



Peace Liard Regional Arts Council

Emergence
Public Art Sculpture





Emergence

In recognition of Canada's 150th Anniversary of Confederation, the 75th Anniversary of the Alaska Highway, and 118 years of the Treaty 8 Agreement, a Caterpillar Trencher was donated by Roger and Christina Gregoire and transformed into a public art sculpture. *Emergence* seeks to reflect the history of the Peace-Liard's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and to emblemize a community moving together toward a deeper understanding of both. The unveiling of the sculpture took place August 11, 2017.



(photo credit: Donna Kane)



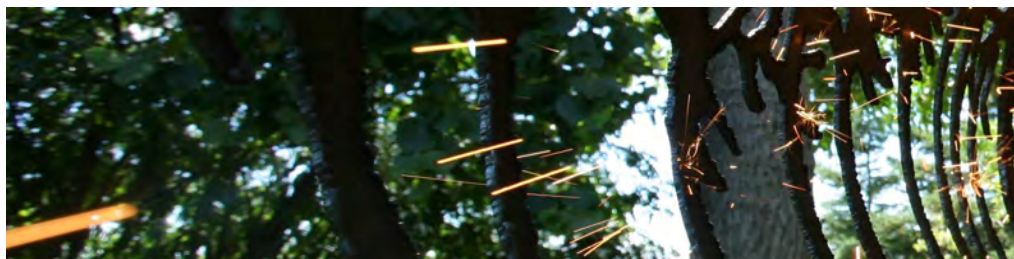
Advisor to Emergence

Brian Jungen was born in Fort St. John, BC and raised in the Peace Country with Swiss and Dane-zaa ancestry. He lives and works in the North Okanagan and has shown nationally and internationally in major solo and group exhibitions including the Montreal Biennale, Documenta 13 and the Sydney Biennial. Solo exhibitions include Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; Casey Kaplan, New York; Hanover Kunstverein; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC; Le Frac des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou; Museum Villa Stuck, Munich; Tate Modern, London; Vancouver Art Gallery; and New Museum, New York.

Brian served as Advisor to the project, providing guidance and insight into the overall design.



Brian Jungen (photo credit: Melanie Turcotte)



Lead Artists for Emergence

Adrienne Greyeyes is a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation, part of Treaty 8 territory, and is a graduate of the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Adrienne currently works as Cultural Connections Manager for Nenan Dane-zaa Deh Zona Family Services Society, an organization in Fort St. John dedicated to strengthening healthy families and facilitating change by recognizing the important and significant traditional and cultural foundations unique to the diverse peoples of Treaty 8. She practices traditional as well as contemporary bead work which has been exhibited nationally, and, in 2011, she co-curated the Grand Entry, Emily Carr University of Art and Design's Aboriginal Student Art Exhibition.



Adrienne Greyeyes (photo credit: Melanie Turcotte)



Adrienne carried out the transformation of the trencher's engine:

“The Alaska Highway brought dark times to the Indigenous peoples along its path. The design that covers the engine reflects this story together with the eventual emergence from that period when Indigenous peoples began to reclaim their home territories. With the highway came visitors who admired the beauty of beadwork created by Indigenous artists and created opportunities to share their work.

The process of using beadwork to encase the engine of the trencher, the heart of the machine that tore its way through the territory, reflects the role that Indigenous peoples should play in decisions made in turtle island. The work combines traditional beading techniques with new materials, exploring the ways in which cultural practices have influenced the contemporary art practices of Indigenous artists. This work is also created to acknowledge and honour all of our Indigenous beaders who are committed to maintaining traditional practices and carving a space for ourselves within the contemporary art world.”



Lead Artists (Cont'd)

Emilie Mattson lives and works in Rolla, BC. She has farmed for 45 years and developed her own visual language using materials at hand. Her three-dimensional works are comprised of fired clay, leather and found farm materials such as scrap metal, cow placenta, glass, and scrap wood from old buildings. Her work has been included in exhibitions in Western Canada.



Emilie Mattson (photo credit: Melanie Turcotte)

Emilie carried out the transformation of the two fuel tanks using cut tanks and bronzed sculptures:

"I liked the shape of the fuel tanks. I could see them being cut to look like a tunnel of black spruce; the shape also reminded



me of historical dioramas and this informed what I created inside the tanks—early visitors to the region. Today what guides us up the highway are sign posts and visitor information centres, but before the highway, early travellers would have been guided by Indigenous people who lived in the area and knew the trails well. I appreciated the irony of using fuel tanks to depict forms of travel before our dependence on fossil fuels. Fossils have been used to form the trail that the horse and rider are travelling on as a foreshadowing of the highway to come.”

The Bronze Sculptures



Of the two bronze sculptures created by Emilie Mattson for this public art piece, one is housed inside the modified fuel tank of the sculpture, and the other is displayed at the Fort Nelson Visitor Information Centre 455 km (283 miles) apart. Visit both and you will receive an Alaska Highway gift. Enquire at either site for details.



Lead Artists (Cont'd)

Karl Mattson lives and works outside of Rolla, BC. He was raised as a fifth-generation farmer and is a multi-media artist and activist. His sculptural and photographic work often relies on scavenging materials from his farm and community, an area being enveloped by the oil and gas industry. His work often protests the environmental issues that plague his community, and his work has been included in exhibitions in Western Canada.



Karl Mattson (photo credit: Melanie Turcotte)



Karl served as Project Manager for *Emergence* and carried out the transformation of the radiator:

“If you think of the machine as a living thing, then the radiator is part of the trencher’s breath, pulling air through itself with the help of the engine. Without the radiator, the engine dies. Without the engine, the radiator has no use. The sandstone rock suspended in the iron-framed hole interrupts the steady pattern of air through its fins. Around the rock, you can see the engine, the heart of the beast. Bronzed deer and elk antlers have been intertwined with steel rod and old pitchfork tines in a latched embrace to the radiator. The trencher was created from the earth to re-create. Like the design of the garden around the piece, the antlers and stone are symbols of raw nature. The sculpture attempts to halt the machine and have it acknowledge its slow breakdown. The earth will take back its ore.”



Contributing Artists

Kristen Auger was born and raised in Fort St. John, BC. She is a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation located in Northern Alberta, which is part of the Treaty 8 territory. She has a Bachelor of Arts (Indian Art) from First Nations University in Regina, Saskatchewan. In 2017, Kristen was one of 150 Indigenous Canadian artists honored with the Hnyatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Indigenous Art Award to “fuel the creation of new artistic works and leave a lasting cultural legacy.”



Detail of Battery Box (photo credit: Donna Kane)



Cut into the battery box of the trencher, Kristen describes her design as follows:

“The moose is used to represent my nêhiyaw (Cree) culture and family. Written in Cree syllabics is the word, niwâhkômâkanak. This word means, "my relatives" in the Cree language. This is to illustrate the interconnectedness of everything in creation. The circle represents the highway and its contribution to the divergence of two cultures or worldviews. The arrows running in opposition to each other further highlight the juxtaposition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cosmologies. The inner dark circle symbolizes changes to the territory and personal loss I felt due to growing up in the area and not knowing my Cree culture and identity. I feel this is intertwined with the history of the area. Finally, a larger circle encompassing the two inner circles is to represent the re-convergence of cultures that have had to come together and learn about one another since the construction of the highway.”



Contributing Artists (Cont'd)

David Jacob Harder is an interdisciplinary visual artist/curator born in Quesnel, BC. He earned a BFA in Visual Arts as well as a BA in Social History from Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. David has shown in numerous public exhibitions across Western Canada and the United States. David created the bucket for *Emergence*. important to have trees from the actual Alaska Highway to interwoven into the piece by planting them in the bucket.

“My work focuses on elements of environmental stewardship and the connection and interaction of people, their creations and the natural world. The composition of plant matter planted within an earth mover or machine is something I've been working on for some time. In a lot of circumstances, these machines are our first contact with the untamed world and henceforth some of our only interactions with pieces of land. The conceptual tone of the work denotes the relationship of manufactured landscapes and our desire to move forward and the integration of our interactions with the animate world. This juxtaposition allows me to further investigate our place in the narrative time, growth, and decay. For the “Emergence” project. I found it important to have trees from the actual Alaska Highway interwoven into the piece by planting them in the bucket.



The work was essentially a bucket that I appropriated from a scrap yard and fabricated. Essentially through giving this discarded bucket new life and keeping it from being dismantled for scrap I saw this as an underpinning principle of the work by allowing the principles of sustainability to live true. This added a further conceptual basis for when I scribed the bucket with both the illustration of the British Columbia coastline and the Alaska Highway starting at Mile Zero. The piece intertwines the connecting lines of British Columbia, the Yukon, and Alaska to frame and catalogue the trencher and mark where a new human/machine/land interaction had been. This work is not to say this is a wrong or right; it is pointing out a fact that it is an act that happened.”



David Jacob Harder (photo credit: Melanie Turcotte)



Contributing Artists (Cont'd)

Helen Knott is a Dane-zaa artist and advocate from the Prophet River First Nations living in Fort St. John, BC. Currently completing a Masters in First Nations Studies at UNBC, Helen was recently named one of 16 Nobel laureate-honoured world activists and one of 150 Indigenous Canadian artists honored with the Hnyatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Indigenous Art Award to “fuel the creation of new artistic works and leave a lasting cultural legacy.” Words from Helen’s poem, “Dear Prime Minister: this poet has something to say to you about Indigenous rights,” have been cut into the boom of the trencher.





Dean Mattson started his artistic life drawing cartoons. He attended Emily Carr University of Art and Design where his cartoons turned to paintings that have sold across North America. Poetry and music are also part of his artistic endeavours. “Am I integral or just turning a useless little wheel / Come see what pretty thing from ugliness grew” is Dean’s contribution to *Emergence*.





Contributing Artists (Cont'd)

Barbara Swail studied art at Emily Carr College of Art and Design. A photographer and multi-media artist, she has, for 20 years, used her art to document the changes and activity in and on the landscape of the Peace River Region. Barbara's contribution is the design for the track component of the sculpture.

“It acknowledges the impact of the highway on the on the ecology, symbolized by the wild animals that have been so profoundly affected by the arrival of men with machines.”



Barbara Swail (photo credit Melanie Turcotte)



Emergence (photo credit: Fit Fast)



The Words

“Emergence” displays several lines of poetry and quotes:

1. Translated from Dune-zaa, the following line expresses the experience of bulldozers coming through Indigenous camps: “Giant kettles are coming through the bush, and they leave a trail where nothing grows.”
2. Cut into the boom of the sculpture are lines from Helen Knott’s poem, “Dear Prime Minister: this poet has something to say to you about Indigenous rights.” The full poem, which was made into a video, can be viewed at <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/831149123630>
3. The following lines were written by Dean Mattson: “Am I integral or just turning a useless little wheel / Come see what pretty thing from ugliness grew.” From these provocative words, many meanings may emerge, depending on the unique perspectives and experiences of those who read them.
4. Cut into the sculpture’s battery box is a design by Kristen Auger. The design includes, in Cree syllabics, the word, niwâhkômâkanak. This word means “my relatives” in the Cree language and illustrates the interconnectedness of everything in creation, including human and other animals.



The Boulder

The boulder that displays the bronze plaque was discovered by Wayne Sawchuk at a boulder cache near Taylor, BC along the Alaska Highway. Weighing 4500 kilograms (10,000 pounds), the rock is significant for the large clawed fossil tracks from the age of dinosaurs, speaking to a time before humans and adding another perspective to the histories of the region. Provided by the Ministry of Transportation and Highways, the boulder was moved to its location at the NAR Park by Caribou Road Services.





Emergence

The artists who created *Emergence* share a geographical place, but their individual histories are unique. Emilie Mattson has farmed in Rolla, BC for 45 years. Her son Karl describes himself as a fifth-generation farmer. Contributing artists Dean Mattson, David Jacob Harder, and Barbara Swail are also of Euro-Canadian descent. Advisor Brian Jungen along with lead artist Adrienne Greyeyes and contributing artists Helen Knott and Kristen Auger, are all members of the Treaty 8 Agreement; some are Dane-zaa, some Cree—Brian Jungen has both Swiss and Dane-zaa ancestry. All these artists have their own story of how they came to be in northeastern BC.

To ensure that every artist had the freedom to express their own perspective, lead artists took on distinct components of the sculpture. The aim was not to coalesce into one idea but to use the Caterpillar Trencher as a shared canvas where artists could express their individual experiences side by side.

Colonialization sought to change the Indigenous people into Euro-Canadians, but its aim to assimilate, to make everyone “the same,” did not succeed. While the damage will be felt for many years, Indigenous cultures, languages, and spirituality remain strong.



In response, *Emergence* celebrates difference. Through showcasing the various histories—those of the pioneer, those who helped construct the Alaska Highway, and those Indigenous groups who have called northeastern BC home long before it was given that name—it is hoped that viewers will come away with a greater appreciation of how difference is an integral part of being alive and is, in fact, the source of our beings.

Temporality also figures in *Emergence*. The vegetation that will eventually obscure much of the sculpture can be seen as both a symbol of repair and of the impermanence of life. Once a trencher used in the building of the Alaska Highway, the machine is now a public art sculpture. In time, its metal will return to the earth where new growth and different ways of perceiving will emerge.

— Donna Kane, Executive Director, PLRAC



Photographs



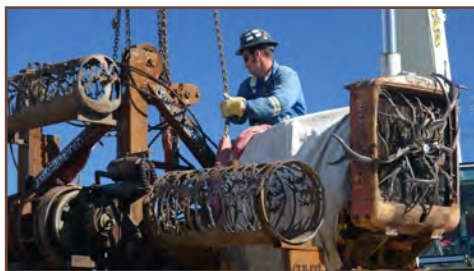
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1. Trencher as canvas at its working site in Rolla (Photo D. Kane)
2. Adrienne Greyeyes, Lead Artist and Brian Jungen, Advisor (Photo: K. Mattson)
3. Emilie Mattson's tanks turned diorama frames (Photo: K. Mattson)
4. Moving to the NAR Park, July 31, 2017 with Brandon Koecher, Rigger, TCL (Photo W. Sawchuk)
5. Placing the trencher, July 31, 2017 by Trans Carrier Ltd. (Photo: K. Fast)
6. Caribou Road Services moving the boulder for the plaque (Photo: K. Fast)
7. City of Dawson Creek Gardeners working on the vegetation component of sculpture (Photo: D. Kane)
8. Detail of Tracks and Words (Photo K. Fast)
9. Detail of sculpture (Photo: K. Fast)
10. Emergence with Snow (Photo: D. Kane)

The PLRAC Acknowledges the Support of

Canada Council for the Arts New Chapter Grant

Government of Canada

City of Dawson Creek

Celebrating BC Communities and their Contributions

Northern Trails Historical Society

The McLean Foundation

Peace River Regional District

Trans Carrier Limited

BC Ministry of Transportation and Highways

Caribou Road Services

Anderson Anodizing

Reg Norman Trucking Ltd.

Ideal Office Solutions



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The PLRAC thanks Brian Jungen and all of the artists who helped create *Emergence*.