

Storm Spirits: The Cultural Ecology of Aboriginal New Media Art

This curatorial residency researches and presents the findings about how the work of emerging and established Aboriginal new media artists connects with, contributes to, and is transforming the Aboriginal media art history and critical thinking of the past two decades.

The historic research strategy will not be driven by a traditionally European time-line based approach derived from theories of cultural and social evolution that privilege the present and future as idealized cultural instances. The guiding paradigm will be ecological – examining geo-cultural sites of Aboriginal media art production with an eye to

- how local resources developed to nurture producers,
- how changes in regional and national cultural meteorology supported and constrained production, recognition and support,
- how communal networks of interaction, inspiration and presentation waxed and waned, and
- how new media art practice came to be established within these processes.

While the production apparatus required to create Aboriginal media art often demands close connections with the non-Aboriginal media arts community and dominant technological and media driven culture, Aboriginal history and contemporary society shapes the most significant aspects of the unique story of Aboriginal media art producers. The most challenging component of this research on the geo-culture of Aboriginal media art is the examination of how distinct and diverse Aboriginal cultures shape and are represented in the works of Aboriginal producers. Taking this analysis a step further, this research will examine how artistic perspectives based on distinct Aboriginal geo-cultural origins provide new vocabularies for the critique of media art in general, and transform prevailing notions of history and contemporary culture.

The next step is examining how Aboriginal new media producers have an intimate relation to the larger ecology of Aboriginal media art production and yet are in the midst of exploring and creating much different production, presentation and critical discourses.

Aboriginal new media did not emerge as a singular and isolated practice. The history of Aboriginal art presents many instances of disconnection and renegotiation where Aboriginal artists were subjected to the inadequacy of, and lack of understanding within dominant modes of contemporary art in relation to Aboriginal expression. The overall production of Aboriginal artists demonstrates a vision that has not been constrained by divisions of pre-existing and predetermining individual arts disciplines, but one that honours story and strives to make the best match with production methodology – whatever that may require. New media was taken up for expression, when appropriate, by artists working in various other disciplines, but primarily the already interdisciplinary media arts. This research will examine new media art works in relation to other modes of production in the bodies of work of Aboriginal artists who have spanned various practices in the production of an interconnected expression.

But new media is also both an outcome and a facilitator of major cultural and social shifts, not merely an additional creative tool. While media art already has well-established critiques closely aligned to cultural self-determination and social change, the apparatus of media arts production and presentation has often been institutionally prescribed, inequitably distributed, and Aboriginal access to it tenuous and temporary. New media, while still far from meeting standards of equitable access to production and presentation, is providing many more communities world-wide with tools for international expression, activism, recognition, and networking. This trend shows no sign of slowing and offers significant opportunities for participation and leadership by the rapidly rising demographic of Aboriginal youth. This research into Aboriginal new media art works will examine their relation to international networks of indigenous activism, and to supporting the cultural development and creative expression of indigenous youth within new media art environments, practices and critiques.