

Identity and Race are both components of life that bring us together as well as unfortunately divide us, in Canada as well as all over the world. A country built on immigration (as some would say about America) is also true for Canada, one of the richest countries in the world when it comes to multiculturalism. A tiny piece of Europe as some would say can be found nestled in the vast territory that Quebec occupies, a cultural hub where both French and English have found a way to coexist. Leaning on Native populations to help us shape our national identity, many different ethnicities and identities play a role in Canadian culture as well as the way we are perceived by outsiders. Like most culturally diverse countries, the notion of Identity and Race has everything to do with the way we express ourselves. In Canada, the generalization that lies within “Identity and Race” must be broadened and addressed as “Identity and Ethnicity/ Culture” in order to really touch on all things that make up our very unique communal identity. Without the inclusion of ethnicity and culture, we cease to recognize that a hundred different cultures could emerge from one race. As the world progresses and we try to disassociate race and ethnicity from prejudice and ultimately racism, many of us have stopped talking about our cultures as a whole which in turn has diminished our knowledge about our very own heritage. In order to regain this knowledge, and to understand what kind of role Identity and Race play in our own everyday lives, we must first pay attention to the past and what artists, movements, events and ideologies helped mold Canada into the recognized cultural hub we are recognized as being, globally. This takes us back to the very first contact that Europeans had with this territory. As stated in “Social Inequalities in Comparative Perspective” by Mary C. Waters, “In 1663 the first permanent French European settlement was established in Quebec City. Mohawks, Cree, Algonquins, Huron/ Wendats, Innus, Abénaquis, Naskapis, Micmacs and Malecites nations were

living at the site of present day Quebec. In 1663, King Louis XIV of France proclaimed the French colony “la Nouvelle France”. In 1763, la Nouvelle France became a British possession by conquest, forming the “Province of Quebec”. At this time, the native French (more than 55,000) already identified themselves as Canadiens, expressing a “collective identity firmly established during the French Regime.” This passage brings together the three main players in Canadian culture, all of which can be *especially* felt here in Quebec. Canada is indeed shaped by the presence of the French, English and Native cultures that have gone on to affect all aspects of our lives, primarily and most obvious being the fact Canada is still to this day recognized as a bilingual country. In all corners of the world where more than one group of people exist, frictions as well as conflicts are bound to occur. The notion of Identity and Race can be especially felt in the art that Canadian artists from all different backgrounds produce. Oftentimes, art finds ways to get messages across that words can not express. This means that the most prominent clues as to how Identity and Race play a role in Canadian culture are to be found in the art that Canadian artists from all different backgrounds are producing. The first artist that plays a role in shaping Canadian culture through art would be Chi-Chien Wang. Born in Taiwan, Wang sought to complete his studies at Concordia in 2002, after having previously studied in Taiwan. The art that came out of this transition can be characterized as a mirror being held up to the way Canadian culture is perceived by those who have not grown up within it. Wang explains his approach as the following: “My work focuses on the everyday experience. I use photography and video to examine texture, smell or existence of life, and, accompanying with sensibility, I also express my concern about urban environment and cultural differentiation. These concerns sometimes resemble my understanding about people, sometimes reflect the space which I live in, and

sometimes answer my doubt about the self. The intrigued signal happens so often that it seems normal to be ignored; however, once it opens up the awareness, the magic of recognition flows.” This statement and/or explanation can be directly linked to the kind of artwork that he produces. This artwork the “Red Man” which is part of the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art’s collection can be viewed as a strong parallel to indigenous people. A disrespectful term that has been used time and time again in history to “describe” indigenous people has been the term “red”, one that Wang may feel personally close to seeing as people of Oriental descent have also had to deal with the equally disrespectful term which is “yellow”. As an immigrant in our country and a student studying art, Wang draws on the adversity natives are constantly being



exposed. “Red”, “yellow” and “black” are all terms that we are all strongly discouraged from using when trying to “identify” someone because people should not be associated directly to the colour of their skin. This could make one wonder why the term “white” has never been linked to racism or regarded as anything “negative” among Canadian culture, once again hinting at the notion that white people for some reason seem to think they are superior, even in the face of people who were present on these lands long before Europeans ever made contact with this part of the world.

Wang uses this piece and its bold title “Red Man” to seriously shed light on the overall inequalities that exist between ethnicities, races as well as cultures that are all said to be “coexisting” among us when really, that is often not the case.

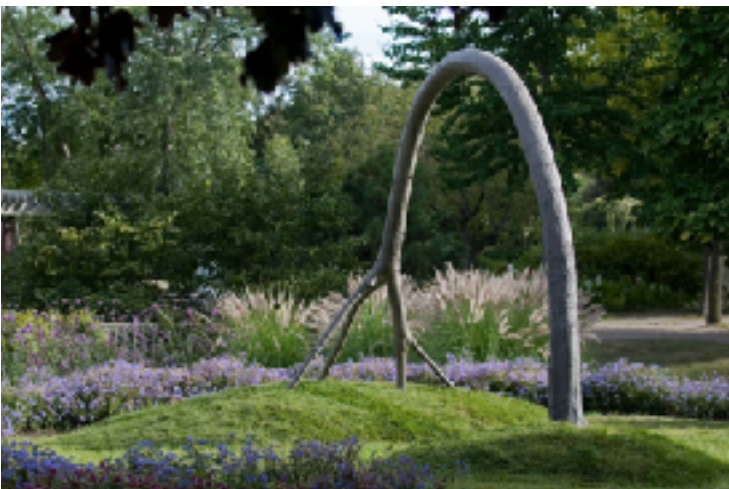
The second work of art that helps us understand in which direction our culture is being shaped towards is that of “Indian Act” by Nadia Myre. Part of this artwork focuses on the Indian Act. A brief description of the artwork provided by Art Mur contextualizes the work of art as the following: “Indian Act (1999-2002) consists of all 56 pages of that federal statute transliterated into beads. White seed beads displace letters while red ones occupy the ground, suggesting that the government’s words are racially ‘white’, the colonist’s language. These passages can also be read as blanks, mute absences punctuating red territory.” At first glance, one may not understand the context that this work of art is relating to. When we think about the labour put into beading fifty-six pages worth of government documents is astounding and the strong feelings that indigenous people may have towards these “set of laws” they have been subjected to on their own territories surely has a lot to do with the motivation behind creating this extensive, massive piece of art. Seeing it beaded out, true to Indian style is a lot more powerful than reading about it and having it interpreted by a handful of different people who all hold their own bias. The Indian Act can be described as the following by the Canadian Encyclopedia: “The *Indian Act* is the principal statute through which the federal government administers Indian status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve land and communal monies. It was first introduced in 1876 as a consolidation of previous colonial ordinances that aimed to eradicate First Nations culture in favour of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society. The Act has been amended several times, most significantly in 1951 and 1985, with changes mainly focusing on

the removal of particularly discriminatory sections. The *Indian Act* pertains only to First Nations peoples, not to the Métis or Inuit. It is an evolving, paradoxical document that has enabled trauma, human rights violations and social and cultural disruption for generations of First Nations peoples. The Act also outlines governmental obligations to First Nations peoples, and determines “status” — a legal recognition of a person’s First Nations heritage, which affords certain rights such as the right to live on reserve land.” This furthers my previous point about the injustice that prompted the creation of this piece, making a literal example out of the saying that “a picture tells a million words.” The Indian Act has been showcased all around Canada in museums and galleries such as the National Gallery of Canada, The National Museum of the American Indian, The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts as well as many others.



The third artist which helps shape our Canadian culture is Michel de Broin. Different from the previous two artists mentioned, Michel takes on a more modern approach to art using objects we're all familiar with and wouldn't typically view as "art". One of his more famous artworks here in Montreal would be "L'arc" which depicts a tree that is arched coming out of the east and going back into it on the other end. According to Art Public Montreal, this sculpture draws inspiration from Allende a former Chilean president. This sculpture is very meaningful to the Chilean population here in Montreal as well as Canada, representing a little piece of their heritage which is designed to commemorate as well as draw inspiration from Allende himself: "In the Floralies gardens on Île Notre-Dame, Michel de Broin's sculpture portrays a tree whose crown plunges into the ground to form an arch, rooted at each end. The artwork, made of concrete and stainless steel, fits harmoniously with the natural greenery of Parc Jean-Drapeau. Although he has died, Allende is still a vivid source of inspiration for the entire Chilean community residing in Montréal. The artist has interpreted the vigour of this heritage in the figure of the tree, whose powerful roots evoke the importance of transmission, taking up the horticultural metaphor used by Allende himself in his final speech: "I am certain that the seed

which we have planted in the good conscience of thousands and thousands of Chileans will not be shriveled forever. They have strength and will be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested neither by crime nor force. History is ours, and people make history."



Finally, we come to our last artwork which encompasses Identity and Race. The King's Beavers, by Kent Monkman is one of the most culturally loaded paintings. Because there is so much going on in the painting, many different interpretations can be drawn. "Kent Monkman, a contemporary artist of Cree and Anglo-Irish descent, explores and reinterprets art history clichés around the image of Amerindians. Using numerous art historical references and painted in a style reminiscent of French eighteenth-century painting, The King's Beavers (whose title itself refers to *les Filles du roi* or the King's Girls) shows the hunt of the beaver as it might have been painted if Louis XV had deigned it important enough to include in his Gallery of Hunts in Foreign Lands in his Château at Versailles. The slaughtered beavers and those soon to be, have distinctly human characteristics. Note the beaver wearing a crucifix and four beaver "souls" ascending to heaven, a motif borrowed from the seventeenth-century painting *France Taking the Faith to the Hurons of New France* in the collection of the Ursulines of Québec City. The animal, now a symbol of Canada, also suggests the fur trade, its importance to the economy of New



France as well as the complicated relations between Europeans and the Aboriginal populations. These are but a few of Monkman's references, for the painting is rife with them and can inspire multiple interpretations, both complex and witty." (Museum of Fine Arts Montreal). The only sure parallel we can make is that the beavers represent the root of all that is Canadian which is why we see so many of them being slaughtered, taken away and even converted in

this image alone. Although only dates back to 2011, it is a crucial reflection of our history which is why it is has been chosen to be a part of the permanent Canadian collection here in Montreal at the Museum of Fine Arts.

The current situation revolving around Identity and Race in Canada is one that I believe has improved since the times England and France waged wars over territory and power and Indigenous were killed in masses. Today I believe we can proudly say that we live in a territory that is for the most part welcoming to people from all corners of the world. The crisis on refugees has grown to an all-time high over the past years due to conflict in numerous Middle Eastern countries. Syrians especially, have turned towards the western world in search of survival and peace. According to the Government of Canada “The Government of Canada resettled more than 25,000 Syrian refugees between November 4, 2015 and February 29, 2016.” Since then the number has jumped all the way to forty-thousand. Although this is not exactly an “event” in time it marks a time period where Canada’s Identity and Race is once again being shifted as it welcomes new people and consequently new cultures, identities and races. In one way or another, all of us who are not of “Indigineous descent” should recognize that we too, were immigrants and maybe even refugees when our ancestors came to this country in dire need of a



better life and a fresh start. The key players in the resettlement of refugees would still be the government as well as us as a people who have everything to do with how refugees are able to start anew.

“La Barade Pour La Paix” is an open-air exhibition that is features all the way down Sherbrooke street in the heart of downtown Montreal. The goal of this exhibition is to showcase flags belonging to over two hundred different countries in a communal space, in order to represent everybody. “The route is lined with the flags of close to 200 member countries of the United Nations, along with those of Canada’s 13 provinces and territories.

The exhibition is designed and organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, with the support of McGill University. It links together Concordia University and the MMFA at one end, and McGill University and the McCord Museum at the other.”(Montreal Gazette). This installation makes me feel very Canadian. Living in a diverse country and especially in a diverse city being Montreal, tolerance and open mindedness are two characteristics I developed at a very young age. “La Barade Pour La Paix” pays homage to all different identities, ethnicities, races and cultures that all meet in a middle ground, being Montreal. When we cross over to the United States and ask Americans what their nationality is, we’ll most likely be told “I am American.” In Canada, we tend to answer according to our ancestry and our roots. This is what makes us culturally diverse.



The third and final event is that of the Carifesta which occurs every July here in Montreal. Carifesta is a parade who's goal is to celebrate the different Caribbean islands and cultures that all come together in a beautiful, colourful parade held on Saint Catherine. Performers dance, sing and walk along Saint-Catherine. The parade is a means for Caribbean people living away from the Carribbean's to pay homage to their heritage and pass it on. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia "In the 2006 census, 578,695 Canadians reported that they originated from the Caribbean, and the overwhelming majority of these people have immigrated to Canada since the 1970s." With the growing number of Caribbean-Canadian immigrations, it is only fitting that the Carifesta be created in order to celebrate this fragment of culture that like so many other cultures has become a part of our national identity.



When we think critically about the notion of Identity and Race within Canada, taking into consideration both the past and the present we can all come to the same conclusion that is: Identity and Race in Canada is always growing. Artists and their productions such as Kent Monkman and Nadia Myre keep us close to the roots of our heritage and where it can be derived from. The clash between Indigenous and European is something that will forever live on in all of us, whether we're indigenous, European or from a completely different ethnicity. A con that I must bring to light is the notion that Indians have yet to be given the rights that they so deserve to live as they please. Reserves and their un-integrated way of life is something that overtime should be altered and bettered for the advancement of Canadian culture and the overall sense of equality they should feel towards the rest of the country. It is hard to believe that the same country which faced gruesome war in regards to territory between French and English rivals is the country that today, opens it's doors up to tens of thousands of refugees. Canadian Identity is indeed a notion which is hard to grasp, simply because we all have our own different views on what is truly Canadian. To me, Canada is about knowledge. Growing up with friends who's parents all had different backgrounds, as mine do also I grew knowledgeable about different ethnicities at a very young age. Many people would argue against my following point but in my opinion, immigration does far more than carry people, it carries knowledge and depth and exposes us to new things that we in turn all end up adapting to. Canadian Identity is what you make of it. Canadian race does not exist, to be Canadian is to be the person you see yourself as rather than the label you are given whilst growing up.

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