great variety of flowers, birds and insects typical of a summer climate.
5. The fauna in the painting is always accompanied by even numbers, given their symmetrical nature.

ABSTRACTS

The boundaries between what is considered ab/normal seem to blur in our current transmodern society governed by the increasing threat of global crisis yielded by environmental, sanitary, geopolitical and economic instability. As an act of resilience and decolonial resistance, North American Indigenous painters utilize traditional hegemonic practices of aesthetic or political control such as landscape painting to serve a twofold function: as a medium to denunciate environmental degradation, and as a claim for cultural sovereignty and global recognition within the Western artistic canon. This paper will take into consideration the most recent work by Kay WalkingStick and Christi Belcourt, who base their artwork in Indigenous grounding knowledge and relationality between human and non-human entities.

INDEX

Keywords: Kay WalkingStick, Christi Belcourt, Native American Art, Relationality, Landscape Painting

AUTHOR

AITANA MONZÓN-BLASCO

Aitana Monzón-Blasco is a PhD candidate in English Studies at the University of Zaragoza (Spain), where she is completing her dissertation on the poetry of Louise Erdrich. She has published research on contemporary North American poetry in journals such as *REDEN*, *Acta Poética*, and *SAIL*. Beyond academia, she is a renowned poet in Spain, having received, among others, the 4th International Poetry Prize (Espasa, 2021) for her collection *La civilización no era esto*. Her latest poetry collection is entitled *Salve* (Espasa, 2025).