

# Medicine Prints, Whale Dreams, and Dancing Coyotes: New Works from the Public Collection

By Tania Willard, Ryan Trafananko, and Kelly Yuste

Throughout 2025, under the stewardship of UBC Okanagan Gallery, UBC Okanagan's Public Art Collection underwent a period of significant and meaningful expansion. Drawing from these recent acquisitions and donations, the exhibition *Medicine Prints, Whale Dreams, and Dancing Coyotes: New Works from the Public Art Collection* has been a year in the making. Centered in contemporary lens-based practices by Indigenous women, in addition to contemporary Indigenous printmaking and carving, the exhibition is a celebration of Indigenous artistic practice. In every work and artistic medium, we see artists exercising Indigenous self-expression, whether through retelling their stories and histories or by subverting the colonial gaze to reclaim ownership of their own representations.

Though the exhibition comprises only works acquired throughout 2025, its genesis dates back to 2020. At this time the Public Art Collection Curator, Dr. Stacey Koosel, identified a gap in Indigenous representation when management of the Public Art Collection was transferred to the UBC Okanagan Gallery within the Faculty of Creative and Critical studies at UBCO. Since then, under Tania Willard as Director, the collection mandate has shifted to reflect UBC Okanagan Gallery's commitment to Indigenous art by representing and supporting the stories of Indigenous artists and their practices through partnership with the Indigenous Art Intensive and acquisitions for the collection. Since 2020, this focus has significantly increased our collection from 48 works of Indigenous art to 70 works (comprising 8.8% of the total current collection). Included in this increase are commissions of local syilx artists, including Sheldon Louis, Coralee Miller and Taylor Baptiste. Most recently in 2025, the Gallery received a donation of works by prominent West Coast Indigenous printmakers and carvers from the late Milton and Della McClaren. The Milton and Della McClaren collection reflects not only the evolving direction of the Public Art Collection, but also the art histories of contemporary Indigenous artists.

Beginning in the 1950s, Indigenous printmaking practices challenged social conditions and gave voice to ancestral knowledges and stories. As the viewer enters the exhibition they encounter *Thunderbird* (c. 1960s) by Chief Henry Speck (U'dzistalis, 1908-1971), who exemplifies printmaking practice as a medium for sharing Indigenous knowledges. Chief Henry Speck was a painter, carver, dancer, and hereditary chief of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation in the community of Kalugwis on Turnour Island, BC. He was crucial in the revitalisation of the Nation's art and culture. Speck was a songwriter as well as a composer of dances and spent much of his life dedicated to revitalizing the potlatch. As a mostly self-taught artist, Speck worked in watercolour, woodcarving, and printmaking. Largely rendering Kwakwaka'wakw world view subject matter, Chief Speck's work, including *Thunderbird* (c. 1960s), is characterised by a distinctly modern sensibility of colour, space, and minimalist abstraction.

As the viewer travels through the exhibition they will pass *Octopus* (n.d.) by Roy Henry Vickers (Tsimshian, Haida, Heiltsuk, 1946-) on the far right wall. Vickers father came from Haida,

Heiltsuk, and Tsimshian ancestry, and his mother was of mixed European heritage. In the 1970s, Vickers studied traditional Native art at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art in Ksan, BC. Following this, Vickers recounts,

“I went to my home village of Kitkatla that summer and was fishing for crabs with an elder when we came across this very large octopus. We managed to catch it and bring it on board. Chester, the elder, told me that young men used to prove their bravery by reaching up inside the octopus' arms to grab its beak and pull it out while it was still alive thus ending its life and showing great courage.”<sup>1</sup>

Like Chief Henry Speck, Vicker's *Octopus* (n.d.) uses screenprinting to render an animal as an act of storytelling. While Speck's *Thunderbird* (c.1960s) points to family lineage through the symbolism of an eagle, Vicker's *Octopus* (n.d.) explores a rite of passage and the familial bond between mother and offspring. Drawing upon the formline style, that is, a distinctive artistic style of Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples characterized by continuous flowing lines and shapes including ovoids, S forms and U forms, we can see this echoed in works by Lyle Wilson and Robert Davidson.

Forming the inspiration for the exhibition's title, *Whale Dreams* (n.d.) by Lyle Wilson (Haisla, 1955-) draws upon Wilson's upbringing and familial connections. Inspired by his uncle Sam Robinson, a carver, Wilson pursued his artistic practice eventually graduating with a diploma in printmaking from Emily Carr. *Whale Dreams* (n.d.) reflects Wilson's upbringing as a Haisla artist from Kitamaat Village. Like other works in the exhibition, *Whale Dreams* (n.d.) utilizes the formline artistic style to depict an orca whale, symbolizing concepts of family, community and protection.

Spanning the gap between printmaking and photography is Michelle Sound's cyanotype printed drum *Theresa Sound, Age 12* (2023). Cyanotype is an early photographic process that is activated by UV exposure from the sun or other UV light source. *Theresa Sound, Age 12* (2023) is a single work from Sound's ongoing *Medicine Prints* series. The exhibition title takes its cue from this series of work- the *Medicine Print* series. Each work is a cyanotype made from positive photographic images and plants on elk hide stretched over drum forms that serve as “an exploration of materiality and process that express relation to the land.”<sup>2</sup>

*Theresa Sound, Age 12* (2023) features an image of Sound's own late mother and was created in studio at UBC Okanagan as part of the Indigenous Art Intensive residency program. The *Medicine Prints* series focuses on flora, traditional medicines, and photographs of Sound's ancestral territory in Alberta. Through these prints she forges and records a connection to the land and her family, “The drums reveal a relationship to memory and territory that demonstrate the importance of land as a place of connection and community. The cyanotype elkhide prints

<sup>1</sup> “Octopus - Remarque #2/10.” Roy Henry Vickers Gallery, [https://royhenryvickers.com/products/octopus-remarque-2-10?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=e344c84e6&\\_ss=r](https://royhenryvickers.com/products/octopus-remarque-2-10?_pos=1&_sid=e344c84e6&_ss=r). 3 Feb. 2026.

<sup>2</sup> Sound, Michelle. Artist statement. *Michelle Sound- Medicine Prints*. <https://www.michellesound.art/home/medicine-prints>. 3 Feb. 2026.

are records of gathering medicines and images on the land and the histories of these living materials.”<sup>3</sup>

Moving into the photographic prints in this exhibition, artistic works foreground Indigenous women’s lens-based practices as a cultural intervention and expansion of artistic strategies and research in photographic practice. Through works by Taylor Baptiste, Krista Belle Stewart and Nadya Kwandibens, we consider how artists circulate throughout diverse Indigenous territories as well as urban geographies.

Taylor Baptiste is an interdisciplinary artist from the Osoyoos Indian Band of the syilx Okanagan Nation. Her practice is deeply rooted in her upbringing in Nk’mip, between the mountains and Osoyoos Lake on the Osoyoos Indian Band reservation. Baptiste’s ongoing research about her great grandfather’s connection to the Inkameep Day School and the art program led by Anthony Walsh form the underlying matrix for *Day School Dancing, Photo Series (1-6)* (2024). Anthony Walsh’s art program at the day school was a way for the forcibly assimilated Indigenous children to retain an aspect of their culture through the arts. Drawings from the school, some by her great-grandfather, Francis Baptiste, show young people dancing with animal masks on. Baptiste draws from these family histories and her work with Dr. Andrea Walsh to animate the drawings as a portrait series, with figures in coyote and fox masks dancing in their home territories on the site of the Indian Day School in a radical reclaiming of history and culture.

Nadya Kwandibens, an award-winning photographer, is Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) from the Animakee Wa Zhing #37 First Nation in northwestern Ontario. In her photographic series *Concrete Indians Series: Laura “Stálhalmcen’ Grizzlypaws* (2015), she features St’át’imc dancer, drummer, singer/songwriter, academic, educator, language and cultural advocate from Xwisten, of the Bear Clan, Laura Grizzlypaws.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 2008, *Concrete Indians* took place as an open-call for a series of contemporary urban Indigenous identity portraits as a representation of decolonial assertions of resistance and resurgence. “All [photographs] are assertions of the strength of Indigenous culture and identity through acts of resistance by reclaiming space,”<sup>5</sup> states Kwandibens.

Moving from still photography to video work, syilx artist Krista Belle Stewart’s *Potato Gardens Band* (2018) challenges the settler gaze through its re-rendering of ancestral lands. Her video captures a scene of renewal: On Spax’mn land, she uses a speaker system to play the voice of her great-grandmother Terese Kaimetko, previously recorded in 1918 on wax cylinders by anthropologist James Alexander Teit. Kaimetko’s voice was used as a cultural artefact, but Stewart’s action has released it on the family’s ancestral territory in an act of return. This

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<sup>3</sup> Sound, Michelle. Artist statement. *Michelle Sound- Medicine Prints*. <https://www.michellesound.art/home/medicine-prints>. 3 Feb. 2026.

<sup>4</sup>Grizzlypaws, Laura. “Laura Grizzlypaws - Home.” <http://grizzlypaws.ca>. 3 Feb. 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Photographers Without Borders. “Powerful “Concrete Indians” Series Examines Decolonization and Identity.” 2017. <https://www.photographerswithoutborders.org/online-magazine/2017/2/1/powerful-concrete-indians-series-examines-decolonization-and-identity>. 3 Feb. 2026.

performance indicates “a relationality between her family, community, and land.”<sup>6</sup> The shaky low-resolution footage with distant noise reads as “a gesture of refusal, a refusal embedded in the settler gaze and usurping of Indigenous lands, shown here in a live feed from reserve to major Canadian city.”<sup>7</sup> In this divergent art form, Stewart examines questions of cultural ownership, authenticity, and the ethics of the archive. Readings of 19th century photographic history have often focused on images *of* and not *by* Indigenous people. Consuming images of Indigenous peoples is a part of a colonial history of usurping land, stealing resources, and appropriating culture. Stewart’s work is a discreet act of resistance to this ethnographic frame.

Indigenous artists work to reclaim story, land, and identities in multiple artistic mediums, from photography to printmaking; and foundational to many coastal Indigenous peoples is the medium of carving. Rupert and Barry (Hiłamas) Scow come from a line of Kwakwaka'wakw carvers living in the Alert Bay/Gilford Island area of Northern Vancouver Island. The Scow family, known as "The people of the Bear," are Kwikwasut'inuxw from the village of Gwa'yasdams on Gilford Island. The Scow ancestors were famous for their beautifully carved totem poles. During the short, dark days of winter at the family Potlatches, the Scow masks and other regalia are danced and sung as articulations of history and presence in Kwakwaka'wakw culture.

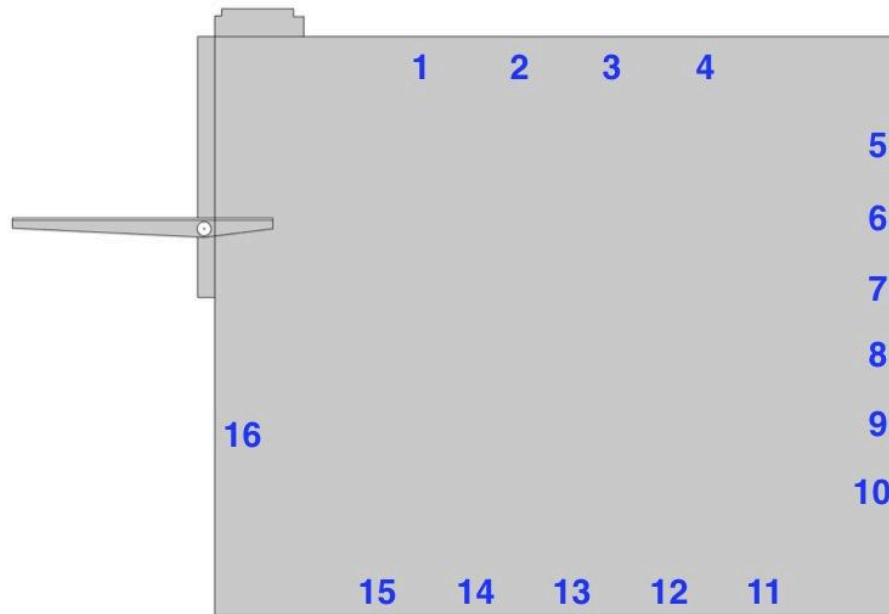
The artists’ works in this exhibition, through the camera, in performative acts and on the land question the invisibility, erasure and dispossession of Indigenous lands, cultures and identities. Through experimental video, performance for camera, and reframing cultural identity, the artists enact what Jolene Rickard calls ‘visual sovereignty’ wherein works are not just representative but deeply tied to Indigenous rights, histories and futures. Beyond the lens based works, Indigenous printmaking in this exhibition features graphic interpretations of cultural story, governance, and familial ties to both human and non-human relations. Drawing from contemporary mediums that are Indigenized, from photography to printmaking, prints become not only multiples but like prints in the snow to track animals, the viewer is following a trail – a trail made by artists looking for meaning, following ancestors towards storied futures.

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<sup>6</sup> Stewart, Krista Belle. Artist Statement. *Potato Gardens Band (2018)*. 3 Feb. 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, Krista Belle. Artist Statement. *Potato Gardens Band (2018)*. 3 Feb. 2026.

## Featured Works



**1.** Nadya Kwandibens  
*Laura "Stálhalmcen' Grizzlypaws,"*  
Kelowna, BC. March 2015.  
*Concrete Indians Series*  
2015  
Digital print on paper  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**2.** Trevor Angus  
*The Raven*  
n.d.  
Wood carving  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**3.** Chief Henry Speck  
*Thunder Bird*  
1960s  
Screenprint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**4.** Rupert and Barry Scow  
*Sisiutl Dance Board*  
1995  
Wood carving with acrylic paint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**5-10.** Taylor Baptiste  
*Day School Dancing, Photo Series (1-6)*  
2024  
Digital print on paper  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**11.** Robert Davidson  
*I am you and you are me*  
2008  
Screenprint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**12.** Jim Johnny  
*Bella Coola Sun*  
1979  
Screenprint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**13.** Michelle Sound  
*Theresa Sound, Age 12*  
*Medicine Prints Series*  
2023  
Cyanotype print on elk hide drum  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**14.** Roy Henry Vickers  
*Octopus*  
n.d.  
Screenprint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**15.** Lyle Wilson  
*Whale Dream*  
n.d.  
Screenprint  
Gift of Milton and Della McClaren  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection

**16.** Krista Belle Stewart  
*Potato Gardens Band*  
2018  
Video (23 minutes)  
UBC Okanagan Public Art Collection