

Celebration and Change (*From the original photographs made for my solo Exhibition in 2004 at the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City)

These photographs, of First Nations ceremony and celebration, are my artistic interpretation of the festivals and ceremonies of many different First Nations cultures of Canada and of their art and artifacts. Contemporary manifestations of First Nations ceremony and celebration, although rooted in tradition, are constantly evolving, due to modern political trends, widespread intercommunication between different First Nations and other influences. Tribal rites are for First Nations people, their laws and spirituality. Ceremonies, guided by symbolic principles, and also more public events are organized to safeguard the cultures. Actively suppressed by Europeans migrating into North America, there has now been a resurgence of information and cultural affirmation across Canada by all First Nations groups. But many formal ceremonies, especially those of religious or cultural events specific to a tribe cannot be photographed due to the historical context of past suppression and exploitation. However, I have had permission to take all of my photographs guided by members of the communities in my understanding of the significance to them. Some traditional rituals, rich in mythology and spirituality, are undergoing constant reassessment to update them for a modern world. Presented to the world at large, the pow wows and ceremonies integrate the young and proudly demonstrate historic cultural expression. My photographs illustrate cultural similarities and diversities among First Nations in North America with colour, aesthetic appeal and visual impact. These photographs may ultimately be of historical importance, but are not documentation. They are powerful, individual images, which appeal to the senses, give cultural information to the world at large and are open to an interpretation by the viewer. They exemplify the beauty and variety of modern First Nations cultures.

Now, I have taken these images one step further, creating abstract collage paintings that take different inspiration from information new to nonindigenous Canadians. I use artefact and regalia from different First Nations across the country pictured together within a single image to represent not only individual tribes, but the modern unification of sentiment among different First Nations. I want to illustrate the problematic events that occurred across Canada in history, in an effort to shed light on issues. For an example, I have produced a "ghost figure" to illustrate the atrocity of residential schooling, used as a tool to suppress First Nations language and spirituality. The First Nations peoples of Canada have lived these repressive edicts from our government and religious leaders for centuries and have had to live with the consequences. My effort in making this work is to illustrate and emphasize these consequences.

Cutting up my original photographs, I attach them to a wooden ground to make a collage, which is then painted around each fragment of photograph. I use artifact and regalia pictured to illustrate some stories of that are much a part of First Nations lives. Much of the work is centred around pow wow photographs which are more easily photographed. I find pow wow interesting as, although pow wow primarily shows the traditional dances, individual ones give a strong presentation of a specific First Nations group in a specific area of the nation. I am making images of the clarity of information that has now become available to me as I study and make these constructions. Like most nonindigenous persons, I was ignorant of many issues until I started to create these images many years ago, and in doing so and met and was instructed by Elders in many areas of Canada about the rich traditions of the cultures.