

Erin Morton (ed.), *Unsettling Canadian Art History*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. 360 pages. ISBN 9780228010982. \$55.00 paperback.

Upon opening the pages of this edited volume, readers may be tempted to regard this book as yet another art history survey which may sprinkle in a few chapters featuring works by writers and artists of colour. If any mention of Black or Indigenous art histories were to be made, readers may expect they would be marginal at best. They may anticipate that this book would fall in line with books in the genre which “primarily reproduce European derived categories for art and culture and art movements, while ‘including’ chapters on racialized visual and material culture that do not disrupt the imperial frame that centres white settler knowledge systems [...]” (19) Not so. Instead, they would begin reading what ultimately is a beautiful, caring, and unflinching indictment of Canadian art history – a loving call to arms to white settler art historians from a brilliant group of scholars.

*Unsettling Canadian Art History* is not your mama's art history survey. It directly contends with the ongoing “colonial unknowing” in the milieu, presenting visual and material culture through multiple decolonial and antiracist perspectives pushing well beyond the frame of shutter stories which have come to be the norm. These shutter stories refer to the notion that white dominant narratives frame the parts of history which they deem worth remembering while excluding undesirable aspects from this picture, much like the camera shutter allows the photographer to crop a view.

The book offers a thoughtful and thorough engagement with Canada's history of slavery and anti-Blackness beyond the chapters by Charmaine A. Nelson and Sylvia D. Hamilton, two Black contributors to the volume. This is a rare occurrence within the landscape of Canadian art writings. In far too many cases, if Blackness and Black histories are discussed, it is solely done so in the chapter by Black authors. *Unsettling Canadian Art History* breaks tradition here by presenting a global and interconnected look at the twin histories of colonialism and slavery as well as their continued impacts on the world. The book emphasizes how closely knit these systems of domination are, taking the time to outline various theoretical frameworks and methodologies which do the work of unpicking the stitches of the horrific tapestry of white supremacy. Throughout the pages of this book, the authors' collective voices ask the pressing question: what is the potential of viewing settler colonialism through a different lens to centre the shared objective of collective care and solidarity? A lens through which the ethics of accountability and care are at the core of how we relate to one another in spaces of knowledge production.

*Unsettling Canadian Art History* opens with the editor, Erin Morton, situating herself as a white settler in a deep, critical manner that shows she stands firmly in being accountable and a true accomplice to decolonial and anti-racist efforts. Morton does so in full knowledge of how settler colonialism, slavery and white supremacy have historically impacted non-white peoples across the globe. In a lengthy endnote in the preface she offers a thoughtful discussion of geographical terminology, specifically addressing the decision to avoid using the term *Turtle Island* (from the Anishinaabeg creation story) instead of *Canada*. She notes *Turtle Island* is now “casually tossed around by white settlers” to virtue signal (xiii). In lieu of appropriating the term, knowing its limitations and problematic use, the editor has opted for continued use of the settler state term, *Canada*, until a better term is found.

The introduction begins with a retelling of a long ago trip to Kijipuktuk|Halifax that Morton took to attend the World's Tall Ships Festival, casting such festivities as structures which enshrine colonial histories as foundational national texts worth applauding while simultaneously overlooking the bedrock of horrific violence they stand upon. Morton sets the stage for the chapters to follow by launching into a discussion of what it truly means to unlearn imperialism and decentre colonialism, emphasizing this involves far more than mere representation but in fact requires a deep understanding and active dismantling of systems of ongoing violence and dispossession. She writes, "Colonial histories show up as concrete material legacies of the present because colonial violence and genocide continue." (5) In problematizing acquired and accepted language the authors in *Unsettling Canadian Art History* are clear in their intent to not only decentre whiteness but also to dismantle white supremacist systems of oppression within and beyond art historical circles. This book positions embodied knowledge and lived experiences as key sites whence to investigate histories of art and culture. Moreover, they "[affirm] the importance of collaborative research and conversations and undertaking decolonizing methodologies, rather than attempting to locate a singular line of argument or set of questions which will 'unsettle' scholarship and research." (xii) The call for interrelation (relating well) between art communities across myriad intersections is powerful.

Aligning itself within an already existing body of work, this volume underscores the people driving an important shift in Canadian art histories who have paved the way for this book namely by highlighting the work of Andrea Bear Nicholas, Heather Igloliorte, Charmaine A. Nelson, Alice Ming Wai Jim, Alexandra Chang, Jas M. Morgan, Dayna Danger, Julie Nagam, Ashok Mathur and Carla Tauton, among others, some of whom are contributing authors in *Unsettling Canadian Art History*. The three distinct parts of the book centre excavating practices peeling back the layers of colonial pasts. The book presents texts in which authors are grappling with histories of exclusion and gatekeeping in overlapping personal and structural colonial contexts impacting communities beyond the art milieu. Each chapter draws throughlines among the three parts to propose a compelling prism of anti-racist and decolonial knowledge to decentre white settler positionalities and dismantle imperial frames for unsettling Canadian art history. The selection of chapters within the volume itself exemplifies the power of relating well.

In the first part of the book, the chapters call back to the notion of colonial shutter stories, drilling down into curated views on Canadian history to unveil them for the pioneer lies they are and the harmful possessive logics of colonial frameworks, namely as they relate to police forces such as the RCMP and to settler conceptions of property and the exploitation of land. Part One "Unsettling Settler Methodologies, Re-centring Decolonial Knowledge" further presents a thoughtful and engaging discussion on strategies white settlers might employ to contend with Indigenous sovereignty within their curatorial and creative practices. They call for white settlers to grapple with the reality that they are the "intended beneficiaries" of colonialism. They urge white settlers to tackle the so-called neutrality of colonial violence and white supremacy so they might at long last embody decoloniality and truly make a difference as ethical accomplices in the fight for decolonial and anti-racist justice. Part One closes with a compelling investigation of intergenerational colonial erasures and loss within communities and families. Lindsay McIntyre describes making a film which relays her Inuk matrilineal lineage obscured by colonial lies and patriarchy, revealing the strategic ways in which these stories have been buried.

Flowing effortlessly from these ruminations on lateral structures of knowledge, or non-hierarchical systems of knowing, the second part of this book, “Excavating and Creating Decolonial Archives” delves deeper into strategies for uncovering lesser-known histories. These texts echo the spirit of the previous section, foregrounding critical archive and collection practices. Part two features a profound engagement with the specific and longstanding histories of Black peoples in Canada reaching back centuries within the archive. The chapters in this portion of the volume entwine contemporary art practices with innovative and restorative archival research geared towards telling the tale of peoples and communities, both Black and Indigenous, which have been suppressed.

The third and final part of this book, “Reclaiming Sexualities, Tracing Complicities” continues the work of centring Black and Indigenous voices and knowledges by proposing powerful texts which reach beyond the realm of visual art and culture to reveal the extent of colonial violence on these communities. Taking an intersectional lens to these histories the authors in this part speak to the ways in which colonial frameworks have skewed both personal and structural relations within and between communities. Part Three shines in its assertion that interrelationality and collaboration across groups with deeper ethical consideration are the path toward liberation for all.

The authors and the editor of this book offer a stunning companion read to ground-breaking Canadian art history publications such as *Making History: Visual Arts and Blackness in Canada*, *Towards an African Canadian art history: art, memory, and resistance*, the *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* journal and multiple later issues of the *Canadian Art* magazine. This book brings together a wide range of perspectives and knowledges about colonial histories, critically examining the frameworks in place within the discipline of art history to deconstruct them. This volume does not shy away from naming white supremacy and pulling the rug from underneath settler colonial and racist approaches to art history. *Unsettling Canadian Art History* aims to carve a path towards new structures which contribute to and centre longstanding decolonial and anti-racist efforts emerging from Black, Indigenous and otherwise marginalized communities.

Joana Joachim  
Department of Art History  
Concordia University