In 1974, Canada’s first Aboriginal art curator, Tom Hill, impatient with the lack of artistic reaction in Canada to Aboriginal political issues, prophesied that “in the future, art will probably manifest the political struggle more, especially as Indians become more vocal in their demands to be treated fairly.”

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many contemporary Canadian Aboriginal artists found new ways of expressing “the political moment.” Visual artists such as Carl Beam and Robert Houle (both Anishinaabe), Edward Poitras (a Métis), and Joane Cardinal-Schubert (a Kainai) built on the earlier political interests of Alex Janvier, a member of the Dene Siline First Nation, and began producing works that were not merely a means of cultural expression but instruments for making non-Aboriginal audiences aware of the real issues facing Aboriginal peoples.

From the 1990s onward, Aboriginal artists broadened their expressions even further to incorporate complex ways of understanding social and political issues facing all Canadians, but now from and including an Aboriginal perspective. Works such as Honour and Balance (2005) by Métis artist Michael Robinson, Ayum-ee-aawach Oomam-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother (1991) by Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore, and K’ómoks artist Andy Everson’s Watchmen (2008) interweave traditional ways of knowing and identity...
formation with artistic expressions of broader Canadian social and political issues, including cultural diversity, social-ecological holism, and intercultural sharing. Such works confront the Euro-Canadian grounds upon which mainstream society largely operates. To these artists, Canada is quite clearly a place shaped by many hands.

Aboriginal creative works and projects such as these have given Aboriginal people an important voice within Canada.5 Rediscovering, within a very old Indigenous way of living, this interconnection between an individual, art, the geophysical land, and an intercultural society lies at the heart of the political consciousness of Aboriginal visual art in Canada today. Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art not only visualizes aspects of this consciousness for others but also communicates it, or performs it, with others. It does not import ideas from political science but generates subtle political resistance through the practice of Indigenous storytelling in a visual medium.

**STORYWORK: THE POWER OF STORIES AS TEACHERS**

Aboriginal art has always been a significant part of what we now call Canada. Today, it is key to how Canadians—including non-Aboriginal Canadians—represent themselves.6 Non-Aboriginal people in Canada account for the majority of purchases of Aboriginal art, but these purchasers are not buying the art merely because it was created by an Aboriginal artist. There is more emotion involved, more thought, more physical influence, and more spiritual connection, even if there may not be a culturally informed understanding.7 Aboriginal voices are clearly becoming more influential, respected, and popular in mainstream Canada—so much so that, as John Ralston Saul suggests, some Canadians are “starting to imagine ourselves in another manner.”8

Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art varies from region to region, artist to artist, and it deploys new kinds of subject matter and new systems of style within the mainstream art world. It is part of a cultural continuum that emerges and adapts, now including the city, the reserve, technology, modernity, the market, imported Western aesthetic techniques, industry, and new forms of government. Yet across this continuum, Aboriginal art is rooted in the ecosystems, cultures, aesthetics, spirituality, and experiences of this land.9 Aboriginal artists often express this broadening sense of interrelationship in their art. For this reason, contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art does not necessarily
seek to depict a specific traditional teaching or way of knowing consciously or directly, and exhibits considerably different formal and functional characteristics within communities than does traditional Aboriginal art. Together, those characteristics have helped create a distinct and new (although very old) visual model in Canada wherein Aboriginal voices, teachings, and perspectives appear to deepen non-Aboriginal Canadians’ awareness. Politically, contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art expresses a distinctly Aboriginal blueprint for building mutually respectful and reciprocal partnerships analogous to what Ralston Saul has termed “a philosophy of minorities.”

The colonial system in Canada reinforced an assimilative educational model based on affirming “the political and social status quo.” Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, however, engages people in a reciprocal process that enacts the enormous social-ecological benefits to Canadian societies of Aboriginal ways of knowing (through language, story, spirituality, and the land), experiential learning, and Aboriginal independence and self-determination. This list is greatly simplified, but it approximates the political consciousness of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art.

This consciousness does not come through an artist’s intention, ideological standpoint, or formal skill alone, nor through a viewer’s receptivity alone, but through the practice of art, which synergistically includes artist, artwork, viewer, and context of the viewing encounter(s). The aesthetic reference through which this process can best be understood is what Jo-ann Archibald calls “storywork.” It can be briefly defined as a methodology, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and oral traditions, that effectively educates the spirit, heart, mind, and body through the power of story and storytelling. Canadian Aboriginal artists engage the principles of storywork in a fashion that is not just about delivering a message but about unfolding story meanings in relation to personal lives.

Storywork is a process of Indigenous education that interweaves the teachings of elders, cultural stories, and personal experiences within a story. The storyteller can guide the process but does not control it. Storywork sings when it engages the heart, the mind, the body, and the spirit together. This is the essence of learning. When stories are taken seriously, they become critical teachers in and for our lives, not only as containers of valuable messages but also as active expressions of social-political insight that contribute to the ways in which humans participate in their everyday lives and the world.
Storywork is ultimately the vehicle through which the political consciousness of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art is communicated. Stories only become alive and have value if shared. Storywork involves many kinds of sharing, including elder with learner, storyteller with listener, context with story, and listener with story. Jo-Ann Archibald, with the help of, among others, various Stó:lō and Coast Salish elders, identifies seven principles that elucidate storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. These principles are storywork markers, each “like a long flat piece of cedar bark used for weaving a basket.” They are also the elements of a political consciousness inherent in contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art.

**STORYWORK AND CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN ABORIGINAL ART**

Storywork provides a reference through which to understand not only story and storytelling but also contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, its political consciousness, and its effects on the public sphere. It applies to contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art for three main reasons: (1) many contemporary Aboriginal visual artists and commentators have referred to artwork as a form of education or sharing; (2) they also refer to artwork as a story or as a reciprocal process of communication and meaning making through a kind of language, like storytelling; and (3) Canadian Aboriginal art, like stories and storytelling, is to be taken seriously as an important teacher in our lives.

One of the most important commentators on Indigenous education, Gregory Cajete (a Tewa) points out that “art becomes a primary source of teaching since it integrates and documents an internal process of learning.” This describes an aspect of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art that helps motivate a storywork process. Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau, one of the most respected and influential artists in Canada, provides an example of this. Morrisseau (1931–2007) was raised by his Anishinaabemowin-speaking grandfather in northern Ontario and, through a life flecked with health and alcohol-related issues, became the first to paint traditional Anishinaabe stories; this was a controversial action that inspired generations of Aboriginal artists and made him the founder of what would later be called the Woodland School of painting.
From the beginning, Morrisseau’s art was intertwined with a learning process, and he eventually flowered into a crucial teacher—storyworker—in the lives of many Canadians. When he was young, his grandfather taught him about the Anishinaabe way of life as a spiritual quest, drawing on knowledge of the scrolls and on stories, oral history, and ceremonies. Morrisseau began painting what he had been taught on almost anything he could find: birch bark, cardboard, canvas. His grandfather encouraged this, despite the discontent of many other elders about Morrisseau’s representations of oral and sacred knowledge. His learning included lessons about the intricacies of paint as a medium; ancient Anishinaabe art, such as the regional petroglyphs; European and Mayan art, such as stained-glass windows and stone friezes with people in profile; the natural world around him, such as the rugged forests, lakelands, and intense colours of northern Ontario; and the social-political issues arising within Anishinaabe communities, where younger generations were no longer learning the important stories and knowledge of their culture like he had. These all converged in his art.

Morrisseau’s desire to teach what he had learned (as a now-recognized storyteller by companions) began merging with the very form and subject matter of his work, as can be seen in his Observations of the Astral World (see figure 1). Here, his traditional Anishinaabe cultural and social-ecological teachings combine with ideas from the new age religion, Eckankar, which he joined in the 1970s. “Eck” is the Divine Spirit believed to connect all living things to each other and to God, a concept easily grounded by an Anishinaabe context, where interrelatedness between human communities, the local animals, local plants and trees, and the spirit world is central. Eck, in the painting, is given its power through Morrisseau’s association of it with the school of fish bridging the human and astral planes: a traditional Anishinaabe awareness, where fish remind society of its dual responsibilities of teaching and learning. On one hand, teaching involves the necessary training to support one’s physical needs, and on the other, it must enlarge one’s spiritual awareness of oneself and one’s sacred place in existence. The references balancing out both planes in the painting are the life-giving trees of the natural world. The formal qualities of the painting—the framing and connecting of all physical and spiritual activities by stark trees and waterborne fish emerging from the enlightening depths through a hole in the all-encompassing blue, watery background—are linked to a prior and interdependent relationship with northern Ontario.
Morriseau’s homeland is powerfully experienced through its two key features of large mixed-forested woodlands and glacially incised basins and veins of water, both complementing the rugged bedrock of the Precambrian shield. It is this original context that shapes the subsequent ideas of Eckankar in the painting, and not the other way around. In other words, the imported Eckist ideas are tested first against their ability to adapt and fit in with the primary relationship to the land and context of Morriseau’s own life. Significantly, it is not the Eckist ideology that is given primacy over the land or the license to adapt the land in its own image; rather, the painting overturns a colonial mentality, rooting everything once again in a partnership with the “natural context.” This element of holism, which continually grounds internal learning
processes for many Aboriginal artists in the geophysical lands of Canada, gives many formal aspects of contemporary Aboriginal art incredible educational, and hence, storywork power in Canada.

An internal learning process also fuels Morisseau’s storywork by helping to substantiate a reverence for the stories and teachings he was stimulated to share, a profound sense of responsibility to his culture and world as instilled by his grandfather, and an important reciprocity that spread through the lives of many viewers. These included the relations established with younger generations of Anishinaabe, who were inspired to reconnect with their culture in the wake of the tragedies ignited by the residential school era, as well as those
built through important non-Aboriginal visitors to his community, such as artist and writer Selwyn Dewdney and Toronto art dealer Jack Pollock.

Following his first successful exhibition with Pollock in 1962, Morrisseau’s work contributed to such educational experiences as the renewal of Anishinaabe heritage and communities, the first solo exhibition featuring a First Nations artist at the National Gallery of Canada in 2006, and countless personal life-experience stories within the lives of Canadians, such as the impact of his *Androgyny* (1983) on former Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who chose it to hang in the ballroom of Rideau Hall in 2008.18

This educational role for contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art gives it an enduring storywork energy that has also prompted many Aboriginal artists and commentators to emphasize the important “sharing of knowledge” inherent in the art process.19 In so doing, contemporary Canadian Aboriginal artists are sustaining an age-old tradition of communicating with other generations, species, entities, and cultures through forms of art, or story, from the ground up.20 What people and artists communicated and shared throughout this tradition was crucial knowledge about “the worlds they lived in, the Land they walked on, the Beings they shared the Land with,” and how they came to “walk” in the many worlds they inhabited both physically and spiritually.”21 This communicative practice equally motivates storywork in Canadian Aboriginal art today.

As important knowledge is gained through an artist’s own internal learning process, traditional Aboriginal aesthetics teach that it must be shared if it is to stay alive in and contribute to the world. This is a matter of respect and responsibility, where personal gain, skill, or perfection are less important than the quality of the communication itself.22 With such an emphasis on quality in the communication process, it becomes imperative that artists stay aware of the various nuances characterizing their interrelatedness with everything in the world around them, with the “core” of their stories, and with the language they use to convey them. Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal artists continue to share some of the most telling, striking, and powerful stories about that rich social-ecological diversity, and about shades of social, ecological, historical, and political life in Canada.23

Coast Salish artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (b. 1957) studied at Vancouver’s Emily Carr College of Art and Design (1978–83) and is well-known for his large-scale, colourfully vivid, and expressive paintings that
engage contemporary Aboriginal social-political issues, often with a biting humour. His art has occasionally been reproved for its use of and similarity to Western aesthetic traditions, but he has responded confidently that “to deal with the contemporary problems that interest me I have to have a contemporary language.” This highlights his awareness of the need for quality communication through his art in order to uphold his responsibilities as an artist to his community and the world in which he lives. Métis film artist and producer Loretta Todd’s impassioned words allude to the intimacy and power Yuxweluptun achieved in the quality “translation” and communication of his story told through *I Have a Vision That Some Day All Indigenous People Will Have Freedom and Self-Government* (see figure 2):

In that first painting I was startled. I marvelled at the scale, the humour, the use of colour in relationship to traditional use of colour. These were all proud but not arrogant innovations. This was boldness without vanity, expansion without destruction; this was risk with responsibility … even as he took chances with images millennia old, he sought to respect the integrity of the design form to honour the meaning behind the aesthetics while making images none had seen before…. This was a path that was utterly new, yet old as the hills. We learn in many ways and from many teachers. From his first canvases Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun was a teacher.

The calling Yuxweluptun felt to alter the way he shared his knowledge also demonstrates an awareness of knowing what stories to tell, as well as their abilities to engage a viewer in a way that the stories can grab hold—spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. A clear sign of his ability to do so is evident when we consider how the title of Yuxweluptun’s work alone, *I Have a Vision That Some Day All Indigenous People Will Have Freedom and Self-Government*, reflects aspects of Todd’s simultaneously unfolding life and work as an impassioned filmmaker frequently concerned with the struggles of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Aboriginal artists do at times feel apprehensive about the part of the communicative process where meaning becomes interdependent with a viewer’s attentiveness and level of participation. Giving the story and viewer space and time to unfold is necessary to keep the spirit and power of the story alive. Joane Cardinal-Schubert stated:
When I’m in the process of making something, that’s when it’s all going on for me; the discovery, the exploration, the challenge. Then when you take it out of that realm ... there is a kind of separation for me because when the viewer looks at it I don't have any control over how they do that. I try and create things that are going to be a mirror for people, so that when they do look at it there is something within it where their own knowledge and memory can take off, so

Figure 15.2
everyone can relate to it on some level…. Part of my strategy is to create things that have a metaphorical jump—allow someone to understand Native issues in terms that they can relate to in their own culture…. What I usually try to do is make something terribly beautiful so that if people don't get it on an intellectual or emotional layer, then they'll get it on the personal [physical] layer of it's nice to look at. Then when they really figure out what it's really about, it gives them a double whammy.27

Cardinal-Schubert’s awareness of her stories’ interrelatedness with the viewer is echoed in the work of Métis artist Heather Shillinglaw, a relative of Alex Janvier. Shillinglaw (b. 1971), who graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design in 1996, now produces mixed-media paintings of native Alberta plants and wildflowers that call attention to social-ecological relationships, thus honouring the knowledge carried by her great-grandmother, a Cree medicine woman. Shillinglaw’s artwork, when viewed from a distance, depicts a flower, plant, or herb almost with the scrutiny of a botanical study. On closer look, a viewer quickly notices that her subject matter comprises a collage of diverse materials that might include layers or accents of leather, buttons, newspaper clippings, watch parts, musical scores, beads, patchwork, and much more. On one hand, these layers obscure or filter a clear perception of the partly painted subject. On the other hand, they also enhance the subject by enriching its relationship to the viewer. Shillinglaw’s work relies on the coming together of diverse ways of knowing and experiencing—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—in order to “see” the natural world in its fullness.

Similar to what we see in the work of Morrisseau, Shillinglaw’s collage elements, while including various human ways of experiencing an aspect of nature, are adapted and come together primarily from a responsibility to the holistic relationship with the natural world. The layering of the prickly currant shrub in Bear’s Delight (2010)—with its three-dimensional, long, thin, golden-brown beads, hand-stitched on a patch of leather to evoke the shrub’s tiny spines, complemented with two-dimensional, painted currant berries and background—interrupts a viewer’s Western aesthetic or scientific training, as well as the socially ingrained way of seeing paintings. In this way, Shillinglaw’s work potentially initiates various storywork threads in the interrelated lives of viewers.
The titles of Shillinglaw’s botanical works also help to stimulate story-work. Her titles—A Headache, I’m So Itchy, Little Savage, Which Direction Do I Grow?—are often deliberately tantalizing, providing just enough information to pique an interest in her subject matter without actually providing any explanations. The effect is to tease the viewer, thus helping to create a story-work synergy among the artist, the artwork, and the audience. Little Savage, for example (see figure 15.3), depicts beautiful camas plants in flower, but the variety of camas is highly poisonous and can easily be confused with the tasty wild onion and other edible types of camas that form part of the diet of local Aboriginal peoples. The title, Little Savage, refers to a very real social-ecological relationship, inviting viewers to learn about the plant but also suggesting that they may need to do so, as is indeed the case: this is a matter of life and death. Shillinglaw’s approach to titles is in keeping with the way that natural elements are named in Aboriginal languages: rather than serving simply to identify, names often emphasize the relationship between the thing named and human beings.28 Shillinglaw’s titles and formal combinations together tell the story of the intimate and intrinsic social-ecological relationship that humans have with the natural landscape when they are respectfully and responsibly “listening” or paying attention. Her distinct ways of communicating this relationship help to initiate storywork, from the ground up.

Intercultural layerings and metaphorical associations also create many situations of great irony and humour. Works of contemporary Aboriginal art can provoke laughter—a response that, like crying and expressing anger, engages a person in a story emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and physically.29 Encounters with contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, especially with works that deal more overtly with highly charged social and political issues, can also produce tears. Joane Cardinal-Schubert’s installation The Lesson addresses the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal communities. First created in 1989 in Montreal, The Lesson was subsequently installed at the Toronto International Powwow in 1999 as well as widely exhibited elsewhere. The Lesson depicts a claustrophobic classroom, with chairs tied together, seats with screws through them, and chalkboards with some of the past and present injustices that took place in such classrooms scrawled across them. One of the chalkboards, the “Memory Wall,” invites Aboriginal people to come up and write their names and thoughts on the board. It is estimated that more than 2,500 people—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—viewed the installation,
many of whom were observed to leave crying. An artwork might also be experienced one way initially, but it evolves as viewers themselves do, taking on new meanings as a viewer’s understanding and sensitivity grow. In this way, contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art constitutes a powerful communication process.

In a place encompassing as many edges of social-ecological diversity as Canada does, contemporary Aboriginal art has its work cut out for it. Along each of these edges are opportunities for learning more about oneself in the world and about other ways to experience the world. It is the well-honed ability to communicate and the long-standing expertise in communicating important knowledge across cultural and ecological edges in Canadian contexts that makes contemporary Aboriginal art especially important to social and political consciousness. In the endeavour to enliven that consciousness, the storywork process generated through contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, is a proven methodology for working with these edges in Canada. It demonstrates that the edges are less like rigid and hierarchical borders in everyday life and more like permeable membranes across which equally important “stories,” or ways of knowing one’s place and role in the world can “intergrade producing a richness of knowledge and practices that enhances the resilience of local societies.” This is the heart of the political consciousness of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, and Indigenous storywork gives it legs.

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE: THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN ABORIGINAL ART

In a still strongly colonial society like Canada, one contributing system tends to overwhelm or dominate others, and benefits generally tend to flow top-down in one direction through rigid borders between different cultures. The storywork process in contemporary Aboriginal visual art actively engages viewers in the experience of living in a Canada in which this structure has been overturned. The principles of holism, interrelatedness, reciprocity, respect, responsibility, reverence, and synergy, functioning together in a contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art encounter, engage Canadians in the experience of a sharing or partnership based on consent, mutual respect, and mutual adaptation, unlike experiences that may emerge in the political, institutional, and hierarchical structures of mainstream society.
This rich form of sharing harks back not only to the original Indigenous knowledges concerning living in this place but also to modern lessons about “the real spirit of intent in treaty making,” reconciliation, and sustainable development. It is a sharing that involves more than just an intellectual somersault or a linear relationship between artist, artwork, and viewer. Active
participants in this contemporary Aboriginal art process reciprocally perform together what John Ralston Saul has called “a philosophy of minorities,” even if only temporarily or subconsciously. Here, an equal sharing between different people, cultures, and communities can enhance the collective knowledges and practices contributing to living in society. In short, contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art communicates and engages Canadians in a political relationship that is, as Michael Murphy argues, based on “equality … an equal right to exercise choices and make decisions that for too long have been
the exclusive privilege of non-Aboriginal peoples through their control of the modern state.” This political relationship involves two key and overlapping dimensions, one social and one ecological. Indigenous politics, traditional knowledges, and aesthetics dovetail in the storywork of contemporary Aboriginal art through its expression of stories that do not claim to give answers from a privileged position. Rather, they rely equally on the contributions—with spirit, heart, body, and mind—of others for meaning-making within everyday life. The eventual outcome is a more social-ecologically resilient society for all those living together in this same place.

Not every person in Canada who encounters contemporary Aboriginal art engages with it in the way that has been described. Storywork “is hard work,” and if not done successfully, could reduce stories to communication without a purpose other than entertainment. Even if the story is told in the right (read “most responsible”) way, the listener might not be prepared to engage with it fully—spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Significantly, however, many Canadians are “grabbed” by an Aboriginal art story, and it does work in various ways on and through their lives.

In an effort to learn more about this equally important dimension of Aboriginal storywork through visual art, I interviewed several Albertans who have engaged with contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art. Lily, a nurse and stay-at-home mother, spoke of her encounters with Heather Shillinglaw’s mixed-media collages, which first grabbed her attention by being totally unexpected—“because how can you expect that? Look at what she does! How can you even possibly in your little imagination even expect something like that? Because if you look at art and you look at Aboriginal art, it’s not what she does.” She was struck by what seemed to her the “life” and “joy” in Shillinglaw’s botanical paintings. Her relationship with this art eventually deepened to include an appreciation for the artist’s use of collage, “the way she creates these images, and the way they jump out at you.” Shillinglaw’s art attracted Lily in part because, as a hobby gardener, she loves plants and is especially interested in species native to Alberta, where she has lived all her life. Lily mentioned the connection she felt between her experiences gardening and her childhood memories of walking around local ravines and her experience of Shillinglaw’s art, which seemed to her “familiar … but not familiar.” Even while hanging on her wall inside her home, the art in some way amplified, or brought to life, her walks and outdoor life, as well as the
flow of the seasons. As she recalled one encounter with Shillinglaw’s art: “It was wintertime, and it’s dark, and we’re covered in snow, and then you have these beautiful, beautiful things that remind you of a season that’s coming or a season that’s passed.”

Lily’s observations echo the stages of learning as they develop into storywork. Together, she and Shillinglaw moved from a predominantly one-way conversation (in which the artwork was doing most of the unexpected talking), to a two-way conversation (through a dialogue about the uses of collage, texture, and media), to chat (as Shillinglaw’s artwork hanging in her house became more familiar with each viewing), to storytelling. The last was expressed through Lily’s reciprocal sharing with me, now also a participant in her storywork process with Shillinglaw’s art, as Lily is now in mine. Lily shared stories about doing art workshops with Shillinglaw in order to learn how to make art herself; about childhood memories that Shillinglaw’s art brought back, like being with the wild roses in the ravine behind her house; about her curious connection, as a nurse, with Shillinglaw’s art as an honouring of the medicinal knowledge carried by Shillinglaw’s great-grandmother; about the “joy” that Shillinglaw’s art invokes in her life, which she related to her love for her two daughters; and about her own passion for native plants in Alberta. Shillinglaw’s art has indeed become a part of Lily’s own life-experience story through all these connections, unfolding equally on a physical, emotional, or spiritual level as on an intellectual one.

Even though there may be no overt intellectual message pertaining to politics in Canada immediately passed on through Shillinglaw’s story, she and Lily perform a partnership that embodies a radical political consciousness where intercultural relationships are mutually respectful and accommodating. Here, they are rooted in the natural geophysical context stabilizing their everyday lives, and each person is guided and supported in everyday life—not necessarily only with gentleness—rather than being imposed upon from an abstract or “artificial context.” The storywork of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art quite literally arises from the ground up, neutralizing the force of Canada’s top-down political and social structures.

A rising number of similar storywork relationships in Canada’s Prairie provinces have altered the philosophy and politics underpinning prairie arts and institutions, such as the Banff Centre, Calgary’s Glenbow Museum, and the statues of Louis Riel in Regina and Winnipeg. Each has been reorganized over
past decades to acknowledge a regional Aboriginal presence that has become increasingly and integrally linked to their social-political success.41 Canadian prairie art has undergone significant change in this regard. Canadian studies commentator George Melnyk observes a change in the way non-Aboriginal painters have painted the prairie west throughout the twentieth century. He points out that the region’s current aesthetic shifts are being developed “in the sweat lodge,” pointing to a possible “post-continentalist phase [of post-modernist prairie populist art] in which the settler audience naturalizes itself by incorporating the Indigenous worldview into regional identity rather than relying on the agrarian myth.” Melnyk calls this shift “the métisization of art.”42 Regional identity has been significantly negotiated as well by Aboriginal aesthetic contributions to society from the ground up. The métisization of art is not simply a trend that non-Aboriginal Canadians alone have ushered into the Prairie provinces. Rather, it has been equally forged out of the Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relationships engaged by the storywork of contemporary Aboriginal art and its foundational knowledge systems. These relationships, based on mutual respect and interrelatedness, have helped give the settler audience the knowledge and practice to re-vision the agrarian myth—like colonial and top-down political structures generally. It is just as important and critical to acknowledge the very aware elders, or artists, who have invited or welcomed non-Aboriginal peoples into the sweat lodge, or artwork, as it is to acknowledge those people who have subsequently applied or reciprocated their experiences in the lodge, or with the art, in their everyday lives. The synergy developing between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadians—in part, through the growth of opportunities to experience contemporary Aboriginal art—is increasing the social resilience of Canadian society. The storywork of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art has stimulated a political consciousness by initiating a working partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals and communities. Such a partnership entails the sharing of knowledge and practice through local consensus and mutual adaptation from the ground up, rather than through mainstream political, social, and institutional hierarchies.

One of the most famous examples of a contemporary Canadian Aboriginal artwork that has generated much social-political reverence, power, and authority is The Spirit of Haida Gwaii (see figure 4) by Haida artist Bill Reid. Reid (1920–1998) was a carver and goldsmith who, inspired by the art of his
great-great-uncle Charles Edenshaw (1839–1920), combined Haida traditions with European jewelry techniques to make his own art, which subsequently influenced a growing awareness of Aboriginal art traditions, a wave of emerging Northwest Coast Aboriginal artists, and a surge of intercultural sharing in Canada.43

The Spirit of Haida Gwaii, installed in the courtyard of the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC, tells the story of thirteen travellers—animal and human from Haida Gwaii—journeying together in a traditional Haida canoe. The accompanying text introduces layers of the sculpture’s metaphorical depth as it came to Reid in a stream of consciousness dictated to his wife, Martine. Right from the beginning, Reid made no provision for an “answer,” or meaning, contained in the work alone: “Here we are at last, a long way from Haida Gwaii, not too sure where we are or where we’re going, still squabbling or vying for position within the boat, but somehow managing to appear to be heading in some direction.”44 He introduces the thirteen travellers, each embodying aspects of their relationship to the land of Haida Gwaii, as well as to each other and the Haida people. In the end, Reid returns to the use of the inclusive pronouns we and us when concluding with still more uncertainty: “Is the tall figure who may or may not be the Spirit of Haida Gwaii leading us, for we are all in the same boat, to a sheltered beach beyond the rim of the world as he seems to be, or is he lost in a dream of his own dreamings?”45

It is telling that Reid includes all Canadian viewers—us, we—in this multi-species boat from Haida Gwaii. The storywork relationship, including the viewers and their contexts, guides the viewer into a profound relationship with Haida Gwaii: its people, land, and ecosystems. The sharing and partnership forged here is not always easy—some of the characters in the boat interact through an embrace (Bear Mother and her children), others in a quarrel (the Wolf and the Eagle)—but it is a partnership shaped by a distinct Aboriginal way of knowing about equality, mutual respect, and mutual accommodation between humans and the more-than-human world in a Canadian context.

This is the kind of relationship that many sustainable development and business commentators in Canada have increasingly been seeking. David Lertzman and Harrie Vredenburg, from the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary, argue that “global sustainable development will not be achieved in a cultural vacuum. In the global context, sustainable development is by its nature and of necessity a cross-cultural endeavor. With their long-standing use and
Figure 15.4
knowledge of ecosystems, Indigenous peoples play an especially important role in the cross-cultural dialogue on sustainable development.46

Around Haida Gwaii and along BC’s West Coast are found many examples of failed government policy and unethical industrial practices for resource extraction.47 It is not difficult to find examples of this in other provinces as well. Mark, an Aboriginal art collector and retired oil industry executive in Calgary, told me that, while employed in the oil industry, he became very aware of environmental issues and that he felt “somewhat conflicted” as a result. As he acknowledged, people in his position work within an established structure driven by growth and profit, and many of the policies and practices that corporations put in place encourage employees to feel a sense of entitlement—to feel that, in carrying out their work, they are simply “being responsible.” Mark’s experience suggests that while conscience and hindsight may lead one to question the ethical grounds of one’s activities, the corporate structure tends to demand that one repress these thoughts and dampens any inclination an employee might have to challenge that structure as a respected and engaged citizen. The storywork inherent in contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art dissolves just such a hierarchical imbalance within a viewer’s own experience.

In the storywork that Mark shared with me, Aboriginal and landscape art—both of which he collects and both of which find a place in his home—mesh with his own experience, making him aware of his surroundings in a more reciprocal and holistic way. Referring to the Canadian Aboriginal and landscape art in his living room, he remarked, “You know it’s so peaceful, it’s so uncontaminated, there’s no buildings, there’s no people . . . it’s serene.” He saw this purity as contrasting with the modern environment: “You go walking around town and you see garbage all over the place, and run-down buildings, and . . . yeah, it affects me . . . subconsciously.” Gradually, he said, “you become more and more aware that people, houses, buildings, roads are taking over the world and leaving fewer and fewer pristine places.”48 When Mark walks the streets of Calgary, the sense of ecological harmony he finds in his contemporary art collection is thrown into relief by the seemingly rampant disrespect surrounding him. The stories expressed in his art collection take on a life of their own: they become teachers, conveying subconscious lessons.

Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art carries significant political and ecological weight. It communicates by engaging viewers in a distinct
intercultural partnership, based in Aboriginal storytelling traditions, that embodies a solution to the socially and ecologically unsustainable practices promoted by mainstream industrial and political structures. This solution is related to principles like holism, reciprocity, and interrelatedness. The embodiment of this political consciousness in the storywork experiences of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art engages viewers in an expression of themselves as interrelated with the land and the other beings that share it. This sustains the life and importance of aesthetics, particularly Aboriginal aesthetics, for contemporary Canada.

As we have seen, a sharing of knowledge through the arts has always been integral to the resilience of Canada. Today, the process is being adapted by artists to confront the colonial attitudes and behaviours that have contributed to many of the social-ecological imbalances currently experienced in Canadian societies. Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art continues to engage societies in the age-old process of learning from each other, interacting with mutual respect and adaptation, and maintaining balanced relationships with the surrounding world.

*The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* was one of Reid’s crowning works in a long career, life, and learning process largely concerned with this theme of reciprocity and balance. The importance of theme can be traced through Reid’s lifelong work on an essay he called “Haida Means Human Being.” In 1979, while confined to a Vancouver hospital, Reid began this essay, which he revised several times throughout his life: it explored the question “What is a human being?” For Reid, becoming human beings was a creative act where “we first had to invent ourselves.” This self-invention is more effectively sustained in communities such as early Aboriginal communities, where “access to [artistic/creative] skills was denied to no one.” Reid argues that over the course of Canadian history, some people became less human by turning their attention away from supporting this kind of creativity and toward the taking away or destruction of this basic creative ability in others around them. In the end, he envisions a time when Canadians will be “neither displaced aborigines nor immigrant settlers” but will realize how becoming human is wholly dependent on how we creatively invent ourselves in relation to our homeland and the world around us. This is a theme that fuels his courageous, vulnerable, and powerful conclusion: “In the Haida language, Haida means human being…. I wish
for each of us, native or newcomer—or, as so many of us are now, both—that however we say it, we can recognize ourselves someday as Haida.”

Aboriginal art expresses a unique soul-connection between humans and the more-than-human world immediately around them. In *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, not only is everyone equal or “in the same boat,” but the “boat goes on, forever anchored in the same place” (my emphasis). The storywork of this sculpture ultimately expresses a political statement that reverses the process that destroyed the creative ability for humans to invent themselves in relation to here. It subtly works to rebuild the necessary relationships for a balanced life in Canada. It reinstates Aboriginal knowledges and practices as crucial contributions to the sustenance of life in this place and also engages non-Aboriginal Canadians as equal contributors in this working partnership.

Contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art succeeds at doing this when it is purchased by non-Aboriginal collectors. Over time, the motives behind the collecting of Aboriginal art have changed. There is frequently much more emotion, thought, even spiritual connection in such transactions than in the past. Whatever their initial reasons, collectors have the advantageous position of being able to “hear” the story again and again as they view their works day after day. Each time they do, the story unfolds, from the ground up, in a different context and presents different layers of meaning within their lives and in the Canadian public sphere. The political consciousness inherent in a storywork encounter with contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art can be at work even for people who do not become purchasers.

In another interview, Leo, the son of Italian immigrants who was, like Lily, greatly moved by the work of Heather Shillinglaw, began discussing his experiences with her art in the context of his own background and upbringing. He told me that when he and his siblings were growing up in industrial Ontario, they felt little connection either with their Italian heritage or with the land. Cultural and ecological considerations took a back seat to just living and working. Leo later moved to Alberta and encountered Shillinglaw’s art at the same time he discovered the prairie landscape. Her art “confronted him,” he said, with something he was not used to in his day-to-day life—an acknowledged connection with the land. It also helped him make sense of his new surroundings and inspired him to think more about his own relationship to the land. He went on to say that Shillinglaw’s art and its stories keep appearing for
him in unexpected ways as he grows with and learns about Alberta as “home.” He is inspired “to connect all the time with the creative process” in his own work. Shillinglaw’s art has also helped him to grow more aware and prouder of his own Italian heritage.52

In a similar way, when Reid envisions a time when all people “in the same boat . . . forever anchored in the same place,” Canada, can call themselves “Haida,” a paradox immediately arises. When human beings are engaged in a respectful and accommodating partnership, the self is not destroyed, appropriated, replaced by someone else’s way of doing or understanding things, as is frequently an overwhelming fear in many relationships with “others.” Rather, the self becomes clearer, as an integral contributing member to the diversity of the world around.53 The storywork inherent in contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art engages viewers in an experience where all participants, whatever their background, are rooted in the “natural context.” This dissolves the validity of the “artificial context” of Canadian politics and clears space for an equal partnership to be expressed and affirmed. Leo’s story demonstrates that his deepening relationship with the land in Alberta through Shillinglaw’s art also helped him deepen his relationship to Italy. “Italian,” like “Haida,” is ultimately an expression of “human beingness” and, when in equal partnership with Aboriginal knowledges in Canada, it too can enrich local society, making life here more whole and resilient.

THE SPiral CONTINUES TO UNFOLD

The expression of this distinctly Aboriginal political consciousness through storywork in contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art is contributing to the slow awakening of more social-ecologically resilient societies in Canada. In a recent public opinion survey, 77 percent of respondents agreed that there is “a great deal” for Canadians “to learn from Aboriginal heritage, culture, and the unique relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the land.”54 The increasing popularity of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art also demonstrates that the relationships formed and knowledges shared resonate with Canadians.55 Indigenous storywork engages Canadians in stories that enact a wild, accommodating, and respectful partnership in this culturally and ecologically diverse place, through an aesthetic methodology that has been doing this same work here for millennia. As an Indigenous aesthetic and way
of knowing, storywork establishes the independence of Aboriginal cultures, art, and knowledge systems on their own terms. This awareness is unavailable through current mainstream, colonial, social-political practices and structures alone, which are generally organized hierarchically top-down from an abstract or “artificial context.” The subtle social-ecological partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians within their own stories and contexts form a significant and unfolding political dynamic. Within its more “natural context,” contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art helps to enrich, respectfully and reciprocally, Canadians’ lives with a deeper experience of living together in this place.

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NOTES

1 Tom Hill, quoted in James Hickman, “The Quiet Birth of the New Indian Art,” Imperial Oil Review 59, no. 2 (1975): 20. Winner of a Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts, Hill, a Konadaha Seneca, has played a key role in the development of Aboriginal Arts in Canada, which has included two terms on the board of directors of the Canada Council for the Arts. See also Gerald McMaster, “Contributions to Canadian Art by Aboriginal Contemporary Artists,” in Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, ed. David R. Newhouse, Cora J. Voyageur, and Dan Beavon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 1:150.
2 McMaster, “Contributions to Canadian Art,” 151.
3 Ibid.
4 Cree artist and curator Gerald McMaster states that these artists primarily help “their audiences understand how to move into the larger world with an Aboriginal sensibility.” Ibid., 154, (emphasis added).
5 See McMaster, “Contributions to Canadian Art.” See also Marie Battiste, “Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language, and Culture in Modern Society,” in Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 202. One of Battiste’s main points here is that “Western education has much to gain by viewing the world through the eyes and languages of Aboriginal peoples.” She discusses the importance of respecting and protecting Aboriginal rituals, ceremonies, and tribal knowledge in this endeavour—all of which are issues engaged, operationalized, and shared through contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, as we shall see.
These two points are especially evident through such significant markers of Canadian identity as Northwest Coast carving, woodland painting, and inuksuit (as in the logo for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics). See McMaster, “Contributions to Canadian Art,” 158; and John Ralston Saul, A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008), 36, 52–53.

This point is contra McMaster, “Contributions to Canadian Art,” 157, and reflects the art process involving Aboriginal art in Canada as discussed below.

Ralston Saul, A Fair Country, 36.


Ralston Saul, A Fair Country, 79.

Battiste, Reclaiming Indigenous Voice, 196.

See Jo-ann Archibald, Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008). Archibald (Q’um Q’um Xiiem), currently associate dean of Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia, is a member of the Stó:lō Nation.

Ibid, 2, 153. Even though Archibald does emphasize orality in storywork, she also acknowledges that “transforming the orally told stories to another language and another form of representation [such as painting] so that the power and integrity of the stories remains” is possible, as long as there are people involved in the process who “know the essential characteristics of stories” (25).


For more on Morrisseau, see Donald C. Robinson, Norval Morrisseau (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1997); and Greg A. Hill, Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006). Note that there is a discrepancy regarding Morrisseau’s year of birth; some sources state 1931; others, 1932.

This is implied in the concept of inaendaugwut and evoked by the pipe-smoking ceremony. See Basil Johnston, Ojibway Heritage (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 78–79, and 134–40, respectively.

See ibid., 69–70. The innate ability in fish to teach this important responsibility in education and life resides in their strong example of living unseen, in the dark depths, behind rocks (behind the scenes), and yet equally “steadfast in the swirling current” of physical reality (70). They have the ability to live and thrive in two worlds at once—the visible and invisible.

For example, Aaron Paquette and Dale Auger, have both recently highlighted this intention in their own art. Métis artist Paquette, in his personal blog, states that he enjoys “sharing what [he’s] gleaned after twenty years of art making” because, in his words, “we’re all in this crazy experiment together.” Aaron Paquette, “HBC—Half Breed Clothing,” The Art of Aaron Paquette (blog), September 11, 2009, http://aaronpaquette.blogspot.com. Auger, a Sakaw Cree artist, invokes the traditional practice of people gathering to share knowledge through arts and ceremony, in order to contextualize his own book of paintings. This invocation is intended as his way of continuing in this same tradition of “sharing knowledge with many nations, multiple generations and diverse communities throughout the world.” Dale Auger, Medicine Paint: The Art of Dale Auger, foreword by Mary-Beth Laviolette (Vancouver: Heritage House Publishing, 2009), 7. Commentators have also highlighted this aspect in contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art, especially through the exhibition context. Doris Stambrau’s work with the Iroquois for her exhibition Lifeworlds guided her toward discussing Iroquoian art “within the framework of a shared process of social development in a specific geographic territory.” Doris Stambrau, “Art as a Mirror of Iroquois Life,” in Lifeworlds—Artscapes: Contemporary Iroquois Art, exhibition catalogue, ed. Sylvia Kasprycki and Doris I. Stambrau (Frankfurt am Main: Museum der Weltkulturen, 2003), 23. Similarly, Gerald Conaty’s recent exhibition in Calgary’s Glenbow Museum of Aboriginal work from the prairies involved a collaboration between him, Cree guest curator Frederick McDonald, and various regional elders, Aboriginal community leaders, and Aboriginal artists. He subsequently described the exhibition as a profound sharing demonstrating the “continuing coexistence with all the beings of this world—with the Other Beings as well as other cultures,” and concluded by stating that “this art is about all of us.” Gerald T. Conaty, “Connections and Complexity,” Honouring Tradition: Reframing Native Art, exhibition catalogue, by Glenbow Museum Staff (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 2008), 19.


Auger, Medicine Paint, 7.


See Leslie McCartney, “Respecting First Nations Oral Histories: Copyright Complexities and Archiving Aboriginal Stories,” in First Nations, First Thoughts: The Impact of Indigenous Thought in Canada, ed. Annis May Timpson (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 89–90. McCartney concludes her study on the importance of recognizing the value of the different perspectives that Aboriginal stories bring to mainstream stories by stating that Aboriginal stories “may not only be locally grounded, culturally specific, and highly particular” but can also communicate “frames of reference, or ways of knowing, to further experience the world” (89).

For more on Yuxweluptun, see Ian M. Thom, “Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun,” Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre with


27 For a discussion of this phenomenon of naming entities in the landscape, see, for example, Keith H. Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 84–85.

28 See Allan J. Ryan, The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999). The author discusses contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art within the long tradition of humour and Trickster stories in Aboriginal cultures.


30 See, for example, Marie Wadden, Where the Pavement Ends: Canada’s Aboriginal Recovery Movement and the Urgent Need for Reconciliation (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2009), 226–29. Aboriginal peoples have made many important contributions to the dominant Canadian system, as demonstrated by the contributors to Hidden in Plain Sight (ed. David R. Newhouse, Cora J. Voyageur, and Dan Beavon). However, as many Aboriginal writers have argued, Canada’s colonial structure is still deeply entrenched within educational, political, and judiciary systems that are characterized less by a possibility for an equal partnership and more by an emphasis on a one-way, top-down flow of knowledge.

31 The comment about treaty making is from Wanipigow’s administrator of social development programs, Marcel Hardisty, quoted in Wadden, Where the Pavement Ends, 226. It relates to Hardisty’s statement to Wadden about the importance and intensity of “sharing” to Aboriginal peoples in this historical context. The treaties, he notes, originally involved a level of intercultural sharing that holistically included the actual raw resources of water, minerals, land, and air, but that has often been concealed or neglected in mainstream Canada today. For more about “sharing” as it relates to the reconciliation process in Canada, see Michael Murphy, “Civilization, Self-Determination, and Reconciliation,” in First Nations, First Thoughts: The Impact of Indigenous Thought
in Canada, ed. Annis May Timson (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 251. Murphy argues, contra Tom Flanagan, First Nations? Second Thoughts (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queens University Press, 2000), that reconciliation is indeed bound up with Aboriginal nationalism and “encompasses a forward-looking relationship among equals who will seek to establish bonds of trust and mutual respect.” This kind of sharing, however, is, according to Murphy, often thwarted by civilizationist policies and paradigms, such as Flanagan’s, which predict the inevitability of assimilation. For “sharing” and sustainable development, see David A. Lertzman and Harrie Vredenburg, “Indigenous Peoples, Resource Extraction and Sustainable Development: An Ethical Approach,” Journal of Business Ethics 56 (2005): 239–54. The authors argue that a substantive intercultural sharing through dialogue between Aboriginal peoples and the resource extraction industries is key to sustainable development in Canada.

34 Saul, A Fair Country, 79.
35 Murphy, “Civilization,” 267.
36 Archibald, Indigenous Storywork, 27. To be sure, there is a very important component in many stories, including Aboriginal ones, whose main purpose is simply to entertain: see, for example, Keith H. Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 50. I am not belittling this equally crucial role of art in people’s lives but only pointing out, as I also take Archibald to be doing, that this is just a small part of “stories” and is all too often, and detrimentally so, the only part ever acknowledged or considered.
37 Archibald, Indigenous Storywork, 139.
38 “Lily,” interview with Troy Patenaude, March 20, 2010, Edmonton. For the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, I have used pseudonyms for all interviewees.
39 For more about these stages of learning as they build into storywork, see Archibald, Indigenous Storywork, 47.
40 For more about the paradigm shift being effected by Indigenous peoples in general in order to move back toward a “natural context” from a strictly Euro-centric “artificial context,” see James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, “The Context of the State of Nature,” in Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 11–38. Youngblood Henderson argues that the basis of the modern state shifted to an “artificial context” (15), privileging a Euro-centric, cognitive, or “interpretive monopoly of human nature” (30) with the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and subsequently expanded on in the colonialist ideas of John Locke. Youngblood Henderson sees a recovering of the “historical and legal legacy of the treaty commonwealth” (33) contra these colonialist ideas, to be of paramount importance to the rebalancing and reuniting of the “best of Indigenous and European traditions” in Canada today (33).
41 See Frances W. Kaye, Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Arts Institutions on the Prairies (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003).
43 For more on Reid, see Doris Shadbolt, *Bill Reid* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1998); and Robert Bringhurst, ed., *Solitary Raven: The Essential Writings of Bill Reid* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2009).


45 Ibid., 246.


47 See, for example, Ralston Saul’s discussion of the “elite failure” of Canadian politicians and the fisheries industry in regards to West Coast shrimp trawling (A *Fair Country*, 189–91). See also Lertzman and Vredenburg, “Indigenous Peoples,” 241–42, for a more general discussion regarding the unsustainability of current industrial trends. This discussion helps introduce their proposed model for sustainability within the context of a case from the West Coast logging industry. To be sure, there are people within governments and industries in Canada who are working to change unsustainable trends. And change has been happening, however slowly, especially as more and more Aboriginal people, with their knowledge and cultural teachings, are included as equal and respected consultants and contributors in the courtroom and on scientific panels. However, much of this particular life-experience story has yet to unfold.


51 During another interview with a private collector in Calgary, who wished to be referred to only as “Crow,” he brought me into his dining room where a massive 60 x 50 cityscape painting—with many overt references to nature and the city’s relationship to the land—hung over the dinner table, creating an intense effect. Crow described to me how it very frequently became the centre of dinner party conversations, which sometimes included very wealthy executives of Alberta’s oil industry, of which Crow was also a part.

52 “Leo,” telephone interview with Troy Patenaude, Calgary, April 19, 2010.

53 For more on this process, see the work of ecopsychologist Bill Plotkin, especially *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche*, foreword by Thomas Berry (Novato: New World Library, 2003).

54 *Contemporary Aboriginal Arts in Canada* (Ottawa: Canada Council for the Arts, 2008), 5. This number is based on the findings of a 2004 Ipsos Reid public opinion poll.

55 A recent proliferation in books discussing Canada in a new, more holistic way and from a diverse range of fields—including language arts, anthropology, history, landscape painting, and politics—demonstrates that many Canadians are seeking a more meaningful relationship with their own geophysical and social-ecological realities than is currently being provided through mainstream political and social structures. See, for example, J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004); Robert Bringhurst, *The Tree of Meaning:*
Language, Mind and Ecology (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008); Victor Suthren, The Island of Canada: How Three Oceans Shaped Our Nation (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2009); Petra Halkes, Aspiring to the Landscape: On Painting and the Subject of Nature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Ralston Saul, A Fair Country; Kaye, Hiding the Audience; Annis May Timpson, ed., First Nations, First Thoughts: The Impact of Indigenous Thought in Canada (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009). The latter three works further discuss this trend as being directly related to or influenced by Indigenous ways of knowing and the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada.