

My work explores the relationship between my indigenous cultural evolution and identity. I am Birdtail Sioux of the Dakota Nation in Manitoba, however I grew up on the coast. In doing this project I have been able to connect more with my culture, primarily through the act of beading. I have used a combination of light, sound, video, and texture to create an immersive atmosphere that both celebrates and shares my heritage. With influences from glitzy stage costumes, complex narrative stories, vibrant colour and stories from home, I have created a sacred space that welcomes you into the embrace of my indigenous culture. When I was younger, I often felt disconnected from my own culture, and as an extension, my identity. Creating this installation allowed me to reconnect with my culture and create that same sacred space that my culture takes in me. Something that evokes a sense of security and pride. A large aspect of my culture is based around a sense of community. In creating this work, I was able to share this experience with my Mother and my Auntie Jo, who helped me bead and were able to tell our stories in our native language. Specifically, the story of The Big Race, which relates to the creation of the Lakota people. I was also able to create 2 sculptures that are representations of important figures from my culture. Iktomi is known as the trickster spirit, he is very neutral, and there are some versions of the story where he used to be the spirit of intelligence. Regardless, he is a very important figure in my culture. And most often is seen taking the form of a spider, although, when in human form, is noted to have red, yellow, white and black face paint. The other sculpture is Maka, also known as mother earth, who plays a large role in the story that is to be listened to in my installation. This space allowed me to explore my heritage and my skills as an artist, being able to ponder over generations of work, and contrast that with my own was a very emotional experience. With this work, I was able to test the limits of my skill as an artist and learn new skills such as beading and installation work.

I wanted to be able to express my own culture as an extension of my own identity. It was a chance not only for myself to grow as an artist but also as a person. In my research, I noticed that a large number of post secondary institutions and health centers, among other places, seem to treat indigenous culture with blanket stereotypes. My goal with my work was to create a piece of work that was uniquely myself and my own culture, and I wanted to be able to share that piece of myself with others. There is not enough care towards Indigenous culture besides hollow statement pieces and slogans on colonialism. While my work does not directly address it, I feel that by being able to take up that space will at least make some uncomfortable. My work is a direct announcement that my culture is not dead or dying or extinct, but alive, growing and evolving just like my own people. And as such, deserving of respect, fair treatment, and education and basic human rights.

In recent decades, many have attempted to apologize and reconcile for the destruction of indigenous culture and society. What we have seen so far has always seemed hollow with little attempt at carrying through with a plan. Indigenous reservations exist, and the people on them still live a silent genocide. Added onto all of this, these conditions have created harmful stereotypes of indigenous people that plague them outside of reservations. There have been several causes behind the continued tokenism and hypocrisies towards Indigenous populations around the world. The reconciliation movement has made promises to Indigenous populations to apologize and hopefully heal the damage created by the genocide on Indigenous people; however, there has been little to no follow through. Research has found that there is an immense amount of tokenism and stereotyping towards indigenous populations around the world

regardless of the recent reconciliation movement. There is evidence of this through regulated indigenous identity, a lack of care towards reservations, lack of education and stereotypes seen in post secondary institutions and healthcare centres, as well as lack of intent behind reconciliation movement promises. There are a significant amount of details on what happens when there is actual successful reconciliation and forgiveness in society and education, instead of being used as a pacifying gesture. We can observe how there is much to be done when it comes to forgiveness, but also how when intent is seen through, can lead to true reconciliation.