

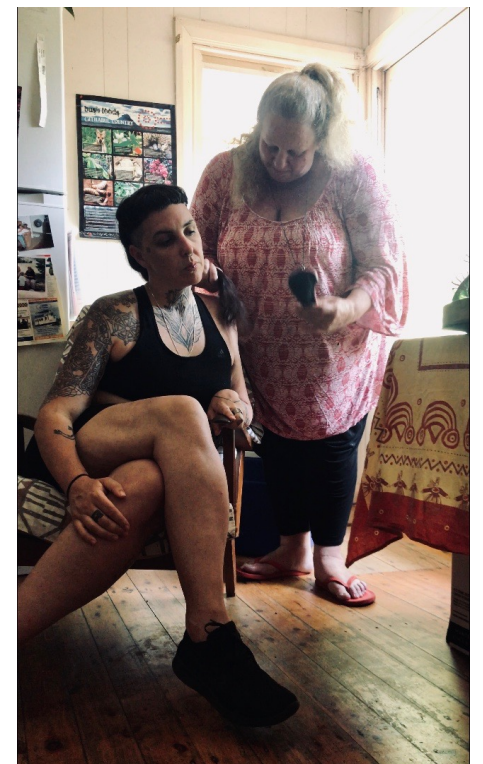
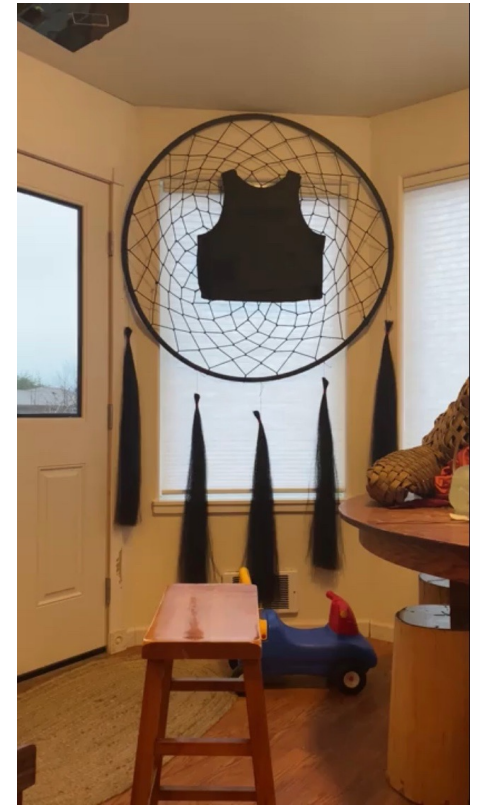


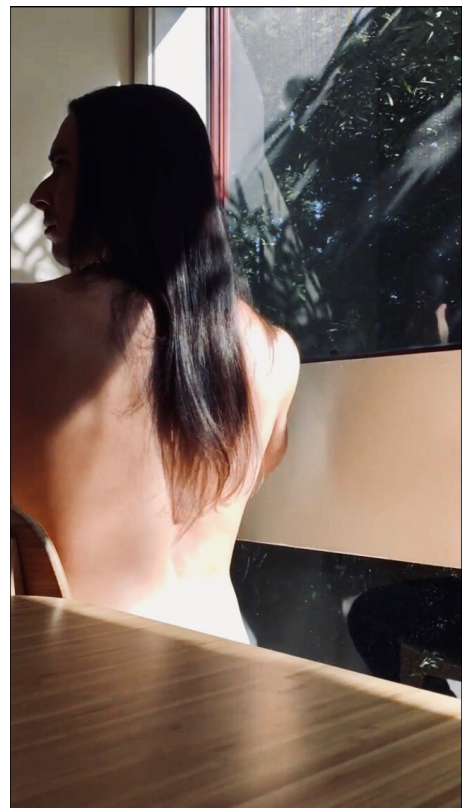
Magna Mater

In *Magna Mater*, twelve Indigenous men, masculine spectrum, or assigned male at birth people with whom S.J Norman is in kinship commit to having their hair brushed, 100 strokes each day over the course of the same moon cycle. This action is performed either by the subjects themselves, or by a person they nominate as an important caregiver in their life, family or community. Each performer's commitment to this daily gesture is documented using the most readily available technology- their phone. Mapping a vast and growing network of queer, First Nations interconnectedness that spans continents, cultures, and ancestral temporalities, this video and performance installation dissolves the colonial violence that modifies and regulates Indigenous bodies and replaces it with tenderness, cultural reclamation and mutual care.

Building on S.J Norman's practice of performance rituals that decolonise and empower First Nations bodies, *Magna Mater* includes performers from Australia, Aotearoa, the Pacific, the North and South American continents whom Norman has grown kinship with over years of his artistic practice. Traces of each performance are collected and included in the installation: material manifestations of the network's ephemeral yet deeply embodied connection.

Performers: Nicholas Galanin, Joseph Pierce, Maddee Clarke, Ileini Kabalan, Ben Parangi, Lukas Avendaño, Javier Stell-Fresquez, Dakota Comacho, Jack Grey, Gallermic Mabuse.





Hair is one of the first parts of our bodies to be removed—cut—by colonizers. In a way, this act of wounding, of laceration, is a prerequisite for assimilation.

I often wonder: Where did all that hair go? Returned to the earth, in the nest of a bird, lost in the desert? Held in museum basements, tagged and numbered?

To focus on Indigenous hair is thus to home in on a locus of interpellation by colonial eyes. For so long Indigenous hair has been fetishized, imagined as a source of exotic power that is at once desired and feared. At times it marks us as instantly legible to outsiders, and at others it makes us incomprehensible.

We, for whom hair is not just hair, but an extension of self-in-community, a form of grounding and relating to our ancestors, know all too well the power of our hair to inspire fear, jealousy, and confusion in those who cannot fathom its logics.

For this they sent (and still send) us to boarding schools, missions, children's homes, concentration camps, border detention facilities. First step: cut the hair. "Kill the Indian, save the man," begins with a pair of scissors.

Our hair is racialized and dangerous. Unruly, long, undisciplined hair in men and masculine people is seen as a symbol of our savagery.

To entrust one's hair to another is not so much a demonstration of care, which it is, but an extension of the body towards another, a becoming-multiple, a sharing of ancestral relation that centers the body as a site of historical negotiation.

Become part of me. Become future with me.

"Will you brush my hair?" This is an act of ontological nourishment, an intimate reminder of our mutual responsibilities, and of our tremulous belongings-to-one-another.

In Magna Mater, twelve Indigenous men, masculine spectrum, or assigned male at birth people with whom Norman is in kinship commit to having their hair brushed 100 strokes each day over the course of the same moon cycle. This action is performed by a caregiver from the subject's community or family. When needed, the subject can also perform the action alone or in communion with the ancestors. This process is documented by the subjects on their phones. Over time, the brushes used by each participant will accumulate strands of hair and will later be displayed along with the composite video documentation. In contradistinction with most anthropological or museum praxis, the hair left on each brush is acquired through a process of care, rather than an act of violence.

Through this process Norman's work does not put the subjects' vulnerability on display, but rather empowers each participant to frame, stage, and reveal only those parts, those histories, that they wish to share. The durational performance marks a shared relationality across time and space; a queering of normative temporality and embodiment through tactile proximities.

These shared intimacies cross colonial divisions of scale, vibrating, calling to resonance. Some would call this, simply, survival. But this work also presents the ancestral concatenation of our bodies in quotidian vulnerability.

Joseph M. Pierce

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Associate Professor, Stony Brook University (USA)



















Magna Mater (2020)

S.J Norman

Durational performance, 10 channel video, human hair, found objects. Dimensions variable.

This work was commissioned for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney.

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