

Catriona Jeffries

Duane Linklater

*wintercount\_215\_kisepîsim,  
mistranslate\_wolftreeriver\_  
ininîmowinîhk  
2022*

canvas, linen, cochineal,  
orange pekoe tea, charcoal,  
sumac, cotton thread,  
blueberry dye, felt tip marker,  
tarpaulin

6 parts, each approximately  
222 x 102 in. (564 x 259 cm)

Vancouver

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*wintercount\_215\_kisep̓sim, mistranslate\_wolftreeriver\_ininimowin̓hk*, 2022, canvas, linen, cochineal, orange pekoe tea, charcoal, sumac, cotton thread, blueberry dye, felt tip marker, tarpaulin, 6 parts, each approximately 222 x 102 in. (564 x 259 cm). Installation view, *my mothersside*, BAMPFA, Berkeley, USA, 2023



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# In Duane Linklater's 'mymothersside,' Memory is Buried Deep in Objects

By Champe Barton Oct 12



Installation view of Duane Linklater's 'dislodgevanishskinground,' on view in 'mymothersside' at BAMPFA. (Daria Lugina)

When you first turn into the [Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive](#)'s main exhibition space, watch your head. Jutting out from the wall sideways, in a splay of tapered wooden pole-ends, is a massive tepee — or at least the bones of one. The sumac-dyed canvas that might otherwise enfold the structure drapes over one side. What remains are the poles, knotted together near their tips and painted a streaky, ashen white.

The effect is twofold: The tepee, that endlessly appropriated icon of pastoral Indigenous life, is disentangled from any cutesy, passive conception. This one could snag you, if you're not careful. And its exposed frame, sapped of color, becomes skeletal. Something has died. Don't you remember?

[Duane Linklater](#), the Omaskêko Cree artist behind this piece, titled *dislodgevanishskinground*, is deeply interested in the memory of things. For much of the past two decades, he has created art focused on the jagged edges where Indigenous and non-Native life meet, which is to say he has focused on the ways we have scrubbed clean our national memories to forget that these collisions took place, at one time or another, everywhere. (Linklater is from Northeastern Ontario, in Canada.) For Linklater, the story of colonialism's bloody expansion — and the memory of all that it snuffed out — is buried deep in the objects we handle and the places we occupy every day.



Installation view of 'wintercount\_215\_kisepîsim, mistranslate\_wolftreeriver\_ininîmowinîhk' in 'mymothersside' at BAMPFA. (Daria Lugina)

*mymothersside*, BAMPFA's survey of Linklater's work from the last decade, serves as an excavation of these memories. It includes some 30 pieces in sculpture, painting and film, as well as one permanent architectural installation. Linklater composed almost all of the works from materials important to his and other Native cultures: animal hides, saplings, sumac, cochineal and charcoal. (These material choices render one major outlier — a series of colorless 3D-printed replicas of Indigenous artifacts from the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City — utterly lifeless by comparison).

The exhibition debuted at Seattle's Frye Museum in 2022, followed by a stint at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. But BAMPFA's version is the largest yet, with room enough for a dynamic installation seen only once before, at the [2022 Whitney Biennial](#).

That piece, titled *wintercount\_215\_kisepîsim, mistranslate\_wolftreeriver\_ininîmowinîhk*, involves six painted tepee-canvas rounds hung from metal rods, which themselves hang some eight feet high via steel cables attached to the ceiling. The covers, stained with blueberry, orange pekoe tea and other natural dyes, drape downward in semicircles, gently bunching on the floor. Visitors are invited to walk between them — an enveloping warmth against the museum's sterile white walls.

Linklater has said he intends for this installation to be rearranged over the course of the exhibition, a reference to the flexibility of the tepee covers as a form of portable architecture. But in concert with the show's other works, the choice also reflects a desire for audiences to meet the art on ethnographic as well as aesthetic terms. In this way the covers are more than sculptural objects in the formalist sense; they serve a practical and ritual purpose — they evince a history. To treat them accordingly prevents the museum from obscuring this essential fact for its visitors, and thus from perpetuating an erasure in which museums generally have played an outsize role.



Installation view of 'mymothersside' at BAMPFA with 'What Then Remainz' in the background. (Daria Lugina)

And in case this institutional duty was unclear, *mymothersside* includes a brasher approach. Linklater's installation *What Then Remainz* required BAMPFA to deconstruct the exhibition's far wall, stripping it to its metalwork and insulation. The museum had to then rearrange the steel framing and use red acrylic paint to spell out the titular phrase, borrowed from a [controversial United States Supreme Court decision](#) determining the jurisdiction of tribal lands. When the exhibition is over, drywall will be reapplied over the framing, leaving the phrase in place indefinitely.

I had seen this piece before, constructed for previous shows (at least three museums contain the inscription). Not knowing better, I expected the rest of Linklater's exhibition to be as pugilistic, fueled by the sort of righteous fury that inflames the work of other artists preoccupied by legacies of colonial violence, like Kara Walker or Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.

But *mymothersside* is almost unwaveringly tranquil. Look at *Modest Livelihood*, a silent, 50-minute documentary film playing on a loop in a darkened corner of the exhibition. The title is a response to a [1999 Canadian Supreme Court ruling](#) that Indigenous people can only fish enough food to sustain a "moderate livelihood" — a preposterous restriction that Linklater counters not with fiery indignation, but with serenity.



Duane Linklater, 'Modest Livelihood,' 2012; Super 16mm film, transferred to blu-ray; 50 minutes. (Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; Photo by Jueqian Fang)

The film follows Linklater, Dane-zaa artist Brian Jungen, and Dane-zaa elder Jack Askoty on a moose hunt in tribal territory of northern British Columbia. The camera keeps mostly on the men's backs, drifting lazily to capture rustling trees or sunlight blinking through grass. One minute-and-a-half long landscape shot — a spray of carmine shrubs breaking on a yellow-green treeline that sweeps clear back to the Rockies — nearly brought me to tears. The image conveyed a profound reverence for the land. It suggested an artist who had determined that in the face of punishing indifference, one antidote may simply be to care.



*'[mymothersside](#)' is on view at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive through Feb. 24, 2024.*

# 'Custer had it coming': Duane Linklater's missives from an Indigenous present

In 'mymothersside' at BAMPFA, the Omaskêko Cree artist considers the importance of anti-colonialist language.

By CHARLES LEWIS III   NOVEMBER 7, 2023

Timing is a funny thing: the day before I visited Berkeley to see this exhibit, I was part of SF's **freeway-jamming ceasefire demonstration**, organized by Jewish Voices for Peace. The people of Palestine are as victimized by colonization as any other group under occupation, and walking beside them in that protest was one of the more life-reaffirming activities I've done this year. So, when I wound up at this exhibit the next day and saw Duane Linklater's canvas with the painted words "Custer had it coming," it struck my anti-colonial heart in all the right ways.

That piece, titled *Boys Don't Cry*, was actually the final stop on our curated tour of **mymothersside** (runs through February 25 at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.) Of First Nations heritage, born into what is now Northern Ontario, Canada, the Omaskêko Cree Linklater's work explores his birth land, both before and after European colonizers planted stakes on its sacred soil.



*"can the circle be unbroken," (2019). Digital print on linen with black-walnut and iron-red and black-walnut dyes, cypress-yellow ochre, black tea, charcoal. Collection SFMOMA. Photo: Jueqian Fang*

With that running theme of homes past and present, I suppose it's appropriate that much of the installation involves deconstructions of the tipi. Although the installation is open to any BAMPFA visitor during regular hours, one can check the museum's website for their infrequently-scheduled tours of the exhibit. The first stop on the tour (the day I went, we had a rather aloof docent leading us) is the 2015 piece *dislodgevanishskinground*. It features 12 tipi poles jutting out from a wall, each slanted to meet at a point near their tips, its linen exterior (used for the piece in lieu of traditional buffalo skin) hangs from the point at which the poles meet. It looks as if the tipi had been put on its side and began to float in midair. We're told that Linklater was tapping into the literal and figurative sense of dislocation people have under colonialism—as if their whole world had been turned on its ear.

This carries into the next piece, *wintercount* (No. 215), in which tipi linens hang like drying laundry, except there are noticeable markings against the earth tones of the linens. We're told that the seemingly random dark markings have two meanings: first, representing just a small number of the First Nations lives lost to Canada's infamous **residential school system**; and secondly, the Lakota calendar. The piece's title comes from the Cree method of counting a person's age, "How many winters have you had?"

In fact, the exhibit's name also alludes to how the Cree, like most Indigenous groups, had no written language. They have one now, though it's relatively "new" compared to the written Germanic-derived scripts (English, French, Italian, etc.) or those of greater Asia. Mashing the titles of the show's pieces together into singular words imitates the syllabic speech pattern of the Cree's spoken tongue, one part directly leading into the other.



'mymothersside,' installation view. Photo by Jueqian Fang

The importance of language in its many forms stands out in the piece *What Then Remains*, the latest entry of a series permanently installed in institutions all around the country. As in other editions, this one required the hosting building to remove a piece of the wall to expose the supportive materials underneath. With just a little red paint, Linklater painted the support beams to make them (sorta) spell out the piece's title. (I say sorta because supportive beams don't form into a traditional English alphabet. What's "written" in red paint is more akin to ad hoc words written on a **seven-segment display**.) And, as with earlier editions, the paint is expected to remain on the beams long after the wall proper has been restored, leaving a permanent mark of Linklater's contribution.

Two videos from his *Cape Spear* series are shown, one of which features the aforementioned cape, uninhabited. The cape was once home to a tribe that lived at one of the furthest northeast points in North America before settlers expeditiously declared them "extinct." We're told Linklater's encounter with surviving members inspired the series, with the Zen-like footage of water hitting rocks suggesting ghosts remaining in a confined area, though that's probably my own takeaway from the description.



"boys don't cry," (2017). Digital prints on hand-dyed linen. Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photo: Dennis Ha, courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

The tour ends with a few mirror-covered tables displaying 3-D-printed recreation of First Nations artifacts from the Utah Museum of Fine Art. On the wall near the tables is the aforementioned *Boys Don't Cry*. The latter is the end of a trail of several clothing articles found throughout the tour. All the clothes were Linklater's in his adolescence, and *Boys Don't Cry* represents an adult recollection of how the young artist tried to process his identity; challenging ideas of white colonialism and universal displays of toxic masculinity. Indeed, the Cree heritage is matrilineal, taking pride in one's connection to the feminine, despite one's specific gender identity.