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Editorial

Considering the history of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, the idea of ‘literary activism’ in Native communities has and continues to encompass survival politics as well as literary aesthetics. From the earliest colonial encounters, Native Americans employed a full range of arts from song to story, beading to hide-painting to embody culture and defend a way of life. All of these — ledger art, songs of warfare, even sermons — became artistic activism, acts of what Gerald Vizenor calls survivance — tools of both survival and resistance.

The works included in this issue arise out of an awareness of the historical settler colonial ‘word wars’, but they proceed as well from a twenty-first century understanding of the trans-indigenous, the global, the digital, and the capitalistic underpinning of contemporary societies. Therefore, they become palimpsestic works, layered with complex allusions. At times the works arise from an awareness of imminent danger — not to Native nations alone, but to the very planet itself. Pieces in this volume attend to global environmental concerns, justice issues as well as location-specific or tribal nation-specific political disputes. Though the balance may shift in these literary exposes between artistic and political concerns, most proceed from a commitment to tribal continuance.

This issue illustrates that indigenous activism is proactive, not simply reactive. It is grounded in the firm belief in our obligation to past and future communities, impressing on individuals a responsibility to the collective. That sense of obligation,

encapsulated in the notion of survivance is implicit in Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Scott Henderson's graphic piece 'Path to Reconciliation'. While, as David Stirrup's review essay explores, many Indigenous scholars question the liberal state framework of the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Sinclair and Henderson's story re-situates an apparent stand-off between First Nations and settlers concerning water protection, made prominent in Canada's Bill C-45 that threatens most of Canada's waterways. The piece's simple, but visually compelling reminder of the relationship between the land, the water, and *all* of Canada's people proposes a starting point in that mutual recognition for both present and future Indigenous-settler relationships.

The piece, representing indigenous protest, also provides a backdrop to Jessica Horton's discussion of visual art since the activism of the late 1960s. Horton shows how the visual arts furnished a path into understanding—and decolonising—an aspect of history that challenges the hegemonic narratives of the settler state. The controversy surrounding the cover artist, Jimmie Durham, whose self-identification as Cherokee has repeatedly been questioned by enrolled members of the Cherokee Nation, complicates any account of Native artistic activism. Durham, who is un-enrolled, finds himself at odds with the Native American Arts and Crafts Act (1990), which prevents him and others like him from claiming to be 'Native' artists. Whatever the truth of his claims, Durham has long been an outspoken advocate on Indigenous issues, and his art emerges boldly from his activism.

Straddling identities has taken a less prominent, but still visible, role in the poetry and prose of Ralph Salisbury, the Cherokee-Irish writer interviewed by James Mackay. Salisbury, a veteran of World War II, has established a long, distinguished career working as a 'questing, mixed-race, working-class individual in a violent

world'. The violence of war — obliquely instigated his poetry career; his poetry, in turn, seeks to heal, to turn back the traumatic impacts of the violence. Maggie Bowers's essay on Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House* and Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* draws attention to the close correlation between colonisation itself and violence against women, proposing the need for further sovereignty to counter such violence.

Examining other effects of colonisation, the works of Jill Doerfler, Kimberly Blaeser, and Margaret Noodin each engage themselves with sovereignty and Anishinaabe-specific issues. Doerfler and Blaeser centre first on White Earth Reservation's ongoing disputes over a new constitution, tribal council jurisdiction, and what constitutes citizenship — issues such as the legal and cultural implications of citizenship based on blood quantum. Doerfler summarises the historical and legal stakes in a non-fiction essay; Blaeser playfully teases out familial, cultural, and tribal implications in a story featuring Native youth. Meanwhile, Noodin addresses Anishinaabe survivance as it is tied to language — not just language preservation, but language revitalisation and performance. The pieces of each of these Anishinaabe writers purposefully or by implication project themselves into the larger arena of Indigenous concerns around tribal governance, citizenship, Indigenous language revitalisation in the twenty-first century. Each of these writers, also powerful scholars, have produced vital work on the academic side of their advocacy as well; LeAnne Howe's reflection on the Native American Literature Symposium, explores just such interconnections between scholarship, arts, and activism, and the urgency of Indigenous-centred work in the revaluation of hegemonic narratives.

This broader perspective reminds us of the necessity of historical revision and renewal in the production of strategies for the future. Such strategies bring the vital

presence of Native American people into the histories that are retold, embedding in the telling implications for contemporary listeners. Craig Santos Perez casts his attention back to a re-visioning of history — in this instance to World War Two and the bombing of his home island of Guam. He simultaneously celebrates powerful legacies of Chamorro language and traditional teachings as survivance tools of present generations. Likewise, the poetry of Inupiaq writer Joan Kane shares Perez's preoccupation with voicing the complex connections between memory, land, and ecological destruction. Her enigmatic poetry builds both tension and intimacy through imagery of the ice-turned-watery eco-system.

In Gordon Henry's essay, Gerald Vizenor's writing in *Summer in the Spring*, drawing upon archival artefacts, comes under scrutiny as Henry interrogates the palimpsestic rewriting of pictographic art and oral traditions, focusing upon the politics of revision and appropriation that are negotiated in such work.

Heid Erdrich, another Anishinaabe literary activist, creates poetry of personal and communal renewal. Her melodic style slides between English and Anishnaabemowin invoking a nearly spiritual register; here specifically her poems employ myth with lush natural images of growth and cultivation to suggest a timeless flourishing. The overlap of the personal and communal is given a more playful and mundane rendering in Eric Gansworth's short fiction. Setting his Native coming-of-age story among reservation homes, Bible study classrooms, late night horror movies and a backing track of The Beatles, Gansworth shines a critical light on the subtle propaganda of American society. Like Erdrich and Gansworth, Akwesasne Mowhawk poet James Stevens similarly engages with layers of story, image, and language to reconfigure contemporary understandings. His sensuous metaphorical poems are inspired by *Lotería* cards (used to play a kind of Mexican bingo). Steven's poetic conjuring

mixes languages and registers to invest his work with a unique and powerful transcultural context.

The many visions attended to by writers in this issue, draw our attention to the complex politics of indigenous knowledge. These contemporary embodiments of literary activism may more self-consciously attend to form and aesthetics, but none could proceed with more urgency or determination to impact outcome than the early literary negotiations whose high stakes were homeland, livelihood, genocide, and deicide. Working always within the shadowy awareness of those histories, Indigenous writers today choose to re-member those legacies, to build upon them as they face ever new manifestations of the tired rhetorics of manifest destiny.

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