

Nametoo: Evidence that he/she is/was present

Celeste Pedri-Spade

University of Victoria

Abstract

This article presents *Nametoo*, a collection of photographic artworks that I completed with my family in a place called Gawaabaasheeng. *Nametoo* confronts the erasure of Anishinabeg from their territorial lands located outside the Indian Act by inscribing our presence on these lands now occupied predominantly by settler Canadians. By drawing on my Anishinabekwe understanding of art, aesthetic, and ways of knowing and situating my work in a history of Indigenous photography, I bring photography out of a Eurocentric paradigm that employs a realist approach to embrace the relational and evocative aspects of photography. I contribute a decolonial aesthetic that is process based and emerges out of relationships with self, others, materials/tools, and the lands in which we are situated. It is a strategic aesthetic that both contributes to my family's decolonial journey through strengthening intergenerational ties, reclaiming history, and regenerating a sense of belonging and identity, and provides a powerful counter-narrative to disrupt colonial histories while engaging viewers in critical reflection of their role in our continued displacement and abuse of our lands. *Nametoo* articulates visual sovereignty by visualizing our stories and their connection to the land. This work offers useful insight to Indigenous Peoples struggling to reassert their sovereignty within contested territories.

Keywords: *Indigenous photography; Anishinaabe; visual sovereignty; decolonization*

indoondaanagidoone¹ (Introduction)

We survived by watching, listening, and experiencing life. A photograph is not going to give that first hand experience, but it may haunt your memory into seeking life. (Rickard, 2006, p. 548)

Life is not art, but lives can make sense in ways that art can reveal.
(Friedman, 2006, p. 169)

Boozhoo. Anag Onimiwin nindishnikaz. Mukwa nindodem. Nizaatikoong nindooji.

I begin by introducing myself, who I am, and where I am from in my traditional language of Anishinabemowin. Every summer my family and I take several trips out to a place we call Gawaabaasheung (Anishinabemowin for ‘the place where the water narrows’). As soon as the snow starts to melt, we begin our annual trips, comprised mostly of just walking around, talking and laughing, eating, and sometimes venturing out onto the lake. Settler Canadians refer to Gawaabaasheung as Kashabowie, a township about 100 kilometers west of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Gawaabaasheung has and will continue to be a significant place for my family because it is one of the locations where my ancestors lived throughout the year. My grandmother was born on an island on a nearby lake and Kashabowie is the first White settler community that my family lived. Although we are registered to the reserves of Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation and Seine River First Nation, very few family members ever resided on these reservation lands and so, when I hear my chi anshininabeg² speak about our traditional lands, I believe they are referring to different places spread throughout our Anishinabe territory like Gawaabaasheung.

A few years ago Kashabowie was sold to a private developer who continues to divide and sell the land to summer-loving RV owners. In recent years, these annual trips have taken on greater cultural and political significance. We are intentionally engaging in what Anishinabekwe scholar and activist Leanne Simpson calls ‘presencing’, which is about collectively activating and renewing our relationships to each other and our lands currently occupied by settler society, thereby, disrupting colonial control over us as we share, create, and cultivate our voice, history, and presence (Simpson, 2011). In July 2013, I travelled to Gawaabaasheung with my two aunts, parents, husband, and children to engage in what I think of as an Anishinabe, family-based visual history lesson. We visited seven specific places that my aunties and husband identified as being meaningful to them as children and young adults. These included “grandma’s point,” “the old

1 Anishinabemowin (the language of Anishinabek) for “I come from a certain place to talk for a certain reason” The language of Anishinabek

2 I use the Anishinabemowin term for “old ones” as opposed to “Elders” to reflect recent discussions among chi anshininabeg in my community who take issue with the way “Elder” has been politicized by non-Indigenous institutions.

cabin,” “Harju’s store,” “the train tracks,” “the old school,” “the main road,” and, “the beach and boat launch”. Because I engage in photography as an artist and academic, I was asked to bring my camera with me and take pictures. With this request, I worked with my family to identify the purpose of this project: To explore our family’s relationship to Gawaabaasheung and to visualize how this relationship intertwines with our ability and responsibility to remember, experience, and communicate significant teachings related to our Anishinabe way of life and history. In carrying out these goals, we aimed to contribute an intimate Anishinabe understanding of the role of photographic art to decolonization, particularly in work related to healing, remembering, cultivating relationships with the land and family, history making, and the ways in which decolonial art and aesthetics is a process that is done with the whole body of a person, in relation to others, our Anishinabe teachings, and the land. While our experiences are unique to us, they extend to a broader Indigenous context and provide insight useful to artists and researchers employing photography in decolonization praxis/practice.

One of the most challenging tasks for me as an Anishinabekwe/artist/researcher is to write about my artwork. Writing academically about artwork often involves dissecting bodies or collections of artworks as “figures” to analyze them; thereby, severing the relational ties between the artworks, which contribute to a momentum—a building up—of critical and emotional meaning and experience intended for its audience. Also, like other individuals engaged in visual work, I believe we must challenge the notion of the “written text” as the central medium of academic knowledge; yet, I have come to understand that there is contextual information that is integral to understanding the meaning and value of my artwork that is conveyed through my words. In an effort to work through these challenges, I will proceed by first inviting you to experience the complete collection of *Nametoo* uninterrupted and then I will draw on the assistance of a helper (Maengun) to write about the artwork, drawing examples to flesh out the significance of *Nametoo* within a framework of decolonial practice/praxis. Who is Maengun and what is his/her purpose? Maengun is my spirit helper. In Anishinabe culture, our people are entrusted with aadisookaannag (spirit helpers) to assist them through their personal challenges. I am writing Maengun into this text, assigning a performative voice—a voice that interrogates and provokes. While it may seem conflicting that my helper would assume a probing role, much like a distant researcher or art critic, this is done intentionally. Aadisookaanag may help in not-so-straightforward ways. They can often present themselves to you, taking on or embodying your fears, conflicting beliefs, values and experiences, so that you must confront them head on. Maengun is here to assist me in situating this art project in personal, familial, theoretical, and broader Indigenous contexts of photography and decolonization, and decolonial aesthetics. Moreover, my hope is that Maengun will help bring a more conversational and intimate tone to make it more accessible to a broader audience and encourage the reader to develop a more personal relationship to my artwork and myself.



SACRIFICE

"One of the places our family used to live is a small cabin on an Island on Kashabowie lake. One day, a white man from Kashabowie went to the government and told them that there was an Indian living in the bush who had kids who weren't going to school. So the Indian Agent showed up at our place and told our dad that we were required by law to go to the boarding school in Kenora. Our dad didn't want us to go. He struck a deal with the guy...dad agreed to give up living our life in the bush to move to Kashabowie, and then he could keep us at home. We would go to the day school in Kash. That's how we ended up here." – Frances Shebobman



DAY SCHOOL

"We used to have to line up boys on one side girls on the other. We didn't like going to school and tried to get away. I remember one winter when the truancy officer chased us all the way across the lake and dragged us back to school...this big man chasing us little girls (laugh), silly, eh?"
– Julie Rusnak



GATHERINGS

"I remember the powwows we used to have as a little girl. They were different than you see now. They were held all along the lakes. The circle was closed with small tree poles up to your chest. The fire was in the middle and families sat with their drums on the sides. People sat on cedar branches and the women served the food. Your great-great-grandmother's sister, Meneegootchegan, was the head of everyone. She looked after all the spiritual and cultural ceremonies." – Frances Shebobman



AUNTY FRANCES



VISUAL NOISE

"This place (Kashabowie) was bought up by a developer. He's selling lots to people for their camps. There's RVs all over the place! Soon it won't look the same at all." – Julie Rusnak



SWITCH

"We used to walk up to the switch and back for something to do. My dad worked for CN Rail and that's how we ended up in Kashabowie. His job with the railway was really the first kind of work for a company. Before that we lived off the land up north." – Rob Spade



VIOLENCE

"Me and your aunt were just little girls when it happened. I remember running to the tracks with a whole bunch of people. They were yelling at your great-grandma on our dad's side to get off the train tracks but she just stood there. The conductor couldn't do anything, you know...but lots of people at that time died that way. She went to the residential school in Kenora, you know. Awful place...they must have ruined her."- Frances Shebobman



PEACE

"Me and aunty got there after it had happened...I guess the train had hit her. People were yelling this but we couldn't believe it because we saw her running away from the tracks into the bush...both Julie and I saw it. We were just little girls, but we knew it was her spirit. She was going home. She was okay." – Julie Rusnak



AUNTY JULIE



GOOD MEDICINE

Women are the life givers, care takers, and medicine people. Your great-grandma had her babies in the bush. There were no doctors. Her mother, your great-great-grandma was the one who delivered the babies. She was called on to deliver many peoples' babies. Once, your great grandma almost bled to death during child birth but her mother came with her medicines and did ceremony. I remember being a little girl and seeing the smoke and the plants. The bleeding stopped." - Julie Rusnak



KINIW

"When Kiniw is older he won't have the same connection to these places as we do. But that's okay. In the bush, you're not supposed to walk in any other person or animal's tracks." – Robert Spade



GRANDMA'S POINT

"In the winter when we were kids we used to stand here at the point and wait for our mom to come back from trapping. She would leave at 5:30 in the morning and she would only take one kid. The rest of us waited for her. We watched this little black dot on the snowy lake grow bigger and bigger when she came home in the evening. It was the best feeling." – Julie Rusnak



HARJU'S STORE

"A Finnish man, Mr. Harju, ran the local trading post. He lived in Kashabowie almost his whole life. He used to give all us native kids candy and ice sticks. He was a kind man." – Robert Spade



KEESHIG



SUMMER FUN

"A developer bought the land and now it is full of RVs...waabske (White People) going camping."
– Frances Shebobman



DWELLINGS

"Before we didn't just have one home, we had many. We lived where we needed to, depending on weather, food, and work. Before Indians lived wherever. We didn't ask permission....not like it is now. And when we left a place, we left it the way it was when we got there." – Shirley Shebobman



OUTSIDE THE SHITTER

"Maybe we should have bought up all the land from the government when it went up for sale." – Frances Shebobman



VISITOR

"I remember being a boy in Kashabowie. I lived here for awhile, but I can't remember when. We travelled a lot and lived in many places. Now, we visit here. Our ancestors lived in many places. They travelled according to the seasons and resources. I don't think they thought of visiting or belonging in the same way we do now. They were busy living." – Robert Spade



ROBERT



RESILIENCE

"The woman in our family are always laughing." – Julie Rusnak



COLONIZATION



JOURNEY

"Every Fall we would pack up and travel from Kashabowie Lake to Whitefish Lake to go ricing. Back then we went by canoe and portage. It took us days, but we all went...kids, adults and even the old ones." – Frances Shebobman



OGINII-WAABIGWAAN (ROSE)

“Lots of women in our family are named ‘Rose’ after our grandmother. When I was just a little girl, she would take me snaring. She could snare everything...fish, rabbits, deer. I went because she needed help. I was small and light, so she would get me to climb up on the sapling until it bent all the way over. She would grab it on the other side and tie it down. That’s how she set the traps for the bigger animals.” – Julie Rusnak



OGICHIDAAKWEWAG (Women Warriors)

Maengun: This project is entitled *Nametoo*, Anishinabemowin for “there is evidence that he/she was/is present.” This seems to speak back to a legacy of colonial violence aimed at eradicating and erasing Indigenous Peoples and their histories. I am thinking of how Western art practice has fostered colonial myths of Indigenous Peoples’ absences and disappearances. This is exemplified in the iconic photography of Edward Curtis and Roland Reed, which presented romanticized, exotic portrayals of Indigenous Peoples, depicting their cultures as bounded entities on the verge of extinction. Also, the famous landscape paintings of the Canadian Group of Seven artists were devoid of human or cultural activity, which helped to bolster the colonial myth of *terra nullius*. Given this colonial history, how do you as an Anishinabekwe artist engage with art and photography without further colonizing yourself and your own family members?

Celeste: As an Anishinabekwe, you bear the scars of wounds inflicted on your ancestors by artists and researchers. A direct example of this is the extensive collections of anthropometric paintings and photographs of Anishinabek commissioned by colonial government officials during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Willmott, 2005). This kind of work was conducted within the confines of Western photographic theory and anthropology, which privileged concerns of realism, subjectivity and individuality (Glass, 2009). It exemplifies a history of how visual/material objects have been a “fertilizer of the colonial vision” (Alloula, 2012, p. 318). *Nametoo* confronts these colonial myths of apparent absences or disappearances by acknowledging and inscribing our presence on these landscapes, which are now occupied predominantly by White settler Canadians. But it doesn’t just inscribe our individual presences and experiences, it marks us in relation to our ancestors—their struggles and their stories—and to other “outsiders” who have a very different and often conflicting understanding of how to exist in these places.

Maengun: Speaking of differences, how does your understanding and practice of art and aesthetics as an Anishinabekwe differ from Eurocentric understandings of art?

Celeste: Well “art” is one of the most highly theorized “subjects” within several Western disciplines. For example, within anthropology it has been manipulated so many times to fit whatever paradigm happens to be popular at the time. As an Anishinabekwe, I refuse to subscribe to any Eurocentric universalized notion of art as a category of things with objective characteristics or inherent beauty. Art has always been a way for me to relate to my family, the Creator, my ancestors, the land, and my own self. Art is a process of relating and through this process, I heal, learn, communicate, pray, struggle, mourn, dream, and experience enjoyment. In a recent publication about Anishinabek artists, Penney (2013) states that artwork created by Anishinabek continues to be instrumental in describing their relations to the land, to one another

and to others. This fits with my Anishinabekwe understanding of art. Given the colonial history of my people, art has always been a decolonizing journey. It has always been grounded in a goal of decolonization; as stated in the manifesto put forward by members of the Transnational Decolonial Institute:

The goal of decolonial thinking and doing is to continue reinscribing, embodying and dignifying those ways of living, thinking and sensing that were violently devalued or demonized by colonial, imperial and interventionist agendas. (Mignolo et al., 2011, para. 1)

Aesthetics is also a highly contested issue, particularly in anthropologies of art. Some art anthropologists call for a complete abandonment of aesthetics due to its entanglement with assumptions formed by an ethnocentric Euro-American “art cult” (Gell, 1992, p. 42). While I agree with the call to refute any Kantian application and understanding of aesthetics related to the nature and appreciation of beauty, I don’t believe in tossing it aside because it is integral to visual/material work carried out within a framework of decolonial praxis. Aesthetics must be decolonized; as Badger (2013) states, a decolonial approach must be “geared towards delinking aesthetics, at the epistemic level, from the discourse of colonialism that is embedded in post-Enlightenment concepts of modernity itself” (para. 1). As an Anishinabekwe, I envision that this “delinking” involves understanding aesthetics as more than just finished attributes or qualities of artworks, but as a process that is done with the whole body of a person, in relation to others, and the environment in which we are situated.

Maengun: You have addressed many important aspects of decolonization and have highlighted the significance of “relationships”. Syed Hussan states, “Decolonization is a dramatic reimagining of relationships with land, people and the state...It is a practice; it is an unlearning” (cited in Walia, 2012, para. 2). Where do you start as an artist/researcher engaged in photography in this reimagining and unlearning?

Celeste: One of the first steps in this process is reclaiming the rich history of photography within Indigenous Peoples’ creative practices and histories. One of the biggest colonial myths attached to photography is that it was a tool only accessible to the colonizer, yet Tlingit/Nisga’a artist McNeil (2009) reminds us, “North American Indigenous people have used photography nearly as long as White Man, and for our own ends” (p. 110). For over a hundred years Indigenous Peoples have been using photography to combat colonialism by carrying out their own respective agendas. Tsimshian researcher Askren (2013) has explored the work of one of community’s ancestors, Benjamin Alfred Haldane (1874-1941), a professional photographer who had a successful career working with his own community members. His works, commissioned by Tsimshian families, illustrate how photography was used to combat stereotypes, document ancestral histories, bring pride to families, and resist colonial control over ceremonial and cultural practices. Similarly ho-Chunk researcher Lonetree (2011) has explored a history of her

people's commissioning of an American photographer around the turn of the twentieth century to visually document their abuse by colonial governments and also the survival tactics they employed to resist and counter this violence. In both historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and dispossession, photography often becomes a practice used in the struggle to maintain autonomy and self-integrity (Buckley, 2000; Pinney, 2011), to mourn and heal (Birkhofer, 2008; Tsinnahijinnie, 2003), and to resist and persevere (hooks, 2003; McNeil, 2009). Grounding my work in this rich history is significant to me—an Anishinabekwe artist grappling with these same issues—because it provides me with a strong sense of empowerment and pride; it provides a strong foundation for my work.

Maengun: You identify as Anishinabekwe. Can you expand on how your own identity and the particular knowledge sharing teachings and practices attached to this identity, inform your understanding and use of photography. In other words how do you relate to and contribute to this rich history?

Celeste: First and foremost, my understanding of photography draws from and contributes to the Anishinabe epistemological practice of “sharing my truth.” This practice is grounded in the sacred teaching of Debwewin. In order to carry out Debwewin, one must speak their own truth and not attempt to speak for another or speak “on” their truth. To attempt to represent someone else's lived experience is viewed as ignoring or working against their practice of Debwewin. Rather, one must reveal their own unique relationship to some aspect of their biological, spiritual, social, or cognitive reality through their selected form of individual expression.³ Given this, the photographs that are part of *Nametoo* must not be viewed as a visual representation of my family's truths, but rather, my visual relationship to their truths revealed through our process of coming together and sharing stories. Here, I am detaching myself from any Eurocentric dominant paradigm that employs a realist or representational aspect of photography. Rather, I am approaching the expressive, evocative and relational aspects of photography, acknowledging that knowledge production takes place as we are making, living, breathing, moving, and relating. Steven Tyler (1987, as cited in Pink, 2006) and Calzadilla & Marcus (2006) advocate for a visual methodology that calls for “evocation” which produces understanding instead of an object.

Maengun: Can you draw from specific examples that illustrate how you put this into action and how this contributes to a decolonial aesthetic?

Celeste: First, look at the relationship between the text and the photograph. I have included a story shared by one of my family members that contributes to our shared history. I have not altered their truth and the stories do not aim to explain what is going on the photograph because I was not trying to show their “visual truth.” Instead, the image reveals my relationship to their

³ Debwewin is expressed through a variety of creative means including oral storytelling, beadwork, dance, and painting.

story. Their story is the lens through which I experience and make sense of my reality. Take the very first photograph, *Sacrifice*. My aunt was describing how her and her siblings ended up in Kashabowie—through forced assimilation. My great-grandfather was forced into enfranchisement. The picture is created by layering two different photographs, which creates a multiple exposure effect. I used photographs of my son playing in the dirt that day, as well as a poster of the “principles” of education in Ontario I managed to shoot from outside the old school while looking in. *Sacrifice* evokes not only their abuse by colonial authorities but also a struggle to persevere—and my responsibility to my children to keep fighting for their education and land rights.

Also, take a set of different the photographs titled, *Aunty Frances*, *Aunty Julie*, my son *Keeshig*, and husband *Robert*. At first one may view these as portraits of family members; however, I see portraiture as photographs that display particular physical or emotional characteristics, which is not what I intended to do with these photographs. I would call these “evocatures” because they are intended to elicit, educe, inspire, and to re-affirm my belief that the land will always reside in us. It marks us. It has the ability to draw out things significant to our history and lived experiences. It can teach us why we do the things we do and why we are the way we are. These evocatures are inspired by Indigenous artists like Iroquois/Onondaga photographer Jeff Thomas and Dzawada’enuxw artist Marianne Nicholson. These artists want their viewers to critically reflect on relationships to the land and place. For these evocatures I layered multiple images of the land within the person. Metaphorically, each layered image is like a layer of skin. Like skin, our relationship with the land is integral to holding us together. I chose a stark white backdrop for each evocature to raise the issue that, as Anishinabek, we are constantly confronted with the challenge of maintaining a connection to the land within a predominantly White society comprised of members that may have very different ideas of how to relate to the land.

Maengun: This is definitely evident in the photographs titled *Visual Noise*, *Summer Fun*, *Colonization*, and *Outside the Shitter*. There is a harsh, almost violent quality to them. When the viewer comes across one of these they are in a way directly assaulted by an intensity of colour and a clash of imagery.

Celeste: Yes, their sporadic placement in the collection is intentional. They are meant to jolt viewers, to unsettle and stimulate. They bring viewers a little closer to the harsh reality of our displacement and the abuse of our lands through settler cultural activities. Garneau (2013) states, “decolonial practice is a direct challenge to colonial habits” (p. 17). These photographs attempt to de-normalize and de-stabilize these settler colonial “habits” of place-making and address how seemingly frivolous activities around recreation are not so inconsequential because they are bound up in historical, cultural, social and environmental consequences of modernization and capitalism. Ingram (2013) states:

Any kind of decolonial aesthetic anywhere in Canada must initially acknowledge the specificity and the full extent of the losses of local Indigenous communities, populations, economies and cultures. (p. 8)

Nametoo contributes to decolonial aesthetics because it engages communities and spaces in ways that identify and intervene in our traditional territories, far outside the confines of our designated reservation lands. It addresses unresolved issues around sovereignty that I believe are not addressed through the colonial imposed land-claims or “treaty-making” processes in Canada.

Maengun: Decolonization and “presencing” is about Indigenous peoples enacting their right to live out their Indigenous sovereignty on their own land, in their own way. How does *Nametoo* relate to this?

Celeste: Regarding Native artwork, Hearne (2012) states that acts of familial recognition function as a political recognition of Native claims and support discourses of Native sovereignty in specific visual ways. *Nametoo* embodies my family’s efforts to use photography to articulate visual sovereignty and presence in our Anishinabek territory. We intentionally selected places not located on our designated reserve lands because we did not want to further perpetuate the colonial myth that has been internalized by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples—that is, “Indian land is only reserve land.” Not only did *Nametoo* provide the opportunity for us to come together as a family and experience these places first-hand, *Nametoo* as an artwork also inscribes our presence on these landscapes, which are now occupied predominantly by White settler-Canadians. Dowell (2013) suggests that visual sovereignty is enacted through work that makes Aboriginal stories visible. While I agree with this understanding, I believe it is important to note that visual sovereignty is carried out through work that visualizes the relationship these stories have to the land and to the important kin and community relationships that are strengthened through relating to and through the land.

Maengun: And what did you and your family learn or from or take away from this experience?

Celeste: *Nametoo* involved four generations of my family. It brought us together to share stories and experiences that contribute to our ongoing healing and work towards reclaiming our family history. But it wasn’t just about reclaiming our history, it was about engaging with this history in the present, about connecting the identity and experiences of my children and myself to those belonging to my ancestors. I did not have the opportunity to learn many life skills and activities my chi anishinabeg practiced because they were forced off the land into a constant struggle with many forms of colonial violence. But now, the greatest gift I can give my children and future grandchildren is their history, a relationship with our lands, and the life skills to survive within these lands in a respectful way. Dowell (2013) states that key to considering art as an act of visual sovereignty is the way in which it can generate healthy social relationships, particularly intergenerational ties. I think addressing what may arise out of these relationships can expand

upon this point. By coming together, my family and I carried out the important work of confronting the colonial past, how the past relates to the present day, and what it means to move forward towards decolonization. I believe this is what Bajorek (2012) refers to when she states, “photography is a historical force in its own right” (p. 148). This understanding of photography is imperative within the context of decolonization because, as Miller & Riding In (2011) state, decolonization is not about returning to the past, but a process that allows people to move forward from the devastating effects of colonization.

At different times during this project, I can recall my aunts coming to the same realization: That they can remember things out on the land that they otherwise forget in the city. This illustrates that they were able to identify and contribute significant teachings about the nature of our Anishinabe memory in the making of history: That our knowledges of the past are communicated and sustained through embodied, situated, land-based activities— memory emerges out of a relationship between us as Anishinabek and the physical and the material environments in which we live. Also, throughout this experience, I can recall my grandmother’s voice stressing the importance of revealing:

that this was the way Anishinabek *did* and *should still* have the right to live. No one had to ask permission like they have to now. We need to show this to other Indians. (S. Shebobman, personal communication, June 2013)

The significance of *Nametoo* is that it counters other historical accounts that have been bolstered and privileged by colonial institutions. These counter-narratives serve as powerful alternative versions of history that may be useful for Anishinabek and other Indigenous Peoples who are attempting to reassert their values, identities, and beliefs. This project helped in understanding and reconciling our own personal histories while at the same time helping to regenerate and reaffirm our truths, rights, and beliefs in a creative way. *Nametoo* brought the concept of Indigenous sovereignty back to a very personal, relational, familial level. My mother always reminds me that our (Anishinabek) sovereignty begins at home. At the same time, it extends to a much broader Indigenous context of activists/artists/researchers/community members who are contributing situated perspectives on the role of art production in resistance and survivance strategies employed by Indigenous Nations throughout North America. *Nametoo* recently travelled to the *Bury My Art At Wounded Knee* exhibition in Portland, Oregon, curated by Indigenous artist/curator Demian Dine Yahzi’. This exhibit acknowledged Indigenous resistance and resurgence through education, perseverance, and dissemination of Native North American art, activism, writing, history, storytelling, and lived experience.

Maengun: In carrying out *Nametoo*, what challenges did you experience as an artist. Were there challenges around ‘being present’ and relating to family and the land with a camera?

Celeste: First, let’s keep in mind that we were in the bush. The number one challenge is really the land! It’s hard to get into that mind frame to take a thoughtful photograph when you are

getting eaten alive by bugs and trying to keep an eye on the weather. The camera almost became a handicap because it placed me in a rather uncomfortable and vulnerable position. However, in that space of vulnerability and disarray, I could relate to and appreciate things about my family that I would not otherwise have. For example, the way they always move so quickly and efficiently. The way they stop, shifting their weight to their back leg and raise their hands when they have something important to tell me. I tried to reveal these little nuances in my work. I developed a greater understanding of and appreciation for their skills and for what they are going through presently. I felt like a clumsy photographer racing to keep up with them but, reflecting back, I see they felt that same pressure. They are racing to tell me things that I need to know and are scrambling to remain connected to places that are changing so quickly. They are survivors in many ways. A camera may be as useless in the bush as a pencil and paper, but it is a good Trickster.⁴

Maengun: Visual art may open up multiple meanings that are determined not only by you, as the artist, but also by the viewer(s) (Leavy, 2009). Can you discuss your artistic choices/methods in relation to the audience of this work?

Celeste: I took a total of 51 images during our visits. This was more than I had planned but my family was pretty enthusiastic. When I was asked to take a picture, I did. As we visited, I began to see how connected each place was. Initially, I thought that one or two stories would arise from being in each spot; however, that wasn't the case. We could be at the old cabin, for example, and someone would talk about an event/experience at the day school. To use an analogy, it wasn't like fishing with a rod and anchor, but with a huge net that resulted in a web of interrelated stories, connected to not one or two places independently, but each place in relationship to another. I chose to use the layering of photographs to reveal this, so most photographs you see are actually several images blended together. This intentional layering implicates the viewer because as the viewer looks at the photographs, they attempt to separate or dissect the images—to “make out” each exposure independently from the other. Here, I want the viewer to reflect on ideas of separation, breaking apart, and dislocation, and critically reflect on how they may or may not be participating in the continued displacement of Aboriginal people through their disengagement, complacency, and disinterest in confronting colonial myths and histories and also through their politics and particular lifestyle choices that impact the land. Garneau (2013) writes that artwork that engages decolonial aesthetics is about stimulating and disrupting the senses and they are “mentally indigestible...they encourage people to puzzle with them and learn what they need of them” (p. 21).

⁴ Trickster is an important cultural hero in Anishinabek culture. Trickster not only tricks, but transgresses, transforms, shape-changes, heals, and works magic. Trickster is neither good nor evil. His/her role is to initiate change. Trickster may destroy but through destruction, he may initiate creation.

Maengun: Yes, in a way the photographs are like a puzzle, but a difficult one. Sometimes I know what I am looking at but then I see something else in either the foreground or background and then I am not sure...

Celeste: Exactly. While I want the viewer to attempt to dissect these blended photographs, the artistic challenge was to make this difficult for them to achieve. In this way, my process is rooted in the same spirit of resilience and resistance that I witness in both my family's struggle and in the artwork of Indigenous artists/activists, like Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Christi Belcourt, Shelley Niro, and Greg Staats, who confront similar issues like place and identity, our relationship with the natural world, and family histories. Also, layering images helps me deliver or demonstrate our stories and experiences with more strength and conviction. If you were to pay close attention to your surroundings in our territory, you would see that many objects in nature are visibly layered, increasing their durability and level of resistance—trees, rocks. My creative process is also connected to how I have grown to relate to and interact with my family. My role is to make regalia for family members, a gift that was passed on to me from my mother and my aunt. This is tied to my clan role of Mukwa (Bear) as a protector/healer. Thus, I liken the way I work with images to how I work with other material items: I am blanketing, protecting, and adorning with these photographs. What I'm getting at here is that, as an Anishinabekwe artist, I have a responsibility to decolonize my own mind and imagination as I create artwork that engages our Anishinabek experiences, struggles, stories, lives, relationships, beliefs and visions. I believe we have to decolonize by confronting the ways in which we may have internalized not only the colonizer's visualizations of who we are, but also the colonizer's artistic and aesthetic processes that have gone into the production of these visual myths. Badger (2013) reminds us that "a decolonial aesthetic acknowledges and subverts the presence of colonial power and control in the realm of the senses (p. 1). In photography, there are many "rules" attached to the art that, as an Anishinabekwe, I do not have to subscribe to because understanding and application of aesthetics and creativity comes from my own relationship with the land, my family, and our lives in relation to many other Indigenous peoples working through similar experiences and histories.

Also, decolonial aesthetics emerges out of situated encounters that involve artists and their materials/tools at a particular moment and place. I encourage all artists engaged in work addressing decolonization to become more aware of how the use their tools (e.g. camera, imagination, pen and paper, paint, etc.) is affected by being present and relating to others. For example, I created *Violence* after learning about the very tragic death of one of my great-great grandmothers. When I heard the story, it felt like a million light bulbs had turned on simultaneously in my head. I wanted to reveal this but the question was, how? How to bring this experience to the work? So, I chose to slow my shutter speed and increase the aperture on my camera, which increased the volume of light entering into the lens. This produced the blurriness and movement. When I went back to look at the image, I felt as if I was struck down. This is the sensorial experience I am attempting to evoke in the viewer. Again, I want the viewer to connect to my experience of learning and processing this part of my history.

Maengun: There are a few photographs that stand apart from the body of work because they appear to be single exposures (*Laughter*, *Kiniw*, and *Switch*). Can you comment about these?

Celeste: I commented previously on how challenging and chaotic this process was—not just the logistics, but challenging in that I was learning a lot of potent, sensitive, and serious information about my family. These photographs, in particular, reveal moments of calmness. The experience of taking these was different than the others because I was taking these photographs more for myself than for anyone else. Yet, they are still very significant pieces to the collection because the audience/viewer needs to witness my quiet pauses—to hear the moments when I exhale—to see the smile on my face. As an artist now looking at my own work, they continue to provide me with the space where I feel most welcome, comfortable and at ease. They do stand in contrast to some of the other photographs like *Colonization* and *Visual Noise*; however, this is intentional and reflective of my decolonial journey. It is full of twist and turns, highs and lows, pauses and accelerations. It has been, and continues to be, unpredictable...it is both intensely private and yet, public. In a way, decolonization is a great mystery. I am reminded of Reyes Cruz's (2012) statement about decolonization:

[decolonization] is about moving towards a different and tangible place, somewhere out there, where no one has really ever been. (p. 153)

Maengun: Working as an artist and researcher with your own family and community brings great responsibility. You have touched upon the collaborative nature of your work, but can you expand upon these concepts of responsibility and collaboration?

Celeste: Within an Anishinabek context, artistic/research/activist practice can inform one another only if responsibility and accountability are at the heart of the project. In any situation, I am responsible to my family and Anishinabek community—to determine how my gifts can be carried out in a useful, respectful, and relevant way. I am responsible to my own creative and artistic spirit and vision. Also, I am responsible for what Morphy & Perkins (2006) state, for “opening the way to understanding processes of creativity and understanding” (p. 15). I believe it is possible to balance these responsibilities only through ongoing collaboration with my family.

My family members chose the locations we visited and led the way as we walked and talked. My role was to listen and let the story inform my visual work. Later on, I worked with them as I produced each photograph. I would share ideas and why I made particular creative and stylistic choices. I was fulfilling my responsibility to share with them ‘how’ and ‘why’ their story moved me a particular direction. Also, I worked with each person on the captions that accompany the photographs to ensure accuracy and clarity. These are their voices, not mine. Their stories did not result from scripted interviews, but emerged through their experiences out on the land and were selected collaboratively as we worked through the images I took. The captions do not describe what is going on in the photograph; rather, they work in relationship with the photograph to help the audience develop a stronger connection to our experiences in

these places. Also, in *Gatherings* and *Rose*, I incorporated other material taken from an old newspaper article and a family photograph of my great-great maternal grandmother that my aunt brought with her. These material objects were significant to her because they contained historical information about Gawaabaasheung that she could relate to. For example, I used the newspaper clipping in *Gatherings*. The article specifically mentions my great-great grandmother and her aptitude for beadwork and sewing. She made many things for her family out of love, to honour her family and her gifts as a sewer and beader. My aunt asked me if I could include it in my work, so I did. I feel proud to incorporate a testament to my great-great grandmother's artistic gifts in my own artwork.

Maengun: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Celeste: I would like to say miigwetch to my family for continuing to share their stories with me. Artists and researchers often think about the ways in which they can do good for the people they work with—driven by what “things” or results they can produce that can be useful to communities; however, I am learning that “doing good” is also about being present, about listening to my own family, about accepting the gift of their time and stories, and about exercising my own gifts and roles. The more time I spend on the land with my family, the more I understand my own creative and aesthetic processes.

Conclusion

Nametoo: There is evidence that he/she was present is a collection of artwork that explored my family's relationship to Gawaabaasheung and visualized how this relationship intertwines with our ability to remember, experience, and communicate significant teachings related to our Anishinabe way of life and history. It contributes to our ongoing journey of decolonization by regenerating and strengthening relationships with the land and intergenerational ties that are instrumental to our healing, history-making, sense of belonging, and identity as Anishinabe people. *Nametoo* provides an intimate Anishinabe understanding of the role and use of art and aesthetics in decolonial praxis by: 1) Grounding our work in a history of Indigenous photography marked by Indigenous perseverance, resilience and the ongoing struggle to combat colonialism; 2) taking photography out of a Eurocentric paradigm by drawing upon Anishinabe teachings and understanding related to art and knowledge sharing processes; and, 3) articulating the ways in which a decolonial aesthetic is a process that is undergone with the whole body of a person in relation to others and the land, thereby enlivening understandings and practices that have been suppressed by colonial constructs and institutions. As visual sovereignty, *Nametoo* inscribes an Anishinabek presence within Anishinabek lands that fall outside the Indian Act, lands that are now predominantly occupied by White settler-Canadians, and reveals that the process of remembering, which is integral to our history-making and involves sensorial acts of being, seeing, listening and hearing *within* our Anishinabek territories. It employs a strategic decolonial

aesthetic to encourage White settlers to critically contemplate and act on the ways in which they may be contributing to the ongoing struggles of Anishinabek, including against displacement, abuse of lands, and the struggle for sovereignty. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred and Tsalagi scholar Jeff Corntassel (2005) state:

it is ultimately our lived collective and individual experiences as Indigenous peoples that yield the clearest and most useful insights for establishing culturally sound strategies to resist colonialism and regenerate our communities. (p. 601)

It is with recognition that I contribute an experience and perspective that offers no blueprint for decolonial art and aesthetics. Rather, my intent is to provide useful insight to artists and researchers collectively engaged in the ongoing decolonial struggle.

References

- Alfred, T. & Corntassel, J. (2005). Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. In *Government and Opposition*. (Vol. 9). Retrieved from: <http://web.uvic.ca/igov/uploads/pdf/Being%20Indigenous%20GOOP.pdf>
- Alloula, M. (2002). From the colonial harem. In N. Mirzoeff (Ed.), *The visual culture reader 2nd ed.* (pp. 519-524). New York: Routledge.
- Askren, M. I. (2009). Memories of glass and fire. In H. Lidchi & H. J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Eds.), *Visual currencies: Reflections on Native photography* (pp. 91-108). Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Limited.
- Badger, G. (2013). States of post coloniality/decolonial aesthetics. *FUSE Magazine*, 36(4), x-xx.
- Bajorek, J. (2012). 'Ca bousculait!' Democratization and photography in Senegal. In R. Vokes (Ed.), *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 140-165). Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc.
- Buckley, L. (2000). Self and accessory in Gambian studio photography. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 16, 71-91.
- Calzadilla, F. & Marcus, G. (2006). Artists in the field: Between art and anthropology. In A. Schneider & C. Wright (Eds.), *Cotemporary art and anthropology* (pp. 95-115). New York, NY: Berg.
- Dowell, K. L. (2013). *From sovereign screens: Aboriginal media on the Canadian west coast*. USA: University of Nebraska Press.

- Friedman, J. (2006). Carlos Capelan: Our modernity not theirs. In A. Schneider and C. Wright (Eds.), *Contemporary art and anthropology* (pp. 169-176). New York, NY: Berg.
- Garneau, D. (2013). Extra-rational aesthetic action and cultural decolonization, *FUSE Magazine*, 36(4), 14-23.
- Gell, A. (1992). The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology. In J. Coote & A. Shelton (Eds.), *Anthropology, art and aesthetics* (pp. 40–66). Oxford: Clarendon.
- Glass, A. (2009). A cannibal in the archive: Performance, materiality, and (in)visibility in unpublished Edward Curtis photographs of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamat'sa. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 25(2), 128–149.
- Graveline, F. J. (2000). Circle as methodology: Enacting an Aboriginal paradigm. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(4), 361-370.
- Hearne, J. (2012). *Native recognition: Indigenous cinema and the western*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- hooks, b. (2003). In our glory: Photography and black life. In L. Wells (Ed.), *The photography reader* (pp. 387-394). London: Routledge.
- Ingram, G. B. (2013). Repopulating contentious territory: Recent strategies for Indigenous Northwest Coast site-based and public art, *FUSE Magazine*, 36(4), 7-8.
- Jones, T. (2011). A Ho-chunk photographer looks at Charles Van Shaik. In T. Jones, M. Schmudlach, M. D. Mason, & A. Lonetree (Eds.), *People of the big voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1942* (pp. 23-34). Wisconsin, USA: Wisconsin Historical Society Press.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Lonetree, A. (2011). Visualizing native survivance: Encounters with my Ho-Chunk ancestors in the family photographs of Charles Van Schaick. In Jones, T., Schmudlach, M., Mason, M.D., & Lonetree, A. (Eds.). *People of the Big Voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1942* (pp. 13-22). Wisconsin, USA: Wisconsin Historical Society Press.
- Miller, S. & Riding In, J. (2011). *Native historians write back: Decolonizing American Indian history*. USA: Texas Tech University Press.
- McNeill, L. (2009). American myths and Indigenous photography. In H. Lidchi & H. J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Eds.), *Visual currencies: Reflections on Native photography* (pp. 109-123). Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Limited.
- Mignolo et al. (2011, May 22). Decolonial aesthetics. Retrieved from <http://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>
- Morphy, H. & Perkins, M (2006). The anthropology of art: A reflection on its history and contemporary practice. In H. Morphy & M. Perkins (Eds.), *The anthropology of art: A reader* (pp. 1-32). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Penney, D. W. (2013). Water, earth sky. In D. W. Penney and G. McMaster (Eds.), *Before and after the horizon: Anishinaabe artists of the Great Lakes* (pp. 9-36). Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.
- Pink, S. (2006). *The future of visual anthropology: Engaging the senses*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pinney, C. (2011). *Photography and anthropology*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Reyes Cruz, M. (2012). Ni con dios ni con el diablo: Tales of survival, resistance and rebellion from a reluctant academic. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1 (1), 141-157.
- Rickard, J. (2006). Cew ete haw I tih: The bird that carries language back to another. In H. Morphy & M. Perkins (Eds.), *The anthropology of art: A reader* (pp. 544-548). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Simpson, L. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence, and a new emergence*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring.
- Tyler, S. (1987) *The unspeakable*. Madison, USA: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Tsinhnajinnie, H. J. (2003). When is a photograph worth a thousand words? In C. Pinney & N. Peterson (Eds.), *Photography's other histories* (pp. 40-54). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Walia, H. (2012, May 1). Decolonizing together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization. *Briarpatch magazine*. Retrieved from: <http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/decolonizing-together>
- Wilmott, C. (2005). The lens of science: Anthropometric photography and the Chippewa, 1890–1920, *Visual Anthropology*, 18, 309–337.