Relational Maker

Tan-si, kaa-kee-know too-tee-mak, hello all my relations, my name is KC Adams, my mother's family is from Fisher River Cree Nation, and my father is from Pegius Ojibway First Nation, and I am of the bear clan. I am a maker living in Winnipeg, Treaty-one territory, using numerous mediums, including photography, sculpture, adornment, public art, installation, ceramics, printmaking, video, AR and VR. This variety of making reflects how my female ancestors worked, applying multiple skill sets to ensure the continuation of their families and communities. It is with them in mind I present these new works. I honour the knowledge they used to construct shelters, gather food, pick medicine, and make clothing and spiritual items. Their knowledge runs through me through oral histories, participating in ceremonies and blood memory. I take that knowledge and utilize modern mediums to make as they did, and I teach the next generation to keep it flowing.

My Indigenous ancestors were dealt multiple blows through the introduction of the Indian Act, which brought in unwelcome political and social changes that disrupted traditional methods of supporting themselves, including labelling their creations as 'anthropological' or 'craft,' a colonial strategy to suppress the brilliance of Indigenous traditional work. The Scots-Lakota scholar Carmen Robertson explains that Indigenous art was "placed in the category of 'craft,' which is positioned low within the hierarchy of the Western art canon" (10). Consequently, Indigenous creations that used artistic mediums associated with 'craft' meant less prestige, recognition and financial success, but is also a dismissive consideration of its rich cultural content. Lately, I bristle against the terms' craft' and 'art.' These Eurocentric artistic classifications do not recognize the rich historical traditions of Indigenous art or its intricate ties to Indigenous culture. The making process by Indigenous makers encapsulates Indigenous knowledge that goes beyond creative or practical; it is relational, spiritual and complex.

Last year, the term '*Relational Maker*' came to me in a waking dream.[[1]](#footnote-1) A Relational Maker is an Indigenous person who creates skillfully made objects, articles or performances that imply kinship, a relationship to land, nature and the cosmos. *Relational Making* is the infusion of relational understanding within Indigenous creations. Métis scholar Sherry Farrell Racette explains, "Indigenous art reflect environmental knowledge and continues to be a response to the land, plants and animals, to family history and to present circumstances" (10). The making process holds Indigenous cultural worldviews and a bonding experience with the people who came before me and the knowledge they carry, regardless of whether the material is land-based or new technologies. Before European contact, everyone in the Indigenous community designed objects that ensured the individual or community's survival. For example, community members decorated clothing, hunting tools and spiritual items to communicate their prayers for the continuation of their culture. Animacy was tied to these items, meaning they embodied a spiritual life force (Farrell-Racette 71). The term *Relational Maker* honours this practice of making items to support cultural values. I encourage other Indigenous makers to think critically about the existing artistic terminology and how our works are viewed through a colonial lens and consider *Relational Making* that honours our worldview.

Works Cited

Robertson, Carmen, and Sherry Farrell Racette. *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*. University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009.

Farrell Racette, Sherry. "My Grandmothers Loved to Trade: The Indigenization of European Trade Goods in Historic and Contemporary Canada". *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, vol 20, March 2008, pp. 69-81. JSTOR, https://doi.org/132.174.251.47. Accessed 11 Sept 2021.

1. In Inninew (Woodland Cree) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway) cultures, guidance can come to an individual in their sleep or while they are awake. They are considered teachings that can come from their guiding spirit or ancestors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)