

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: Grade 7 – Grade 12

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

## SONNY ASSU

### RE-INVADERS: DIGITAL INTERVENTION ON AN EMILY CARR PAINTING (INDIAN CHURCH, 1929)

2014



*“While I embrace my Ligwilda’xw/Kwakwaka’wakw heritage and I identify as an Indigenous person, I don’t consider myself a ‘First Nations’ artist, or an ‘Indigenous’ artist or a ‘Kwakwaka’wakw’ artist. I am an artist who happens to be Indigenous. I believe embracing these labels places an assumption on what my art will be, or how it will be seen. So for me, First Nations art is everything and anything – it could be a mask, a totem pole; it could be a modern painting, an installation, a performance, or other work that doesn’t conform to what we assume art or First Nations art to be. I want people to understand that there is a depth to all forms of art, and a depth to Indigenous people who are artists.” –Sonny Assu*

#### GUIDED OBSERVATION

- What is happening in this work?
- The title for this work includes the term “re-invaders”. What comes to mind when you hear the term “re-invaders”? How can you relate the term “invaders” to colonialism?
- Generate a list of themes based on your initial impressions of this work.

Sonny Assu, *Re-Invaders: Digital Intervention on an Emily Carr Painting (Indian Church, 1929)*, 2014. Archival inkjet print, Framed: 40 x 30 cm. Purchase, funds



donated by James Lahey and Pym Buitenhuis, 2018. © Sonny Assu. 2018/3587.

## CONTEXT

This work is from a group of prints Assu made called “Interventions on the Imaginary.” In the series, Assu layers West Coast formlines on reproductions of famous Canadian artworks as a way of asserting Indigenous presence. In this work, the floating formlines seem like a futuristic intrusion in an otherwise harmonious space – perhaps resembling an alien invasion or a hovering spacecraft. Discuss how the formlines make you feel. Why do you think the artist painted them?

Formline art is a type of design that uses a combination of curved lines in S- and U-shapes and ovoids (ovals). Many coastal Nations developed their own unique approach to formline art, and today artists continue to experiment with modern approaches to it. The hot pink and electric purple formlines (which Assu calls UF-ovals) are part of this contemporary remix of traditional forms. His colour choices give Re-Invaders a graffiti-like appearance. It is as if he has tagged this reproduction with spray paint.

The reproduction underneath Assu’s formlines is Emily Carr’s *Church at Yuquot Village* (1929). Note that AGO curators Wanda Nanibush and Georgiana Uhlyarik changed the name of this painting in 2018, but Assu’s work references the painting’s old title (*Indian Church*). You can read more about the name change here: <http://artmatters.ca/wp/2018/05/emily-carrs-church-in-yuquot-village/>

Assu made Carr’s painting the subject of his digital intervention because he was drawn to the appearance of the church against the forest. In an interview conducted at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2019, he said “I found the church to be captivating. As a symbol of colonialism, it appears so desolate against the forest backdrop. Re-Invaders flip the narrative, speculating that Carr was actually capturing the settlers’ decline, in contrast with the perception that she was capturing the Indigenous decline. Speculation, humour and sci-fi narratives all played a big part in the creative process for this series.”

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY:

Sonny Assu (born 1975) is Ligwilda’xw of the Kwakwaka’wakw Nations. Assu did not learn of his Ligwilda’xw heritage until he was eight years old. The revelation about his ancestry would be a defining moment in his life, and spark the ideas around hybridity in his practice. He lives on Vancouver Island, in his ancestral home on unceded Ligwilda’xw territory (this refers to land that was never given to the Crown by treaty or other formal agreement). Assu says, “...my biggest influence has come from me moving back to my home territory. I’m grounded here. My culture is from here; my family is here. I get to make art where my ancestors lived. I feel them, they guide me.”



# CREATIVE RESPONSE

## PROJECT: REINVENTING PAINTING/FOUND OBJECT

Artists often challenge and extend the boundaries of traditional media. By reimagining and remaking traditional works, they juxtapose media to create new meaning.

- How does this impact your experience of the work?
- How does this alter the meaning of the work?

For this project, browse the AGO Collection virtually at [ago.ca/collection](http://ago.ca/collection). Select an artwork you would like to reimagine and infuse with new meaning. Print out the selected work to use as a template for your artmaking.

**MATERIAL LIST** (This is a suggested material list. Please modify the list according to the supplies and media you have available.)

- Pencils, paper, erasers, sharpeners, glue stick, white glue, sewing kit (thread, needles, scissors)
- 18" x 18" raw canvas (if you do not have a canvas, use a large sheet of paper, cardboard or cotton fabric for your painting)
- 8 1/5 x 11 printouts – images from the collection
- Graphite Sticks 6B
- Assortment of found objects: beads, embroidery thread, needles, stones, buttons, fabric scraps
- inks, watercolour brushes, watercolour wells

## INSTRUCTIONS

### Step One: PLAN

Working with the image you have selected, imagine having to extend the image beyond its borders.

- What might that look like?
- Consider what sections would be painted?
- What sections would be embroidered?
- What stories do they tell?

### Step Two: DESIGN and PAINT

On the raw canvas (or background you have selected), transfer the image you have selected using graphite (apply graphite to the back of the printed images. Turn the image over. Using a pencil, draw over parts of the image that you want transferred onto the canvas.

- Ensure that you apply steady pressure).
- Begin the process with the ink materials first – experiment with different textures.
- Once dried – accentuate the elements by gluing and sewing the found objects

## ANALYSIS

- How has the initial artwork transformed?
- How has the meaning transformed?

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