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<https://www.laurademers.com/she-falls-for-ages>

Indigenous Futures: Skawennati's *She Falls for Ages*

In an ethereal city called Sky World, geological, solar, and wind powers have been fully mastered for the purpose of running an ecological metropolis. Agglomerations of pod-like structures – the domiciles of the Sky People – shape the urban landscape of this glowing, atmospheric, rainbow-tinted land. At its heart thrives the Celestial Tree, which has brought light and life to the Sky People for thousands of years, and which must be nourished and protected with utmost care. When the Celestial Tree is one day deracinated and Sky World compromised, Ancient Flower, the protagonist of the tale, takes it upon herself to plunge into the void of the cyberspace's artificial azure and towards the earth, carrying seeds in the hopes of generating life in this new, unknown dimension. She plummets, her dress billowing between her legs, and lands on the wings of a migratory bird. Then, on a lazy sea turtle's back, she deposits her seeds into a mound of earth brought by an otter. From it, sunflowers grow, as does the land that expands into the shape of the continent we currently occupy – Turtle Island.

Skawennati, a Montreal-based Mohawk media artist, presents a new piece titled *She Falls for Ages* (2017) at Vtape gallery and research centre. Filmed live on [AbTeC Island](#) – short for *Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace* – which was constructed on the virtual platform *Second Life*, this work recounts the oldest known version of a Haudenosaunee creation tale.

Not unlike artists and writers of Afrofuturism, members of the Indigenous Futurism movement present alternative histories and projections into the future, often finding inspiration in the genre of science fiction. Responding to the critical lack of representation of indigenous identities in digital media, and their essential absence from discourses on futurity – defined by Jean-Paul Martinon as that which “constitutes the *present space* of the future” (Martinon, xi) – Skawennati fabricates a place of convergence for myriad timelines.

Skawennati complicates canonized sequences of events with *She Falls for Ages*. We are encouraged to reconsider Turtle Island as a site that remains “under construction” – just like AbTeC. The narrator's opening line, “Once upon a time...”, is followed by an immediate and unexpected shift to the present tense, rather uncharacteristic of orally transmitted legends. This jarring effect emphasizes the artist's requisition of an active voice in the retelling of her nation's ongoing story.

Equally as striking are the clashing visual tropes used to collapse past and future; characters, many of which possess telepathic powers, experience premonitory visions in hazy black and white – a cinematic trope typically associated with a return to a distant past or memory. In a 1996 article titled *Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace*, Loretta Todd, a Métis Cree writer, film director, and activist, mentions that the collapsing and flattening of time and space which takes place in the virtual embodies certain indigenous nations' belief that “the past is in the future, that the future is knowable.” “Prophetic belief and skill aside,” Todd says, “there is a relationship to time and space that is not restricted to the moment at hand” (Todd, 186). More than a decade after the publication of this text, Skawennati continues to harness the potential of cyberspace and the internet as a medium to mirror, project, and stretch time in multiple directions.

In other pieces, Skawennati throws herself into the virtual world by inhabiting AbTeC Island as an avatar, and by welcoming viewers into this thriving technological ecosystem. The smooth digital matrix of AbTeC is the territory – quite literally – upon which Skawennati's envisioned indigenous futures are made real. Existing in a place somewhat safeguarded from corporations and colonialism, this simulation is described as a peaceful locale where European notions of ownership, private property, and false measures of “civilization” have yet to be clearly depicted. Consequently, this virtual world is more receptive to fluid conceptions of territory, place, and coexistence. Todd reminds us that even in cyberspace, the [colonial, imperial, and patriarchal] appetite could well consume ‘the native’, and it has already begun” (Todd, 184). While it is presumptuous to assume that the cyberspace won't eventually duplicate the world as it currently stands, there is hope for AbTeC. In addition to serving as a backdrop for Skawennati's [machinima](#) productions, AbTeC serves multiple social purposes. Conceptualized as the headquarters of a resource center promoting current and future indigenous causes, AbTeC also hosts educational workshops, houses archives, and fosters an inclusive community through new digital technologies. The island is far from an unattainable utopia, for its social project is very much rooted in reality.

Jean-Paul Martinon. *On Futurity; Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York; 2007.

Loretta Todd. “Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace”, *Immersed in Technology*. MIT Press, Cambridge; 1996. 179-194.