

(Re)membering and (Re)imagining: the Joyous Star Peoples of Turtle Island

Natalie King

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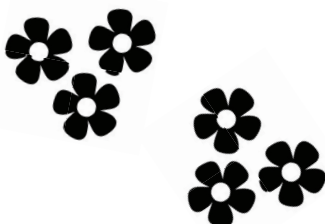
Natalie King is a queer interdisciplinary Anishinaabe artist, facilitator and member of Timiskaming First Nation. King's multidisciplinary arts practice includes video, painting, sculpture and installation as well as community engagement, curation and arts administration. King's works are about embracing the ambiguity and multiplicities of identity within queer Anishinaabe experience(s).

My name is Laura St. Amant, I am also a painter. I currently belong to what is presently called the Georgian Bay Métis community and am in the process of reconnecting to my grandmother's community of Henvey Inlet. In my work I discuss topics of identity, queerness, gender, colonialism, and sovereignty.

*I'm totally biased because I have been moved to tears by Natalie King's work. Specifically Ms. Gay Ojibwe when I saw it on Instagram *if you were wondering* It reminded me of illustrations from my childhood in the 90's, but it was triumphantly Anishinaabe and queer!*

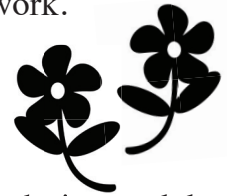
In (Re)membering and (Re)imagining: the Joyous Star Peoples of Turtle Island, her luminous illustrations speak of love, compassion, freedom, sexuality, and pleasure. These works are dreamy, soothing, but also striking in the precise way that everything fits together. Included prominently throughout the work are Anishinaabe symbols, medicines, and beadwork. The care that Natalie has taken in painting these details feels like a love letter to Indigenous viewers.

King paints queer Indigenous joy that recognizes pain and anger, and gives those feelings room to breathe and be understood. These paintings teach without telling you what to do. It is storytelling, sharing and connecting in a conversation about how we find and take care of each other in the face of an ongoing colonial project.



LS: What inspires the work that you make?

NK: I am inspired by in-between-ness. I am often thinking about belonging, reverence, pride, relationality, and feelings of exuberance and freedom. I am inspired by people who make life on their own terms while existing on the margins. Mostly, I think I am most interested in making work that speaks to ideas or questions about how we can connect to creation and ourselves on our own terms? What does it mean to inhabit an identity which is intersectional? I like the idea of queering ideas of self-presentation and regalia, the ways in which we present ourselves and the communities we are from, celebrating joy. I am also inspired by the many people who came before me. I try to honour them in my work.



LS: Who do you speak to with your paintings?

NK: Conceptually, I'm often thinking about the ways in which we communicate our desires and dreams as queer people, as Anishinaabe people. Often, it feels like I'm trying to connect or speak to something buried within me, speaking to a self that the world never really lets me be but I can speak to in my work, I feel called to do it. I think I am trying to speak to some version of a future ancestor and maybe a version of a past self too.

LS: How has the pandemic impacted how you work?

NK: The pandemic has impacted how I work pretty much in every way. Having no access to materials I ended up working with the materials I had in my studio, many frames for the paintings were reused and repurposed or made from extra stretched canvas I had already in the space. I had a long roll of canvas left that I gessoed and made into one large piece. The pandemic also made me aware of how much my practice is based on my relationships with other people. Without the feedback or encouragement of others I find myself becoming overloaded with self-doubt, questioning everything. Interacting with other folks gives me hope for their visions for the future, when you have other people around you can share many skill sets as well. Not having access to family and friends throughout the pandemic made me analyze my ideas more while in isolation. During the process, I had less resources and became very internal. Painting has helped me cope with my mental health with the pandemic as well.

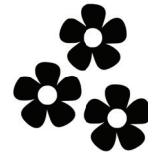
LS: How did the narrative of this series come together?

NK: I started to think about how all knowledge(s) are interconnected. Anishinaabe knowledge(s) not only tell the stories of the natural phenomena that exists within the earth itself, but also it relates that knowledge to our everyday lives as Anishinaabe people. When we look at the stars we are looking at the past, a light that existed thousands of years ago but, so many ideas of futurisms exist in ideas of looking out onto the universe, looking beyond, and this informs our present moment. I love this inbetween moment, this past/

future dichotomy. I am also thinking about how we come from the stars, how we inhabit our realities as star people, as starseed.

LS: How did you develop the visual aesthetic of your work?

NK: I like the idea of my work being very open and accessible. I am drawn to things that shine and glow, my mom always said I'm like a crow cause I used to go into my sisters room and collect her jewelry (haha). I try to have an unapologetic worldview and project that outward through colour and bold patterns. I am very drawn to fashion and clothing as signifiers of identity, how it all tells a story, how the ways we ornament our bodies really say so much about who we are. It really communicates to me so much of what queerness is about, world-building, telling a story, creating our own worlds within worlds. So much of my inspiration comes subverting femininity or really leaning into it. I think these are all ideas that inform my visual outlook.



LS: And finally, what kinds of lessons has this series brought you?

NK: This series has taught me a lot about myself as an artist. Being in the studio for several months creating these works really taught me more about how much of my arts practice is about work, labour and material access. It taught me how to become more proud of myself. It constantly reaffirmed how resisting the white colonial gaze is an all encompassing full-time job. It taught me what it means to make work during a pandemic, how to properly manage my time while working full time at Xpace. It really taught me how much knowledge I have inherently within me. It taught me to trust myself.

(Re)membering and (Re)imagining: the Joyous Star Peoples of Turtle Island, is a beautiful act of queer Anishinaabe resistance that intertwines past, present, and future ways of being and knowing.

Miigwech Natalie!

