



JOBENA PETONOQUOT

Rebellion of my Ancestors

Nid Ànike-mishòmisibaneg Od-Àbimitàgewiniwà

March 26 to August 14, 2022

JOBENA PETONOQUOT brings together community, art history, colonization, religion and resilience, and carries family histories and holistic and relational knowledge from her Algonquin Anishinābe and Naskapi relations into her rigorous artistic practice. She folds the past into the present through a blend of customary and contemporary media, including beadwork, fibre art, installation, printmaking and photography.

Petonoquot presents the natural world as a place of healing. This is where she often situates herself, drawing upon her own and her family's knowledge and experience of living on the land. This opens up a space for the artist to reflect upon the impact that colonization has had on interactions with the land. Petonoquot also takes a critical and sensitive look at the relationship between colonization and Christianity, where religion was used as a justification for genocide.

As a method of storytelling and memory-keeping, beading is a form of cultural resilience. In a similar vein, Petonoquot's work encourages people to talk about, think about, and look further into the history and ongoing experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada.





JOBENA PETONOQUOT

Rebellion of my Ancestors

La rébellion de mes ancêtres

Nid Ànike-mishòmisibaneg Od-Àbimitàgewiniwà

Curators: Lori Beavis, Guest Curator and Executive Director, Centre d'art daphne, and Rebecca Basciano, Curator, OAG

This exhibition was realized with the support of the City of Ottawa, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.



Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

My Grandfather Trapped the Rabbit (detail), 2018

Velvet, beads, lace, Victorian bubble-glass frame

44.5 x 30.5 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

I perceive beadwork as a somewhat violent act, as it relates to life. As the needle pierces the fabric, the act of beading establishes a dialogue that can be both very beautiful and very painful.

— Jobena Petonoquot

Gins of the Church, 2022

Red velvet, lace, beads, metal animal trap

35.56 x 35.56 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

Petonoquot often works with fabrics and furnishings reflecting the Victorian era. In this particular work, however, the metal leg-trap resting on soft velvet is a stark and surprising element. “Gin” is another word for “trap,” and was sourced by the artist from the Bible. This work represents the relationship between Christianity and colonialism, as well as the snares used for subsistence living.

Petonoquot’s grandfather, who was of mixed Algonquin Anishinābe-Irish identity, was born at the end of the Victorian era. He resisted his European background, instead using his knowledge of hunting, trapping and living on the land to provide for his family – even though colonial powers forbade Indigenous self-sufficiency.

In this work, Petonoquot pays tribute to the rebellion of ancestors like her grandfather. As she has herself stated, if he had not rebelled as he did, she would not be here today.



Sanctuary for the Children, 2021

Deer hide, muskrat fur, beads, tea-stained lace

15.88 x 11.43 x 6.35 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

Petonoquot created these small, delicate moccasins as a commemorative action in early June 2021. The event that spurred her to make this work was the recovery of 215 children buried on the site of what was once Canada's largest Indigenous residential school, located on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory in the southern interior of British Columbia.

During the recovery, it was found that some of the children were as young as three years of age. For Petonoquot, this work pays tribute to all the children who did not come home.



My Medicine, 2018

Deer hide, glass
seed beads

10.2 x 8.9 cm

Courtesy of the
Artist

I'm inspired by the medicine found in
nature. That is my Church.
— Jobena Petonoquot

The small medicine bag may contain
sacred objects, or objects that ensure
well-being. The pouch is most often
worn under the clothing, and the
contents are private to the wearer.



My Grandmother's Heart (detail), 2021

Glass seed beads, deer hide, linen, rabbit fur, felt

36.8 x 28.6 cm

Loan from the Hamelys Collection

Although beading is often an art passed down by grannies or aunts, this was not the case for Petonoquot. Instead, at the age of 25, she taught herself the patterns and techniques, and started to bead.

When she looks at her work now, she sees her ancestry — a little bit of Algonquin Anishinābe, a little Naskapi, and a pinch of Victorian-era European-Canadian all come together. The beads sewn into patterns are a way for her to stitch together family memories and stories that she has heard throughout her life, and now holds within herself.

Petonoquot only knows a few words of Anishinābemowin, but through the beads and her art practice, she is able to speak her language.





Bury Colonialism I
2018
Medium
Canvas of the Group
Jobena Petonoquot would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts for its generous support.

Bury Colonialism II
(Esequio al colonialismo II)
2018
Medium
Canvas of the Group
Jobena Petonoquot would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts for its generous support.

Bury Colonialism I, 2018

Photograph

50.8 x 63.5 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

Jobena Petonoquot would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts for its generous support.



Jobena Petonoquot
Resilient Repugnance
2018

Resilient Repugnance (from left to right: *Buried Dress*; *Dead Bird*; *Sunrise*), 2018

Photographic triptych

76.2 x 76.2 cm each

Courtesy of the Artist

Jobena Petonoquot would like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts for its generous support.



Resilient Repugnance: Buried Dress (detail), 2018
Photo: Jobena Petonoquot

Resilient Repugnance: Baptism Gowns, 2018

Fabric, beads, earth, birch branch, cedar (comprised of four baptismal dresses suspended from a branch)

Branch: 195.58 cm; Dresses: 59.7 x 25.4 cm each

Courtesy of the Artist

These Victorian christening dresses have been embellished with delicate and time-consuming beadwork. They show Petonoquot's relationship to Christianity, which has been misused as a tool of colonization. The symbols make a connection to religious crosses, as well as the Four Directions.

The dichotomy of this work is that these delicate, intricately beaded white dresses have been soiled with dirt. The beaded baptismal gowns document, as do the accompanying photographs, Petonoquot's durational performance, in which she buried them in the earth of her home community of Kitigan Zibi. It was an act of mourning and healing without forgetting, and refers to the continuing impact of colonialism, as well as the necessity of Indigenous healing.





Resilient Repugnance: Baptism Gowns (detail), 2018



The Reservation Bonnet, 2018
Beads, nylon thread, leather,
teabag filled with dirt from
Kitigan Zibi, dyed linen
Bonnet: 17.8 x 17.8 cm; Teabag
rosary: 45.72 cm
Indigenous Art Collection,
Crown-Indigenous Relations
and Northern Affairs Canada

This Victorian bonnet was dyed red to evoke the wrapping of wounds. The soil in the teabag was collected from Kitigan Zibi, and in some ways it is a commentary by the artist on inequities between the Church and Indigenous peoples on reserve lands.





Ode to My Grandfather, 2018

Deer hide, beads, satin ribbon and velvet
(embellished with robin and plant motifs)

Left: 22.9 x 11.4 cm; Right: 22.9 x 11.4 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

The floral and plant motifs on these moccasins are a tribute to Petonoquot's grandfather and his knowledge of the land. As footwear, moccasins symbolize a connection with the earth. The floral beadwork and the sunset colours reinforce the cyclical patterns of the natural world, including moccasins that push fallen branches back into the earth to nourish the soil.

The making of moccasins is a way of sharing history. As a self-taught bead artist, Petonoquot learned patterns and techniques by looking at historical and contemporary examples of Naskapi-style puckered toes and Algonquin Anishinābe beading and weaving designs. The moccasins were made to fit her own feet and, through her art practice, Petonoquot can embody her ancestries and express her Algonquin Anishinābe-Naskapi identity.





We all drank tea with the Queen
(from left to right: *Good little Indian*; *The Queen's Tea*; *Beaver Pelt*; *Ode to Tom Thomson*), 2011
Intaglio prints on rag paper, ink, glass beads
38.1 x 50.8 cm, each
Indigenous Art Collection, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Petonoquot created this series after visiting one of Montreal's many souvenir shops. The scalloped edges are based on customary birch-bark etching, while the oval format is Victorian. Hybridized decoration was popular in 18th- and 19th-century Victorian tourist markets, and souvenir consumption endures as a site of negotiation for Indigenous identity.

Using the doll, teacup, beaver, and the iconic Group of Seven image of a jack pine, Petonoquot's prints are stereotypes as well as symbols of colonial presence, and indicators that we continue to live in a colonized space.

My Church (from left to right: *Red Bonnet*; *Yellow Bonnet*; *Black Bonnet*; *White Bonnet*), 2021

Linen, satin, ribbon, lace, beads, deer hide

17.8 x 17.8 cm

Courtesy of the Artist





My Church (from left to right: Red Bonnet; Yellow Bonnet; Black Bonnet; White Bonnet), 2021

The church Petonoquot is acknowledging here is the spiritual place she inhabits by being on the land. The four bonnets reflect the colours of the Four Directions, as well as the cycle of life within the natural world.

Each bonnet has been beaded on two sides with a figure or representational image. The images include: a dead chickadee; a sleeping rabbit near, but not ensnared in, a trap; a sunset; spruce boughs arranged to replicate a Gothic church window; and the medicine plants cedar, Labrador tea, and the trillium.

The animals and plants are represented in finely stitched beadwork. Each image was noted and reflected upon by the artist as she walked on her home territory. The cycle of life continues as Petonoquot remembers the plant teachings taught to her by her grandfather.



Colonial Souvenir, 2019

Leather, glass seed beads, red acetate, photograph, vintage doll, lace

3D viewing glasses: 14 x 14 x 14 cm

Photograph: 76.2 x 76.2 cm

Doll: 25.4 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

Native humour comes from five hundred years of colonization. [...] Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. It gave us privacy. Whenever two First Nations people got together, something magical was sure to happen: there would be laughter.

— Drew Hayden Taylor¹



Colonial Souvenir (detail), 2019

Petonoquot has purposely created an image that will never be seen clearly — even when viewed through the 3D glasses. This is her commentary on the realities of ongoing colonialism, as well as on misconceptions by those who do not take the time to fully know or understand the lives and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

It is also a tease. Teasing someone is a gentle way of pointing out that a person's behaviour might need to change. Lori Beavis has stated that, "My grandmother always told me, 'We like to make fun of ourselves and to not take ourselves too seriously.' I think this was because humour and laughing help us foster understanding by making us think about and see the world in a new way."

¹Drew Hayden Taylor (Ed.), *Me Funny*, 2005, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver. "Whacking the Indigenous Funny Bone: Political Correctness vs. Native Humour, Round One," p.69.

Bringer of Death, 2018

Beads, lace, deer hide, wooden dowel rods, teacups,
and cedar branches

83.8 x 57.2 cm

Courtesy of the Artist





Bringer of Death, 2018

This teepee is a home-sewn child's toy created by Petonoquot as an exercise in creativity. The structure itself is one that has become a pan-Indigenous symbol, despite being used only by certain groups — predominantly Plains peoples.

This work brings together many elements seen in the artist's oeuvre. The fabric is reminiscent of Victorian furnishings, and the beaded crow is a reference to the natural world, as well as a symbol of her relationship with her stepfather.

Petonoquot had known as a young child that the crow was a symbol of evil for Algonquin people, yet it is also a bird that should never be killed. This is a story that she has carried with her. The surrounding teacups and saucers are a reminder of tea parties with grandmothers, while cedar is a medicine.

JOBENA PETONOQUOT

Jobena Petonoquot was born in 1980 in Kitigan Zibi, Quebec. She holds a bachelors degree in Art History with a minor in Photography from Concordia University (2012). Petonoquot's artwork flows primarily



from her maternal grandfather of Anishinābe and Irish descent. Her art practice emphasizes resilience and pride in her Aboriginal identity, as well as the defence of traditional values. Through beadwork technique and photography, she creates narrative works that take a critical and sensitive look at Canada's colonial history, as well as highlighting the beauty of her culture and her love of the land.

Petonoquot was co-collaborator of *The Native Arts & Craft Initiative* (2013-2014) with the Naskapi Community center, and also acted as an art instructor for this pilot project. She has contributed her work most notably to *Walking With Our Sisters* (2013-2019) curated and created by Christie Belcourt. Her works *Drinking Tea with the Queen* and *My Grandfather Trapped the Rabbit* were featured in Volume 6 & 7 of the Kanata McGill Undergraduate Journal of Indigenous Studies. Petonoquot is the first Indigenous winner of the Impressions Artist Residency (2018) at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Supported by the Conseil des arts de Montréal (CAM), this was a two month long research residency followed by a solo exhibition called *Rebellion of my Ancestors*. This exhibition was also featured at the Warren G Flowers Gallery in Montreal, QC (2019). Group exhibitions include the BACA Biennale at Art Mûr (2020), and the *Bead by Bead* group exhibition at Gallery Meteque in Montreal, QC (2020). Her work has been collected by the Indigenous Art Centre in Gatineau, QC. Currently she is part of a project called *Artroduction* (2021) created by Galerie 3 in Quebec City, QC.

LORI BEAVIS

Lori Beavis is a curator, art educator and art historian living and working in Tiohtià:ke / Montreal. Identifying as being of Michi Sagiig (Mississauga) Anishinaabe and Irish-Welsh descent, she is a citizen of Hiawatha First Nation at Rice Lake, Ontario. Her curatorial work, art practice and research, articulates narrative and memory in the context of family and cultural history, and reflects on cultural identity, art education and self-representation. At this time Beavis is the director of Centre d'art daphne, Tiohtià:ke's first Indigenous artist-run centre. She serves on the Executive of the Indigenous Curatorial Collective / Collectif des commissaires autochtones (ICCA) Board of Directors.

REBECCA BASCIANO

Rebecca Basciano is the Curator at the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG), where she supports and contextualizes regional artistic practices through curating exhibitions, publishing catalogues, acquiring works, facilitating touring exhibitions, and networking partnerships. She holds an MA in Art History from Carleton University (2013), and specializes in Canadian art. Her recent curatorial projects and accompanying publications have integrated strategies of inclusion and diversity, offered counter-narratives, and examined the intersection of historical and contemporary art, and include *Jobena Petonoquot: Rebellion of my Ancestors* (2022, co-curated), *Dark Ice: Leslie Reid and Robert Kautuk* (2022), *Filtered* (2021, co-curated), *(Re)Collecting the Group of Seven* (2020), and *Jennifer Dickson: The Credo Project* (2020). She has presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada Conference (UAAC) and the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative Conference (CWAHI). Her recent publications include a monograph on Frances-Anne Johnston (2022) and *Dark Ice: Leslie Reid and Robert Kautuk* (2022).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Media Coverage

Ka'nhehsí:io Deer. "Algonquin artist uses beadwork and found objects to explore stories of resilience." *CBC News*, December 17, 2018.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/jobena-petonoquot-solo-exhibit-montreal-1.4949079?msclkid=0055a553a61a11ec999f43fe19ee6ad6>.

Sylvia J. Dreaver. "Jobena Petonoquot: Artist Continues Family History of Rebellion." *Galleries West*, June 13, 2022.

<https://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/jobena-petonoquot/>.

"Jobena Petonoquot." *Art Souterrain*, 2022.

<https://www.festival2022.artsouterrain.com/en/artistes/petonoquot-jobena/>.

"Jobena Petonoquot: Rebellion of my Ancestors." *Warren G. Flowers Art Gallery*, Dawson College, September 19, 2019. <https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/art-gallery/exhibitions/jobena-petonoquot-rebellion-of-my-ancestors/?msclkid=005556c7a61a11ec953d908526e185a0>.

Resources and Research

Olivier Dezutter, Naomi Fontaine et Jean-François Létourneau, dirs. *Tracer un chemin, Meshkanatsheu : écrits des Premiers Peuples*. Wendake : Éditions Hannenorak, 2017.

Gord Hill. *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2021. Available for sale in the OAG Shop.

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine. *Blueberries and Apricots*. Toronto: Mawenzi House Publishers Ltd., 2018.

Nyla Matuk, ed. *Resisting Canada: An Anthology of New Poetry*. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2019.

Drew Hayden Taylor, ed. *Me Funny*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005.

Exhibition at the Ottawa Art Gallery

March 26 - August 14, 2022

Curated by Lori Beavis and Rebecca Basciano

English Editing: Sheila Singhal

French Translation: Louise Saint-André

Algonquin Translation: Mariette Buckshott

Design: Phillip Lizotte and Sophie Nakashima

Technical Coordination and Installation: Jennifer Gilliland,
Dan Austin, Peter Shmelzer, Mark Garland, Rob Keefe

This exhibition was realized with the support of the City of Ottawa, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Publication Design and Coordination: Etta Gerrits

Photos: All photos in the catalogue are by Rémi Thériault except the images of *My Grandfather Trapped the Rabbit* on page 3, *Resilient Repugnance: Buried Dress* on page 10, and *Ode to My Grandfather* on page 15.

Front cover: Jobena Petonoquot, *Bringer of Death*, 2018

© Ottawa Art Gallery, Jobena Petonoquot, and the Authors, 2022. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-894906-65-4

Ottawa Art Gallery | oaggao.ca

OAG
GAO