

“WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE”

as long as the sun travels, the
grass grows, the river flows.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PAINTINGS
BY DIANNE PATYCHUK

BEN
NAVAEE
GALLERY

These paintings were made in response to the call to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report released in June 2015. The TRC exposes harms and wrongs that Canada has done and is still doing to indigenous peoples, from cultural genocide to fraud and coercion, from the abuses in residential schools to seizing land, underfunding and breaking treaties. We are all implicated in these injustices starting with the treaties that are at the core of the relationship between original peoples and settler communities. What the governments we elect do (legislation, policy, funding, etc.) is one way that we are implicated in the growing gap between settler groups and First peoples and the many injustices and denial of rights. So are our individual attitudes and actions. These paintings are the result of my study and reflection on this since July 2015.

Part I. Hope and Bravery

This group of paintings respond to deaths that shouldn't have happened. Toddlers dying in house fires, youth suicides, murdered and missing women and girls are some examples of the results of systemic violence - negligence and indifference to basic human rights 'amid a backdrop of colonialism and racism'. (Ontario Coroner's Report 2011).

Fire at Loon Lake: “It takes a Village”



Medium:
Acrylic and Paper
Dimensions 24 X 40

The Fire Chief in the Village of Loon Lake decided not to respond to the 911 call for a house fire at the adjacent Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation in Feb. 2015 because the FN had an unpaid bill of \$3400. Two toddlers died. The response ranged from blaming the FN to outrage that emergency services were withheld. The rate of fire on reserves is 2.4 times higher, and the death rate 10.4 greater than other communities.

Bravery and Leadership

Medium:
Acrylic and Paper;
Dimensions 24 X 40



Grade 8 student Shannen Koostachin spearheaded the largest youth-led human rights movement in Canada when she fought for a school for Attawapiskat First Nation. She died at age 15 in a car accident before the school opened. Inequity in education for First Nations children widened due to funding caps over the last two decades.

More Than 1200



Medium: Acrylic
Dimensions: 30X 40

This painting has more than 1200 markings for more than 1243 documented missing and murdered indigenous women and girls (1980 to April 1, 2015, updated data prepared by the artist). This is an underestimate because it excludes places not under RCMP jurisdiction such as urban areas).

More than 1200, Strawberry Ceremony



Medium: Acrylic
Dimensions: 30 X 40

Using a grid of 1200 one-inch squares with markings for the more than 1243 missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The colours coincide with the annual 'Strawberry' demonstration February 14 in cities across Canada. In 2014 at the 10th annual event, over 1200 people gathered at Toronto police headquarters asking 'Where is your heart' and handing out strawberries.

Red Dress Day, October 4



Medium: Acrylic,
OilDimensions: 16 X 20

In several cities, red dresses are hung in public places and nature as a memorial to murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. See: "Red Dresses Draw Attention to Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women"

Youth Suicides



Medium:
Acrylic and Paper;
Dimensions: 16 X 20

The Ontario Chief Coroner's report on youth suicides in Pikangikum First Nation (2011), described it as a story of "stamina, endurance, tolerance, and resiliency stretched beyond human limits until finally, they simply could take no more." They are exposed to lavish lifestyle elsewhere but their families and communities live in extreme poverty.

Hope



Medium:
Acrylic and Oil
Dimensions: 24 X 30

The youth of remote Northern Ontario First Nation communities such as Neskantaga FN and Pikangikum FN (with high rates of suicide) survive against being pulled to the brink of despair. In both these communities, members talk about the strength and healing that comes from the connection to the land.

Gifts of the Ancestors: Anishnaabe Seven Sacred Teachings



Honesty,
Humility,
Truth,
Wisdom,
Love,
Respect,
Bravery.
Values to live
by taught to
Anishnaabe
children,
represented
by figures
pulled from
the woodgrain
in these fir
panels.

Medium:
Acrylic and wood filler,
on panel Dimensions: 24 X 24

Honesty,
Humility, Truth,
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Part II: Defenders of the Land, Forest and Water

The paintings recognize and thank Indigenous people for taking leadership in defending and protecting the land, forest and water. “With deep humility and gratitude, we thank Indigenous land defenders for their resilience and the knowledge they have kept alive – through ceremonies and struggle -- that has protected the places that we and future generations hope to share as our homelands.” see Declaration: <http://www.defendersoftheland.org/supporters>

Rustic: Protecting the Whitefeather Forest



The Pikangikum First Nation is a protector of this forest but it is also a potential resource for a local sustainable forestry industry that would provide jobs and housing for the community. The youth lumber training co-op is one of the projects of the Pikangikum First Nation Working Group that this painting series supports.

Medium:

Acrylic, wood filler on plywood

Dimensions: 20 X 27

Defending the River Delta



The James Bay Hydroelectric project flooded 11,500 km² of wilderness land that was home to the James Bay Cree and Inuit, diverting and damming nine free-flowing rivers and flooding an area the size of Belgium. This also contributed to the deaths of an estimated 10,000 caribou.

Medium: Wood stain,
soft pastel on fir panel
Dimensions: 24 X 24

Big River



“Big River” is the name the Dene people use for the McKenzie River whose delta flows into the arctic and is a lifeline like the arteries in the body. In 1977, the Berger Commission recommended a ten-year wait before construction of the pipeline to allow time for settlement of native land claims and study of impacts. The project was put on hold and ultimately an alternative route was chosen.

Medium: Oil;
Dimensions: 20 X 24

Part III. Our Home on Stolen Land

"Indigenous peoples have been in 'Canada' since time immemorial, for at least 11,000 and perhaps 100,000 years." These paintings explore the treaties - agreements between nations for a respectful parallel journey along the river of life sharing resources for mutual benefit, mutual prosperity and mutual protection. Made between original peoples and their descendants and the Crown's people (arrived people/settler societies, descendants of slaves), they were to last "as long as the river flows, the grass grows and the sun shines (or sun travels)." The un-surrendered abstract landscape paintings on wood panels use patterns in the woodgrain and speak to the many unsettled land claims, and un-surrendered land.

The White (Settler Problem)



Medium:
Acrylic, soft pastel
Dimensions 16 X 20

This painting shows the colonial justification for the 'agenda of assimilation' of Indigenous peoples and the extinguishment of rights and title to the land: the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullus* (land belongs to no one), and later the White Paper (under Jean Chrétien as the Minister of Indian Affairs in the government of Pierre Trudeau).

Legislation that is supposed to guide government/(settler community) relationships with First peoples (nation-to-nation relationship); the recognition built into section 35(1) of the Constitution Act; and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007). Citizens Plus (the Red Paper) was the Alberta Chiefs' response to the White Paper and its assimilation agenda.

Citizen Plus: Towards Nation-to-Nation Respectful Relationships



Medium:
Acrylic, wood filler, soft pastel;
Dimensions 16 X 20

Ontario: Our Home on Ancestral Lands of First Peoples

(Odawa, Ojibwa, Cree, Algonkin, Huron-Wendat)



Medium:
Acrylic, paper, thread);
Dimensions: 48 X 36

There were 12 land-related agreements 1983-2011, 18 land settlement agreements 1990 - 2012, and 50 more have been accepted for negotiation as of October 2015. Most are boundary-related: First Nations not receiving all the land entitled to under treaties.

Un-surrendered - The Toronto "Purchase"



Medium: Acrylic,
soft pastel of fir panel
Dimensions: 24 X 24

Toronto is on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. The official story that the land was purchased by the British but is more accurately one of fraud and displacement. Over two hundred years of complaints and petitions by the Mississaugas stating that their understanding of the agreement was not being honoured finally led to a new settlement in 2010. Almost all of us living in Toronto were 'squatters' up until 5 years ago.

Un-surrendered - Red Ochre

The painting shows 'settlements in the shape of a 'u' and an 's' and a reference to turtle island (another name for North America). One of the solution strategies at negotiation "termination" tables has been to turn First Nations into 'fee simple' entities like municipalities that tax residents to fund services.

Medium: Acrylic, wood filler,
soft pastel on birch panel;
Dimensions 24 X 24



Un-surrendered- The Red Fence

A fence separates land according to who owns it. An example is the red fence at Sauble Beach on a disputed boundary on a stretch of beach and fishing ground. The Saugeen First Nation argues that their ancestors never surrendered this stretch of land in Treaty 72 in 1854. The current court fight dates back to the early 1990s and is one of 300 claims in dispute in Canada.



Medium: Acrylic,
soft pastel of birch panel
Dimensions: 24 X 24

Un-surrendered - Red Village

The red village is on a backdrop of the elements of the treaty promise of respectful relations “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows”. In this painting, the houses also have an 'unsettled' nature because the issue of housing - affordable, safe housing - is one of the most important unsettled issues of inequality for First peoples today both on and off reserves.



Medium: Acrylic,
soft pastel of fir panel
Dimensions: 24 X 24

Un-surrendered - Sun, River, Grass



Treaties promised sharing resources “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows”. Many have “postage stamp” size reserves (Supreme Court Judge, Beverly McLaughlin) where First Nations can live within the larger area that could be used for hunting, etc. A land area too small to support a growing population contributes to overcrowded housing.

Medium: Acrylic,
soft pastel of fir panel
Dimensions: 24 X 24

Closing the Gap 1



The wood grain is used to show the huge gap in living conditions and resources between settler communities and Indigenous communities. A cap on funding has resulted in a relative decrease in resources for First Nation communities for two decades. The Closing the Gap report of the Assembly of First Nations (2015) lists priorities for government action to begin to close the gap

Medium: Acrylic, soft pastel,
wood filler on plywood
Dimensions: 8 X 26

Part IV. First Nation Projects that the Proceeds Support

The proceeds from the sale of these paintings go to support projects in two First Nations that had declared a state of emergency because of youth suicides. The projects are priorities identified by the First Nations that have the support of Chief and Council, that provide a way for organizations in the south to be solidarity partners with the First Nations.

Pikangikum First Nation Working Group Projects

Pikangikum First Nation is located 100 kilometres north of Red Lake. Included in the Coroner's 2011 report on the youth suicides in Pikangikum First Nation was a call for the creation of a group to work in solidarity with the Pikangikum First Nation. A group that was formed includes engineers, churches, Frontier Foundation (an Aboriginal-led organization with education and forest projects, and portable sawmill) and the Pikangikum Chief and Council members. The Pikangikum First Nation Working Group has provided 150 laptops, replaced 3600 incandescent lightbulbs with LED bulbs to reduce pressure on the diesel generating system and installed portable water and wastewater systems in 14 homes. Plans for additional projects include installing more running water systems in the homes of people with significant health problems, training youth in a lumber co-op to provide experience, jobs and home building and a food cooperative. Contact the artist, dpatychuk@sympatico.ca for information on the project or to make additional donations

Neskantaga First Nation

Neskantaga First Nation is located 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay. It has been under a boil-water advisory for two decades, the longest in Canada. The school and community are raising funds for a playground upgrade so that the children have a safe place for play and social interaction. Additional donations can be sent to Neskantaga Education Centre - Playground Upgrade and sent to Norverene Taylor, Principal, Neskantaga Education Centre, P.O. Box 106, Landsowne House, ON, P0T 1Z0 or contact the artist dpatychuk@sympatico.ca for information on electronic transfer through the school principal.

About the Artist



I chose Toronto's South Riverdale neighbourhood as my home in 1983 because of its history of community action on social justice issues. My art training is from OCAD and U of A. I have been exhibiting my art since 2002. I also have a BA and MA in Sociology. I worked in the health system for 40 years as a nurse and social epidemiologist supporting decisions to reduce health inequities before retiring to paint full time and volunteer on social justice issues.

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Please contact me at dpatychuk@sympatico.ca for more information on the paintings, shows or to visit my studio gallery on Curzon Street, Toronto.

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