

Redefining aboriginal art

BY JUANITA BAWAGAN

It took 30 years for KC Adams to come out of the closet – the aboriginal closet that is.

Adams is an aboriginal multimedia artist but she said she didn't describe herself as one until 2001. She had been creating a Cyborg series of all-white installations that highlight the co-existence of humans and technology.

"I realized they were a reflection of my own confusion," she said describing her conflicting identity with her Scottish-Métis background.

"Just because you weren't raised aboriginal doesn't make you any less aboriginal than anyone else," she said to the crowd of over 200 people at the New Sun Conference March 3 at Carleton.

Adam's "hybrid" identity is one of the ways artists addressed the rigid ideas aboriginal and non-aboriginal people have about their culture and identity. This all plays into the conference's theme of "reconfiguring realities."

More than changing who aboriginal people are, New Sun Conference chair and Carleton Canadian studies professor Allan Ryan said the conference shines a light on the success stories often lost in the "gritty" portrayals of aboriginals.



KC Adams is a Scottish-aboriginal multimedia artist. || PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES PARK

"That's the norm," he said. "There are a lot of positive stories out there and they're expressed through art."

Hip-hop performances, film screenings and speeches from leading aboriginal artists packed the schedule for the sold-out conference.

Symphony conductor John Kim Bell said people need to shift the aboriginal narrative from one of suffering to one of success. To reconfigure the aboriginal reality, he founded the Aboriginal Achievement Awards.

He said he had similar experiences to Adams, being boxed as "assimilated" because he was classically trained. Whether it's new media or classical art, people have to stop confining what is aboriginal art to specific forms, he said.

The conference has changed venues, speakers and themes over the years but Ryan said the spirit of the conference is the same.

"In a sense it's the same thing," he said. "It's looking at who is doing things on the edge and pushing boundaries." □

Charlottesville, March 8-14, 2012.