

# Robert Houle: Red is Beautiful

Robert Houle (Saulteaux Anishinaabe; born 1947, Sandy Bay First Nation) is one of the most influential Indigenous figures to break into the contemporary art world. The first major retrospective of his work, *Red is Beautiful* celebrates this singular artist's remarkable career, which spans the years 1970 to 2021. While the title of the exhibition references one of Houle's early paintings, it also invokes the re-imagining of First Nations cultures across Turtle Island.

From the outset of his career, Houle carved an independent path where Western and Indigenous art meet. As a colourist who looks to the materials and insights of the oldest art traditions of this land for guidance, he quickly established himself as a new voice in modern abstraction. His work reflects his core values: immediacy, gesture, the earth, the sacred.

For Houle, the spiritual power of the ancient ones is essential in developing a new vision for the future, one that holds the complexities of contemporary cultures. Whether he pierces the abstract canvas with porcupine quills, reworks a grand history painting from an Indigenous perspective, or reconceives the sacred while acknowledging his ancestors, Houle lays out a path forward that is full of colour, light, and sovereignty.

**Organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario.**

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**Room 1**

**Oka**

1991

oil on board

Courtesy of the artist

**Seven in Steel**

1989

oil on steel and maple

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Norman Garnet, Toronto, 1996

In the fall of 1989, Houle held a residency at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario. Houle's group of seven oil paintings on steel memorializes First Nations who were annihilated for their relationship to the land.

**Kanehsatake**

1990–1993

oil on etched steel panels and treated wood

Art Gallery of Hamilton. Gift of the artist, 1994

**Kanata**

1992

acrylic and conté crayon on canvas

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 1994

For described audio on this work, visit [www.ago.ca/houle](http://www.ago.ca/houle).

## **O-ween du muh waun (We Were Told)**

2017

oil on canvas

Confederation Centre Art Gallery, CAG 2017.1. Commissioned with the A.G. and Eliza Jane Ramsden Endowment Fund, 2017

## **Ipperwash**

2000–2001

oil on canvas, digitized photograph on Masonite, and anodized aluminum

Collection of Museum London (Ontario). Purchased in part with financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Volunteer Committee and through a gift of the artist, 2006

## **Kanehsatake X**

2000

oil on canvas, digital photo, and ionized steel

Collection of Comsatec Inc.

## **Muhnedobe uhyahyuk [Where the gods are present] (Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas)**

1989

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 1992

“There is a spiritual place in Manitoba known as the Narrows of Lake Manitoba where the water beating against the resonant limestone cliff and pounding along the pebbled shore creates the sound ke-mishomis-na-ug (literally, ‘our ancestors’), believed to be the voice of Manitou.

It was and still is a sacred place, a power place whose hierophantic messages compel Saulteaux who continue to live nearby to offer tobacco; and many travel to it seeking renewal, as a Muslim will travel to Mecca. To the Saulteaux, the Narrows are known as Manito-waban, meaning the 'divine straits' or 'the place where god lives.'"

—Robert Houle, "The Spiritual Legacy of the Ancient Ones" (1992)

## **Warrior Lances for Temagami**

1989

mixed-media sculpture

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

### **In case in Room 1**

## **Apsáalooke (Crow) Artist once known a miniature parfleche**

1890–1910

rawhide and natural dyes

Courtesy of the artist

## **Beyond History Painting**

In 1991, Houle began to paint *Kanata* (1992), a First Nations perspective on the nationalist history of *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770), Benjamin West's commemoration of a key moment in the Seven Years' War between Britain and France. Houle uses colour to centre the figure of the Delaware man, drawing attention to the unending misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples as merely passive observers and pointing instead to their direct stake in the histories of Canada and the United States.

In *O-ween du muh waun [We Were Told]* (2017), Houle presents a landscape in which the Delaware figure looks out to the Atlantic Ocean. The title phrase, “we were told,” is an acknowledgement that the arrival of Europeans was prophesied. This could be an image from before European arrival, with the First Nations figure contemplating contact not as a victim but as a human with the wisdom passed down from the ancients. It could be an image of a future where Indigenous cultures and the earth are thriving, a moment Houle’s generation fought for.

## **Room 2**

### **Palisade I**

1999

oil on canvas, watercolour on paper, and lithographic print

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

### **Postscript**

1999

lithographic print on paper

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

### **Postscript**

1999

acrylic, graphite, ballpoint ink, computer printout from website, photocopy, and mat board on paper

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

### **Postscript (study)**

1999

acrylic, ink, xerox image, newsprint, vinyl lettering, and ballpoint pen ink on paper

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

### **Study for Smallpox**

1999

acrylic, collage, vinyl lettering, and graphite on paper

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

## **Vermine Virus**

1999

watercolour and graphite on paper

Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program

## **Do Not Open Until You Get Home**

2007

installation: video, player, video projection, and vinyl lettering

Courtesy of the artist

## **Room 3**

### **Parfleches for the Last Supper**

1983

acrylic and porcupine quill on paper

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Gift of Mr. Carl T. Grant, Artvest Inc., G-86-460 to G-86-472

#### **Parfleche #1, Matthew**

“In the world you will have trouble, / but be brave: / I have conquered the world.” (John 17:33)

#### **Parfleche #2, James the Less**

“In a short time you will no longer see me, / and then a short time later you will see me again.” (John 16:16)

#### **Parfleche #3, Jude**

“If anyone loves me he will keep my word, / and my Father will love him, / and we shall come to him/and make our home with him.” (John 14:23)

#### **Parfleche #4, Simon**

“I have told you all this / so that your faith may not be shaken.” (John 16:1)

### **Parfleche #5, Philip**

“To have seen me is to have seen the Father, / so how can you say, let us see the Father?” (John 14:2)

### **Parfleche #6, Andrew**

“A man can have no greater love / than to lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

### **Parfleche #7, Bartholomew**

“If the world hates you, / remember that it hated me before you.” (John 15:18)

### **Parfleche #8, Thomas**

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. / No one can come to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

### **Parfleche #9, James**

“I tell you most solemnly, / no servant is greater than his master, / no messenger is greater than the man who sent him.” (John 13:16)

### **Parfleche #10, John**

“I give you a new commandment: / Love one another; / just as I have loved you / you also must love one another.” (John 14:34)

### **Parfleche #11, Judas**

“And yet, here with me on the table is the / hand of the man who betrays me.” (Luke 22:21)

### **Parfleche #12, Jesus**

“Then he took some bread and when he had given / thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, / ‘This is my body which will be given for you; do this / as a memorial of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

### **Parfleche #13, Peter**



“I tell you, Peter, by the time the cock crows / today, you will have denied three times that you know / me.”(Luke 22:34)

### **Parfleche #20/Wovoka**

1983

acrylic and porcupine quills on paper

On loan from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada

### **Untitled (Palisade colour bar)**

2006

oil on wood

Collection of Grant Wedge & Bob Crouch

### **Mississauga Portraits (Waubuddick, Maungwudaus, Hannah)**

2012

panels, oil on canvas and Masonite

Gift of the artist, 2020

2020/113.1–.3

*The Mississauga Portraits* depict three members of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe (Mississauga) troupe, which toured Europe in the 1840s. Maungwudaus, who is depicted in the centre panel, had left Canada with a troupe of eleven dancers hoping to capitalize on a growing desire for cultural performances on European stages. He is seen here alongside his wife, Hannah, and his son Waubuddick. The group performed at the famed Egyptian Hall in London, England, and other venues in European cities including Glasgow, Dublin, and Belgium. He returned to perform in Toronto in 1851 after publishing a book documenting his travels.

**See *Paris/Ojibwa* in the Leonard Rotunda (Gallery 115) on Level 1 for more of Robert Houle’s work about this troupe.**

## **Parfleche for Alex Janvier**

1999

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

## **Parfleche for Edna Manitowabi**

1999

oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

## **Parfleche #14 Sitting Bull Sioux**

1983

mixed media on paper

Collection of Barry Ace and Earl Truelove

## **Parfleche #19 Chief Poundmaker**

1983

mixed media on paper

Collection of Barry Ace and Earl Truelove

## Room 4

### Premises for Self Rule

*Premises for Self Rule* is a series of five paintings in which Houle juxtaposes abstract colour fields with colonial legal documents. A series of photographs of a Blackfoot gathering partially obscures the words. In this series, Houle proposes that these documents—the Royal Proclamation (1763), the British North American Act (1867), Treaty 1 (1871), the Indian Act (1876), and the Constitution Act (1982)—present both hindrances to and support for Indigenous sovereignty.

### Premises for Self Rule: Constitution Act, 1982

1994

oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, and laser-cut vinyl

Purchased with funds from the Estate of Mary Eileen Ash, 2014

2014/1

### Premises for Self Rule: Treaty No. 1

1994

acrylic on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, and laser-cut vinyl

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Acquired with funds from the Canada

Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program / Oeuvre achetée avec

l'aide du programme d'aide aux acquisitions du Conseil des Arts du Canada,

G-96-11 abc

### Premises for Self Rule: The Royal Proclamation, 1763

1994

oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, and laser-cut vinyl

City of Toronto Art Collection, MOCCA Collection

### **Premises for Self Rule: Indian Act, 1876**

1994

oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, and laser-cut vinyl

Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank / Collection de la Banque d'art du

Conseil des arts du Canada

### **Premises for Self Rule: The British North America Act, 1867**

1994

oil on canvas, photo emulsion on canvas, and laser-cut vinyl

Collection of Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP

### **Study for Premises for Self Rule**

1994

assemblage of acrylic-painted, multi-ply boards in blue, dark red, green, red-brown, and yellow with graphite and blind inscriptions, photogravures with relief-printed text, and acetate films with laser-printed text, mounted to white multi-ply board

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2020

2020/150

### **New Sentinel**

1987

oil on wood panel, ribbon, and encaustic on cow skull

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. Purchase, 1999

## **Everything you ever wanted to know about Indians from A to Z**

1985

acrylic, rawhide, wood, and linen

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Acquired with funds from The Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc., G-89-1501 a-cc

## **In Memoriam**

1987

oil paint, feathers, leather, and ribbon on plywood

Gift of Vanessa, Britney, and Nelson Niedzielski, 2000

2000/1196

## **Falklands**

1982

acrylic on wood

Gift of Tony Ryan in memory of Richard M. Barrett, 1992

92/30

## **Study for These Apaches Are Not Helicopters**

1999

collage of inkjet prints, vinyl letters, graphite, coloured pencil, ink, and oil paint on paper

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2018

2018/3728

## **Aboriginal Title**

1989–1990

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Hamilton. Acquired with the assistance of the Alfred Wavell Peene and Susan Nottle Peene Memorial, 1992

## **Innu Parfleche**

1990

oil paint, acrylic, iron, ink, metal, owl feather, and mammal leather

Musée canadien de l'histoire / Canadian Museum of History

V-F-190

## **Self Portraits**

1990–1995

graphite, Polaroid prints, coloured pencil, letraset, Krylon spray paint, and handmade paper

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2018

2018/3730

## **Self Portraits**

1990–1995

digitized scans of original album

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2018

2018/3730

Robert Houle at the Assiniboia Residential High School dormitory in Winnipeg in 1967, preparing to board the Confederation Train, which travelled across the country to share the story of “Canada.”

Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of the artist.

## **Indian Act 1876**

1985

acrylic on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs

Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et

Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Royal Proclamation 1763**

1985

acrylic on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

## **B.N.A. Act 1867**

1985

acrylic on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Constitution Act 1982**

1985

acrylic on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Blue Apache**

2003

oil on canvas and etched red slate

Courtesy of the artist

## **Atomic Lacrosse**

2005

oil on board and gelatin silver prints

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2020

2020/149

## **Return of the Red Man #1**

1992

Polaroid photo, tape, paint, and magazine on paper

Collection of Stephen B. Smart

## **Room 5**

### **Zero Hour**

Houle produced his first mixed-media installation, *Zero Hour*, as part of the Vancouver Art Gallery's 1989 exhibition *Beyond History*. In military terms, "zero hour" is the time an operation is set to begin—in this work, Houle is referring to the detonation of the first atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert on July 16, 1945. The paintings are luminescent depictions of the mushroom clouds that brought immense devastation to Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache territories, where residents also suffered exponential increases in the prevalence of cancer. In the centre of the room is a sand painting, a nod to this tradition in Navajo culture as well as a representation of the notion of healing. The inscription on the wall—"For as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, the grass grows"—is a phrase found in treaties which is meant to draw attention to the inherent and everlasting rights of Indigenous Peoples to the land.

**Warning: This installation includes a laser beam, which may affect visitors with photosensitivity.**

### **Zero Hour**

1988

mixed media, oil on canvas, rocks, and sand



Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston. Purchase, Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program, 1998 (41-011)

## Room 7

### Sandy Bay

1998–1999

oil, black-and-white photograph, colour photograph on canvas, and Masonite Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Acquired with funds from the President's Appeal 2000 and with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program / Oeuvre achetée avec l'aide du programme d'aide aux acquisitions du Conseil des Arts du Canada, 2000-87 a-e

In this work, Houle revisits memories of attending the Sandy Bay Residential School, in order to let them go. Robert's father, Solomon, used the *Saulteaux* term *pahgedenaun* (let it go from your mind) to describe the process.

References in this work include:

(photograph, top left): Père Chagnon, who was widely liked in Sandy Bay First Nation because he spoke *Saulteaux* and was kind. He is the only non-Indigenous person buried on Sandy Bay First Nation.

(photograph, bottom left): A First Communion ceremony at which Robert's sister Marilyn is present. Siblings were forcibly separated and unable to communicate at the school.

(oil painting, left): Sandy Bay Residential School, overlaid with words from a hymn Houle's mother sang to him: "ON SAM KI KISEWATIS ANA MANITOWIYAN" ("Oh, you are so kind and so treasured although you are god-like"). The windows represent family members. These are the bonds of family love and the passing-down of culture that the residential school system intended to break.

(oil painting, middle): Shoreline of Lake Manitoba at Sandy Bay. For Houle, this is a healing place.

(oil painting, right): Sister Clothilde, one of the abusive nuns at the school.

For described audio on this work, visit [www.ago.ca/houle](http://www.ago.ca/houle).

## **Grandmother (drum)**

2015

oil on canvas

Collection of Deborah Chansonneuve

## **Shaman Heals by Touching**

2015

oil on canvas

Collection of Brian Norton

## **Shaman Never Die**

2015

oil on canvas

Private collection

## **Shaman Dream in Colour**

2015

oil on canvas

Collection of Sylvia and Michael Smith

## **Shaman Takes Away the Pain**

2015

oil on canvas

Private collection

## **Dark Moses**

2009

oil on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Shape Shifter**

2009

oil on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Sister Clothilde**

2009

oil on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Shield for Aboriginal Title**

1990

hide, human hair, oil paint, porcupine quill, and graphite on metal  
Collection of David Andrew Welling

## **Room 8**

## **Transforming BlueThunder**

2021

oil on mylar

Courtesy of the artist

## **Cathedral**

2016

oil paint, graphite and porcelain skull on pine, vinyl text, and pine shelf

Courtesy of the artist

### **Parfleche for Rock Hudson**

1985

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

### **Sandy Bay Indian Residential School I (schoolhouse, praying, sleeping, waiting, people, lake)**

2010–2011

9 oil on canvas panels, watercolour, graphite and vinyl text on wall, and wainscoting

Courtesy of the artist

### **Sandy Bay Indian Residential School II (schoolhouse, praying, sleeping, waiting, people, lake)**

2010–2011

9 oil on canvas panels, watercolour, graphite and vinyl text on wall, and wainscoting

Courtesy of the artist

### **Sandy Bay Indian Residential School IV (alizarin crimson, cobalt violet, winsor red deep, magenta, cadmium red light, cadmium red deep)**

2012

6 oil on canvas panels, watercolour, graphite and vinyl text on wall, and wainscoting

Courtesy of the artist

**Room 9**

## **Pontiac and the Aesthetics of Disappearance**

Houle began to develop a visual language in the 1990s as a conceptual response to what he calls the “aesthetics of disappearance.” In his practice, he memorializes Nations that were massacred in the name of colonial “progress,” and critiques Western appropriations of important figures, like Pontiac, who led his community in a fight against British occupation. In this room, as part of his project of restoring this figure to his proper place as a leader in Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism, Houle reflects on how commodity culture colonized Pontiac’s name. “Growing up on the rez’ in southern Manitoba in the 1960s, Pontiac was the family car we drove down to the lake,” he has said. “It was not until high school that I read about Pontiac, the Odawa chief who led a confederacy of eighteen nations against the British Army in the summer of 1763 (the year of the Royal Proclamation).”

### **The Chief**

1996

oil on canvas with Pontiac hood ornament

Royal Bank of Canada Art Collection

### **I Stand**

1997

oil paint, porcupine quills on canvas, etched brass plaque, vinyl text on large red wall, and 1947 Pontiac convertible

Courtesy of the artist and Norm Dumontier

### **Kekabishcoon Peenish Chipedahbung (I Will Stand in Your Path Till Dawn)**

1997

36 third-generation advertisements on red latex background with vinyl lettering

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. Gift of Paul Gardner in memory of Donald Gardner, 2007

**1947**

1996

advertisement, colour photocopy, and plexiglass

The Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern. Purchased with support from the Canada Council's Acquisition Assistance Program, 1997

**Savage Love**

around 2003

book covers and oil on canvas

Collection of Grant Wedge & Bob Crouch

**Pontiac**

1996

oil paint, porcupine quill, and varnish on canvas

Collection of David McIntosh

**Chief, the New Pontiac Big Six**

around 1997

transfer chromolithograph with collage of vinyl letters, watercolour on paper, and quillwork laced through wood veneer support

Gift of Stephen B. Smart, 2018

**2018/3729**

## Room 9

### **The Pines**

2002–2004

oil on canvas

Gift of Susan Whitney, 2017

2017/243

Houle painted *The Pines* to remember the spiritual energy he felt when he visited the site of the Kanien'kehá:ka Resistance in the community of Kanehsatà:ke.

For described audio on this work, visit [www.ago.ca/houle](http://www.ago.ca/houle).

### **Demasduwits Warrior #5**

1988

oil wash, ribbon, and porcupine quills on paper

On loan from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada

### **Demasduwits Warrior #13**

1988

oil wash, ribbon, and porcupine quills on paper

On loan from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada

### **Untitled (Male Nude)**

2007

conté on paper

Collection of Barry Ace and Earl Truelove

### **Light Box**

2011

oil on canvas

Collection of Christopher Varley + Sandra Shaul

## **Parfleche**

2011

oil on canvas

Collection of Christopher Varley + Sandra Shaul

## **Untitled (Mohawk Summer Collages)**

1991

graphite, magazines, coloured pencil, letraset, spray paint,  
and paint on paper

Collection of Amy Smart, Squamish, B.C.

## **Parfleche II**

1985

oil wash on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern  
Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-  
Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Parfleche II "H"**

1984

acrylic with porcupine quills on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern  
Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-  
Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Parfleche III "A"**

1985

acrylic on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern  
Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-  
Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Rainbow Woman**

1982



alkyd paint on wood

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Room 9 – Al Green**

### **Sacred Geometry**

In his early work, produced between 1970 and 1983, Houle experimented with the tensions and connections between his Saulteaux traditions and modernism. In this period, Houle discovered the Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman, whose exploration of the spiritual qualities of colour he respected. Houle rejected the pure abstraction of artists like Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich for the sacred geometry of Anishinaabe art, which offered a new visual language outside the patriarchal renderings of the West. Houle emerged as a new voice in modern abstraction, an artist who values immediacy, gesture, the spiritual qualities of colour, the earth, and the sacred.

### **Red is Beautiful**

1970

acrylic on canvas

Musée canadien de l'histoire / Canadian Museum of History

V-F-174

**For described audio on this work, visit [www.ago.ca/houle](http://www.ago.ca/houle).**

### **Cryptogram No. 2**

1981

graphite on paper

Purchase, with funds from the James Lahey Fund and the Estate of Penelope Glasser Fund, 2020  
2020/64

## **Diamond Composition**

1980

silkscreen on paper

Collection of Melvin Thompson & Harvey Bouchard

## **Ojibway Blanket**

1983

gouache and porcupine quill on paper

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Square 4**

1980

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Square Homage to Albers**

1979

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **Epigram: A Visual Statement**

1980–1983

acrylic and quills on canvas

McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Purchase 1985

## **Parfleche II – C**

1984

acrylic and porcupine quills on paper

McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Bequest of Anthony David Ryan

## **Square No. 3**

1978

acrylic on canvas, on painted wooden mount

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Myron Laskin, Santa Monica, California, 1987

## **Idyllic Moments**

1985

acrylic on canvas

Collection of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, purchased with the assistance of The Walter & Duncan L. Gordon Charitable Foundation Funding, 1986

## **The First Step**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada /Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **“The First Step”**

Careful.

If you read any further in this poem

I cannot be responsible for what may happen.

Remember.

You're now proceeding at your own risk.  
I take no part in your decision  
to read on.  
Stop!

I can't let you go on.  
Yet,  
anything I do  
cannot make you realize the gravity of your choice. It is the most dangerous  
and important  
one  
you've ever made.  
Are you still willing to continue?

Funny  
what a person will do  
just to reassure himself  
that he is still living.

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **The Stuff of Which Dreams Are Made**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada / Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

### **“The Stuff of Which Dreams are Made”**

Individuals

awakening to each other

can be a glorious experience as long as they imagine

they are sleepwalking.

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **Wigwam**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada /Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

## **“Notions”**

I had the notion

one day to be

open, sincere, loving,

and yours.

But you got the notion

to dispense with emotion and instead

became yourself.

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **Epigram for the Shortest Distance**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada /Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

## **“Epigram: The Shortest Distance”**

Coming together  
is a very slow process  
when you're on

parallel  
lines.

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **Games**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Canada /Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et  
Affaires du Nord Canada

### **“Games”**

You said:

Come with me

if you want to be someone you are not.

So I did.

And we ran away from yesterday—

pretending we'd forget.

Today came.

We played with it awhile, passed it off with a smile and moved onward  
again.

We fancied ourselves free.

Weren't we?

The time passed.

I whittled away at your manhood. You broke me with greed.

We did become others.

Didn't we?

Didn't we?

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **Parallel Lines**

1972

from *Love Poems*

acrylic on canvas

Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada /Collection d'art autochtones, Relations Couronne-Autochtones et Affaires du Nord Canada

## **“A Seemly Parting”**

Let's you and I be different  
and seem  
indifferent when we say  
“goodbye.”

—Brenda Grushcow, from *Moments Out of Tune*

## **Ojibway Motif, #2, Purple Leaves Series**

1972

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa: Gift of Raymonde Falardeau, 1998

## **Mohawk Summer**

1990

reproduction of original cloth in vinyl

Courtesy of the artist

For 78 days in 1990, the community of Kanehsatà:ke and their supporters resisted the Canadian army while defending their sacred lands. As an act of solidarity, Houle blocked out the windows of his studio near Queen Street West and Denison Avenue in downtown Toronto with four coloured cloth banners, each featuring a single word—SOVEREIGN, LONGHOUSE, LANDCLAIM, and FALSEFACE. These banners faced out to the street; inside the studio, the lack of natural light meant Houle could not paint.

## **Mohawk Summer**

1990

coloured cloth banners with vinyl text

Courtesy of the artist

“Over thirty years ago, I experienced a profound contempt and hostility towards the Bourassa government of Quebec with regard to the sovereignty over our territories and lands; the flashpoint being a sacred burial ground facing desecration through the expansion of a golf course. The heartbreaking divide made the country see a virtual war where a police bullet killed one soldier and many among us saw a nation reveal its colonial attitude through the exclusion of aboriginal peoples in the now-dead Meech Lake Accord.



With great pride, I recall how other nations across the land joined in solidarity with the people of Kanehsatà:ke. That 'Mohawk Summer' showed defiance in the face of prejudice and colonization. These banners were created in the national colour of blue followed by the colours of the quahog shell—violet, red, and light crimson—and covered the windows of my Queen West studio for the entire summer; a rainbow of colour denied light is darkness, mourning. It is fitting to remember that seminal moment that made me realize what I had always suspected: my human and treaty rights were subject to unilateralism buttressed by paternalism. The people of Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawake showed courage, unity, and strength for those resting among the pines of that hallowed ground.”

—Robert Houle