

Audio tour transcript

Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to experience the exhibition *If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?*, running January 25 - March 30, 2024. The assembled artworks share experiences of otherness, pain and healing.

Before entering the gallery, you may wish to use the coat rack in our welcome area or set large bags inside the gallery doors. Please do not touch the artworks in this exhibition and avoid disturbing the dust in the installation *Six Million Stitches*. Artists Stacey Fayant and Melanie Monique Rose invite you to read books they have provided in the gallery. Stacey encourages gallery visitors to snuggle up with her quilt in the chair provided. Melanie Monique Rose also invites visitors to access her full-length artists' statements and songs that have inspired or been created alongside her artworks through QR codes posted in the gallery.

Please help yourself to sensory tools for use in the gallery from the baskets under the table at our entrance wall. There are earmuffs for those sensitive to sound, dark glasses for people with light sensitivity and fidget toys for those who wish to keep their hands busy. Please return these items on your way out.

I'm Sandee Moore, curator of the exhibition *If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?* I'm delighted to guide you through this exhibition of artworks created using needles by Saskatchewan artists Stacey Fayant, Marcy Friesen, Melanie Monique Rose, Mindy Yan Miller & Marcus Miller, and Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson.

A needle pricks, pokes, and provokes. It also draws together and mends. This optimistic act of repairing and healing defines the works in this exhibition. When we acknowledge the painful losses of language and culture, and the violent mechanisms of colonization, genocide, and environmental destruction, we recognize the humanity of those who have experienced this hurt. More than teaching us, artworks in this exhibition ask us to *feel*, awakening our empathy and ability to value others as equals. Art can offer us a profound experience of compassion, different from reading about something in a book, newspaper, or on Instagram.

I hope that encountering these artworks arouses empathy, kindness and understanding of others, especially of the dangers of dehumanizing other people by conceiving of them as a homogenous group with the same views rather than individuals or, indeed, imagining them and their experiences to be less valid than our own.

Most importantly, I want to highlight these artists' intentions to *heal* through their artworks. Through their stitches, these artists mend their relationships with the past, the self, others, and the environment, inviting us to do the same, shaping a resilient social fabric.

Likely, the first thing you'll see upon entering the gallery is a wall with a table that holds helpful items and gallery information, including self-guided tour pamphlets and the exhibition didactic panel. On the didactic panel, you'll see the exhibition title (*If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?*), the artists' names, exhibition dates and a short introduction I wrote for this show.

You might be familiar with the phrase "If you prick me, do I not bleed?" from Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. In the play, a repeatedly marginalized character makes an anguished plea using these words, asking to be recognized as a person and an equal to the other characters. The objectification of others and dismissal of their feelings and experiences persist today.

Photos are permitted. Please credit the artist and tag the Art Gallery of Regina if you post pictures from our exhibition.

If we go from the entrance doors to the left, we will first see an installation by artist Stacy Fayant entitled *People with Face Tattoos Make Me Heal*. Her installation incorporates two large textile banners, between which is a constellation of framed photographs of smiling people all bearing face tattoos.

Stacey made many of these photographs into fabric that she used to create the quilt draped casually over a chair. The band of satin that binds the quilt's edge is a tactile tribute to a blanket that the artist loved as a child. The casual positioning of this quilt invites gallery visitors to snuggle up with the quilt and read the book on the side table.

In this book, Stacey shares additional photographs of people whose faces she has tattooed and, more importantly, the inspirational stories of their journeys to receive traditional cultural marks. "The point of this documentation and storytelling," claims Stacey, "is not to explain mark by mark what each tattoo means, but to try to convey the importance of each tattoo, the joy of each tattoo, the work of each tattoo."

Stacey, who is Métis, Cree, Saulteaux and a member of Peepeekisis First Nation, is trained to help people of any nation/cultural background find appropriate markings. She began to heal from her own anger and trauma by learning about traditional and cultural Indigenous tattoo practices through a residency with Earthline Tattoo Collective. The collective and its trained artists are committed to ensuring the cultural safety of individuals and communities through research, collaboration, design development, and creating awareness of Turtle Island's cultural Indigenous tattoo practices.

"As an Indigenous Cultural Tattooist," states Stacey, "I have chosen to cherish the story of the ways our bodies change throughout our lives. Sometimes, this change is a choice (tattoos, piercing, hair dye), and sometimes, it is not chosen (wrinkles, scars). Bringing back our cultural tattoos has the power to heal the trauma, the dissociation with our bodies, the shame and the rifts in our communities that colonization has brought to us."

Stacey's project, *People with Face Tattoos Make Me Heal*, is inspired in part by a thoughtless comment made by one of her coworkers: "People with face tattoos make me sick." Although Stacey laughs at the power her appearance can have over another person's body, the power to make them physically ill, she realizes that face tattoos have other powerful effects. "I realized," she says, "that people with face tattoos make *me* heal and had been making me heal since I learned about our Indigenous Cultural tattoos. Bringing back our cultural tattoos has the power to heal the trauma, the dissociation with our bodies,

the shame and the rifts in our communities that colonization has brought to us."

Stacey has been undergoing a journey for the last few years of learning about her traditional Cree/Saulteaux cultures and the role of traditional marks in her culture. The tattooing traditions of Indigenous Canadians have been so successfully suppressed that neither Stacey nor her family members knew that tattooing was part of their traditional cultural expression. Some family members disdained tattoos, an attitude informed by imposed colonial/Christian values. Stacey seeks to share what she has come to understand: tattoos are not, as a Eurocentric worldview often conveys, marks of criminality. They tell about a person: their accomplishments, personality and role in their community.

Stacey hopes to present images of people with these tattoos so that we can all come to understand traditional cultural marks and how they are acts of care and medicine and provide vital connections to community for Indigenous Canadians.

Turn your attention to the backing of the quilt and the textile banners now. You may notice that what initially seems to be an abstract pattern is a photograph, flipped, repeated, and turned into a design cascading down the wall like waves. You will see hands adorned with turquoise rings and marked with stick 'n' poke tattoos.

These are Stacey's hands. You might notice she is holding something small between her thumb and forefinger. It's a wedge of lemon, which she placed between her lower lip and gums while receiving her chin tattoo.

Although we don't see Stacey's face in this image, she has included herself; this image shows her vulnerability and generosity. When coupled with the many pictures of smiling people with face tattoos, Stacey seeks to transform people's preconceived notions of face tattoos through these friendly images. We can learn to appreciate the cultural value of tattoos and the beauty of these people as individuals.

On March 16, Stacey will perform a light skin stitch tattoo on her daughter. Stacey's open-hearted kindness and inclusivity is remarkable. She says, "Those settler, newcomer or indigenous people with open hearts and minds can begin healing from colonization's inherited harms and celebrate, tattooing as a practice to connect with inter-generational, knowledge family, and healing through laughter and resistance." While tattooing is often a family and community event, Stacey invites everyone to support her and her daughter in this powerful active care of mother for child."

If you continue around the gallery, turning to the right, you will come to Hanna Yokozawa, Farquharson's textile pieces, Lunar Sea and Lunar Waves.

Lunar Sea is a large, clear acrylic disc dotted with bodies of whales created from fragile webs of thread. Hanna has developed her own innovative way of making lace; she uses a sewing machine to draw with thread and then dissolves the fabric ground, leaving only the stitches. The delicacy of her work reveals the fragility of many species, particularly whales, in our earthly ecosystems.

A Japanese Shinto animist perspective influences Hanna's art-making, in which she stages moments of tranquillity and reflection on the ephemeral beauty of nature. While Hanna's work is beautiful and peaceful, it contains a darker message. In her work, the artist posits a future where climate change remains unchecked, driving animals from their traditional ranges. *Lunar Sea* imagines whales that have sought refuge on the moon's seas.

Hanna often recycles materials in her work, not only thinking about climate and habitat but reducing her impact. Hanna's other artwork, *Lunar Waves*, sits on a low pedestal below *Lunar Seas*. The pinned and pleated fabric folds show her meticulous skill as a textile artist and her innovative processes in quilting. The layered humps of cloth are fastened to a block of cork, representing the pitted surface of the moon. The starkness of this piece gives the sensation that the shimmering of moonlight on water has been frozen and stilled.

Early astronomers mistook shadowed craters on the moon for bodies of water and forests while mapping and naming the moon's surface from their terrestrial telescopes. Hanna's reverence for the natural world has led her to a different but no less enchanting understanding of the moon. "As I gaze at the leisurely drifting clouds around the full moon in the night sky," she reflects, "I hear the whales' cries from the depths of my heart. Whales are said to communicate with the Sirius star, transmitting their high frequencies to the sea and healing Earth's waters. May the water within you resonate and be healed as well."

If we continue to circulate through the exhibition

counterclockwise, we will come to *Six Million Stitches* by artistic collaborators Mindy Yan Miller and Marcus Miller.

Six Million Stitches (first performed at *Contemporary 12-14* in Vienna) was begun and halted in 2017 due to the emotionally demanding nature of the work. The artists conceive of their work as a Holocaust memorial, an opportunity to remember an event now distant from us in time but whose horrors we should not forget.

The Millers performed *Six Million Stitches* at the Art Gallery of Regina on Saturday, January 27. The remains of that performance form the substance of their installation.

There is a chair where Mindy sat and sewed human hairs into a piece of wool. Each stitch in human hair represents a life lost in this genocide. The band of yellow wool was taken from a blanket owned by Mindy's parents and folded to resemble an armband with which Jews were branded in Nazi Germany. It is adorned with a Star of David, a symbol of Jewish faith and a mark used to single out Jewish people for extermination in concentration camps, bristling with black and grey hairs.

You also hear whispers. These whispers were recorded during Mindy and Marcus' performance. One read the first 600 of the six million names of people who died in the Holocaust, while the other wrote and erased these names on the chalkboard you see here.

The remains of their performance - whispers, a scattering of hairs, and chalk dust like cremains - are a visceral reminder of how little remained of so many people who perished in one event of genocide.

Six Million Stitches intersects with all marginalized communities and invites people to bring individual experiences of loss to this forum for mourning and remembering.

Elements of this work are excerpted from *Needle and Thread*, performed with collaborators Suzanne Miller & Allan Paivio at the *Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World* conference at Arizona State University, followed by several iterations in Canada.

Once again, continuing to the right through the gallery, we come to a series of television monitors with still images by Marcy Friesen. These photographs, provided by Marcy's commercial representative Fazakas Gallery in Vancouver, represent a significant development in the artist's practice. For many years, Marcy has maintained a successful career creating functional items, such as hats, moccasins, and gauntlets, made from fur decorated with beadwork. Recently, she has turned her skills to communicating challenging topics.

Marcy is of Swampy Cree and Welsh ancestry; the photographs arrayed here address painful experiences of loss of culture and other harms of colonization as well as pride in identity, family and traditions.

Let's start with the photograph on the left and move to the right. Instead of sewing beads onto a hide or animal skin, Marcy glued beads directly to her own face and her daughter's and mother's faces. The colours and arrangements of the beads are a kind of storytelling, of writing her and their identities and stories on their faces, rather than holding them deep inside.

Beginning on the left is *Be Strong*. The artist has covered her face with bronze-coloured beads and an orange lily pattern. It is a statement of pride in her indigenous identity, a declaration of resilience, and a call to action. The title of this photograph - *Be Strong* - is something the artist uttered to herself through the lengthy process of covering her face in beads. She wants to be strong in the face of confronting traumas of the past and feeling the pain of those who suffered in residential schools. She is careful to care for herself and knows that we can heal together as a

Marcy bisects her face in the following photograph, *Looking Myself in the Eye*. The artist has blanketed one half of her face in stark white beads and the other in tiny brown and red beads. By covering her face, she is not hiding who she is but celebrating it. Marcy states that she creates based on her past experiences; this image is no exception. It is an empowering image of self-love by acknowledging and appreciating the white settler and First Nations parts of her ancestry. It also demonstrates determined resilience in the face of harmful stereotypes of Indigenous people she has witnessed and experienced throughout her life.

The middle photograph in this series is called *Brokenhearted Grace*. Grace is Marcy's daughter's name; it is Grace that we see in this photograph. Two thick blue lines extend from Grace's eyes to her chin, heavy tracks of tears carving a path through a vermillion background. It takes a very long time to apply these beads to her face; Marcy used time to talk with her daughter about the harm done to indigenous Canadians in residential schools. Mother and daughter shared in this

heartbreak and share it with us as an audience. They also share healing rooted in traditional knowledge and forms: the flower on Grace's hat is one of Marcy's favourite things to bead and points the way to recovering traditions and becoming stronger as a community.

Although the fourth photograph along is titled *Don't Cry for Me*, Marcy didn't wish to focus solely on tears. She transformed the beaded image of a teardrop into a branch laden with blueberries. The artist lives in close proximity to the land and draws strength and comfort from the land. She acknowledges the land as a source of life-giving food, such as berries, while recognizing the peace and healing she gains from it. The artist turns her distress into something beautiful and nourishing by transforming the beaded teardrops into a gently undulating branch laden with ripe blueberries. Her photograph is a reminder that there is always hope for healing and growth, even amid heartbreak and hardship.

Significantly, Marcy pays homage to her mother's wisdom and leadership in the last photograph on this wall, called *Knowledge Keeper*. Marcy covered her mother's face in multicoloured beads. Although this riot of tiny spots of colour is random and nonrepresentational, it also conveys something meaningful. Marcy's mother's Cree name translates to "Woman Who Sits in the Rain" in English; this jumble of beads can be seen as raindrops coating the woman's face. Like all of the sitters in her photographs, Marcy's mother is dressed in furs. In this case, the wolf pelts are an homage to Marcy's grandfather, who worked as a trapper. A fur wrapped around her mother's shoulders embodies an embrace, offering strength and

empowerment to the individual from their ancestors.

You may notice two pedestals topped with plexiglass vitrines; these contain artifacts from the creation of Marcy's photographs. These mask-like shapes are what remains of the beads Marcy peeled off her face and those of her family members after taking her photos. I am grateful that the artist generously shared the remains of her creation process, providing ways for us to understand what her work is and how she made it.

Continuing our circular tour through the gallery, to the right of Marcy's works, we come to a variety of textile artworks by Regina-based artist Melanie Monique Rose.

Melanie often works with powerful symbols of identity, including her own Métis and Ukrainian heritages and, increasingly, her sister-in-law's Palestinian identity.

Melanie imagines an imposing yet loving relative in her freestanding figural sculpture *Aunty/Anti Bomber*. "Aunty (cousin)," Melanie writes, "reminds you that we are all related. Lovingly, she is offering bannock slaps. She wants us all to smarten up and remember our humanity." *Aunty/Anti Bomber* is a no-nonsense nurturer who can tell squabbling children or countries to "smarten up" and resolve their differences.

This work began when Melanie, who primarily works with needle felting on wool, discovered a varsity jacket or a bomber jacket with a wool body in a thrift store. She embellished this masculine-coded garment with felted flowers, referencing Métis beadwork traditions. Melanie recognized that this jacket, which

shares a colour palette with the Palestinian flag, was a gift from fate.

Auntie covers her head with a scarf known as a *kufiya*, a symbol of Palestinian identity. Melanie has augmented the kufiya pattern with gently twining florals in wool. In place of a face, there is a mirror so that we can all see ourselves reflected in the figure of *Aunty/Anti Bomber* and imagine playing a role to quell conflict.

The body is given physical and spiritual strength from potent items almost hidden inside a stick known as a devil's club wand, a willow wreath, a stone, plant medicines and a feather on the leather cord.

The jacket is lined with a floral-printed scarf, signalling both the artist's Métis and Ukrainian heritages. The skirt, patterned after a ribbon skirt, is fashioned from kefiya scarves made in Hebron, Palestine at Hirbawi Textile Factory. Melanie chose the floral-printed ribbons that adorn the skirt to connect to her cultural traditions and symbolize hope, mourning and rebirth.

Melanie's work observes parallels between her family's experiences of being colonized in Canada and her sister-in-law's experience of colonization in Palestine, grieving lives and integral connections to other living beings on the land: buffalo in Canada and olive trees in Gaza. Rose has written about this: "As the constant bombs and white phosphorus rain down on the Indigenous Palestinian people of Gaza, the land, plantcestors and other than human kin are under attack too. The olive of Palestine is among the most ancient olive trees on earth. The IDF is attacking these ancient beings, attempting to destroy lifeways, as the occupiers of the west did with our bison."

Aunty," she says, "reminds us that oppressed people around the world must be in solidarity together."

If you direct your gaze upward to each side of *Aunty/Anti Bomber* you will notice felted wool discs. The yellow circle on the left represents the sun; the black one on the right represents the moon. Melanie is inspired by the notion that all people of the world depend upon these same celestial bodies for comfort, warmth and hope.

The sun and moon determine the rhythms of our lives and give us strength. Melanie credits musician Nikki Lane's song "Send the Sun" for inspiring her artworks *Send the Sun* and *We are all staring at the same moon*. The gallery has a QR code so you can open a link and listen to this song from Lane's 2017 album *Highway Queen*. Although we may think of the sun and the moon as distant and either blazing hot or icy cold, Melanie's choice of materials, fleece and felted wool, invites us to view them as soft and comforting. They are also blooming with life, curling vines, stems and blooming petals.

If you circle a bit more to the right, you'll see a small shelf with a book and a framed photograph on the pony wall. This photograph is called *Solidarity Blanket*.

Created in 2014, this was the artist's first needle-felted blanket. It shares a message of solidarity, comfort, and protection with her sister-in-law (Yafa) and her sister-in-law's mother (Khalida). In the photograph, taken in Regina before Melanie sent the blanket to Khalida in Palestine, the artist's sister-in-law is enshrouded in the soft wool unfolds and vibrant flowers of the blanket.

The flowers on the blanket are a symbol of cultural identity as well as resistance. Melanie shares the personal connection that the flowers have for Khalida in particular:

"Khalida Jarrar has been arrested and imprisoned many times since I first made [Solidarity Blanket]. In 2019, just eight months after serving 20 months in administrative detention without charge or trial, she was arrested again in her family home in Ramallah, Palestine, by the occupying Israeli army. While in prison, her daughter, our beloved sister and friend Suha, died. Khalida was set to be released in one month. Despite international and local pressure, Israel denied Khalida a final kiss at her funeral. Khalida (through great difficulty) was able to send a letter: 'Suha, my precious. They have stripped me from bidding you a final goodbye kiss. I bid you farewell with a flower. Your absence is searingly painful, excruciatingly painful. But I remain steadfast and strong, like the mountains of beloved Palestine.'

On December 26, 2024, in the early hours of the morning, Khalida Jarrar was once again arrested by Israel."

Melanie has much more to share with gallery visitors. Please use the QR code to the right of this photograph to read her beautifully written, full-length artist statements. Melanie has also provided a book, *Palestinian Stories*, on the shelf to the left of the picture, whose foreword was written by Khalida Jarrar.

We will end the audio tour of *If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?* by moving toward a homey kitchen table with mismatched chairs in the middle of the gallery space.

These are family heirlooms from Melanie's great-grandmother, Helen. Generations of her family members have shared meals and conversation around this table, which is not set for a meal but for a communal activity.

Over the past four years, Rose has engaged youth and used art for activism, exploring themes like mental health, colonialism and racism. So Melanie is not the sole creator of *A Community Story Blanket*, but invites many people to share their stories, messages of hope or protest, or marks of personal identity through needle felting onto the blanket substrate.

Needle felting uses a barbed needle to create and secure images from unspun wool to a ground of woven cloth. "In my practice of needle felting," states Melanie, "I have found great comfort in this, both on my own in the studio and out in the community which has carried me through grief and the long dark winter. Over the last few years this collaborative blanket story has felt many hands and places. It has told stories of the times, of identity and culture, it has made new friends and perhaps have made those who gather around it empower themselves as artists, storytellers, and activists."

This soothing, repetitive action is analogous to the healing and strengthening of the community of care formed around this blanket. *A Community Story Blanket* has been caressed by many hands and embroidered with many stories by those who found their voices as artists, storytellers, and activists through this project.

Melanie goes on to note that "The blanket story isn't done yet, it started under the pretense that

those who started it wouldn't necessarily be finishing it. And that through the cacophony of colour, design and diversity of hands telling stories at one point, we could make one balanced and complete artwork. Until that time, we will poke poke poke, conspire, and create. "

Eliza Doyle created a song as part of the Youth Generating Momentum Camp run while youth gathered to work on *A Community Story Blanket*. Please use the QR code on the exhibition label to listen to the song *Power of the Storm*.

Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to view the group exhibition *If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?* sponsored by Harvey Linnen Associates.

Please return to take part in **free** public events. We invite our community to witness, support and celebrate cultural practices together within an inclusive framework of mutual care and understanding.

Six Million Stitches: a Performance by Mindy Yan Miller and Marcus Miller Saturday, January 27 begins at 2:00 PM

Sculpting Memory: Poetry and Paper Quilling with Tea Gerbeza on February 4 2:00 - 4:00 PM

Healing Through Tattoos: A Conversation with Tattoo Artist Arielle Racette February 24 12 - 1 PM

People With Face Tattoos Make Me Heal: Live Skin Stitch Tattoo Performance with Stacey Fayant March 16 starting at 1:00 PM

Multicultural Panel Discussion of Traditional Cultural Marks March 17 see www.artgalleryofregina.ca for details, including start time and viewing online or in person

Thank you to the City of Regina's Accessibility grants program for enabling us to provide inclusive ways to process the concepts in our exhibitions.

I wish to thank our core funders SK-Arts and the City of Regina, through their Community Partner Grant program.

I am grateful to Casino Regina for sponsoring our opening receptions.

I am grateful to the Government of Canada for making many of our live antiracism and multiculturalism events possible.

And I am delighted to recognize SaskTel for making this audio tour possible with their sponsorship that connects people to experiences of art through communications technology.

I especially thank YOU for taking the time to listen to this audio tour and attend this exhibition. You can support the Art Gallery of Regina by becoming a member, donating, or both. Visit our website, www.artgalleryofregina.ca, for details on becoming part of our gallery's community and more about *If You Prick Me, Do I Not Bleed?*.