

Cultural Transfers 2018-2019

Curatorial Judgment:

Photographic Representations of Indigeneity in the Context of Difficult Pasts

Friday, March 2, 2019

Trina Cooper-Bolam (Cultural Mediations PhD Candidate)

Carol Payne (Art History Associate Professor)

How might photographic exhibitions of works *of* and *by* Indigenous Peoples offer spaces for Indigenous articulation and historical recovery even as they remain entangled sites of settler-Indigenous negotiation? What are the ethical concerns that emerge during the use and reproduction of photography in public history exhibitions? We take these questions as points of departure for a dual presentation that aims to work through questions of curatorial ethics and praxis in terms of the photographic representation of Indigeneity.

Discussing *Reclaiming Shingwauk Hall*, a Survivor-driven reclamation project that seeks to transform the former Shingwauk Indian Residential School into a museum, Trina will tackle issues of ethical photographic representation and reproduction in the context of difficult and fallowed histories. Working at the behest of the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association and the Shingwauk Indian Residential School Centre, Trina is a curator and designer of the museum's exhibits. She endeavours to make visible the stories and experiences of living Survivors together with the stories of those who cannot speak for themselves, the children of the school's industrial period, 1874-1934. Expanding on Anthony Shelton's theorization of 'praxiological museology' and differentiating it from 'institutional critique' with which it is often conflated, Trina will discuss ethical curatorial and design strategies that aim toward historical recovery and justice, and, arguing against the canon, she will consider the potential for the retention of auratic qualities in photographic reproduction. Through this process, she will introduce for discussion the uneasy but inevitable elisions of the authentic and aesthetic, which permeate museal production.

Carol will discuss the early stages of developing a curatorial strategy for an exhibition of photography shot by Joseph Idlout (?-1968), an Inuk hunter based around *Mittimatalik* (Pond Inlet) and *Qausuittuq* (Resolute) in Nunavut. Idlout was likely the most extensively photographed and filmed Inuk of his time. Appearing in widely circulated documentary films and in hundreds of photographs, he became the face of Inuit culture for southern Canadians during the 1950s and after. But Idlout was also a photographer himself, shooting about 300 negatives between 1951 and 1958. Now in the collection of the Nunavut Archives, these photographs are historically and culturally significant statements of Inuit life from an Inuk perspective during a period of traumatic change and enforced assimilation for Inuit in the *Qikiqtaaluk* region. Taking as a point of departure Heather Igloliorte's assertion that "productive work can be done by bringing images back to the communities in which they were made," this exhibition is being undertaken with Idlout's descendants and community members

in *Mittimatalik* (Pond Inlet) and *Qausuittuq* (Resolute). Carol will introduce Idlout's photographs within the broader context of racialized visibility during the 1950s in the Qikiqtaaluk region and discuss potential strategies for their re-presentation.

Our models for these discussions of curatorial strategies are the groundbreaking work of Onondaga artist-curator Jeff Thomas and Inuk Art Historian Heather Igloliorte as well as the volume *Curating Difficult Knowledges* (co-edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson).

By presenting material in its early stages or in-progress, we welcome open discussion and debate.