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DISRUPTING NARRATIVES OF COLONIZATION—
MUSEUMS AS PEDAGOGICAL SPACES

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DISRUPTING NARRATIVES OF COLONIZATION— MUSEUMS AS PEDAGOGICAL SPACES

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Abstract

Drawing on an autoethnographic approach, we explore the role of museums in contributing to a decolonizing discourse. Through a guided tour of the Alex Janvier exhibition at the Glenbow Museum, a review of additional artifacts associated with the exhibition, and autoethnographic texts, we have come to see the deep potential of public institutions to be sites of disruption and possibility. This exhibition challenged discourses that lift dominant cultural narratives and offered other possibilities for social transformation. In particular, we explore the power of art as a pathway for disrupting personal narratives, which, in turn, has implications for social, political, and cultural narratives.

Résumé

S'inspirant d'une approche ethnographique, nous explorons en quoi les musées contribuent au discours de décolonisation. À l'aide d'une visite guidée de l'exposition d'Alex Janvier au Glenbow Museum, d'un examen d'artéfacts supplémentaires associés à l'exposition et d'une étude de textes auto-ethnographiques, nous constatons le grand potentiel des institutions publiques comme sites de perturbation et de possibilités. Cette exposition a remis en question les discours qui privilégient les discours culturels dominants et a offert d'autres possibilités de transformation sociale. Plus précisément, nous explorons le pouvoir de l'art comme stratégie pour perturber les discours personnels, une réalité ayant plusieurs implications pour les récits sociaux, politiques et culturels.

In May 2018, we saw an advertisement for a major retrospective on the work of Alex Janvier—a modern Indigenous master. The showing was hosted by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, and organized by the National Gallery of Canada. The exhibition included “more than 150 artworks showing the evolution of Janvier’s unique vision and told the story of his experiences, as a boy in residential school, through learning about

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art as a student, to the many years of working as a professional artist putting his work out there for all to see" ("Art Is Life," 2018). With interest piqued, we attended an organized non-formal learning event (Heimlich, 1993), specifically a guided tour, and have committed to follow-up informal learning experiences, described as "the incidental unplanned and unconscious learning that is most prevalent as visitors wander around" (Taylor, 2010, p. 6) in a museum or art gallery. In this article, drawing from Janvier's work as a backdrop, we explore pedagogies and exhibition (museum) practices in response to issues of identity and colonization. We are inspired by Janvier, who passionately proclaimed, "My paintbrush is really my most powerful tool because it is available for my personal empowerment" (Janvier, 2016, p. 6).

In this article, we probe stories being communicated through the pedagogical practices of this particular exhibition and how, as adult learners and adult educators, we experience these stories. As described by Monk (2013), stories told in museums have the power to disrupt our individual narratives and change how we perceive self and the world. We also maintain that herein also lies the power to sustain narratives that need to be disrupted. Subsequently, do practices associated with this exhibition contribute to a decolonizing narrative, and if so, how?

Disrupting Narratives

Narratives of colonization have traditionally encompassed imperialist and assimilative frameworks (Louie, Poitras Pratt, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2017), devaluing and invalidating Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. Transformed frameworks of knowledge and understanding will only emerge when oppressive Eurocentric narratives are disrupted and dismantled to create space—to "[move] beyond the superficial inclusion of Indigenous content" (Louie et al., p. 21). This requires thoughtful and purposeful focus, intention, and engagement, authentic dialogue, and welcoming of other ways of knowing in all ways ethical and integral to Indigenous experiences, methodologies, pedagogies, and practices.

Museums are, indeed, educative spaces with the potential to significantly impact and influence, formally, informally, and incidentally, perspectives and relationships with respect to power, privilege, [in]equities, and social [in]justices germane to Indigenous communities and culture. Not unlike formal, higher-education spaces of learning where, historically, "Western epistemologies have devalued Indigenous ways of knowing as a matter of course" (Louie et al., p. 17), museums have also [re]created history through a particular lens. More pointedly, if museums are dedicated spaces aimed at stimulating and supporting personal reflection, social interaction, and emotional learning (Winstanley, 2014), within these spaces resides immense potential to revisit and disturb long-standing narratives. These narratives refer to historical frameworks designed and organized to convey power relations and legacies predominantly created by non-Indigenous people about Indigenous Peoples. The Janvier exhibition provides evidence that spaces are now opening up to disrupt abiding narratives as a way of correcting historical accounts by making visible buried tensions and stories that deserve to be witnessed and shared.

An Autoethnographic Lens

Through an autoethnographic, storied approach to non-formal and informal learning, we believe that "storytelling is appropriate to the work of a museum for museums are

storytellers” (Bedford, 2001, p. 33). We continue to ponder, however: how are these stories being told?

Autoethnography invites self-reflection and is defined as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Regarding the epistemological underpinnings of autoethnography—how we come to know what we know—

autoethnography intends to draw the reader into the workings of the social context studied thereby enhancing the readers [sic] own understanding and knowledge of the culture studied (connecting the personal to the cultural). The context of the research, the values of the researcher, and the assumptions carried through to the actions being researched, deepen the impact of an autoethnography; thereby allowing others from both inside and outside a culture to become familiar with the characteristics that distinguish that culture (Pitard, 2017, Conclusion section, para. 1)

In autoethnography, “the story is not the focus; rather, [it] is the medium...through the power of story and sharing of experience, stories are a pathway, a lens, through which to better understand the culture of something” (Kawalilak & Groen, 2016, p. 154). Further, we realize that stories, within Indigenous contexts, are ways in which knowledge is shared within the context of relationship (Sefa Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000, p. 27). Sharing our experiences with one another through story, guided by an autoethnographic lens aligned with the culture and context, we were seeking to more deeply understand.

Within the context of our own professional culture and social discourse, we are positioned as lifelong adult learners, impacted and shaped by the narratives we have lived. We are cognizant of our positions of power and privilege as White, educated women who grew up in middle-class families, albeit on a lower rung on the middle-class, socio-economic ladder, benefiting from many supports and availability of resources along the way. In essence, we were part of mainstream, Canadian society—we were not “the Other.” In this way, we realize that our privilege as settlers positioned us as participants in the colonization narrative, relative to our positions of power and privilege.

As adult educators—a vocation we have had the privilege to work and live—we are already involved in disrupting narratives through our work with students and through our mentorship and teaching. Our intentional choice to locate ourselves in this field of scholarship and practice of adult education and adult learning means that we have chosen to actively participate in leaning into and challenging narratives that have traditionally informed our own education and perspectives. As active engagers, not passive observers, we continue to ask, how do we intentionally take up our work within spaces offered to us and in the spaces we create within university settings? More specifically, the university—policies, processes, and protocols—is a colonized landscape that, in spite of proclaimed intentions to embrace diverse ways of knowing and being by becoming more thoughtful and responsive regarding cross/intercultural sensitivities and responsiveness, we continue to struggle to understand. In essence, the struggle to let go of tightly held notions, beliefs, and perspectives continues. We maintain that the path forward is to lean into difficult conversations—to welcome with purpose the uncomfortable and the unfamiliar. Simply, we believe that only in this way will the narratives that have permeated our own storied lives and influenced our understandings and perspectives be disrupted, thereby creating space

for other ways of knowing and being in the world. It is through our work as adult educators and through our own reflective praxis that we aim to contribute to this shift and influence.

Sites of Disruptive Pedagogies

As we reflect on the history, intentions of, and spaces created within museums, we ponder, how permeable are these spaces? How open are museums to welcoming diverse and alternative cultural understandings—to challenging long-standing narratives deeply rooted in the cultural fabric and held perspectives of a particular society? And what are the risks in challenging these narratives by disrupting long-held beliefs that have supported the status quo?

Drawing from our childhood experiences and the stories that museums typically depicted regarding Indigenous Peoples in North America, the "Indian" section was filled with artifacts—tepees, colourful clothing and headdresses, pottery, unsophisticated weapons, and depictions of battles between the colonizer and "the Other." In many ways, like with the "Indian Village" located on the grounds of the Calgary Stampede (a yearly 10-day exhibition and rodeo event), the culture and historical traditions of First Nations and Métis Peoples remain romanticized. What resonates as we reflect on our early experiences is *looking at* people and a culture different from our own, not opening to or leaning into the raw and emotional experiences of Indigenous Peoples, the deep impacts of colonization, and all the associated traumas and tragedies. Our early museum experiences depicted Indigenous Peoples and ways of knowing and being in the world as unsophisticated—we were the saviours, the conquerors, taking up with focus and intention the responsibility to civilize an uncivilized people. This description may be regarded as naïve and unsophisticated. This constitutes our memories, however, and was further reinforced by what we read in textbooks when growing up, by school assignments and educational activities, and through childhood games we engaged in.

Over the years, our formal, informal, and incidental education and life experiences have fostered the ability to differentiate between narratives constructed to support a particular world view and position of privilege from the actual lived stories of trauma and colonization. These are raw and inner stories of those who live, are impacted by, and continue to protest historical narratives, advocating for the unveiling of truths more deeply textured and far more complex than what have traditionally been conveyed in museums. We experienced this turning point when entering the Janvier exhibition at the Glenbow Museum. Indeed, we experienced entering this space with a sense of anticipation *and* caution. We knew that the story about to unfold would be visually narrated by someone who had lived experiences totally foreign to our own. What we stepped into was an unfolding narrative, artistically and emotionally communicated. What we would see and absorb would not be artifacts appropriated by a museum, intended to strategically arrange and convey a preferred and familiar narrative. Rather, we learned that this display was led and coordinated by an Indigenous curator, guided by the voice and artful depiction of the lived story of modern Indigenous master Alex Janvier. With openness, we leaned into and entered this space.

We now turn to the Janvier exhibition held at the Glenbow, and the narrative that is taken up through the portrayal of his paintings and in the learning opportunities, both informal and non-formal, to consider its contribution in the decolonizing discourse.

The Janvier Exhibition

The *Alex Janvier: Modern Indigenous Master* exhibition was on display at the Glenbow Museum from June 16 to September 9, 2018. With the Glenbow being the final stop on an 18-month tour that began in New Brunswick and continued through Ontario, Saskatchewan, and finally Alberta, almost 150,000 people (Klinkenberg, 2018) viewed this exhibition featuring 154 of Janvier's paintings. When asked how the paintings were chosen for the exhibition, curator Greg Hill admitted how challenging it was to choose what to include from such a prolific painter, whose career as an artist spans more than 65 years. Ultimately, after spending time with Janvier and learning what he wanted, it became apparent what was required: "The exhibition has to tell the story of Alex, the Dene and Indigenous peoples in Canada." As well, "his paintings tell the story of his experiences, as a boy in residential school, through learning about art as a student, to the many years of working as a professional artist" ("Art Is Life," 2018).

Delving briefly into Janvier's history, he was born in 1935 of Denesuline and Sauteaux descent, and began drawing as a toddler on the reserve in northeastern Alberta, his early childhood home. However, when he was seven, Janvier was taken to Blue Quills Indian Residential School near St. Paul, Alberta, where he stayed for the next 10 years. Recalling this experience, Janvier said, "They removed me from my family as a child, removed my spirituality and tried to remove my language. I would like to say today that they have failed" (Klinkenberg, 2018, p. R6). He continued to paint during his time there, and then, after a brief stint at seminary, Janvier enrolled in art studies in what was then the Alberta Institute of Technology and Art (now referred to as Alberta University of the Arts), becoming one of the first Indigenous students in Canada to earn a degree from an art college (Klinkenberg, 2018, p. R7). Since that time, he has had a career as an artist that spans seven decades. "At one time, as a protest, he signed canvases not with his name, but with his band's treaty number—287—assigned by the government" (Klinkenberg, 2018, p. R7).

Visiting and Revisiting

Critical reflection and engaging in dialogue to make deeper meaning of experiences have been foundational to our scholarship and practice and to the shaping and deepening of our relationship as adult educators and colleagues over the past 15 years. What follows are initial reflections as we prepared for and entered the Janvier exhibition. We chose to use present tense in our first reflection to best communicate our experience. Then, after coming together to further explore and dialogue about our initial reflections, we delved further to prompt a deeper response and understanding. This contributed to the shaping of our second reflections, taken up six months after having experienced the Janvier exhibition.

Reflection 1.

Janet. I do not know what to expect as I comfortably sit in a chair outside the museum waiting for Colleen to join me for our booked tour. Five minutes later, we are gathered as a group to begin our one-hour guided tour of the exhibition. Prior to moving into the space, our tour guide gives us a concise overview of the exhibition and how the paintings were chosen. I feel my trust in this exhibition beginning to increase when I learn that the curator Greg Hill is also Indigenous and that Alex Janvier was greatly involved in choosing the paintings that we are going to see. As I turn the corner, I am swept away by the richness of

the colours and the feeling of movement within these paintings. These are large canvasses, bold and powerful in their message, and, for a short while, the voice of our guide recedes into the background as I absorb my first impression of Janvier's art. The powerful connection that Janvier has with the land is instantly clear.

Probably one of the most powerful moments of this tour occurs when we gather around a painting entitled *Lubicon*, painted in the late 1980s, almost vibrating with the liberal use of red. The guide explains that this painting emerged out of Janvier's anger over the treatment of the Lubicon Lake Nation by the federal government and resource extraction corporations. Part of the Lubicon Lake Nation's protest "called for a boycott of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics and especially the exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, held at the Glenbow Museum and sponsored by Shell Oil, a major corporate offender on Lubicon Land" (Hill, 2016, p. 23). Wow! Here we are within the very space that was a site of protest over 30 years ago. I appreciate the unflinching narrative of the guide as she outlines what transpired here during the 1988 Winter Olympics in this museum space, and feel my trust in her and in this exhibition grow immensely. I begin to more deeply engage in this experience—in what she has to say and what is being communicated to me through Janvier's art—feeling the pain in his own life and in the lives of Indigenous Peoples, but again absorbing his deep affinity for the land.

Colleen. I have always been drawn to spaces where Indigenous artists share stories through their paintings, sculptures, tapestries, poetry, songs, dancing, and other forms of artistic expression. I also enter and experience these spaces with some tension, as these are spaces *not* intended merely to entertain; they are designed and intended to educate. As I anticipate my entry into these spaces, I feel conflicted. I experience an enticing curiosity juxtaposed with an awareness of my need to remain circumspect about any claims I might have to knowing and discerning the lived stories and experiences of Indigenous Peoples. Indeed, in my early school years, I was presented with a narrative of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, a narrative created by those in positions of power; narratives *about* Indigenous Peoples, not *by* Indigenous Peoples. These narratives provided justification—rationales for actions taken in support of a long history of colonization.

My life work over the past many years as a social worker and now as an adult educator and academic compel me to revisit and deconstruct narratives through a more critical lens; narratives that permeated education received as a young girl in a school system where First Nations and Métis children were, in retrospect, glaringly absent. To reconstruct, however, is to rebuild and recreate. Correspondingly, this compels a letting go of tightly held notions, beliefs, and assumptions—some that I don't even know I am holding onto—in order to create spaces for new narratives and understandings to emanate.

As I anticipate and prepare for viewing the Janvier exhibition with Janet, the colour of my skin and my location as a privileged member of Canadian society restore in me feelings of confusion and culpability for transgressions of the past that continue to profoundly impact Indigenous Peoples and communities in the present. Little do I know that this will be so much more than a "viewing"—a profound experience is about to unfold. I feel a deep responsibility to prepare myself, coupled with a wave of humility that calms me. A few steps into this retrospective exhibition, I am caught off guard, stopped in my tracks by the power and breathtaking beauty of Janvier's circle art paintings. These are watercolours on paper, each represented as a circular piece of storied art—"the circle is a metaphor for the cycle of life...the continuum of night and day, of life and death, of new life" (National Gallery of

Canada, 2019, para. 2). This entry to Janvier's work, referred to as "Janvier in the Round," is a powerful prologue of what is yet to come. I am brought to a standstill, rooted in this entryway, hesitant to move on. I simply do not want to leave this space! Little do I know that this is only the inauguration, an authentic welcome to open to all that there is here for me to receive. This is a space that will continue, around every corner, to unfold in ways that will incite pondering, reflection, questioning, re-evaluating, and most of all, listening with humility.

Reflection 2.

Janet. As I review what we each wrote about our visit to the Janvier exhibition, I am left with more than one narrative; one is of profound loss and pain for Indigenous Peoples, while the other is an overarching narrative of possibility and hope. Turning to the first narrative, Janvier was bold in his message of the impact of colonization on him personally and for Indigenous Peoples here in Canada. For example, Janvier's painting *Blood Tears*, completed in 2001, reflects on his experiences in the Blue Quills Indian Residential School, and "on the back is a list that details losses suffered by children at residential schools. It ends with the statement, 'the rest will take their silence to their graves as many have to this' " (Klinkenberg, 2018, p. R7). I am awash in emotions, knowing that I will never understand the trauma he and others experienced at the hands of the settlers. And yet, this painting, among others with a similar message, reaches out to me in a way that words on a page cannot.

Turning to the second narrative of hope and possibility, there were other Janvier paintings in this exhibition that exuded light, energy, and joy; it seemed as if they were ready to jump off the wall! The movement, the colour, and the prominence of the circle in these pieces are still with me, evoking an almost spiritual response. To me, these abstract paintings revealed Janvier's profound love for nature, and I was immediately drawn deeper to explore my own connection with nature. "Nature gives you that opportunity. You walk in the bush and look at leaves and see all sorts of designs in there. As you get close to the water, there is a variation in colour. Anywhere you look at the sky, it looks different" (Klinkenberg, 2018, p. R7). I am left feeling that we are all, settler and Indigenous Peoples, called back into a relationship with nature that we knew and lived. Turning to Janvier, in this relationship, he calls on us in these paintings to see ourselves as landlords of the land in which we are not apart and separate, but where we are all deeply interconnected.

Colleen. I continue to revisit and ponder Janvier's paintings that convey, in all ways compelling and transparent, historical and present-day issues that impact First Nations Peoples and communities. The guide at the museum shared that in 1950, when Janvier was only 15 years of age, he was asked to create a border mural at the Blue Quills Indian Residential School. Other paintings created in that same year—*Our Lady of the Teepee* and *St. Joseph the Carpenter*, to be mounted in the school's chapel (Hill, Dueker, Martin, & Koebel, 2016)—were available for viewing at the Janvier exhibition.

I kept returning to these earlier paintings; the boldness of colour and clean lines of an Indigenous "Our Lady" holding an Indigenous baby Jesus. This painting, in particular, resonated deeply with me as a clarion call to spirituality, connection, family, relationship, love, and community. Reflecting on Janvier's age when he painted this piece, I meditated on all the tensions and torments Janvier must have experienced at the time when living in a

residential school, torn away from his community—his mother, his family, and the land of his ancestors. We were informed by the guide that, after much pushback and controversy, this painting was included in an international Vatican exhibition in Rome, where Janvier was awarded honourable mention.

Undoubtedly, Janvier's paintings created over the past 50-plus years, since his time at Blue Quills Indian Residential School, further impacted me intensely. Janvier's art tells an authoritative story of politics, power inequities, and injustices that have profoundly impacted Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Janvier's retrospective also conveys his development over the years as an artist, taking up new methods and techniques and advancing his artistic abilities and expression.

Nonetheless, I sensed a hopefulness in some of Janvier's later works, as I witnessed paintings that convey connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, where significant steps and connections, still in progress, are being made toward reconciliation. His earlier paintings, however, provided me a more informed and foundational understanding of the disturbing world Janvier experienced as a child and the unfolding years, from then until now, of progress and continuing contentions yet to be mitigated.

Discussion: Museum Spaces and Challenging Discourse

As we walk through the Glenbow Museum, we can be tricked into feeling that we are in a dispassionate and objective space (Clover, Bell, Sanford, & Johnson, 2016). The sounds emanating from rooms are subdued, exuding an authoritative air, as patrons move about and talk in subdued tones. If we do not go deeper and probe what is displayed, we can simply accept that what is before us is a collection of artifacts disseminating knowledge in an interesting but neutral and removed fashion. Yet it is important to realize, as evidenced by our experience with the Janvier exhibition at the Glenbow, that museums and art galleries are powerful spaces of storytelling, with curators and pedagogues working behind the scenes to orchestrate a particular narrative, carefully choosing and combining artifacts, texts, and learning opportunities to reinforce a chosen message.

Indeed, we do not need to go back very far in history to realize that museum spaces only presented stories proffered by the elite through "private collections held by aristocrats and universities" (Grenier, 2010, p. 151). According to Clover et al. (2016), it seemed as if these institutions existed to reinforce the status quo in society, legitimizing certain voices and silencing others. More pointedly, museums and art galleries have been charged with "social exclusion, sanitizing history, determining what counts as knowledge and reinforcing existing power structures" (Kawalilak & Groen, 2016, p. 164). However, as we begin to acknowledge that these spaces are indeed not culturally neutral holdings of artifacts and that they are important places of storytelling, curators and educators within museums are also acknowledging these tensions and are mindfully broadening their outreach, thoughtfully expanding the range of their exhibitions, and considering what message is being conveyed in their displays (Grenier, 2009).

Turning our gaze to the implications for these spaces as sites of learning, adult education scholars (English & Mayo, 2012; Parrish & Taylor, 2010) have identified museums as potential sites of public pedagogy, whereby they could "reimagine themselves as institutions with both the capacity and drive to take up environmental and social justice issues" (Johnson, 2016, p. 181). Again, current reality suggests that opportunities are expanding for the adult learner

to actively engage in their own meaning-making and interpretation (Clover, Sanford, & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010; Grenier, 2009) with intentional and active learning possibilities that also include multimodal approaches. Drawing on these expansive approaches, adult learners are encouraged to move beyond a rational and cognitive understanding to include embodied, affective, relational, and aesthetic ways of learning and knowing (Ellsworth, 2005). In essence, with the increasingly interactive nature of museum and gallery displays, these institutions can serve as dynamic settings for informal and non-formal learning opportunities, under the broader notion of public pedagogy whereby our assumptions about the world are interrupted (Biesta, 2012) and we are invited to [re]consider and [re]image through a new narrative.

As we consider the Janvier exhibition as a space of public pedagogy, particularly drawing on decolonizing pedagogies, we first return to those earlier discourses whereby museums have been implicated with reinforcing a privileged narrative (Bennett, 1995, 2004). In particular, within our Canadian context, a colonial discourse places the settler and discovery narrative in the centre of our history with the British and French as the “founding nations” of Canada. How this colonial narrative is taken up within a museum space was addressed by Sperlich and Brogden (2016) as they considered how a particular set of First Nations artifacts were displayed in a museum in western Canada. They noted that the narrative associated with this display “values settler achievement, minimizes, even negates settler conflict with First Nations peoples, and reinscribes the ‘civilized and civilizing’ mythology of migration as settlement” (p. 14). In addition, it has been revealed that similar tensions existed in an earlier review of the relationship between the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and First Nations Peoples, but that “curatorial attitudes have changed, and new partnerships have been formed to ensure that museum collections are appropriately handled” (Clapperton, 2010). In sum, scholar and museum curator Phillips (2011) suggested that museums are a barometer of public and political ideologies and that we are in the initial stages of challenging settler colonialism in Canada.

Delving further into the role that museums, and in particular the Janvier exhibition, can play as part of a public pedagogy that challenges these colonial stories and works toward decolonization here in Canada, we must first understand what this means. According to Sium, Desai, and Ritskes (2012), decolonization is “a messy, dynamic, and contradictory process with desired outcomes that are diverse and located at multiple sites in multiple forms, represented in Indigenous sovereignty over land and sea, as well as over ideas and epistemologies” (p. 180). Furthermore, decolonization moves beyond apology and reparation and works toward genuine social transformation (Regan, 2010). Again, it must be acknowledged that museums are beginning to realize this and are working toward becoming more inclusive, creating space to challenge these discourses. Indeed, according to Johnson (2016), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified “education of the public as a key to reconciliation with an important role for museums and archives. This is not surprising given the political, ethical, spiritual, ceremonial, emotional, and embodied dimensions of historical remembering in public history institutions” (p. 178). Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that museum curators across Canada wish to engage in this important work of reconciliation and reparation. Jisgang Nika Collison, executive director and curator at the Haida Heritage Centre, and Nicola Levell, associate professor of museum and visual anthropology and an independent curator at the University of British Columbia, believe that in their quest to bring these worlds together, they are engaging in the “the act of

Yahguudangang—To Pay Respect, the establishing of relationships that cannot only help to make things right, but also make a new world that is inclusive of our people and our way of life" (Collison & Levell, 2018, p. 79).

Looking back at our reflections and the intent of the exhibition, it became clear to us that Janvier wanted to convey a message of decolonization through his art. Greg Hill, Audain senior curator of Indigenous art (National Gallery of Canada) and curator of this exhibition, stated that Janvier's paintings convey "what it means to be an Indigenous person in a country, that for a long time, sought only to eradicate a sense of self-identification or connection to one's Indigeneity" ("Art Is Life," 2018). We both deeply engaged with this particular narrative as we reflected on paintings that illuminated the profound pain that Janvier and so many Indigenous Peoples experienced within the residential school system. There was also an underlying thread of protest throughout his work, challenging the colonial narrative that has celebrated settler growth and expansion. For example, as mentioned earlier, several of his paintings were simply signed with his treaty number, and others, such as *Lubicon*, pulled back the curtain on decades of land abuse and expropriation by the federal government in collusion with the corporate sector. "This work is an eloquent and powerful reminder of the inherent contradictions between the sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples and development agenda of corporate Canada" (Hill, 2016, p. 31).

In our opinion, the Janvier exhibition revealed a second narrative, moving beyond seeking apology and reparation to work toward genuine social transformation (Regan, 2010). Both of our reflective narratives took up this additional intent that Janvier wished to communicate: "Viewers connect to the beauty and truth about humanity that comes through the paintings" ("Art Is Life," 2018). Many of Janvier's paintings, beyond this exhibition, celebrate the land and his profound connection with the natural world. He sees himself as "the landlord, in a very real custodial sense...animals, trees and plants are personified and perpetuated in both the spiritual and secular oral traditions of Indigenous communities" (Martin, 2016, p. 27). As a result, while he offers a profoundly disturbing and challenging narrative on the impact of colonization on the environment and on Indigenous communities, he offers a pathway forward wherein we would live in reciprocity with each other and with land.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this exhibition took place within a particular context—the Glenbow Museum—and that we participated in a guided tour, as an example of non-formal learning. The curators and educators could have chosen to gloss over their museum's role in perpetuating a colonizing narrative, with the exhibition *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* displayed during the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, which "glorified and romanticized Aboriginal history while denying contemporary realities" (Martin, 2016, p. 31). A boycott of this display, with many museums refusing to contribute artifacts to it, did have a dramatic impact, with "artists protests, the creation of a Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, and many changes in Eurocentric museum policies and practices" (Martin, 2016, p. 31). As we gathered around *Lubicon*, a painting that was part of the Janvier exhibition, and our guide offered a frank description of it and the events that catalyzed its creation, we were experiencing a profound example of decolonizing pedagogy. Both Janvier, through his art, and our guide, in her narrative, seemed to be standing side by side in communicating this powerful message.

Implications for Practice

The Janvier exhibition at the Glenbow demonstrates the important role of public institutions in contributing to the decolonizing discourse. We are storied beings, and when we spend time in a public setting—be that a museum, an art gallery, a symphony hall, or a theatre—we are searching for the story communicated by the display or performance and the associated educational programs. Up until recently, turning to museums, a particular story was told about the world, one that privileged certain voices and pushed others to the side—women, Indigenous Peoples, and immigrants (Clover & Sanford, 2016, p. 136). And when we consider displays that did highlight Indigenous communities, the majority of those perpetuated a settler narrative, highlighting a Eurocentric narrative of Canada (Sperlich & Brogden, 2016) and their accomplishments in civilizing this nation and Indigenous Peoples.

The Janvier exhibition tells a different story of the Indigenous Peoples in Canada, deeply challenging our assumptions of Canada and history and not only calling us to seek reparation with Indigenous communities, but also inviting us to imagine new possibilities (Biesta, 2012). This is the real work of museums, and it is important for educators and curators to reflect on the stories they wish to tell in these public spaces. As the Truth and Reconciliation report has acknowledged, museums have a critical role in this process, and it is our hope that this exhibition is a signal that more curators and educators in these spaces will play this role in public pedagogy to tell stories that challenge the colonization narrative and engage us in a decolonizing narrative.

As well, it is important to acknowledge that museums are places of creativity and imagination (Clover & Sanford, 2016). Through the alternative pathways of knowing and being that the arts offer us, our current narratives are disrupted and new possibilities emerge. Returning to the profound impact that Janvier's paintings had on both of us, it felt as if we were in a dialogue with Janvier that moved well beyond words. As he communicated incredible beauty, pain, anger, and love in his art, we also felt these emotions and in turn were challenged to disrupt our own narratives and place in this world. "Artists have, of course, a history of responding to the upheavals and changes of their times, interpreting and representing these in visual, poetic, narrative and performative arts" (Clover & Sanford, 2016, p. 138), and in this instance, we realized the powerful role the arts can play in disrupting the narratives of colonization.

Summary

Drawing on an autoethnographic approach, we sought to explore the role of museums in contributing to a decolonizing discourse. Through our guided tour of the Janvier exhibition at the Glenbow Museum, our review of additional artifacts associated with the exhibition (brochures, newspaper articles, and books), and our autoethnographic texts, we have come to see the deep potential of these places to be sites of disruption and possibility. This exhibition challenged discourses that lifted dominant cultural narratives and offered other possibilities for social transformation. In particular, we realized the power of art as a pathway for learning, as we disrupted our own personal narratives and in turn considered the implications for social, political, and cultural narratives. We return to the words of Alex Janvier (2016) to lift up the power of his art and this particular exhibition in contributing to the public pedagogy of decolonization:

I would like this show to encourage our Native people to be proud again and to start to express themselves, painting and going back to our traditional ways. We've lost much of our old knowledge, but some have held on. Whether consciously or not, we've retained some knowledge. In spite of everything I lost, I emerged as an artist. (p. 7)

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