



March 11 to July 31, 2021

I'm Not Your Kinda Princess

Lori Blondeau

A survey of works curated by
Nasrin Himada

Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art
Unit 1, 460 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0E8 | (204) 942 1043

plugin.org

PLUG IN ICA

Free to All

Visit Plug In ICA

Established in 1972, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art is one of Canada's leading contemporary art centres and the country's first named ICA. As an ICA, Plug In makes space for specialized research for artists while building new audiences for art.

Tour our exhibitions and permanent artworks. Attend our critical lectures, performances, screenings and readings. Browse our unique Book Shop filled with art magazines, catalogues, contemporary anthologies and artist multiples. Research using our library of over 3000 art related books.

All of our public programs are free, as our mandate states, to ensure we are open for all.

Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art
Unit 1, 460 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3C 0E8
1 (204) 942 1043

Gallery Hours
For the most current information on our hours please visit plugin.org or contact info@plugin.org.

Office Hours
Monday – Friday 10am – 5pm

plugin.org



Lori Blondeau, *Stones from my Kokum's House*, Mixed Media, 2021. Photo by Karen Asher.

I'm Not Your Kinda Princess

Lori Blondeau

A survey of works curated by Nasrin Himada

March 11 to July 31, 2021

Online discussion between Lori Blondeau and Franchesca Hebert-Spence
Saturday, July 17, 2021

On a windy fall day, members of the Winnipeg arts community trekked to the theatre at Artspace for an artist talk - inside you could hear the low hum of folks visiting while the sun slowly set outside. Lori Blondeau, a new member of the arts community who had moved to the city less than a month prior, had been invited to give a presentation on her practice. That night, standing upon the stage, framed by velvet curtains, Lori not only reviewed her practice but also introduced herself to the audience by sharing stories of her experiences. One story she told was about the time that CBC had come to interview her mother, Leona Blondeau (Bird), after Bill C-31 had passed. The reporter asked, "how does it feel to be an Indian again?" to which her mother replied, "I never wasn't and this piece of paper doesn't change who I am." Lori has shared many stories with me since then, but to this day, this remains one that frames my fundamental understanding of Lori as a person and as an artist. Below are stories that Lori has shared with me that run in tandem to the artworks on display in *I'm Not Your Kinda Princess*.

I can only articulate this deep knowing as 'power in pride'. It is characterized by a weaving together of memory, knowing and stories - of and for Blondeau's kin. As an individual who had been taken out of community, I don't have the same access, knowing or memory of place. This makes the time that Lori has spent sharing her stories with me all the more special. It's also why I hold so much respect for the power that comes with her deep knowing of self, community and kin, that she communicates throughout her practice.

In the 90's to 00's, Indigenous cultural production was, and can still be, written about in a way that centres the power of the work in its capacity to educate non-Indigenous viewers. In particular, the threads or translations focus on strategies of humour and 'contemporaneity' with the end goal of deconstructing stereotypes, rather than probing the deeper layers of the conceptual framework that are specific to Indigenous folks' community or lived experience. This pattern can be seen with artists such as the beloved late James Luna, Shelly Niro and Dana Claxton, in addition to Lori. The emphasis on the western gaze, and writing that focuses on how Indigenous cultural production that *benefits* the western gaze has effectively overshadowed the ways in which artists have made, and continue to make, work that centres themselves, their families and their communities. I'm not denying the moments of permeability, but rather my argument is that the focus has been weighted to prioritize 'universal' access rather than specific cultural experiences or visual languages - the characteristics that make art a potential site for transcultural experience. When interviewed about whether her work was a reclamation of the 'Indian Princess,' Lori echoed her mother: "Indigenous people shouldn't have to reclaim anything that was always theirs to begin with."¹

Both Lori and Leona's statements are about memory and remembering, honoring and being part of a continuum - while this is a form of activism and resistance, I shy away from naming it as 'radical'. Terms like 'radical care' or 'radical relationality' take actions that are fundamental to various nation's epistemologies and suggest they lie outside a dominant or default framework. Positioning them as radical delegates them as a subaltern action, rather than a continuum and a source of community power that can be tapped into. Lori's photographic series *Pakwāci Wāpisk* is an excellent example that points to the ways in which she actively decentres a western-european gaze and instead privileges those with a shared experience or knowing. In these images, neoclassical architecture, an aesthetic associated with western-thought or a visual short-hand for "civilization," is shown as decrepit and crumbling - even the word neoclassical is as much of an oxymoron as the concept of a 'dead culture'. Yet, Lori stands fierce and defiant upon these stages. Her pride and knowing - denoted by the nod to the knowledge systems that endure, that she enacts by wrapping her body in the colour of power for Plains folks - demonstrates heart work through embodying survivance, thriving, and the power of her kin. Her photography, performance and installation each respond to a specific context. For example, in *Pakwāci Wāpisk*², Lori explores the way we stumble across architecture in public space, calling attention to these inconspicuous ways they serve as monuments to imperialism, and refuting the values they stand for through her own deep knowing of longer histories of space and place (be it constructed, researched or searched for).

Asiniŋ Iskwew is a series that capitalizes on how photographs act as mnemonic devices, capturing a moment in time to serve as a catalyst for memory. The series itself is undeniably powerful; Lori is an indomitable figure with the composition tilting upwards, and paired with the sheer scale of the work when printed, these images have a commanding presence. These elements are amplified with the coded knowledge of the history of Mistaseni - the images aren't mere references to Mistaseni but rather serve as fragments, calling to those who know, or have shared histories. When *Pakwāci Wāpisk* and *Asiniŋ Iskwew* are installed in context with one another, clear connections can be drawn between the compositions and in the way, Lori holds herself; yet the stories that go with the works serve very different conceptual purposes and tell two different histories.

The multilayer integration of intimate narratives continues in one of Lori's most iconic performance personas - Belle Sauvage. Performances that are enacted by Belle Sauvage allude to and remember women who performed in Wild West shows and vaudeville acts. What is unique about the installation of the series in this exhibition is how the series is juxtaposed with a photo of Ernest Bird. The image was taken in 1928, where he posed, decked out in a beaded vest, cowboy boots and a six-shooter. Ernest Bird is Lori's grandfather, and this image is one of the multiple archival images installed within *I'm Not Your Kinda Princess*. The images are family portraits; images of the folks that the work is made for and where her work comes from. The tangibility of Lori's family photos becomes even more precious when we think about an ongoing move to digital images and the spaces in which they're retained.

When the *Putting the Wild in the Wild West* series (collaboration with Adrian Stimson) began in 2006, the images were shot on 55 Polaroid film, which peeled making a positive and negative - the negative could be used to reprint. Individuals would sign over the rights to the images to Lori and Adrian, paralleling land histories of land apprehension, and in return receive the positive image or the 'printed' image. It was in 2010 that the stock of polaroid film ran out after the company went bankrupt, forcing the images to be taken using digital cameras afterwards. The role of the photo changes in a really significant way - unlike the image of her grandfather, unless the photos are printed and cared for, their ability to act as a mnemonic device is compromised in some ways.

Lori isn't performing Belle Sauvage, she's remembering: remembering the acts, remembering signing land claims with an x, remembering the significance of standing in front of the camera, remembering that these photos will last - if they're cared for - and imagining what they'll mean for her children and her children's children.

¹ Nickita Longman, "Deconstructing Notions of the Indigenous Woman through Performance Art," UM Today (University of Manitoba, November 7, 2018), <https://news.umanitoba.ca/deconstructing-notions-of-the-indigenous-woman-through-performance-art/>.

² *Pakwāci Wāpisk*, Lori Blondeau, photograph on aluminum, 2017. Collection of the Art Gallery of Alberta (not installed in *I'm Not Your Kinda Princess*)

³ Series not installed in *I'm Not Your Kinda Princess*

Biography

Lori Blondeau is Cree/Saulteaux/Métis from Saskatchewan. Since the 1990s, Blondeau's artistic practice in the fields of performance, photography and installation, along with her curatorial work and activities as co-founder and Executive Director of the Indigenous art collective TRIBE, has proved decisive to the ever-increasing centrality of Indigenous art and knowledge production in Canada. With her performances, which include *Are You My Mother?* (2000), *Sisters* (2002) and *States of Grace* (2007) and photographic work, including *COSMOSQUAW* (1996), *Lonely Surfer Squaw* (1997) and *Asiniŋ Iskwew* (2016), Blondeau's practice, both as a solo artist and in collaboration with fellow Visual artists including Visual Artists James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, Shelly Niro and Adrian Stimson, demonstrates a clarity of focus which is remarkable for its precision, humour and strength. Her photographic and installation work has been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Windsor (Ontario), Kelowna Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton) and Remai Modern (Saskatoon) among numerous others. Her performance pieces have been showcased at Nuit Blanche (Saskatoon and Winnipeg), VIVO (Vancouver), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto) and the 2007 Venice Biennial. Blondeau has participated in panel discussions and given lectures at the AGO, the University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (Santa Fe) and the 2020 Sydney Biennale. Since 2018, Blondeau is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Art at the University of Manitoba School of Art; sat on the Advisory Panel for the Canada Council, Visual Arts program and served as a member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective. Blondeau was a recipient of the 2021 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

Essay by Franchesca Hebert-Spence

In the middle of the prairies, there is a community on the periphery of a valley. For a long long long long time, the valley served as a lookout for the community. For upon the hill were tipi rings, imprints left by those who would stay there. As time passed, a farmer from the community came along and ploughed the ground, erasing the rings that had been there for so long. When razed about it, he said "I didn't remember they were there!" But a Kokum who lived on that very hill did remember and created a beautiful rock garden in front of her sod house. Eventually the little sod house was left empty and burnt down, leaving its imprint in the earth and the rock garden behind. One day, the hill had visitors: the kin of the Kokum. As her relatives stood on the hill and remembered, her granddaughter picked up a rock and carried a piece of that hill with her to her home eastward.



1



2



4



3

Lori Blondeau, Installation images of *I'm Not Your Kinda Princess* at Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, 2021. Photo credits: Karen Asher.

- Lori Blondeau, *Stones from my Kokum's House*, Mixed Media, 2021.
- From left to right: Lori Blondeau, *Asiniŋ Iskwew*, August 2018, Inkjet prints on di-bond, Dimensions: 167.6 x 111.8 cm each, Courtesy of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, CIRNAC) / Ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord (Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada, RCAAANC); Lori Blondeau, *States of Grace* (Venice), 2007, Ink-jet on di-bond, Dimensions: 119 x 160 cm; Lori Blondeau, *Grace*, 2006, 14 ink-jet prints on paper, Each of 14 components: 50.7 x 50.7 cm (image), 61 x 61 cm (support), Courtesy of Kenderdine Art Gallery | College Art Galleries | University of Saskatchewan Art Collection

- From left to right: Lori Blondeau, *Grace*, 2006, 14 ink-jet prints on paper, Each of 14 components: 50.7 x 50.7 cm (image), 61 x 61 cm (support), Courtesy of Kenderdine Art Gallery | College Art Galleries | University of Saskatchewan Art Collection; Lori Blondeau, *Lonely Surfer Squaw*, 1997, Duratrans on lightbox, 104.8 x 80.2 x 17 cm (lightbox exterior), 86.4 x 61.6 cm (photo), Courtesy of Remai Modern, Mendel Art Gallery Collection, purchased with the assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts 2008; Lori Blondeau, *COSMOSQUAW*, 1998, 20 min 37 sec, Performance documentation, Performed as part of the 5-day festival "Re-Inventing the Diva," co-produced by exhibitions and media art for Western Front, Vancouver, BC.
- From left to right: Lori Blondeau, *Asiniŋ Iskwew*, August 2018, Inkjet prints on di-bond, Dimensions: 167.6 x 111.8 cm each, Courtesy of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, CIRNAC) / Ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord (Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada, RCAAANC); Lori Blondeau, *States of Grace* (Venice), 2007, Ink-jet on di-bond, Dimensions: 119 x 160 cm

Our Members Friends of Plug In ICA

Plug In ICA is a dedicated non-profit organization with a 49 year history of presenting the best of contemporary art and artists.

We insist on operating admission free!

Members Levels	Or better yet become a member of our Director's Circle whose support sustains Plug In ICA as it continues to be an essential platform for contemporary art and artists with the aim of building audiences through critical dialogue.
Students / Artists \$30	Director's Circle levels include: Motivator Instigator Galvanizer
Basic Visitor \$75	
Family \$90 (2-4 Members per household)	
Keener \$125	
Keener Family \$140 (2-4 Members per household)	
Explorer \$250	
Visionary \$500	

See our website under "Support" or contact Angela Forget directly for detailed information on benefits, sponsorship and partner associations: angela@plugin.org.

plugin.org

In the Bookshop



Lori Blondeau:
Who Do You Think You Are?

Performance, Installation, Documentation 1996-2007

Published by the Mendel Art Gallery, 2006

978-1896359601

32 pages

\$30

Who Do You Think You Are? examines the work of artist Lori Blondeau, inspired by the 2006 exhibition *Grace* curated by Dan Ring. Text by Dan Ring, Len Findlay with introduction by Vincent J. Varga.

Research Library

Plug In ICA's Art Research Library's searchable online catalogue can be accessed at: librarything.com/catalog/PlugInICA.

Members have sign-out privileges and all are welcome to access our library during gallery hours.

Acknowledgments

We are on Treaty 1 Territory. Plug In ICA is located on the territories of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Ojji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Plug In ICA extends our heartfelt gratitude to the artists we work with, our generous donors, valued members, and dedicated volunteers. We acknowledge the sustaining support of our Director's Circle. You all make a difference.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Arts Council and Winnipeg Arts Council. We could not operate without their continued financial investment and lobbying efforts.

