



Daphne Odjig

Odawa-Potawatomi-English, Wikwemikong 1919–2016

Thunderbird Woman, 1973

serigraph on paper, 4/48

86.3 x 67.3 cm Image: 69 x 55.3 cm

Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery

Acquired with the assistance of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Women's Committee, G-73-215

Proposal:

Thunderbird Woman was created while Daphne Odjig lived in Winnipeg where she founded the first Indigenous-run gallery/print shop in Canada called *The New Warehouse Gallery* on [331 Donald Street](#), which became the birthplace of “The Indian Group of Seven/Professional National Indian Artists Incorporation.” *The Thunderbird Woman* represents a figure of transformation, half-woman/half bird – a powerful entity. Odjig once said, “We come from strong people. We had to be strong to survive...It’s in my blood to strive and work and grow”.

The powerful imagery of Daphne Odjig’s *Thunderbird Woman* is used as an icon and a symbolic message of hope and matriarchal strength. It articulates Indigenous agency, the roles of guardianship and protection, and the notion of transformation. In Odjig’s words, “I conceive of the thunderbird as a spirit of protection and guardianship. I place thunderbirds in some of my paintings to symbolically suggest the role of the guardian spirit”. Odjig’s Thunderbird presiding over Winnipeg in a mural brings both an archival knowledge of Indigenous arts in Winnipeg, but also a poised as a symbol of strength in a city faced with challenges in the wake of the Tina Fontaine verdict and many ongoing social injustices.

Relevance to Colony Street presence...Daphne Odjig created a lasting legacy in Winnipeg for national Indigenous arts. *The Thunderbird Woman* print was created in the seventies, when Winnipeg, was a hub for Indigenous groups coming to meet when transitioning from their

home communities and now home to over 78'000 Indigenous people living in the city. Having Daphne Odjig's Thunderbird Women in a central area downtown on University of Winnipeg property is amazing. Mixing traditional Indigenous narratives and imagery with cubist and surrealist influences, Odjig's works are defined by curving contours, strong outlining, overlapping spheres and sense of mixed bold colors. Her work has addressed issues of colonization, the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the status of Indigenous women and children, bringing these political issues to the forefront of contemporary art practices and theory. Daphne Odjig has lasting impressions and her work is still relevant today with a resurgence of Indigenous aesthetic practice.

"As an Aboriginal person I feel great pride in being a part of this project. I admire and respect Daphne's work and have for some time. I consider it a great honor to be considered for this endeavour. I feel that replicated works of art is a form of flattery but with the woodlands art, it's much more than that, it's the opportunity for retelling a story. It's something you don't get by replicating *Starry night* (by Van Gogh). As an artist, I'm happy that we aren't forgetting where we came from and are paying homage to our roots. The narrative that was compelling then still holds true today". ~ Mike Valcourt, mural artist who is proposed to reproduce the print.

ABOUT:

Mike Valcourt was encouraged by friends and family to start painting at a young age. He made smaller commissioned work for businesses and organizations that were familiar with his enthusiasm before he knew he wanted to be an artist. Mike describes his art as thoughtful and precise. He is influenced by the Woodlands style of art, maintaining its narrative, sometimes derivative, yet contemporary quality. Jackson Beardy is a great source of inspiration and vision for his work. "My hope is to continue learning and sharing, as long as both are purpose and motivation in my life. After all, art is easy – it is people that are difficult."

Jaimie Isaac is the Curator of Indigenous and Contemporary Art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Isaac holds a Masters of Arts from the University of British Columbia research focus on Decolonizing and Indigenizing Curatorial Practice. She has curated several exhibitions, Recent projects include *Insurgence (co-curated)* and *Boarder X* national tour. Isaac co-founded of *The Ephemerals Collective* which was long-listed for the 2017 Sobey Art Award. Selected published essays are *Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years*, *The Land We Are Now: Writers and Artists Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation* and the *Public 54: Indigenous Art: New Media and the Digital* journal. Jaimie was a co-faculty for the *Wood Land School* at Plug In Summer Institute in 2016. Isaac was one of the Canada Council's Indigenous delegation at the 2017 Venice Biennale. She volunteers on the Border Crossings Magazine and is on Advisory Committees for Manitoba Museum and Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Wall-to-Wall is a mural and culture festival that takes place across Winnipeg, Manitoba on original lands of Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland

of the Métis Nation and Treaty 1 Territory. It sees the creation of multiple indoor and outdoor murals across the city and celebrates each new work of art with unique events. The festival culminates with a huge celebration that coincides with Nuit Blanche, bringing together diverse communities around art, music, dance, and more.

Wall-to-Wall Mural & Culture Festival is produced by [Synonym Art Consultation](#) in partnership with [North End Community Renewal Corporation](#) (NECRC) and [Graffiti Art Programming](#) (GAP).