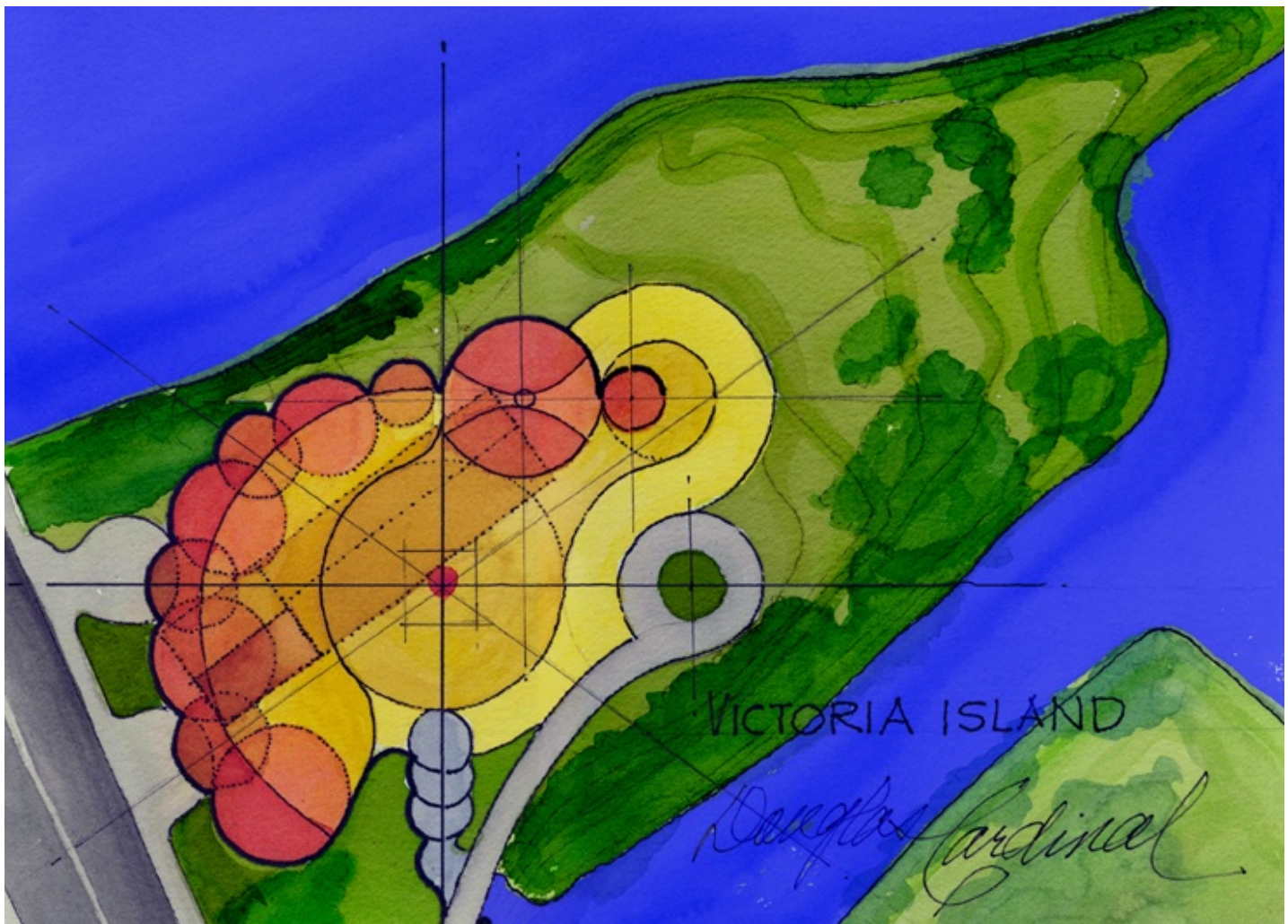


Gzhe-minidoo Ki | God's Country



Thursday, June 21, 2012 to Saturday, July 28, 2012

Opening

Thursday, June 21, 2012 to Friday, June 22, 2012

Curators: Howard Adler and Christopher Wong Artists: Scott Benesiinaabandan, Douglas Cardinal, Tannis Neilson and Frank Shebageget Critical text by: Howard Adler *God's Country* is a radio station for Christian country and southern gospel music... *God's Country* is located in Potters County, Pennsylvania, it is "unspoiled, untouched" and "untamed"... *God's Country* is a modern day story of slavery, young women ignored by the police and protected by "freedom of religion" are trapped in polygamous communities scattered throughout North America... *God's Country*, often abbreviated to "godzone," is a phrase that has

been used by New Zealanders and Australians to describe their homeland... *God's Country* was used by the Confederate army to describe parts of Tennessee in the 1860's, it was also used to describe California, and to describe the land of the Mississippi plains; it is still occasionally used to describe the United States, and parts of Canada. *God's Country/Gzhe-minidoo Ki* features four contemporary Aboriginal artists whose works innovatively challenge histories of colonization. Appropriating a ubiquitous phrase with religious connotations, the exhibitions title symbolically reclaims Indigenous lands by placing western notions of ownership and possession into an Indigenous context. When translated into Anishinaabemowin (the Ojibwa Language), the term loses its power to claim Indigenous lands as belonging to the deity of the colonizing group. The artists in this exhibition explore issues of past wrongdoings and processes of colonization, but also demonstrate decolonial practices and strategies for reclaiming Indigenous voice. They find ways to honor the traditions and teachings of their ancestors by not forgetting their stories, and by incorporating structures found on the land, and in nature, into their artistic practices. This oeuvre of work is not only about the Canadian context, but also addresses shared colonial legacies across international borders. *God's Country/Gzhe-minidoo Ki* asks the viewer to consider how Indigenous peoples continue to grapple with difficult colonial legacies, and to think about how they are implicated in these histories. **Douglas Cardinal's** design of the *Museum of the American Indian*, part of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., and his design of St. Albert's Place, a provincial government building located in Ponoka, Alberta. Both buildings reflect Cardinal's characteristic curvilinear design, which in the museum represents the nurturing female forms of Mother Earth, while in St. Albert's Place it dispels the rigidity associated with the Alberta Government. Also on display is Cardinal's Blueprint for the Asinabka National Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island in Ottawa, Ontario. The Centre is a Circular Building open to the four directions and the solstice lines, it faces east to symbolize reconciliation and a new dawn, and it is shaped to symbolize the Seven fires prophecy of the Anishinaabe people. **Frank Shebageget's** installation piece is titled *Lodge*. Ubiquitous with travel to remote northern communities, the Beaver floatplane has become synonymous with modern innovation, resource speculation and by association, the exploitation of Native Peoples and lands in the pursuit of commercial interests. Here, this 'Beaver dam' points to the practice of hydro-electric generation, the displacement of communities and the devastation of vast wilderness areas. **Scott Benesiinaabandan's** experimental video piece *Ak-Sunrise* was created as a part of the Canada Council for the Arts Australia/Canada Indigenous Urban Artist Exchange program Jan-April 2012. This work was created as a part of the exhibition *Mii Omaa Ayaad/Oshiki Inenedamowin* (someone lives here/new thought) that was a series of new work that explored shared colonial histories of First Nations in Canada and Aboriginal Australians. It deals with ideas, histories and the present issues of land (terra nullius) language and resistance. **Tannis Nielsen's** *Not forgotten* is an experimental video about the loss of language and culture, and the detrimental effects of assimilation policies through residential schools, convents, and sanatoriums. It's repetitive visuals and ethereal soundscape reflect traumatic memories of institutional experiences, notions of cultural loss and survival, intergenerational effects, and the importance of not forgetting this important history. Howard Adler, 2012

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