

Structures are not the shape of things, but the underlying principles behind how things appear, as if they resided behind a curtain. A structure displays; but properties that manifest in its appearance can only be understood formally, and do not necessarily disclose the inner structure, and are in fact able to hide and obscure it by offering a front, a skin, a first degree of comprehension. The superficial appearance of things, by the same token, often has strategic functions to hide their hidden deep structure.

Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures* (2009)¹

In 2014 Duane Linklater selected seventeen objects from the American Indian collection at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City to copy. The objects spanned over one hundred years and came from a range of American Indian cultures from the Pacific Northwest Coast as well as from the Southwestern United States. The makers of these objects—wool weavings, painted masks, headdresses, clay pots, a costumed kachina doll and a model wooden totem pole²—were unknown in the collection. Their everyday, ritual or artistic function erased in their transformation to ethnographic object. Linklater engaged in a process of using automated filters to copy the objects, photographing his computer screen to capture digital images of weavings, then printed on linen, while eight objects were scanned and 3D printed in standard off-white plastic resin in Salt Lake City, over 3,000 km from the artist's home. The loss of information in these processes, and the lack of attribution within the collection, replicates the loss that took place in their transformation into Westernized ethnographic objects. As Moira Simpson outlines, there has been “scant regard for indigenous peoples’ concepts of individual or communal ownership and right over objects or knowledge.”³ The replication, the reproduction of ‘poor images,’ in Linklater’s process is crucial. The off-white objects were presented in the museum on a series of tables with a mirror underneath them within the museum, their reflection and those who viewed them coming into sight.⁴

Working across installation, performance, film, and photography, Linklater excavates histories to unearth folds and knots addressing cultural loss, recovery and sovereignty. The notion of recovery is central, underlined by the significance of processes of exchange, he engages with the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism. Unearthing work hidden beneath gallery walls⁵ or re-inserting iconic Indigenous imagery inscribed within Canadian identity,⁶ he explores the migration and exchange of knowledge and ideas, and their consequences.

The title of this exhibition, *From Our Hands*, is taken from an exhibition which took place in Toronto and toured across Ontario, between 1982 and 1985 presenting Indigenous craft,⁷ and including the work of Ethel Linklater (Trapper), Duane’s paternal grandmother. As Anita Aarons wrote in the catalogue introduction, the exhibition was,

organised out of respect and encouragement to those craftsmen who, throughout a century and a half of adversity and unsympathetic handling of their cultural mores and values, have kept their minds busy. They have been busy rescuing and keeping alive some of the skills used for ritual purposes which engender the making of beautiful and sometimes awesome objects - artifacts made in an awareness and wonder of life itself and the ritual of living.⁸

The description of Ethel Linklater’s objects—children and adult mitts, slippers, mukluks and baby boots—details the process of their making; home tanned moosehide, rabbit fur trim, floral beadwork, wool string with red and white braided tassels to name but a few. These objects have been borrowed from a museum collection at Duane’s request and are supported here on a series of concrete and steel structures positioned on a large plywood plinth.

1. Condorelli, Céline. 2009. *Support Structures*. Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, p.28.

2. The objects selected by Linklater were acquired by the museum between 1974 and 2003 through donation and purchased from five private collectors.

3. Simpson, Moira G., 2001. *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-colonial Era*. London and New York: Routledge, p.192.

4. As part of the exhibition *salt 11: Duane Linklater* (2015) at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah.

5. Linklater scraped away the layers of paint since accumulated on the walls to uncover the photographs from Kimowan Metchewais’s (formerly McLain) 2002 Ramp project, as part of *Duane Linklater: It means it is raining / Kimowan McLain: Without Ground* (2002) at the ICA in Philadelphia in 2014.

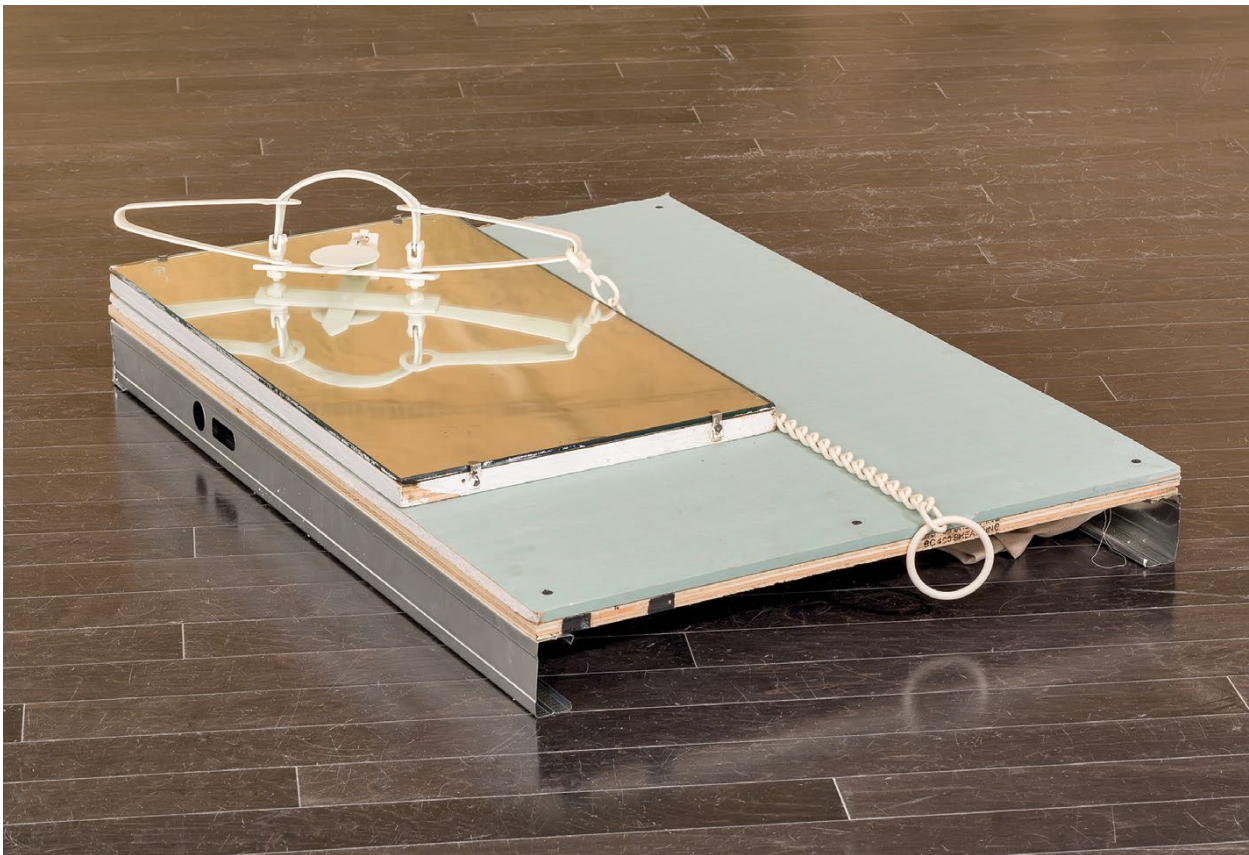
6. A stylized bird was appropriated from Norval Morrisseau’s seminal large-scale painting *Androgyny* (1983) and translated into neon in Linklater’s work *Tautology* (2013).

7. The title of the exhibition was *From Our Hands: an exhibition of native hand crafts*.

8. Exhibition catalogue, *From Our Hands: an exhibition of native hand crafts*, 1982, unpaginated.



Duane Linklater, *UMFA1981.016.002* (2015), ABS plastic 3D Print. Purchased with funds from the Phyllis Cannon Wattis Endowment for Modern and Contemporary Art from the Permanent Collection of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.



Duane Linklater, *Trap* (2016), Powder-coated trap, mirror, gypsum, wood, steel, clay. Installation view of *A Parallel Excavation: Duane Linklater and Tanya Lukin Linklater*, at the Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton (2016). Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery. Photography by Blaine Campbell.

That this loan was negotiated by Mercer Union through the Thunder Bay Art Gallery mobilizes present day structural relations of cultural heritage while highlighting traces of genealogy and questions of legacy. As Céline Condorelli has written:

To think through support calls for opening up and reconsidering systems of production and their unspoken rules and ideologies, and provoking their reformulation anew through an ongoing obligation or requirement to address in relationships what is being supported, through what means, and by whom.⁹

The role of support, and of care, comes to the fore. Linklater's grandmother's mitts, boots, and slippers, five objects in total, are supported on ten concrete sculptures designed by him. This intergenerational relationship is extended in the presentation of a claymation film, *Origin of the Hero* (2016), by Duane's twelve-year-old son, Tobias Linklater.

This support is not limited to family or exhibition structures, plinths or modes of presentation. Linklater explores the structural language of the institution to develop a series of structural responses. Materials that are ubiquitous within construction, mold resistant drywall, plywood and steel, are repurposed in a series of 8 foot high sculptures, their width mimicking that of Duane's chest and height referring to his height with extended arms. This act recalls the opening lines of Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: political life across the border of settler states* when she describes the role of ironworkers from Kahnawà:ke who built the infrastructure for skyscrapers, bridges, and other large-scale construction jobs in cities across the Northeastern United States traveling on Sunday nights to start work Monday mornings.¹⁰ It is also these materials, wood, steel and gypsum, that have been mined and extracted from the land and now found in hardware stores far and wide. The sculptures are draped with discarded elk and moose hides, offcuts from a native craft store, plastic and linen sheets, and are presented in clusters in the front and back galleries as a form of occupation. Steel studs have been powder coated in two shades of white and two shades of red.

In this exhibition, Linklater considers the internal language of walls, what is said and unsaid, spaces for the Indigenous body, and how such spaces of inclusion can be extended. There is a large-scale structural intervention in the galleries, introducing a sentence questioning Indigenous sovereignty of land and law, and legacy. Over the past weeks the drywall, plywood and steel studs along the length of the east wall have been removed. The structure of the gallery has been physically altered and extended. The east wall has been replaced with new steel studs, in a skeletal form, powder coated in a fire engine red at specific intervals to form the words, "WHAT THEN REMAINS."

There is an alignment between structure and language, and between territories and bodies within the work. Further in her study, Simpson reflects on the legal horizon of First Nations' membership and its implications, "if the right to determine the terms of legal belonging, a crucial component of sovereignty, has been dictated by a foreign government."¹¹ Thinking about how to proceed as a nation, she continues,

The question emerges of how to do this—procedurally, ethically—if the certainty of its means are opaque or hidden and you are also viewed not as a people with a governmental system, a philosophical order, but as a remnant, a "culture," a minority within an ethnocultural mosaic of differences.¹²

The role of the remnant comes to the fore. The question of "what then remains," is excerpted from a statement by Justice Sotomayer in the closing remarks of the United States Supreme Court case *Dollar General v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians* (No. 13-1496), in which a thirteen-year-old tribal member on a training program, alleged

9. Céline Condorelli, 2009. *Support Structures*, Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, p.12.

10. As she states it is "a life of difficult, dangerous labour, and intense travel, and a life that returns, the literature of various sorts tells us, back to "reserve" as much as the job and drive time can allow." Audra Simpson, 2015. *Mohawk Interruptus: political life across the border of settler states*. Durham. North Carolina: Duke University Press, p.2.

11. *Ibid.*, p.10.

12. *Ibid.*



Both images: Installation view of *A Parallel Excavation: Duane Linklater and Tanya Lukin Linklater*, at the Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton (2016). Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery. Photography by Blaine Campbell.

sexual abuse by a non-Indian employee of the company's store on the tribal land. At the core of the case was the legal principle that tribal courts have civil jurisdiction over non-Indian conduct arising from consensual relations on Indian reservations, weaving through overriding sovereignties across territories and bodies, and, critically, Indigenous sovereignty. As Sotomayer expanded,

What then remains of the sovereignty of the Indians? ...you just want to cherry pick what 'sovereignty' means...Because if they're sovereign, the United States can have treaties with people that basically say in your land, you do what you want; I'm not going to enforce your judgement if I don't think it's consistent with due process here. But we don't dictate to other sovereigns what kind of systems they should have. You're right we have the power to do that, but it's still something that we don't have to exercise.¹³

An image from a previous exhibition comes to mind. In *Learning* (2013)¹⁴ Linklater presented a photograph reproduced from the internet of the iconic photograph by Canadian Press photojournalist Tom Hanson capturing a defiant Mohawk warrior with his arm raised and rifle in hand. Richard Livingston Nicholas, the masked Mohawk, stands atop an overturned Sûreté de Québec (provincial police) vehicle during the standoff at Oka, Quebec, in 1990. Both men died suddenly, in separate incidents, on the same day in 2009. The question returns, "what then remains?" This utterance proposes a question and an urgency of the present towards the future.

There is a duality to this exhibition's title, implying both made from our hands and, implicitly, taken. Through this layering of generations, of structures and structural systems, *From Our Hands* is an intervention into that which is given, its residue will persist.

13. The Supreme Court of the United States, *Dollar General Corporation et al., Petitioners, v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, et al.*, Washington, D.C., Monday December 7, 2015. https://www.supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/argument_transcripts/13-1496_p8k0.pdf, accessed 17 August 2016.

14. This exhibition was organized by Althea Thauberger and presented at Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto, from 20 June until 10 August 2013.