

# Teacher Resource

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: Grade 7 – Grade 12  
CURRICULUM LINKS: Visual Arts, Science, Geography, Social Studies

**AGO**  
**FROM HOME**

## CARL BEAM TIME DISSOLVE

AROUND 1992



*“My works are like little puzzles, interesting little games. I play a game with humanity and creativity. I ask viewers to play the participatory game of dreaming themselves as each other. In this we find out that we’re all basically human... My work is not fabricated for the art market. There’s no market for intellectual puzzles or works of spiritual emancipation.”*

—Carl Beam

### GUIDED OBSERVATION

- Take 30 seconds to look at this work. How does your eye move through it?
- What elements has Beam used to create visual interest in this work?
- What message is this work communicating? How does Beam’s choice of media support this message?

Carl Beam, Time Dissolve, around 1992. Photo emulsion, acrylic and pencil on canvas. 274.3 x 213.3 cm Private Collection, 2019.



## CONTEXT

Carl Beam's work brings together his autobiography and personal memories with Western and Indigenous histories. Using a variety of media, Beam brings to light historic oppression and the ongoing and devastating impacts of colonialism.

Beam experimented with various media including drawing, watercolour, etching, non-silver photography, photo transfer, installation and ceramics. Later in his career, Beam was working with new heat transfer techniques for incorporating photo-imagery into his work. He also began working with photo emulsion on his large-scale canvas works.

In *Time Dissolve*, Beam positioned personal photos against a faded image of Jesus Christ. The top of the piece features the type of Christian imagery you see in paintings of the Renaissance era (1300–1600 Europe); these types of works still hold a prominent place in museum collections and exhibitions across the Western world.

Under this representation of the *Lamentation of Christ*, Beam fills the rest of the canvas with images from photographs of his friends and family. He circles and identifies some of them in the image. The photographs refer to particular moments in Beam's life ranging from his time in residential school to visits with family .

Why combine Christian iconography and personal photographs? By using images of his family, Beam centres and honours Anishinaabe thought and philosophy while moving away from the Christianity that was forced upon him as a child, when he was taken from his family and placed in residential school. In the artwork, Beam circles his friend Gilbert Oskaboose. His friendship with Oskaboose was part of their resistance within the schools. His work asserts the importance of place and community, as he shows Indigenous thought and practice is still valued and carried on at home.

## THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY (1493), CANADA'S INDIAN ACT (1876) AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Though almost 400 years apart, you could connect a straight line between the Doctrine of Discovery (1493), which claimed European powers could claim Indigenous lands under the pretense of discovery, and Canada's Indian Act of 1876, which stated (among other things) that the Canadian government would control most aspects of Indigenous life, including status, land, cultural practices and education.

Beam was born in 1943. At that point, the residential school system had been in place for over 100 years. The schools were aligned with Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and they intended to aggressively assimilate Indigenous children into European-Canadian society by cutting ties with their parents, language, land and culture. Canada's widespread residential school system gained momentum in the 1830s, and the last residential school closed in 1986.

Beam's multilayered canvases speak to the atrocities inflicted on Indigenous communities. Wanda Nanibush, Curator of Indigenous Art at the AGO, has this to say about Beam's work: "This work is a work of resistance – that he says 'I am the artist' is very important. Beam resists through being an artist, a friend, and a family member."



## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Carl Beam (1943–2005) was born Carl Edward Migwans in M'Chigeeng First Nation in West Bay on Manitoulin Island to his Anishinaabe mother Barbara Migwans and father Edward Cooper, an American soldier. His grandparents Dominic Migwans, Chief of M'Chigeeng and his wife Annie, raised him until 1953 when the Canadian government sent Beam to the Garnier 'Indian' Residential School in Spanish, ON.

He studied art at the Kootenay School of Art in British Columbia in 1971 before transferring to the University of Victoria in 1973. In 1976, Beam received his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Alberta, Edmonton. He cited American artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg as influences, for their collages of pop culture images, painting and printing styles, as well as Andy Warhol for his use of photo-silkscreen processes. Using collage and photo-transfers, Beam combined subjects and events from various sources and histories, connecting Indigenous worldviews to wide-ranging cultural, historical and political matters.

## EXTENDED EXPLORATION

- Why do you think Carl Beam has made the images so murky and faded in his representation of them?
- Why do you think Beam titled this work *Time Dissolve*? What does it mean to dissolve time?
- After exploring this work, has your initial impression of the painting changed? Why? Why not?

## CREATIVE RESPONSE

In your journal, create a lune poem. A lune's syllable pattern is 5/3/5. Since the middle line is limited to three syllables, it is often the shortest line of the three. This makes a lune curve – like a crescent moon.

In your exploration of *Time Dissolve*, use the following as prompts for your poem:

- What do you see....
- What do you hear...
- What do you feel...

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