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SOUTHWEST GLASS ARTISTS
CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ART BIENNIAL
VIRTUAL INDIAN MARKET WINNERS
ANCIENT TEOTIHUACÁN

BILL GLASS JR.
JEAN LAMARR
SHELLEY NIRO
VIRGIL ORTIZ

center at IAIA that focuses on the advancement of contemporary Native arts and culture, including not only the care of collections and records but also support for training via internships, fellowships, research, and guidance in Indigenous-centered methodologies.¹

Mithlo also addresses Native arts scholars' reliance on interviews for publications and a lack of research engagement with existing literature and archives. She urges scholars to cross-reference interviews with archival material and secondary sources to ensure accuracies while becoming familiar with the field's prior discourse. This process, in tandem with reaching out to tribal nations and Native arts communities, provides a method for academics and curators to deepen their education, enact integrity, and work respectfully in their decisions to focus on particular artists. Thus, Mithlo calls for Native arts exhibitions to center Native knowledge and community relations to uphold accountability. In this vein, she names Jimmie Durham's career-long, ethnic fraud as an ongoing violation of tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Indigenous philosophies of knowledge and community building take center stage in Mithlo's discussions of the local to global dynamics at the Venice Biennale. Reflecting on the series of Native arts events she co-curated there via the Indigenous Arts Action Alliance collective between 1999 and 2017, Mithlo explains how these collateral sites relied on support from Italian hosts who provided exhibition spaces. She identifies these projects as experimental—a quality offering the most possibilities for advancement of Native arts. Mithlo also recommends a framework for collaborative, Native arts projects, *Indigenous Cultural Protocols and the Arts* (Australia Council for the Arts, 2006), with principles of respect; Indigenous control; communication, consultation, and consent; and interpretation, integrity, and authenticity.

Let's keep reaching, and as Mithlo writes, "do the work."

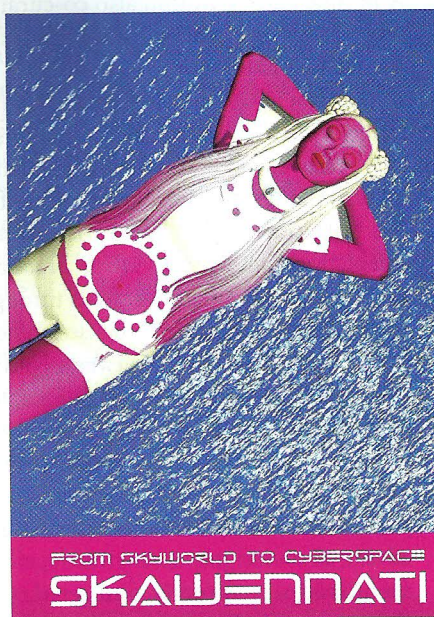
—Michelle J. Lanteri

1. Eric Davis, "Institute of American Indian Arts Receives Grant for New Research Center," *Tribal College Journal* (January 28, 2019), web.

Skawennati: From Skyworld to Cyberspace

Matthew Ryan Smith

McIntosh Gallery,
Western University, 2019



YOU CAN JUDGE THE BOOK *From Skyworld to Cyberspace: Skawennati* by its cover. With a fuchsia, computer-generated woman floating in a sea of blue, the cover's acid-bright colors and futuristic font are high tech, vibrant, and contemplative. Both catalogue and exhibition underscore how Mohawk artist Skawennati successfully marries innovative media with ancestral narratives. All of her work in the show, including the video, personal attire, and drawings, demonstrate that new techniques, new media, and new styles are significant to Indigenous arts.

Published in English and French, this catalogue provides background and commentary to Skawennati's solo exhibition, which ran from March 21 to April 27, 2019, at McIntosh Gallery, Western University in London, Ontario, before traveling to the University of Waterloo Art Gallery in Waterloo, Ontario, from September 12 to October 26, 2019. Guest curator Matthew Ryan Smith initiated the

exhibition during his tenure as curator-in-residence at McIntosh Gallery in 2018. The catalogue features critical essays by Smith and emerging scholars Wahsontio Cross (Mohawk), Maize Longboat (Mohawk), and McIntosh Gallery curator Helen Gregory.

This show is not a retrospective but a deep dive into a few of her projects. Born in Kahnawà:ke Mohawk territory and a member of the Turtle clan, Skawennati is best known for her machinima videos. She also leads many projects, including Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures, to open the virtual world to Indigenous youth. These organizations hosted Skins Workshops on Aboriginal Storytelling and Digital Media to teach programmers and designers to include Indigenous clothing and features in the online virtual world *Second Life*. Skawennati shares her goals in the catalogue: "I fear that if Indigenous people cannot envision ourselves in The Future, we will not be there. We need to visualize ourselves as full participants in the multi-mediatised world of today and tomorrow to help ourselves become active agents in the shaping of new mediums and new societies."

The catalogue captures many facets of Skawennati's work: life-sized images of the artist's avatar, the artist dressed as her avatar, corn husk dolls, and Barbies (the artist's favorite toy from childhood) in miniature versions of the outfit, and movie stills from the machinima films (movies made in *Second Life*). The gallery screened her latest videos, including *She Falls for Ages* (2017), a retelling of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story in which the heroine Otsitsakaion (Ancient Flower) leaves her cosmic home, Skyworld, and founds Turtle Island. The show includes elements of her process, including storyboard drawings, character sketches, and important parts of the mise-en-scène.

In his article, "Other Places, Outer Spaces," Matthew Ryan Smith describes his goal for the show: to highlight how new technologies allow for new aesthetics and new approaches to storytelling. He

notes, “Skawennati’s work attempts to visualize not only what the future might look like, but also how Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) communities might position themselves within it.” Smith finds the areas where scientific discoveries about time and space overlap with Haudenosaunee cultural values.

Wahsontio Cross contributed the essay “The Power of Creation” to the catalogue. An artist, curator, and doctoral candidate in cultural mediations at Carleton University in Ottawa, Cross underscores the idea that using the images and technology from science fiction to tell ancestral stories is not a contradiction but a continuation. She notes that Skawennati’s narrative art follows Haudenosaunee protocols of “circular storytelling, a way of making the ideas in the story relevant to the viewer by repetition and making connections to the present.” For Cross, Skawennati’s doll making is integral to Haudenosaunee cultural expression, not only as children’s toys but also “for medicinal and spiritual purposes.”

“I fear that if Indigenous people cannot envision ourselves in The Future, we will not be there.”

The article “Facelights, Screen Capture, Action!” by Maize Longboat highlights the machinima process. Longboat, a master’s degree candidate at Concordia University in Montreal and participant in a Skins Workshop, offers insights into the special challenges of filming entirely online, which combines technical knowledge with dexterity. In machinima, props might suddenly disappear or pixelate, and a character might need an invisible face light to retain details. He discusses the difficulties in creating the Tree of Life for *She Falls for Ages*. Each blossom had to be added individually so the tree would look lifelike. Longboat is enthusiastic about the benefits this technology offers emerging Indigenous filmmakers.

In “The Adventures of an Avatar and Her Real Girl,” Helen Gregory considers how Skawennati’s work plays with science fiction. With a doctoral degree in art and visual culture from Western University and an artist herself, Gregory states the works in the show express the potentials in drawing from customary storytelling practices “with digital media as a way to pre-record a future history.” She also explores the role of avatars in both the virtual and the physical world.

This bright, informative catalogue offers a vision of the show to those who cannot visit it and a deeper understanding for those who have. One small issue: the catalogue offers no information about the writers. Short biographies would have been helpful to understand their perspectives, plus it would have stressed the depth of knowledge and expertise present in this project. Like its bright, colorful cover, the catalogue reflects the vibrant exhibition.

—Suzanne Newman Fricke, PhD

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