

YOUR OLD WAY KIND OF VISION

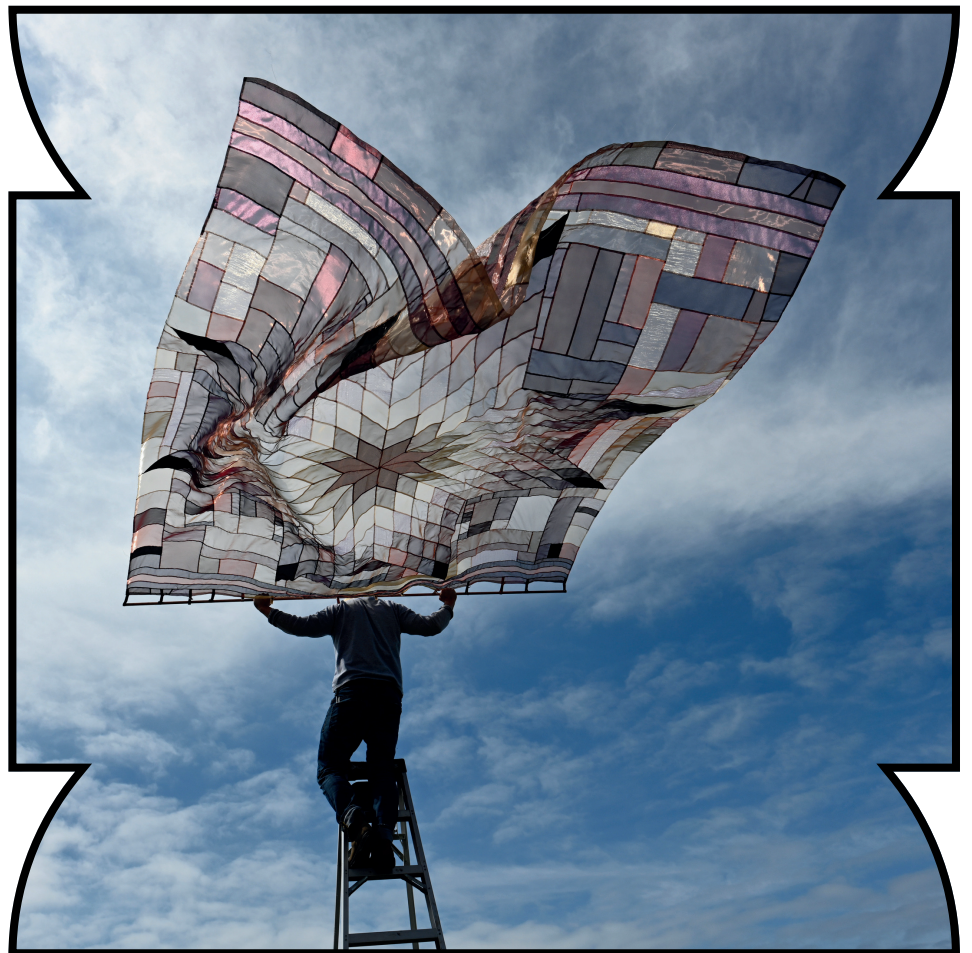
SIRU ALLOOLOO

CATHERINE BLACKBURN

WALLY DION

CHARLENE VICKERS

CURATED BY DAINA WARREN
PRESENTED BY THE ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE
JUNE 1-30, 2024 AT LIBBY LESHGOLD GALLERY



Your Old Way Kind of Vision combines the works of four Indigenous artists—Siku Allooooloo, Catherine Blackburn, Wally Dion, and Charlene Vickers—who explore their Indigenous backgrounds through their distinct artistic practices. The exhibition title is borrowed from artist and poet Siku Allooooloo's poem titled "Arnaquatikka." In the first stanzas of the poem, she writes:

**Maybe it's your old way kind of vision...
That looking past and through
ability
that enabled you to see me**

**Glint on the distant horizon
Sunlight held in floating ice**

**I am named/from a world
that no longer makes sense
Translucent, disappearing
I no longer make sense**

**I walk with secret knowing
Loving, in that old way
only spirits understand
... and somehow, you**

**You smile as you greet me
like you're happy to see home
Like you see my mother's vision
I beam with vibrant blue
_Happy - to see you too**

"Your old way kind of vision," is a fitting reference to the works in this exhibition. The phrase serves as a jumping-off point for considering how the artists connect to their ancestral knowledge and channel this knowledge into their art. Allooooloo, Blackburn, Dion, and Vickers place traditional concepts within a contemporary vision; each artist employs Indigenous forms and references to produce heavily nuanced pieces with materials slightly removed from the artists' ancestral cultures, building upon unique ideas and concepts to create original Indigenous works. Additionally, all four artists share a commitment to honouring their cultural heritage and engaging in ongoing conversations about Indigenous identity.

Catherine Blackburn's *Aboriginal Classics* is a series of delicate beadwork on tea bags filled with traditional herbal medicines. The tea bags are intricately embellished with small seed beads, evoking the plants that can be found within each: fireweed, red cedar, elderberry, cow parsnip, and pine, among others. The pieces draw on Dene motifs and patterns and explore themes of identity, language, and story. Another artwork by Blackburn in the exhibition, titled *CAREibou*, is the lower segment of a caribou hoof adorned with embroidery threads and pony hide. The second part to this project is titled, *Harvester*, which is a stitched blue IKEA shopping bag with the words "TAKE ONLY WHAT" This piece appears to reference Indigenous hunting ways that respect the ecology of the land. Inherent to these respectful methods is the understanding that to refuse this way of honouring the land when taking from it is to ruin the tradition of the hunt, including its teachings and cultural aspects, for future generations.

Wally Dion's beautifully constructed, translucent star blankets are incredibly delicate yet have a definite presence. The star blanket is a potent symbol in Indigenous cultures; it is a traditional gift to honour and celebrate important life events, such as births, marriages, and graduations. The star design represents the Morning Star, a symbol of hope and new beginnings. The making of traditional star blankets today is an act of cultural continuity. The eight-pointed star represents the morning star, which has many meanings in different Indigenous communities. Over the decades women began to integrate additional community-specific cultural symbols into the overall design. With his star quilts, Wally Dion recognizes and honours "women's crucial role within Indigenous

communities: as nurturers, gatherers, teachers, and leaders. The colours used in the blanket are meaningful, each representing a different aspect of life, such as happiness, love, and strength."

The feltworks in Charlene Vickers's extensive series are based on natural forms and incorporate the artistic style established by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, and termed Ovoidism. Vickers's work nods to a lengthy West Coast lived experience while incorporating her Anishinaabe roots in colourful, playful ways. Bordering on what might be considered craftwork, approximately 180 artworks appear in a visually stunning array that morphs into owls and other beings. The use of owls is significant: in various Indigenous traditions, owls are associated with wisdom, knowledge, and the ability to see what others cannot. They are often seen as protectors, guardians, and spiritual messengers. Not all cultures view owls in a positive light due to their associations with death and the spirit world; however, Vickers's pieces tend towards a more optimistic ideation. She also includes works on the floor that allude to moccasins, specifically the soles of traditional footwear; their outlines are based on the size of the artist's feet, illustrated in twelve varying iterations.

Lastly, Siku Allooooloo's poem "Arnaquatikka" is included. Allooooloo is an Inuk/Haitian/Taíno filmmaker, interdisciplinary artist, writer, decolonial advocate, and community builder based on Vancouver Island, BC. Her multidisciplinary artwork and writing explore themes of Indigenous identity, language, and land. This piece of writing was selected due to its beautifully articulated ideas around traditional practices and Inuit creation stories, specifically the story of Sedna. This particular piece has evocative subject matter that is expressed in a deeply layered and sensory way.

Your Old Way Kind of Vision invites viewers to reflect on the significance of artists' connections to their cultural knowledge and ways of living. This exhibition highlights how these incredibly compelling ways of reimagining traditional Indigenous concepts and objects are shaping contemporary art now and in the future.

Written by Daina Warren.