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How do we approach conversations about decolonization and truth and reconciliation?

From my vantage point the focus of the people in North America -Turtle Island has shifted during the pandemic. It turned outwards after several centuries of a more self-centred gaze. Perhaps the forced isolation granted us the opportunity to look at the socioeconomics of their own countries while watching the chaos unfold around the world. Further to that have many North Americans have chosen love over hate in relation to the climate of overt racism we see around us. I am only hypothesizing, and I have no idea what the outcome will be from these apparent moral awakenings.

At times I find keeping a firm hold on my emotions both in the form of anger and angst seems impossible. Simply reading the comments section of any news media post relating to the 'others' can be an exercise in self control. The shameless contempt for all things that questions the status quo or right-wing nationalism is readily apparent. I am mortified and at times frightened by the way these people talk about Indigenous matters which they know almost nothing about. The hate speech about marginalized folks as well as minority communities is also devastating.

The time to change these views is now and it starts with decolonization. The need to decolonize public spaces on Turtle Island is always on my mind and I am conscience of this as I intuitively create in these spaces. Decolonization has become something of a catch phrase in our countries as of late. The concept can be intimidating and feel hostile to some as what decolonization means can also unclear. Personally, it quite simply means 'land back'.

The implementation of the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada is imperative for us to move forward. Those affected by the virus as well as the weight of the daily news which highlights unrest around the world, racial discrimination, economic strife, the discovery of the unmarked graves of kidnapped Indigenous children prolongs the collective strife after the affects of the Covid pandemic. The discovery of these unmarked graves is an illustration of the lack of meaningful connection between settlers and Indigenous communities. The surprise by many Canadians at the discovery of the graves seems surreal to me. The discovery surprises no one in Indigenous communities however the recording of the number of graves found is reminiscent of the assigning of numerals to 'students' as their names were too difficult to pronounce. I have an Inuit friend who still wears the 'tag' with his number imprinted on it which reminds him of his torturous time in the residential school but also of his strength.

I believe collectively we must remain hopeful to heal. However difficult this may prove to be. There is still so much that connects us to one another, and I am hoping that the pandemic has made that more apparent to everyone. Since late July 2021 I have been building site specific art installations across Canada. They are constructed with knit, crochet or woven red yarns. There is no waste as the very same string is used in subsequent installations. Although this is painstaking it is worth every ounce of effort. I have included photos of a few I have built. I can build anywhere inside or out. The challenge of an unknown environment to build in is part of the point. I must adapt. We all must.

Red is the colour of blood, the colour of passion and of anger. It is the slur against Indigenous and represents danger and power. It can also represent courage and love.

All of the work is handmade by me. I learn each new skill as a sort of re-building of myself and use it as a perfect example of skills that are found in every culture. On every continent. They are not from one people alone. It is one of the many threads that bind us as a species. The ability and need to protect ourselves from our respective climates. To cloth ourselves and our families. To decorate our spaces and provide comfort. To carry our children against us.

I want to illustrate the temporary nature of each of our lives, of our struggles and our achievements. The complicated creations represent the connectivity between each other and our environment as it will also not last forever. Each installation promotes discussion with the people who see it being built and displayed.

I am hoping that you will consider participating. Please allow me to use your outside space or an indoor space.

There will be no damage to the space, nothing left behind. We can arrange on an individual basis how you want to advertise my presence or what space you want me to use. I have started a #hopeandhealingcanada hashtag which I can attach your spaces handle to. I take high resolution photos as well as a time lapse video at each venue.

I understand that your programming may already be set but I am confident you will agree that this is a special project that holds significance for everyone residing on Turtle Island. Please contact me if you are open to this project. The artist fees are based on CARFAC rates and the installation is generally a three month contract that is 15% less than a solo exhibition fee.

All my best to you as we all move forward, Tracey-Mae