



Kent Monkman - Clip 4

Christianity, Aboriginal culture and Cree syllabics

The first time that I decided that this was the body of work that I wanted to pursue I think happened with some research that I was doing with some art books. The previous body of work that I had done dealt with similar themes which were the impact of colonization and Christianity on aboriginal people and I was using Cree syllabics as a motif I guess of examining the impact of Christianity, because the translation of the Bible and the Christian hymns into the Cree language was done by an Anglican Missionary in the 19th century. And so just the very existence of this form of writing credited to this Anglican missionary, this impact of the church on aboriginal people, that this written form of the language was developed. So from that body of work with that sort of theme in mind, I started to think . I had these human figures grappling sort of beneath the layers of syllabics and they were quite sensual, sort of erotic figures of bodies wrestling, so I was playing with the idea of how through this intersection of culture through Christianity, you know, meeting aboriginal cultures, it's often...a space that can be one of conflict and one of consent, and I think it's very easily, sometimes too easily polarized or set up, that you know Christianity has had profoundly negative influence on aboriginal people, and so it was about opening this dialogue and saying well there's been many different ways that Christianity has

impacted aboriginal people and through that investigation with that Cree text and the Christian hymns that I was translating onto the paintings, this idea of the impact on sexuality came through. At the tail end of that series I started to imagine what these figures might look like set in a landscape and it really came as a sort of, I guess a purely logical extension of that work. I was just curious to learn more about who those figures were more specifically that I was dealing with, there was a bit of ambiguity in the figures. They were sexless, they were ageless, they were race - less in a way. They were just these bodies grappling beneath the syllabics and so I realized that I was really dealing with the sexuality of aboriginal people and the impact of Christianity. I had to deal with it more directly and that's when I started to investigate more specifically about who those bodies, you know, who were these bodies and that's where it sort of led into the landscape and then once I situated these bodies in the landscape I realized that one had to be an Indian and one had to be a cowboy because I was dealing with homosexuality as a form of sexuality that is essentially taboo in Christianity and that was one of the things that I'd been dealing with in that series with the Cree syllabics was how two spirited sexuality became taboo and forbidden, you know, through contact with the Christian church.

