

Carmen Robertson, Judy Anderson and Katherine Boyer (eds.). *Bead Talk: Indigenous Knowledge and Aesthetics from the Flatlands*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2024. 200 pages. ISBN 9781772840650. \$27.95 paperback.

*Bead Talk: Indigenous Knowledge and Aesthetics from the Flatlands* is a book edited by Carmen Robertson, Judy Anderson and Katherine Boyer that brings together conversations between artists and academics about the cultural, political, creative, and activist act of beading. *Bead Talk* contains five conversations between artists and curators: Ruth Cuthand and Marcy Friesen, Judy Anderson and Audie Murray, Katherine Boyer and Dayna Danger, Franchesca Hebert-Spence and Carmen Robertson and Felicia Gay and Carmen Robertson as well as three essays by important scholars in the field of Indigenous contemporary art: Cathy Mattes, Sherry Farrell Racette and Carmen Robertson. It's important and empowering to note that all the contributors to this book are Indigenous to the Canadian prairies, flatlands and plains, which makes these contributions and understandings of cultural processes and philosophical underpinnings that inspire and embody their practices all the more meaningful and relevant.

There are many dimensions to the exciting revival and resurgence of beading as a cultural phenomenon, from the creative community building of beading groups, to beading as a contemporary, fine art medium showcased in art institutions, to beadwork's aesthetic influence on art and design. An important highlight and connection to Brandon University is the chapter six essay by Michif artist and scholar Cathy Mattes about the Brandon Beading Babes, "*Until We Bead Again*": *The BU Beading Babes and Embodying Lateral Love and Generous Reciprocity*. The group was founded in 2013 by former IshKaabatens Waasa Gaa Inaabateg Department of Visual Art Professors Peter Morin and Cathy Mattes. This university-based beading group had significant cultural influence, as it demonstrated "...prioritizing relationships and art over university structures and systems." The Beading Babes still meet and bring the university beading community together with elders and other local community members. All bond and support each other in the group.

Flatlands beadwork is a powerful political act as well as the creation of something pretty and consumable. The beadwork movement critiques and challenges settler colonialism, systemic racism, and epistemic violence, in another demonstration that Indigenous contemporary artists are the avant-garde of cultural, social and political trends. Artists break the trail for the academics with their methodologies, processes and theoretical perspectives. Art historians and other cultural scholars are scrambling, playing a catch-up game to properly understand and appreciate the important cultural shifts that have been investigated already in the worlds of Indigenous contemporary art. The beadwork presented and discussed in the book is grounded in traditional world views, values and philosophical understandings that speak to present day social and cultural issues. A notable example is Ruth Cuthand's series *Brain Scans* (2023), depicting neurodiverse brains and mental health issues like PTSD, ADHD, anxiety, depression and schizophrenia using day glow and glow-in-the-dark beads and black lights, that are visually mesmerizing and open the floor to important conversations about our understandings of mental health issues. Ruth Cuthand's conversation with Marcy Friesen speaks to their mentoring relationship, and mental health issues in relation to their practices. Friesen's *Cleansing Tears (Depression Moccasin)* (2020) and *Muskrat Tears* (2020) use traditional mediums to convey contemporary mental health crises. The artists lay the foundation to rebuild, re-tell and reconceptualize existing power structures and settler colonial narratives both historical and contemporary. When artists work from

this basis, it is healing and empowering as it demonstrates agency in the struggle against oppressive discrimination and disconnection from culture, community, traditions and futures.

The book's format as a collection of essays and conversations by respected and celebrated artists and academics in the field of prairie beadwork art, is a demonstration of Indigenous epistemologies, dialogic and knowledge transmission. Dr. Brenda Macdougall touches on how the conversations between artists connects to the teaching of Kiyokewin in Métis culture, of visiting and connecting with others, the act of spending time, talking, listening and sharing. Visiting creates an informal and approachable way of exchanging knowledge, but much like an artistic practice it takes dedication, time, effort and active presence. Kiyokewin is a verb, it is an active process where one can learn, teach, inspire and grow. This emphasis on the importance of beaders and beading groups meeting in person and spending time with each other reinforces and maintains relationships to family, community and the land. When beaders visit and learn from each other, they create connections that span generations, genders, communities, worlds and spiritual realms.

*Bead Talk* is particularly moving and inspiring to Indigenous people with emotional and kinship connections to beadwork. From a personal perspective, being a Métis woman myself, people often assume I can bead, and though I've tried to learn and understand the meaningful and comforting connection of beading groups, when I visit the Beading Babes now run by Barb Blind and Kevin McKenzie at the Indigenous People's Center at Brandon University, I am more of an appreciator of the artform than a beader. My appreciation for beading came from the wearable artworks made by my maternal Grandmother Elsie Yanik (née Larocque). I grew up wearing beautifully beaded moccasins and parkas that she made me. I used to think everyone's grandma just made them these things, and it was only later in life I realized that this is the way my grandmother was passing down our culture, traditions and values. My grandmother's mother Charlotte Larocque (née Smith) passed away when she was young, and Elsie was sent to Fort Resolution Residential School in the Northwest Territories where she was taught silk embroidery by the nuns and Parisian French as the story goes. My grandmother lived her adult life in Métis, Cree and Dene communities in Fort Smith, NT and Fort Chipewyan, AB and it must have been those communities that passed on their skills to her as she was a talented artist that could work in any traditional medium from porcupine quill and birchbark to smoked moosehide and fish scale. This important aspect of disconnection - reconnection echoes the stories of many artists in the book, and the fact that many young Indigenous artists to this day will ironically learn beading at colonial institutions. My grandmother went on to teach beading and moose hair tufting to the children at the residential schools in Fort Chipewyan to support them emotionally and culturally and as my cousin George Tuccaro told me, "to keep on eye on them as she knew what happened in those schools".

The thrill of seeing beadwork's moment of breaking through the colonial glass ceiling in contemporary art institutions, and all the amazing Indigenous artists, curators and scholars using their story telling skills and creativity being embraced and celebrated by national and international arts audiences, is tempered by the knowledge of how beads and beading groups reconnect disconnected peoples in a powerful act of resilience, reclamation and resurgence. The artists in the book share stories about their artistic practice, about themselves, their families and their love of beading. *Bead Talk* offers both text-based and visual information as to how beading embodies epistemological concepts such as reciprocity, respect and interconnection.

*Bead Talk: Indigenous Knowledge and Aesthetics from the Flatlands* is an essential text and contribution of knowledge to scholars of Indigenous contemporary art, art history and Native Studies.

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