

Duane Linklater, *cache*

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“There must be something that as an artist and as an Indigenous person I can leave behind, because I’m not going to be here forever; there must be something that I can leave behind me to help the ones that are coming after.”¹ Published in *Mousse Magazine* in 2017, these words

from Duane Linklater seem the most informative way to contextualize his recent installation at Catriona Jeffries in Vancouver. Interested in land-based education and cultural transmission, Linklater has developed a practice emphasizing Indigenous structures—conceptual and material—to counter processes of erasure, extraction and dispossession. His work often results in a material arrangement that problematizes the white cube’s architecture and spatiality, as well as the alienation of Indigenous people from the land and settlers’ exploitation of natural resources. Using building materials, Linklater addresses the museum as a constructed space:

The materials in the walls are extracted from the land. [...] This is where the resource extraction takes place, in the home where the moose and Indigenous people live. That system has to be removed, meaning the Indigenous people have to be removed in order for those resources to be extracted.²



Linklater's exhibition is titled *cache* and is based on a strategic storage system Indigenous peoples use to preserve and conceal food and material items, and consequentially knowledge: caches were vehicles for transmission, carriers of cultural significance. Working with opacity and inversion, Linklater performs gestures of refusal that address both the ancestral continuum and the colonial obliteration of Indigenous peoples. At Catriona Jeffries, Linklater's intervention is first experienced outside the white walls. At the entrance of the building—a former metal workshop on East Cordova Street—green mesh fabric covers a major part of the courtyard fence, adding to the industrial look of the converted art gallery and prompting confusion about the current purpose of the space. Brian Jungen's outdoor sculpture *Flagpole* (2020) stands in the courtyard. The tilted, upside-down pole rises to shed light on the children's lives the residential school system has taken. This "anti-monument," as Jungen calls it, points to the atrocities the Canadian government perpetrated through its assimilation project. While Jungen's sculpture and Linklater's installation are distinct works occupying different spaces, they seem to be interwoven in a long-lasting conversation. The artists have been good friends since they went moose hunting together in 2012 and made a film about their experience, titled *Modest Livelihood* (2012).

Inside the gallery, various elements are gathered in and around a massive scaffolding system that stands in the middle of the space, almost reaching the heights of the 25-foot-high ceiling. Acting as a display grid and a cavernous shelter, the structure showcases individual artworks while also shielding them from the viewers. Several paintings are hung throughout the scaffolding. One in particular stands out; a monumental piece of bound canvas dramatically suspended, its pink and red hues evoking the colours of flesh. Titled *immolations_of_saint_anne_* (2024), the painting refers to St. Anne's Residential School, which was located in Fort Albany, Ontario, and is known for the violence inflicted upon Indigenous children of the James Bay region. The school operated from 1902 to 1976 and was funded by the federal government. The buildings burnt down over the years; in 2015, a fire destroyed the last remaining structure. Linklater's installation sparks important questions about how the past resonates beyond its temporal borders. He exposes the structure, which sheds light on the art world's entanglements with colonial violence, while keeping the artifacts out of sight or reach. Tucked inside the metal grid, two dressers give the installation a domestic, private feeling as potential containers for personal belongings. Towards a corner of the structure, a sculpture rests on a plinth half hidden behind paintings. Three basketballs are held between the upended legs of stacked wooden chairs, the kind of chairs we would find in a classroom. Linklater's assemblage of paintings and sculptures resonates with Jungen's inverted flagpole, as it refers to the residential school system and plays with monumentality and power dynamics.

On the top board of the scaffolding, a snare drum is set on a floor tom. Although no sound can be heard, a steady beat seems to run silently through the gallery. Bouncing basketballs and resonant drums vibrate in one's imagination. An iconic beat is described in the exhibition text, "The kick drum resounds—one echoing hit is punctuated by two eighth notes before a brassy snare maxes out the headroom on the fourth beat. And it repeats." This 1963 beat by drummer Hal Blaine, initially recorded for The Ronettes' tune *Be My Baby*, has been used in numerous songs.

Linklater's interest lies in The Jesus and Mary Chain's *Just Like Honey* (1985), for which Blaine's beat was recreated using a reduced drum kit comprised of a snare drum and a floor tom. The inaudible beat that inhabits the gallery also echoes the work of *eagles with eyes closed*, a musical project consisting of Linklater and his son Tobias. Linklater has been concerned with questions of transmission, notably "how songs are transmitted, how language is transmitted, and how beat is transmitted."³ The *cache*, as an intergenerational practice, contributes to leaving something for the next generation, maybe even a beat that is waiting to resound again.

Further in the gallery several colourful welding screens are shielding a variety of items—a photograph of a bison herd adorned with gold leaf, a mink fur, steel pipes, feathers, a circular object made of tied tamarack branches. Some screens are placed so close to the walls that viewers can't access what is behind, they can only catch a glimpse in the openings. Without any textual descriptions, the artifacts are somewhat shielded from colonial appropriative logics as well, keeping the embodied knowledge enclosed. Linklater takes on the historical exclusion of Indigenous people from museums and galleries and flips it over as he turns the exhibition space into a *cache* that is dedicated to protecting and preserving Indigenous culture. His multifaceted and critical installation counters the symbolic monumentalizing of colonial ideology as expressed through art institutions' practices and offers an "anti-monument" that challenges issues of cultural loss. A thought-provoking exhibition, *cache* gives shape to recovery, carving an inversion space for the safety of what persists.

1. "What Then Remainz? Duane Linklater in Conversation with Kitty Scott," *Mousse Magazine* 59 (2017): 258.
2. Scott, "What Then Remainz?," 263.
3. Scott, "What then Remainz?," 257.

Maude Johnson is an author, curator and art consultant. Her writing and curatorial projects focus primarily on performative, material, and curatorial practices and issues. Her exhibition projects have been presented at Galerie de l'UQAM (Montréal, 2022), Regart artist-run centre (Lévis, 2020), Critical Distance Centre for Curators (Toronto, 2018) and in the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery's SIGHTINGS off-site exhibition space (Montréal, 2016). Her writing has appeared in *Esse arts + opinions* and *ESPACE art actuel*, and in a number of art publications and exhibition brochures.