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REVISION  
*and*  
RESISTANCE

*mistikôsiwak (WOODEN  
BOAT PEOPLE) at  
the METROPOLITAN  
MUSEUM of ART*







# ONE OF NORTH AMERICA'S MOST THOUGHT-PROVOKING ARTISTS STAKES A NEW CLAIM



“Monkman beats Western history painting at its own game.”

*(The Globe and Mail)*

“Isn’t a time-traveling, gender-fluid, Indigenous sex goddess exactly what art needs right about now?”

*(New York Magazine / Vulture)*

“SURE TO ALARM  
AND EDUCATE”

*(The Observer)*

“Works that do nothing less than turn conventional Western art history on its head.”

*(artnet News)*

“Heady and intense...  
Monkman excels at layering  
the present onto the past  
and vice versa.”

*(ARTnews)*

“STUPENDOUS”

*(New York Times)*



Kent Monkman  
*Welcoming the Newcomers*  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
335.3 x 670.6 cm



Kent Monkman  
*Resurgence of the People*  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
335.3 x 670.6 cm

*A new publication from the Art Canada Institute*

# KENT MONKMAN

## REVISION *and* RESISTANCE

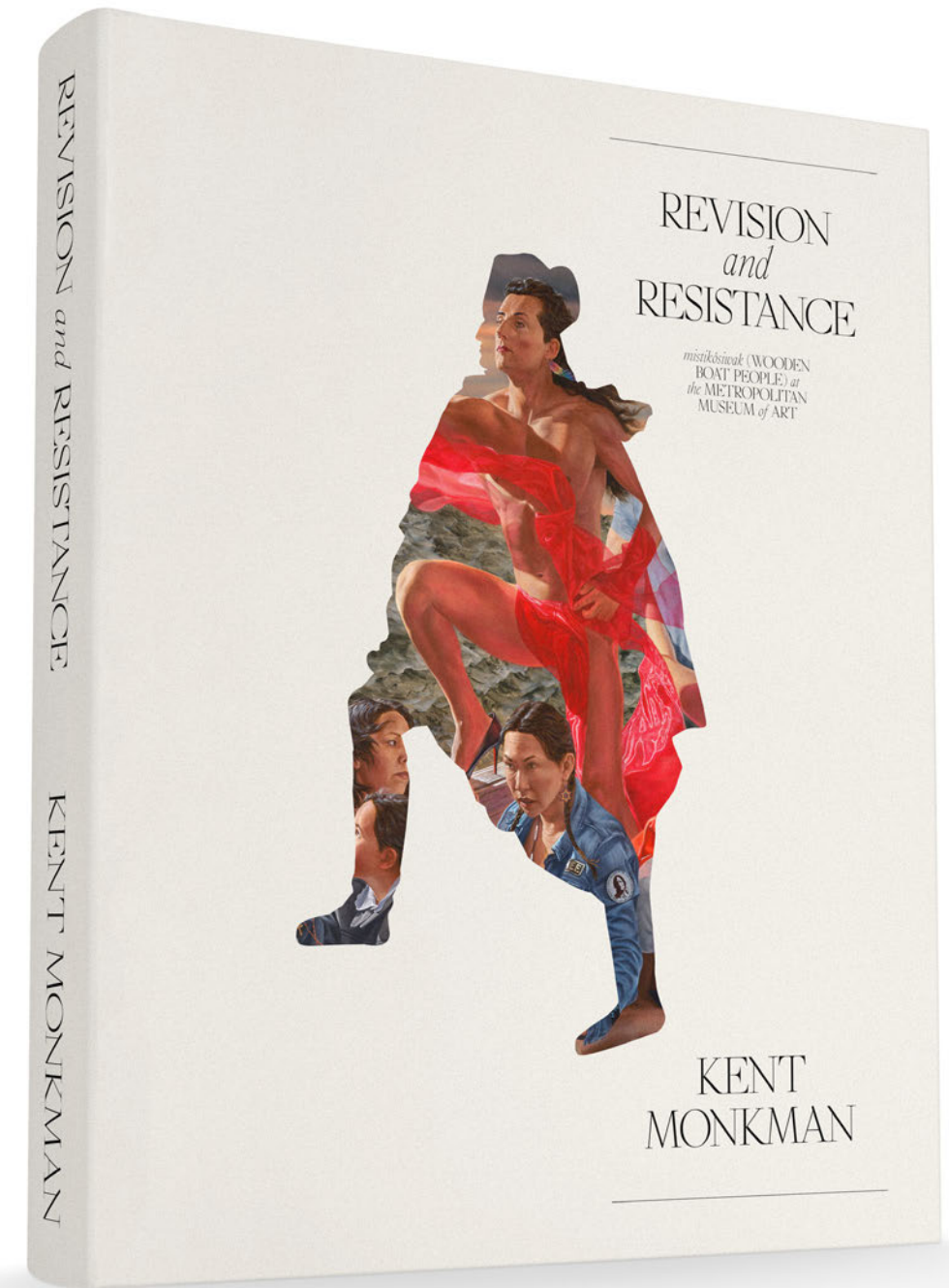
*mistikôsiwak (WOODEN BOAT PEOPLE) at the METROPOLITAN MUSEUM of ART*

This book explores *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)* by the internationally renowned artist Kent Monkman. Commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the epic diptych exhibited in The Met's Great Hall revisits iconic works of art, notably the famed painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze. Monkman—featured in *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)* as his time-travelling, shape-shifting, gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—reverses the colonial gaze of American and European art history through an Indigenous lens to present a powerful vision for the future.

Featuring commentaries by Sasha Suda, director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada; art historian Ruth B. Phillips and historian Mark Salber Phillips; Jami C. Powell, associate curator of Native American Art at the Hood Museum; Shirley Madill, executive director at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, and Nick Estes, assistant professor at the University of New Mexico, *Revision and Resistance: mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art* is the definitive documentation on Monkman, his practice, and two of the most important paintings of our times.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- ISBN 9781487102258 | 9.5" x 11.875" | 130 pages
- Retail price: \$50
- Over 150 full colour photographs and paintings
- Two photo essays: one of the making of the painting, one of its installation at The Met
- Die-cut dust jacket over hardcover laminated case
- Two gatefolds of Kent Monkman's diptych paintings *Welcoming the Newcomers* and *Resurgence of the People*
- Two sewn-in booklets featuring indexes of historical artworks referenced by Kent Monkman in *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)*



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Photo: Paul Weeks





REVISIONING  
HISTORY  
AN INDEX  
MARKET

RUTH B. PHILLIPS  
and MARK  
SALBER PHILLIPS

Photo: Paul Weeks



Photo: Paul Weeks

SAMPLE PAGES *from*  
REVISION *and* RESISTANCE  
*mistikôsiwak* (WOODEN BOAT PEOPLE)  
*at the* METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



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KENT  
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## SHIRLEY MADILL



# Introducing MISS CHIEF EAGLE TESTICKLE

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Kent Monkman, *Being Legendary*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 121.9 × 182.9 cm, private collection.

OPPOSITE: Still from Kent Monkman, *Dance to Miss Chief* (detail), 2010, DigiBeta, 4:49 min.

BOTTOM LEFT: Monkman at age four, with his parents and siblings, photographer unknown.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Clarence Tilenius, *Bison Diorama* (detail), taxidermy and mixed media, 8.7 m (width) × 7.5 m (depth), Orientation Gallery, Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg.

<sup>1</sup>Monkman notes that “Cher had her half-breed phase, which was glamorous and it was gender bending at the same time.” See Jonathan D. Katz, “Miss Chief is always interested in the latest European fashions,” in *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, ed. Michèle Thériault (Montreal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University, 2012), 19.

<sup>2</sup>Kent Monkman, in conversation with the author, October 2019.



**KENT MONKMAN IS A VISUAL STORYTELLER.** For more than two decades he has subverted art history’s established canon through the appropriation of works that tell stories of European domination and the obliteration of North American Indigenous cultures. Monkman challenges the accuracy of such representations by repopulating and correcting settler landscapes in a transgressive manner. He reimagines well-known paintings in order to provide a contemporary, critical point of view—and often his agent of disruption and change is one Miss Chief Eagle Testickle (originally called Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle), or Miss Chief for short.

Miss Chief’s name is a play on the words “mischief” and “egotistical,” and in its early use also incorporated “Cher” as a way to perform a reimagining of the 1970s pop diva.<sup>1</sup> Today, she is known as Monkman’s alter ego, living and taking part in art history. In the tradition of Indigenous storytelling, she embodies the mythological trickster and takes the form of a two-spirit, third gender, supernatural character who exhibits a great degree of intellect and knowledge when she is present in a work of art. Monkman uses her to help guide viewers to see new truths. Glamorous, flamboyant, confident, and always high-heeled, she inhabits paintings and appears in installations, performances, and videos. Since her first manifestation nearly twenty years ago, she’s played a central role in correcting accounts of Indigenous histories. Indeed, Miss Chief is the key to much of the artist’s work.

Monkman’s own story begins in Manitoba. A member of the Fisher River First Nation, he was born in 1965—one of four children—in a small hospital in St. Mary’s, Ontario, his Anglo-Canadian mother’s hometown. Soon after, the family returned to northern Manitoba and the Cree community of Shamattawa where his parents were engaged in missionary work. His father then moved the family to Winnipeg and settled in the middle-class neighbourhood of River Heights. Monkman’s great-grandmother, who lived with the family until he was ten, spoke only Cree. Most of the city’s Indigenous population was located in the economically challenged North End. From an early age, Monkman discovered that Winnipeg was riven by race and class. While identifying with both sides of his heritage, he developed a stronger connection with his Cree culture thanks to the presence of his father’s relatives, especially his great-grandmother.

Monkman remembers seeing the dioramas in the Manitoba Museum, then called the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, during school field trips. These theatrical tableaux represented Indigenous people as if frozen in time, often hunting bison or camping in prairie landscapes. This dramatic dislocation between that ideal and the catastrophic fallout of colonization evident outside the museum, where Indigenous people were living on the streets, was a fundamental turning point in the artist’s thinking. In his words, the museum visits “were inspirational and scarring at the same time.”<sup>2</sup> In the fall of 1983, shortly after graduating high school, Monkman began studying illustration through a commercial art program at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario. After completing

his degree in 1986, he became involved in theatre and set design at Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto.

Although known for his representational paintings, Monkman’s practice was initially semi-abstract. An early body of work, titled *The Prayer Language*, consisted of acrylic paintings in which he incorporated Cree syllabics drawn from his parents’ hymn book, which appear embedded in the paint. Beneath them, ghost-like homoerotic images of men wrestling emerge. The Cree translations of Christian hymns became a backdrop to define a personal

TOP: Kent Monkman, *The Triumph of Mischief* (detail), 2007, acrylic on canvas, 213.4 × 335.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

BOTTOM: Kent Monkman, *The Triumph of Mischief*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 213.4 × 335.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

OPPOSITE TOP: Kent Monkman, *Woe to Those Who Remember from Whence They Came*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 182.9 × 274.3 cm, private collection.

OPPOSITE MIDDLE: Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *Women of Caughnawaga (Femmes de Caughnawaga)*, 1924, stained plaster, 43 × 60 × 44 cm, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec City.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Peter Rindisbacher, *A Metis Family (A Halfcast with his Wife and Child)*, c.1825, watercolour and ink on paper, 21.5 × 26.5 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.



at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The performance was a response to one of Monkman's paintings being excluded from the museum's First People's Gallery out of fear his work would challenge the historical legitimacy of paintings by Kane.

Miss Chief was fast becoming an important figure in Canadian history with the power to undermine important institutional collections of art. Her new-found status was celebrated in Monkman's first major touring solo exhibition, *The Triumph of Mischief*, which travelled to various galleries and museums across Canada from 2007 to 2010. During the tour, Monkman continued to research historical works of art as a means of challenging Canada's early history and included his findings. This allowed for an unprecedented adaptability: Monkman could exhibit new work based on local histories and contexts drawn directly from each collection. The title piece for the exhibition is *The Triumph of Mischief*, 2007, now a key work in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. The painting's background resembles Yosemite Valley and echoes the sublime romanticist landscape paintings of the

German-American Albert Bierstadt. The scene is conceptually similar to Catlin's *Dance to the Berdash*, only in Monkman's interpretation there is a subversive twist. The painting is sexually charged and contains images of artists, trappers, explorers, and mythical characters engaged in a wild scene of homoerotic violence and debauchery. All revelry is orchestrated around the central character, Miss Chief, who now appears as a time-traveling intervener in the colonial past and present.

For the Winnipeg Art Gallery version of *The Triumph of Mischief*, held in 2008, Monkman gathered inspiration from three historical works in the permanent collection: *Femmes de Caughnawaga*, 1924, a bronze by Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté; *The Dakota Boat*, c.1880, a painting by W. Frank



Lynn; and *A Metis Family (A Halfcast with His Wife and Child)*, c.1825, a watercolour by Peter Rindisbacher. Visual quotations from these works are found in Monkman's painting *Woe to Those Who Remember from Whence They Came*, 2008. In the painting's far left, a prairie vista overlooking historic Fort Garry sets the stage. A former Hudson's Bay trading post, this is the site where Treaty No. 1 was signed between the Ojibway and Swampy Cree of Manitoba and the Crown. The same paddleboat in Lynn's painting that symbolizes technological progress is seen on the Assiniboine River. On the far right of the canvas are the women and Métis family from Suzor-Coté and Rindisbacher's works respectively. In the centre, walking behind the figures, is the apparitional figure of Miss Chief. As she is commanded to leave, she glances back to her homeland. As a result of her disobedience, she turns into a pillar of salt. While the historiography of past events cannot be changed, Monkman shows that the representation of these events can be rewritten. It is through the character of Miss Chief that such a restaging can occur.

More recent interventions that expand the scope of this working method include important video works such as *Dance to Miss Chief*, 2010, in which a dancing Miss Chief is romantically interweaved among footage of Winnetou, a fictitious "Indian" who appears in Karl May's German Western films. Another is the painting *Seeing Red*, 2014, which makes use of sophisticated stereotypical visual tropes drawn from art history in order to reverse the Western gaze. Miss Chief, clad in a bullfighter's uniform adorned with contemporary Métis beadwork, uses a Hudson's Bay blanket to engage a bull modelled after Pablo Picasso's famous cubist works. The traditional matador lays dead nearby while a Hermes-like figure floats above, reaching for his winged sneakers that hang from a power line supported by an Indigenous Northwest Coast totem pole. Miss Chief stares directly at the viewer. The invocation is here obvious—traditions invented by Europeans are in the process of being replaced by a pan-Indig-



RESISTANCE  
*in the*  
MAKING



SECTION TWO







TOP: Monkman and his staff set the scene for *Welcoming the Newcomers*. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

BOTTOM: Demonstrating for two models how to pose while holding a photo of the reference artwork.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Mixing paints in the studio. Behind Monkman is his painting *The Deluge* finished earlier in 2019.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: A model waiting for further instruction.





# REVISIONING HISTORY

SECTION THREE





OPPOSITE TOP: Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851, oil on canvas, 378.5 × 647.7 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Southern and Northern Cheyenne, drawing from the Maffet Ledger (detail), c.1874–81, graphite, watercolour, and crayon on paper, 29.8 × 13.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

BOTTOM LEFT: Unknown, The great Bartholdi statue, liberty enlightening the world: the gift of France to the American people, c.1885, chromolithograph, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

BOTTOM RIGHT: *Resurgence of the People* (detail), 2019.

Monkman's *Resurgence of the People* subverts history painting's conventional adherence to a linear past with a vision for the future. He draws on the composition of *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851, by Emanuel Leutze, painted seventy-five years after George Washington captained a boat full of troops across the Delaware River. Leutze's work celebrates Washington as a hero who upholds the ideals of the American Revolution, and captures the moment in which Washington sails to victory at a turning point in the war. He stands astride the wooden boat, weighed down by crew paddling it forward through the icy water—an image of fortitude and impending triumph.

Like Washington, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Monkman's gender-fluid and time-travelling alter ego, stands strong and tall in contrast to everyone around her. She navigates the waters of a cataclysmic world where Indigenous people offer salvation to those displaced by the same colonial project from which Washington's so-called victory was born. In Leutze's painting, the landmass in the upper left corner signifies the ultimate prize. In *Welcoming the Newcomers*, that same land is visible, and in *Resurgence of the People*, it is occupied by a small, militarized group who stand in for Washington's legacy. But that group is surrounded by waters that threaten to submerge them. In fact, Miss Chief leaves them behind, finding power in claiming the boat as a means of transporting Indigenous peoples and their values into the future.

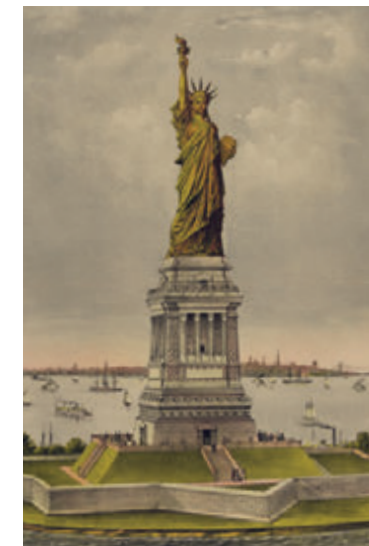
The pose of Miss Chief also invokes the mythical figure of Lady Liberty depicted in the iconic New York City sculpture produced in celebration of the victory of American revolutionaries and abolitionists, and a long-time symbol of hope for arriving settlers. In *Resurgence of the People*, Miss Chief as Lady Liberty holds an eagle feather instead of a torch. Similarly, Monkman replaces the flag in Leutze's work with the coup stick, used by Indigenous warriors in the prairies as a sign of bravery in battle. (The coup stick also replaces the hunting spear in Monkman's



figural allusions to classical depictions of Adonis.) Thus, the three symbolic figures who simultaneously pervade Monkman's painting—Miss Chief, Washington, and Lady Liberty—evoke different notions of victory against adversity. Through Monkman's quotation, the viewer is asked to consider the meaning and cost of victory: in life, and in posterity, when it is written into history.

In *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, the promise of liberty for all is suggested by the inclusion of African and Indigenous sailors and soldiers, however marginalized in the composition. Of course, Washington himself is now a problematic figure, especially as regards Indigenous peoples and slavery. Leutze's incorporation of non-white sailors distracts from his painting's role in nation building through myth. Similarly, the visual reference to Lady Liberty in Monkman's *Resurgence of the People* reveals that so-called victory is complex, despite its historical depictions otherwise. Capitalism and democracy have not provided equal opportunity. Monkman's own symbology questions Western ideas of victory over people and land, which are ultimately out of keeping with an Indigenous perspective.

A different and more nuanced notion of victory is offered in *Resurgence of the People*—a values-based concept of togetherness, family, and reciprocity. The enslaved African figure in *Welcoming the Newcomers*, for instance, is a doctor in *Resurgence of the People*, helping a lifeless white man. Monkman shows that resilience and opportunity, combined with good will and love, beget more of the same. The repetition of figures across the diptych, including Miss Chief herself, challenges notions of time: how can two paintings depicting scenes that take place over 150 years apart include the same characters? This repetition across a diptych is an art historical device; in *mistikôsiwak*, it underlines the parallels and continuums in





White during his travels in the Virginia colony. In contrast, when Monkman turns to the present and future in *Resurgence of the People*, the faces of his figures are taken from the living models he photographs in his studio. And as a sign of the recovery and rescue depicted in that painting, the family from *The Natchez* reappears on the right side of the composition, this time in the form of a same-sex couple.

Similar interventions occur in adjacent figures in *Welcoming the Newcomers*. Behind the family is a reclining female figure based on Thomas Crawford's *Mexican Girl Dying*, 1848, in The Met. Like Delacroix, Crawford was inspired by a specific text: William H. Prescott's 1843 *History of the Conquest of Mexico*. Like the mythical Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion, Monkman breathes life into the marble sculpture, erasing the mortal wound she fingers with her right hand as well as the crucifix next to her left hand—a reference to Prescott's argument that the Spanish motivation for colonization, religious conversion, had redeemed the violence and death brought by conquest. In place of the pathos of Crawford's image, Monkman restores colour and sensuous life to the girl's body and removes the inaccurate feather garments derived from Amazonian Indigenous dress.<sup>12</sup>

In parallel with these transformations, a series of male figures at the back of the composition reference and recuperate a number of the classicizing, romantic bronze sculptures popular with American art collectors during the second half of the nineteenth century. On the far left, a seated man wearing an eagle feather and loincloth brings to life Augustus Saint-Gaudens's *Hiawatha*, 1874, its eponymous subject among the most misrepresented of Indigenous historical leaders. While the historical Hayo'wetha was the Onondaga co-founder of the Haudenosaunee confederacy, which, many historians think, provided a political model for the confederation of the thirteen American colonies, Longfellow's epic poem about the leader conflates him with the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) culture hero Nanabozho.<sup>13</sup> Here, again, Monkman corrects stereotypes, giving Hayo'wetha a necklace

OPPOSITE LEFT: Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Hiawatha*, 1871–72 (carved 1874), marble, figure: 152.4 × 87.6 × 94.6 cm; granite base: 58.4 cm; plinth with inscription: 14.6 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: *Welcoming the Newcomers* (detail), 2019.

TOP: Thomas Crawford, *Mexican Girl Dying*, by 1846 (carved 1848), marble, 51.4 × 138.4 × 49.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

BOTTOM: *Welcoming the Newcomers* (detail), 2019.



<sup>12</sup>Mestizo poet Livia Corona Benjamin's "Thomas Crawford, Mexican Girl Dying," written in response to The Met's invitation to contribute to its Native Perspectives project, movingly relates past to present tragedies, and thus early contact period to contemporary colonialism and racism. It begins: "Silencio. Be quiet. / There is a Mexican / Girl Dying, amongst / the sculptures and decor- / ative objects that / dress the American / Wing. Mantelpieces, / fountains, ornament, / dead centerfold-pose / Exposed, cross / in hand, without / citizenship." It ends: "A Mexican / girl is dying. / We know why some girls / from Mexico / die and others / do not." Accessed November 25, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/the-american-wing/native-perspectives>.

<sup>13</sup>Tlingit artist Jackson Polys's *Native Perspectives* intervention emphasizes the political function of such representations to the realization of America's "manifest destiny": "To trace the arc of the hunched back of this imagined Indian is to follow the call for the end of the wild. Longfellow's ethnographic errors while naming the nature of this man matter less than repeating a self-fulfilling prophecy in service of a new national tribe, which relies on the neutering of the Indian problem. This body is depicted with sensitive restraint in a state of retreat, requiring the quiver down and weapons appropriately at rest, in order to keep the future settled. This projection helps us come to terms with and justify the foundational violence of wars unfortunately won. Americans, aided by the work of artists, become Native, and Natives are incorporated into the national narrative." Accessed November 25, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/the-american-wing/native-perspectives>.



SECTION FOUR

A VISION  
*for the*  
FUTURE





OPPOSITE TOP: Claude Régnier, *Life of George Washington: The Farmer* (detail), c.1853, hand-coloured lithograph on wove paper after a painting by Junius Brutus Stearns, 45.7 × 60.3 cm, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The president and his children oversee his slaves at his Mount Vernon plantation in Virginia.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Two Sámi women from Norway hold up a sign that proclaims “Water is Sacred,” in solidarity with Standing Rock Sioux protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline, 2016, photograph unknown.

BOTTOM: Activist group Decolonize This Place and a city-wide coalition of grassroots groups rallied outside The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for the fourth Anti-Columbus Day Tour, October 14, 2019, photograph by Erik McGregor.

challenge to institutions like The Met, one also represented by *mistikôsiwak*. At a time when the state is stripped back to core military and police functions, with concentration camps and the world’s largest prison co-existing beside Starbucks, strip malls, and art museums, it’s clear that capitalism is not opposed to authoritarianism; in fact, it embraces it. What does art do for the people? *mistikôsiwak* is a declaration that art alone cannot solve longstanding colonial inequalities. Buying the right products or collecting the right art will not put an end to colonialism. Monkman’s engagement is much deeper—bleeding off the canvas and onto the streets, into the reservations of our minds and hearts. Monkman forces each one of us to witness the real, while demanding we undo the unreal. The act washes over us like waves of history, ebbing and flowing, oscillating between love and rage. It hurts and heals. Water is life.

enforced scarcity, for instance—carrying-capacity myths of overpopulation or fears of the “Great Replacement” of white people—is debunked by Indigenous abundance and the transformative power of healing and love. Miss Chief breaks the spell of colonial realism, showing it is nothing of the sort. The actual reality of settlers is that which has been suppressed: genocide, ecocide, theft, and destruction.

And so Miss Chief naturalizes an enduring Indigenous order—an Indigenous realism that humanizes Indigenous relations, among themselves, with other people and beings, and with the past, present, and future. She exposes the fallacies of colonial reality. Miss Chief and her cast of characters are not magical beings; they represent actual people with actual stories. Monkman resists the impulse to turn Indigenous belief and custom into mere aesthetics, or genuine political engagement into spectatorship. These paintings don’t protect us from the past, or the coming Indigenous future. They represent an Indigenous tradition of resilience and resistance. But a tradition counts for nothing if it isn’t contested or modified. An Indigenous culture that is merely preserved on museum walls is no culture at all. And no cultural object can retain its power when there are no new eyes to see it. For that reason, *mistikôsiwak* shouldn’t be viewed as a conversion of Indigenous practices and beliefs into lifeless artifacts, a practice typical of museums.

Put simply, Kent Monkman’s Indigenous realism becomes universal. An Indigenous future isn’t just for Indigenous people—it is essential for the very existence of life on the planet. This future calls for a complete departure from the current unreality represented in art. And the Indigenous generosity in Monkman’s work should not be read as weakness, but rather strength—a call for a better world that starts with more humane art.

Last Indigenous Peoples’ Day, outside The Met, marchers with the movement and activist collective Decolonize This Place chanted, “They want art but not the people.” It was a

