



Centring Kinship, Omaskêko Ininiwak  
Artist Duane Linklater Rewrites the Rules of  
the Museum

By Danni Cheng

Open now and running until 21 September 2025, [Camden Art Centre](#) and [New Curators](#) present *akâmi-*, the first UK institutional exhibition of Omaskêko Ininiwak artist [Duane Linklater](#) (b. 1976). The exhibition includes contributions by his late paternal grandmother Ethel (Trapper) Linklater, his son Tobias Linklater, and a new commission with Sugpiaq artist Tanya Lukin Linklater, under the collective name Grey Plumes.

Working across painting, installation, and sound, Duane interrogates the frameworks of the museum in relation to current and historical conditions of Indigenous life. For this London presentation, the artist and his collaborators bring a painting series and installation into dialogue with newly commissioned ceramics and sculpture, united by a soundscape that permeates all galleries. Through strategies of co-production, *akâmi-* contends with institutional frameworks, the hierarchies between fine art and craft, and the premise of the solo exhibition.

On the occasion of Camden Art Centre's presentation, New Curators fellow and co-curator [Danni Cheng](#) shares her insights on working with the artists and the thinking behind *akâmi-*.



Duane Linklater, *Speculative apparatus 2 for the work of nohkompan*, 2016 with *Mitts*, c. 1980, by Ethel Linklater. Collection of Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

A deep-seated tension underlies *akâmi*-. How does one stage an institutional exhibition while carrying a deep and historically fraught relationship to the very structures that uphold such institutions? Can Indigenous potentiality manifest in the space that materialises epistemic violence, where cultural belongings are “suspended, locked in colonial time,” as Tanya describes it? That this exhibition unfolds in a venue within one of the earliest colonial metropolises only heightens the stakes.

The title of the show offers a compelling pathway to understand Duane’s approach to this dilemma. *akâmi* is the Omaskêko Cree word for “across,” bearing both literal and figurative resonances for the exhibition. The works assembled under this title testify to multidirectional crossings of time, disciplines, generations and geographies. Together, they articulate a shared conviction that Indigenous futurity is cultivated in motion, gathering its momentum and force in these traversals. On their own terms, the artists assert a presence within the contemporary exhibitionary landscape, short-circuiting the extractive gaze that might mire Indigenous life in a mythic past.



Duane Linklater with Ethel (Trapper) Linklater and Tobias Linklater and Grey Plumes, *akâmi*-. Installation view, Camden Art Centre, 3 July – 21 September 2025. Photo: Rob Harris

The extended byline of the exhibition—*Duane Linklater, with Ethel (Trapper) Linklater, Tobias Linklater, and Grey Plumes*—offers another entryway into this conceptual footing. From the outset, it was clear to us that Duane had no interest in catering to the institutional impulse to frame his show through the lens of individual exceptionalism or a “historical first.” He refused to perform this role. Alleviated of this burden of representation, a far more expansive constellation of relations and references emerged. This decentring of authorship was among the earliest decisions made in the curatorial process— a decision that would bear implications for both our ethical-conceptual and administrative frameworks. Progress was certainly not linear, and decisions arose from various layers of encounter. Working alongside the artists, 10 New Curators fellows and curatorial staff at Camden Art Centre made for a sustained reminder that “you can only move at the speed of trust,” as curator Candice Hopkins put it.



For Duane, the opportunity to exhibit is equally an opportunity to exert agency within and against the circuitry of museum protocols. How might one unsettle the sequence of established procedures—contracts, loan forms, condition reports—that accrue behind the scenes to make up an exhibition? One response lies in the multiply-authored installation, *Speculative apparatus for the work of nohkompán and nikosis*, acquired by Tate in 2020 and now exhibited in the UK for the first time as part of *akâmi*.

The installation is perhaps best introduced through an anecdote. It begins in 2014, when Duane receives a cold call from Thunder Bay Art Gallery in Northern Ontario. They're calling to ask if he's related to Ethel (Trapper) Linklater, whose works are in their collection. He responds in the affirmative—Ethel is Duane's paternal grandmother. The works in question are intricately beaded and fur-trimmed mitts, mukluks and slippers. Unaware of the works' existence up to this point, Duane responds to this stroke of bureaucratic serendipity by conceiving a series of concrete and steel armatures—purpose-built not only to hold but also to elevate Ethel's works, literally and metaphorically. Staged across two plywood plinths, audiences encounter a temporary reunion contingent upon the simultaneous activation of institutional mechanisms at Tate and Thunder Bay Art Gallery. That is, while Tate has acquired the "work," Ethel's belongings remain in Thunder Bay's collection and must be loaned each time the piece is displayed.



Duane Linklater with Ethel (Trapper) Linklater and Tobias Linklater and Grey Plumes, *akâmi*. Installation view, Camden Art Centre, 3 July – 21 September 2025. Photo: Rob Harris

Nearby, a stop motion film by Duane's son, Tobias, plays out on a monitor perched atop another concrete *apparatus*. Indeed, this is a story that begins long before that cold call, and one that persists well beyond it. The deft handiwork of Ethel's mitts, mukluks and slippers is a matrilineal inheritance from knowing hands, those that laboured for the survivance of Cree lifeways. Even as they periodically return to institutional custody, the inclusion of Ethel's works in *akâmi*—across the Atlantic and in tactile proximity to her loved ones—affirms an Indigenous presence that is constitutively mobile and insists that institutions labour according to its demands.



And we were grateful to heed its instructions. Throughout the curatorial process, Duane and Tanya were incredibly generous in what they shared with the cohort, always with careful deliberation. The tenderness of *Speculative apparatus...* was not lost on any of us. We heard stories of grandparents in residential schools, of Ethel's inheritance of Cree lifeways, of Duane's surprise at that fateful phone call. In equal measure, we encountered areas of embodied knowledge inaccessible to us. As non-Indigenous curators, we endeavoured to work in alignment with the artists' ethics, privileging their self-determination over the pursuit of easy legibility to a general London audience.



Duane Linklater, *Accession*, 2016. *From Our Hands* at Mercer Union, 2016. Courtesy the artist and Mercer Union, Toronto

A new installation created by Grey Plumes (Duane and Tanya) titled *Suarluni/nokosit/coming into view* features in Camden Art Centre's Reading Room. The work consists of eleven raku clay vessels modelled after a 500-year-old Sugpiaq pot controversially excavated from Tanya's homelands on Kodiak Island, Alaska, and now held in the Alutiiq Museum. Though little is known about its maker or original function, it is assumed to have been used for rendering whale fat.

Under the direction of the artists, the vessels were fabricated by ceramicist Ewelina Bartkowska at Rochester Square. Each vessel was smoke-fired, a process rooted in ancestral Sugpiaq pottery practices, leaving unpredictable traces of dark patterns on its surface. The aim was to approximate a likeness to the original pot, not to produce a perfect replica—an approach that embraces the variability inherent to ceramics, beyond human error. To surrender to the firing process is to understand it as an equally agential force in determining the vessels' lifecycles.

During the firing process, some pots chipped and cracked; here in the sunlit alcove at Camden, so too may their sooty surfaces fade. One of the pots holds flowers, while others are dappled with lard—an homage to the caloric and cultural potency of whale fat. All the materials here are susceptible to transformation, and Grey Plumes seeks not to dictate how they live and die. The sensibility here is antithetical to the 'God-trick' gaze that privileges sight over function, that claims mastery over the lifecycle of belongings. Rather, the artists embrace a horizontality that distributes control to a broader network of agents: the many hands the vessels have passed through, the vicissitudes of weather, the ebb and flow of smoke. As Tanya put it: "The complexity of the gaze is not what I'm interested in. I'm interested in full-body sensation... the possibility of *being with* rather than *looking*."



Duane Linklater, *they have piled the stone / as they promised / without syrup 4*, 2023. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. Photo: Jimmy Limit. Collection of Manizheh and Danny Rimer

This groundedness is also insisted upon by *they have piled the stone / as they promised / without syrup* (2023), a series of nine abstracted paintings by Duane. The works emerged out of his visit to the Bishop Fauquier Memorial Chapel, built in the 1880s on the grounds of the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Indian Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The Anglican chapel was constructed in part by Indigenous children, who were asked to “pile the stone” and forgo their ration of maple syrup for Lent. To some measure, Duane’s impetus to include this series was to “show England back to itself.” Washes of moody magentas, overlaid with caramellised maple and other natural pigments, lay bare the systemic cultural genocide by residential schools in their very country of export. But we were also concerned about moving beyond the mirror, so to speak, for the artists’ works function not merely as correctives or mediatory measures. Nor are they damage narratives to inspire self-flagellation. While these ongoing colonial violences have served as departure points for the works in *akâmi*-, what emerges from their debris are knowledges and futurities that demand a sustained reckoning.

Feature image: Duane Linklater with Ethel (Trapper) Linklater and Tobias Linklater and Grey Plumes, *akâmi*-. Installation view, Camden Art Centre, 3 July – 21 September 2025. Photo: Rob Harris