

# Teacher Resource

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: Grade 7 – Grade 12

CURRICULUM LINKS: Visual Arts, Science, Geography, Social Studies

## **BARRY ACE** *trinity suite*

2011–2015

*“I draw a lot from my culture. I think most artists’ work is autobiographical, so you’re pulling from your past, your history, your family history, your community history...my work is a confluence between the historical and the contemporary.” —Barry Ace*



Barry Ace, *trinity suite*, 2011–2015. Mixed media (motion sensor display monitors, fabric, metal, horsehair, extension cords, mirror, plastic, capacitors and resistors), Installed (McLean Centre, 2018): 207 x 95 x 53 cm. Purchase with support of the Max Clarkson Family Foundation and the Dennis Reid Fund, 2018. © Barry Ace. 2018/3586.

### GUIDED OBSERVATION:

- What is your first impression of *trinity suite*? What captures your attention?
- Describe the materials the artist has used.
- What puzzles you about this work? What questions would you have for the artist?



## CONTEXT

Ace's digital bandoliers are a reimagining of the traditional bandolier bag. Although made by women, men traditionally wore these bags as part of ceremonial dress. Worn on the shoulder, the bag crosses the body and rests at the wearer's hip. The bag-makers modelled the overall construction on pouches used by European soldiers. Early bandolier bags were decorative and did not have a pocket. These bags are a mark of generosity and friendship.

Many Nations across North America made these types of bags. The different materials and designs are an indication of who made them and where they came from. Traditionally, women around the Great Lakes region used glass seed beads, obtained through trade with Europeans, to embellish bandolier bags (as well as moccasins and other ceremonial items). Seed beads are incredibly small – they can be as tiny as three millimetres long – so using them to decorate an item represents an incredible amount of skill, time and labour for the maker.

Ace's futuristic bags replicate floral designs from his ancestral home, the M'Chigeeng First Nation located in Odawa Mnis (Manitoulin Island). Instead of beads, Ace reuses cast-off computer parts, circuit boards and electrical components like capacitors and resistors, to construct floral patterns. Before European contact, artists of the Great Lakes typically used dyed porcupine quills for decorative elements. As Europeans arrived in North America and glass beads became part of trade, artists began incorporating these materials into their work.

Ace's use of electrical components is both a literal nod to his ancestors' adoption of new materials as well as a metaphor to the ideas behind traditional designs. Beaded flowers typically reference medicinal flowers, and these flowers release their healing properties when infused. Similarly, capacitors and resistors store and release electrical current, releasing energy when needed. By using contemporary technologies to reinterpret traditional designs, Ace connects the present-day to the past, asserting the continuance of Anishinaabe culture and belief systems into the future.

The past-present-future continuum of Ace's artwork also alludes to the notion of survivance. Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor first connected "survivance" to Indigenous issues in the late 1990s, stating that, "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry." Put simply, Ace's *trinity suite* is a way of saying, "We are still here and we'll continue to be here."

Each of Ace's bandolier bags contains an iPad.  
From left to right, *trinity suite* includes the following:

- Niiowa Ndanwendaagan (My Relatives): This iPad shows Ace family photographs.
- Bandolier for Manidoo minising (Manitoulin Island): This iPad shows a 1925 film made on Manitoulin Island. At the time, the Canadian government banned Indigenous Peoples from wearing regalia and dancing on reserves. This group was allowed to dance for visiting bureaucrats. Ace says that although the atrocity of the ban is important, what is also relevant is the generosity of the dancers who wanted to host the delegation and share the beauty of their culture, even though that group was the same one trying to erase their rights, history and culture.
- Bandolier for Charlie (In Memoriam): this iPad shows digital photographs of a close friend of Ace's who passed away.



## Teacher Resource continued

### ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Barry Ace (born 1958) is an Anishinaabe (Odawa) artist based in Ottawa, Ontario. He is a member of M'Chigeeng First Nation, Odawa Mnis (Manitoulin Island). He originally studied to be an electrician but later changed his studies to graphic arts.

Ace traces his interest in artmaking back to his childhood. Around the age of seven or eight, he helped gather materials to help his great-aunt Annie Owl-McGregor make Anishinaabe splint-ash baskets. His great-aunt and his grandmother Mary McGregor-Ace, were both artists who made beadwork, quillwork and basketry. Their work had a profound impact on Ace.

Ace has shown in museums around Canada, the United States and Europe. In 2015, he received the K.M. Hunter Artist Award for the visual arts. Ace is also a member of the Ottawa Ontario 7 (007) Collective, which presents new work outside of the art museum or traditional curatorial context.

### EXTENDED EXPLORATION

- What do you find interesting about this artwork after reading about the context in which it was created? Has your point of view changed from your initial reaction? Explain.
- How do the electrical components add to the ideas behind this artwork? How would these ideas change if Ace used different materials?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

Imagine if you had three screens that captured the important moments in your life – what would those moments be?

- Sketch your response.

<https://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2017/02/nfn-barry-ace.html>

**Book your visit today!**

ONLINE [AGO.ca/schools](https://ago.ca/schools)  
EMAIL [groupsales@ago.ca](mailto:groupsales@ago.ca)  
CALL 416 979 6608



**AGO**