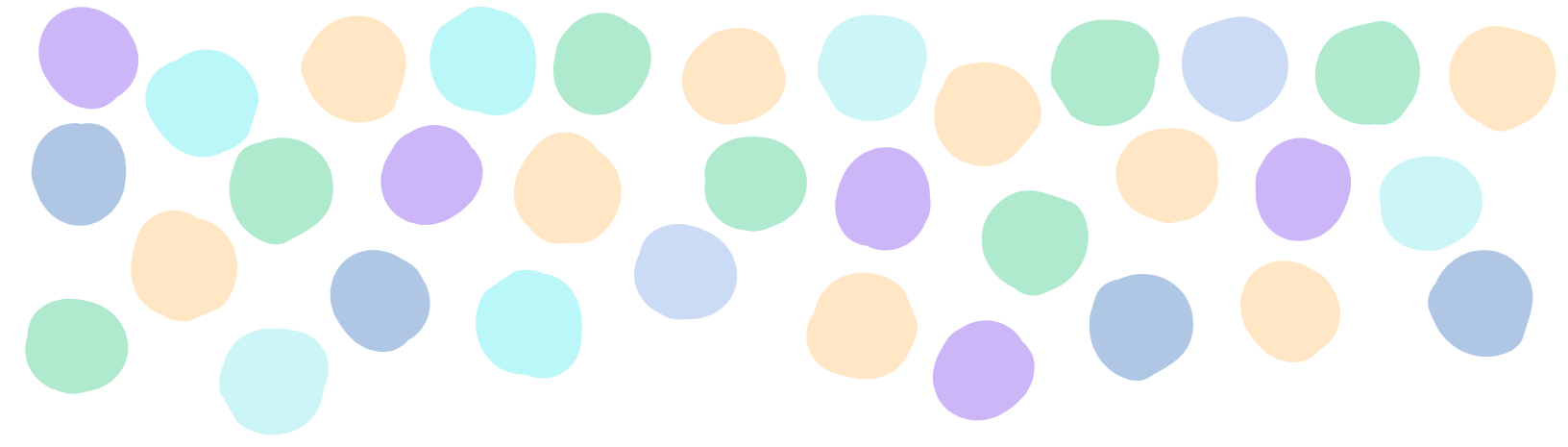




Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums

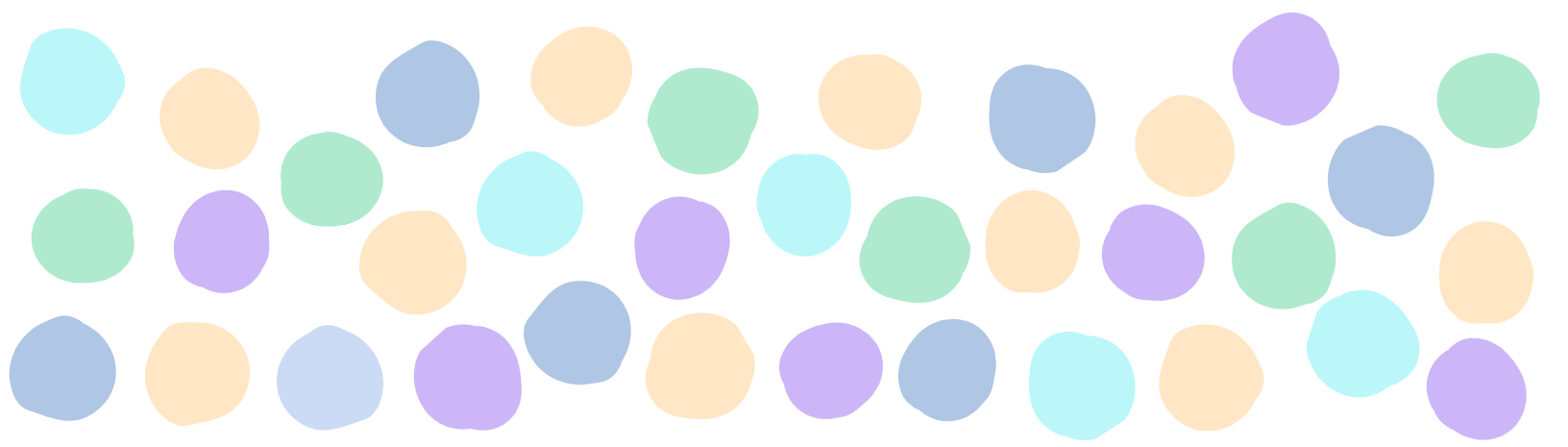


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Power is the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events.

Privilege is a special advantage or right possessed by an individual or group.

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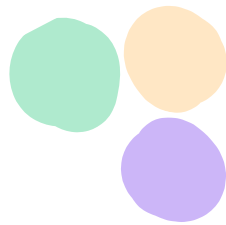


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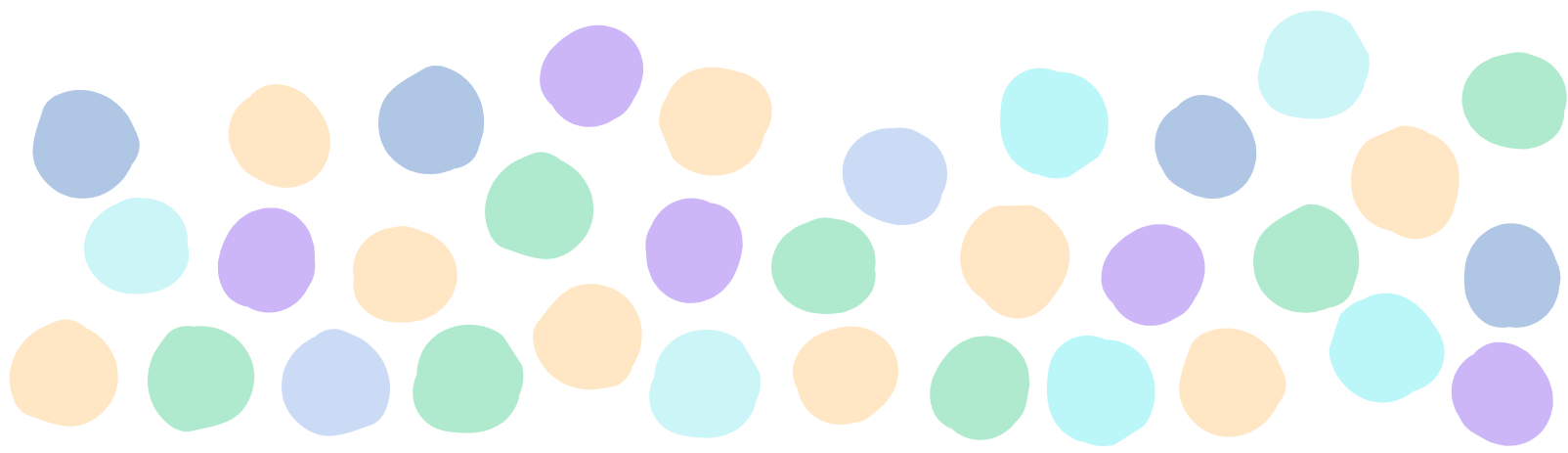
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Partnership Profiles

Leah Marie Dorion is a Métis interdisciplinary artist raised in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She is a self-taught visual artist and credits her creative family for inspiring her to take up painting and traditional Métis arts. Leah completed a Master of Arts degree at the University of Saskatchewan in 2010. She is also a teacher, a published author, and storyteller. Her art pays homage to women, earth-based spirituality, and Indigenous knowledge.

Helanna Gessner was raised in Cudworth, Saskatchewan and now lives in the nearby town of Wakaw. She is the Curatorial, Collections, and Exhibits Manager at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre and has been involved in the museum sector for over a decade. Helanna completed her Master of Arts in Museums Studies through the University of Leicester in 2018.

The Diefenbaker Canada Centre (DCC) is located on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Its mission is to help people make meaningful and personal connections to ideas of citizenship, leadership, and Canada's role in the international community. The DCC has memberships with both the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) and the Museums Association of Saskatchewan (MAS) and is committed to following guidelines on ethical considerations and Indigenous engagement in the museum sector.

This report shares their experience in this project from Helanna's perspective in hopes of inspiring others working in museums to foster institutional and community collaboration, create brave spaces, and to showcase the Indigenous voices speaking truth to power. As Leah shared with the discussion circle, we need to commit to reconciliation and:

"Have the courage to try."



Acknowledgements

Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums and *Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children* were some of the most rewarding initiatives I have had in my time working in the museum sector. It would not have been possible without the participation of all the people who contributed their time, knowledge, and skills.

I want to recognize all of the Indigenous peoples who have advocated and fought for their cultural rights throughout history. Their efforts are at the core of the work being done today in building and strengthening relationships between Indigenous communities and museums. I hope this report will support these continued efforts in Saskatchewan and across Canada.

I would like to thank Leah Marie Dorion for her partnership. Working with Leah has been an amazing experience and I am grateful for the grace, kindness, and joy she brought to each meeting and event.

Thank you, Elder Curtis Breaton for providing guidance during the discussion circle and interpretation of the themes brought forward by the participants in the discussion. Your words “with open mind and open hearts” have stayed with me and have continued to impact my journey in reconciliation.

I would like to thank Emma Morris, Museums Association of Saskatchewan’s Executive Director, and Jake Moore, University of Saskatchewan Art Galleries and Collections’ Director, for writing letters of support for the grant application to SaskCulture and providing consultation in the preparation of the discussion circle.

Thank you to the Mann Art Gallery for lending 24 original Leah Marie Dorion book illustrations to the DCC for display in *Opikinawasowin*.

I would like to recognize Louis Lafferty Photography for allowing the DCC to use photos of Leah and her artefacts in exhibition and promotional materials.

Thank you to all the DCC staff who provided support and contributed to *Power and Privilege* and *Opikinawasowin*.

I would like to thank Emily Conlon, Heritage Education Intern for the DCC during this project. She contributed immensely to the development of the exhibition and I hope it was a rewarding experience for her.



Thank you, Marilyn Black, who recommended reaching out to Leah for this project. Marilyn also provided guidance on how to respect Indigenous traditions when asking Elders for engagement and participation which I am immensely grateful for.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to all the discussion circle participants. Their participation was crucial to the project, their contribution culminating in this report. With their consent, I share their names to be recognized for their contributions.

London Boothman
Elder Curtis Breaton
Deborah Buffalo
Leah Marie Dorion
Brianna Fiddler
Kelly Fiddler
Tara-Leigh Heslip
Tarah Hogue
jake moore
Emma Morris

Finally, I wanted to recognize SaskLotteries for funding this project through SaskCulture's Multicultural Initiatives Fund.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helanna Gessner".

Helanna Gessner





Introduction

As museum professionals in Saskatchewan and across Canada learn about the importance of upholding the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), they are also seeking guidance on how to put what they learn into action. I initiated *Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums* to create space for and celebrate Indigenous cultures within the DCC. It was also intended to contribute to reconciliation in the Saskatchewan museum sector by sharing the process of relationship-building, learning the logistics of working with Indigenous artists, Elders, and community members, and supporting their self-determination.

Throughout my time with the DCC, I have intentionally held a place in my work and lifelong learning commitments to truth, reconciliation, and exploring ways to make positive and transformational changes in the museum sector. To be able to influence change, I recognize that I first need to get educated on racism, anti-racism, Indigenous rights, and history of colonialism, nationally and internationally and that it will be a life-long journey. I fully support the “Museums Are Not Neutral” movement, and that challenging existing narratives is an important step in facilitating truth telling in museum spaces. I am sharing this experience openly and transparently in the hopes that other museums, cultural organizations, and individuals can learn from this experience.

Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums created a space where Indigenous peoples and museum professionals explored how museums can support and empower Indigenous self-determination instead of dictating Indigenous history from colonial perspectives. The exhibit *Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children*, created in partnership with the Diefenbaker Canada Centre (DCC) and Métis artist Leah Marie Dorion, was used as a case study for participants to discuss museum engagement with Indigenous communities. Participants evaluated and discussed the strengths and weaknesses from its conception, through development, to its display and engagement with community.

This project was created in response to the CMA’s report [Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums](#) in the DCC’s attempt at actively incorporating these recommendations into its exhibits and programs.

Moved to Action was written in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Call to Action #67 and makes comprehensive recommendations on how the Canadian museum sector could better comply with UNDRIP.



Logistics & Methodology

Inspiration through Life-Long Learning

"Stop the silence. Listen, and act."

Dr. Verna St. Denis

Below are excerpts from forums, conferences, and workshops that I have taken part in that have played a formative role in my education and influenced the *Power and Privilege* project.

Dr. Verna St. Denis defined settler colonialism as: an ongoing system of power; normalizes continuous settler occupation, exploitation of land; and assumes European values are moral and therefore justified.¹ Museums were created through this colonial mindset and will always be part of the history. During a panel discussion at the same forum, Dr. Carmen Gillies highlighted that incomplete and/or partial awareness of racism (dysconscious racism) is perpetuated throughout Canadian society and education systems. In museums, this could be when Indigenous stories, history, and voices are missing from the narratives and truths museums share with their visitors, intentionally or not.

At the 2021 Alberta Museums Association Conference, Dr. Kisha Supernant acknowledged the realities of Canadian heritage practitioners: that heritage practitioners remain positioned as experts on and stewards of pasts that are not often their own; that many of the practitioners are from settler contexts; and that heritage practitioners need to acknowledge that Indigenous communities are the rightful caretakers of their own heritage.²

Sharon Nyangwesco, Founder and CEO of QuakeLab has highlighted that museums need to move from being equitable, to justice-oriented.³ She identified community engagement as one of the areas that museums can course-correct and work on undoing historical wrongs. This discussion on power dynamics and display set me on a path of evaluating my own curation practices and designing for justice and inclusion.

1 Dr. Verna St. Denis, 'Journey Towards Understanding Racism and Anti-Racism', presented at māmowī āsohtētān University of Saskatchewan 4th Annual Internal Truth and Reconciliation Forum, March 26, 2021.

2 Dr. Kisha Supernant, 'Being a Good Relation: The Role of Cultural Heritage Institutions in Reconciliation', Keynote Session, Alberta Museums Association Conference, September 16, 2021.

3 Sharon Nyangwesco, 'The future of museums is equitable', Canadian Museums Association Conference, April 27, 2022.





Exhibit Space

The DCC is committed to diversifying its exhibits and ensuring that underrepresented groups, such as Indigenous peoples, are actively given space and a voice in the museum space. With the closure of the gift shop at the DCC we took the opportunity to turn it into exhibit space that would be dedicated to local community, culture, and initiatives. This space, while small at 280 ft², has high traffic and high visibility, with a glass wall facing out into the building entrance, making it the first thing visitors see when entering the Diefenbaker Building.


Project Budget

Since additional exhibit development had not been accounted for in the DCC's annual budget, it meant that additional funding had to be sought out to utilize the space to its full potential. With an exhibit and discussion circle in mind as the activities, the DCC applied to SaskCulture's [Multicultural Initiatives Fund – Project Stream](#). The budget we originally applied for was \$14,927. We received partial funding at \$10,000 which required the budget to be adjusted accordingly.⁴ The budget accounted for artist fees, cultural service provider honorariums, advertising and promotion, and additional project materials such as ceremonial tobacco. Not included in this budget are the in-kind hours of the Mann Art Gallery employees who packed and unpacked the art borrowed from them to the DCC, and any DCC staff time which was significant for planning, execution, and report writing. A significant portion of both budgets was to account for travel expenses for participants of the discussion circle to encourage those outside of Saskatoon and in rural communities to take part.

As an artist, Leah accepted that we budget for her fees and royalties for the exhibit in accordance with the CARFAC Fee Schedule which was included in a signed loan agreement between the DCC and Leah.

The Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens ([CARFAC](#)) is a non-profit corporation that represents professional visual artists. The [Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule](#) provides guidelines on how artists should be compensated for professional services, exhibitions, copyright, and royalties.

⁴ We also applied to the Co-Op Community Investment Fund with artist-led programming in mind. While this application was unsuccessful, I gained experience in navigating CARFAC fees for artist-led activities.



History has often seen Indigenous Elders and community members not properly compensated for their work. By today's standards, Elders need to be recognized for the generations of ancestral knowledge they hold and must be compensated appropriately. As part of the University of Saskatchewan, the DCC honours the Cultural Service Provider rates that are based on current USask PhD rates: \$300 for a half-day or \$600 for a full day. This does not include mileage, per diems, or accommodations if needed, which also had to be accounted for in the budget. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to accept this rate or set one that they identify as equitable.

Discussion Circle

As part of the University of Saskatchewan, the discussion circle had to receive approval by the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. This ensures that as a researcher I am behaving ethically and treating all participants with respect and ensuring that all safeguards for participants privacy were in place so they could make an informed decision on taking part in the project. While I was writing the ethics application Leah and I collaborated on what the discussion circle would look like and how to foster a culture of care. Reconciliation work and speaking the truth can be empowering, but it can also have real world, negative consequences for Indigenous participants.⁵ We wanted to make sure we were fostering a brave space where participants could speak freely and not create more harm.

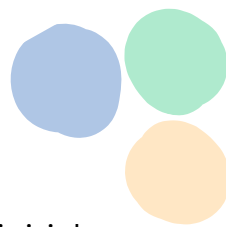
Inspired by Sydney Pickering, Connie Watts, and Nadia Beyzaei's presentation⁶ at the EDI in the Cultural Sector Conference, I adopted live digital notetaking to capture themes, ideas, and opinions in a way to respect the dialogue occurring between participants and not capturing personal stories unless participants had indicated it was okay to do so. Post-discussion circle Elder Curtis, Leah, and myself met to debrief and interpret the themes, ideas, and opinions that were captured during the circle with the intent of them being published in this report and any other forms that were identified by participants as being necessary.

"Brave spaces clearly centre themselves around the concepts of civility, owning intention, choice to participate, respect, and absence of intentional harm."

Moved to Action, pg. 92

⁵ Dr. Meranda Roberts, 'What will it take to Decolonize Museums?' Canadian Museums Association Conference, February 28, 2023.

⁶ Sydney Pickering, Connie Watts, and, Nadia Beyzaei, 'Understanding Civic Impact Through the Lens of Indigenous Cultural Knowledge', EDI in the Cultural Sector Virtual Conference, June 16, 2022.



Project Timeline

The preliminary planning of the project began in October 2022 with initial partnership building and grant writing. Once funding was confirmed, work began in earnest in January 2023 to develop the exhibit for display at the beginning of February to coincide with the display period of *Snapshots of Canada* from the Canadian Museum of History. We celebrated the opening of both exhibits on February 15th with an artist talk from Leah alongside a presentation by Dr. Andrew Watson with the University of Saskatchewan's Department of History. The exhibit remained on display until May 19th, after which it was uninstalled, and the art and objects transported back to the Mann Art Gallery and Leah in Prince Albert respectively. The discussion circle took place on the last day of the exhibit, with a post-discussion meeting with Elder Curtis and Leah taking place in the month afterwards, followed by report writing and communications materials developed to be distributed and utilized by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and museum staff.

Relationship Building and Collaborative Curation

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

UNDRIP Article 13.1

As Leah and I worked towards curating the exhibit, I continuously referred to the *Moved to Action* report's standards for museums as well as the [Standards for Saskatchewan Museums](#) to ensure I was embracing UNDRIP and supporting Indigenous self-determination. In developing the exhibit, this means collaboration and letting go of control and decision-making that Leah had the right to be doing and following her lead in what was required of me. As a curator, it is often easy to utilize a solo approach to choose themes, write content, and design exhibits and programming. By not falling back into this safety net and instead offering my experience in the logistical and administrative aspects of museums and any of my other skills, including curation as needed, an incredible partnership flourished.



During our initial exchanges via email, Leah had immediately identified her children's book illustration as a focus for the exhibit. She donated these to the Mann Art Gallery in Prince Albert and assisted in coordinating a loan to the DCC with the Mann Art Gallery. Leah compiled a list of 51 book illustrations and other solo art that fit with the theme of childrearing and then asked me and the DCC's Heritage Education Technician Intern Emily Conlon to curate a selection. She also borrowed the DCC Métis toys and cultural objects to be displayed alongside the art, going through the same process where Emily and I identified items that would complement that art and support the exhibit's narrative.

Getting to see Leah's first look at the completed exhibition was a highlight of my experience. I felt honoured that she was confident enough in me to use my curatorial experience to display the pieces we had collectively chosen in a way that I felt was true to both her art and the intended audience – children. I intentionally kept the children's toys close to the ground to be at children's sight line rather than adults; even the art was lower than traditional museum standards recommend to further empower children's connections with both the art and toys. Leah's son Louis Lafferty is a photographer



and had taken photos of the collection; one of which was a curated circle of his moccasins surrounding a toy horse draped with a Métis sash. It was important to Emily and I that we pay homage to this original design and recreated it within the exhibit.

Honoring protocols and ceremonies for engagement is a core aspect of engaging with Indigenous communities that museum staff need to account for and better understand. Elders who are knowledge keepers are often over-burdened with requests from settler organizations who are on their path of reconciliation; just because you ask for engagement from Elders does not mean they are obligated to engage. These relationships should not be an extractive experience for Elders. We wanted to make sure that the visitors to the exhibit and the participants and Elders of the discussion circle would find some benefit to themselves and their community as well.

Originally Leah and I had asked multiple Elders for their guidance and participation who shared our interest in the project. However, when it came to the timing of the exhibit opening and discussion circle, they had community priorities that they had to attend to. As outlined in the *Moved to Action* report, it was important that we support and understand that the Elders put their community needs before that of the institution. Leah had recommended Elders from her circle that we could approach for their help and partnership in this project, one of which was Elder Curtis Breaton. While he had already said yes to Leah, I still had the responsibility to honour Indigenous protocol and ask him in good faith through the offering of tobacco, which he accepted.

Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children

Opikinawasowin was on display from February 15 to May 19, 2023. This section is composed of the artist statement written by Leah for the exhibit and a transcript of the talk she gave at the exhibit opening. Leah was guided by Elders to share the true way of love, joy, and nurturing of Métis childrearing practices that government policies and residential schools destroyed. As the featured artist whose knowledge and creativity are being shared, her words help create an understanding and appreciation of Métis culture as it is represented in the exhibit.

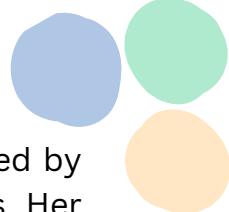
Artist Statement

This collection features original artworks created by Métis artist Leah Marie Dorion on the theme of *Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children*.

This series of collected artworks was created by Leah Marie Dorion from 2014-2021 and are a combination of children's book illustrations and other independent pieces from her private collection. This show reflects Métis cultural symbolism, worldview, characters, and teachings that are a hallmark of her artistic practice to tell the story of growing Métis children.



Photo Credit: Louis Lafferty Photography



The book illustrations are on loan from the Mann Art Gallery and were donated by Leah to the gallery to be properly curated and used for educational purposes. Her children's books are still published and available from Strong Nations Publishing in British Columbia.

This collection also debuts artwork and artefacts from Leah's personal collection that was created to tell the story of Métis child rearing and development. Many of her illustrations and original artwork are deeply influenced by Métis Elders' teachings, which are available in her [Master's Thesis \(2010\)](#).

May we all be inspired by the spirit of love that forms the heart of this art show and remember that we all have a role to play in "growing children".

Leah Marie Dorion

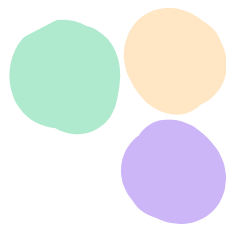
Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children Exhibit Opening Artist Talk

The following are excerpts from the Artist Talk with Leah Marie Dorion from the opening of the exhibit.⁷

Putting our children at the heart and the centre of our community is one of the most special experiences, its profoundly healing. It gives children a voice when we put them at the centre of our circle. When I was asked to do the show, I felt so moved because I get to put Métis children at the centre of the circle in a place that is very hierarchical...and I get to put these little Métis children's voices into this reconciliation story. My work that you are going to see in the show is imperfect. It's raw. It's just really, pure emotion, and it comes from the heart. And what you're going to see in the show is my work for children's books.

The little artworks you see there we actually created for book illustrations, so they were developed and created to be observed by children, and they are early reader's books. These are children who are not reading yet, so I am trying to bridge literacy – to take them from that seeing world, the listening world – to the reading world. And as children in Canada read my books, they are getting Métis characters, Métis teaching, Métis perspective, and Métis children.

⁷ Snapshots of Canada and Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children Exhibits Opening, February 15, 2023.



How wonderful, there is reconciliation. And they get to see how Métis children are raised and some of the philosophy in my children's books, and I think what the work does, it bridges children's difference and brings them together. They see color, they see love, and they see babies, and they see just people who love each other, and I think that is what I just love about the illustrations. Not many people get to see the actual artwork that goes into a book.... you'll notice the edges – there's splashed paint, they're imperfect, but they're perfect in that way, and they're raw.

I did purposefully put other paintings that are more polished and are a little more independent. They were created outside of the book series and they were there to show how I represent some of my more polished works with children and families, and you can see they are a little more detailed, a little more meticulous, and there's a little different direction. When I walked in the door and saw those little book illustrations and they just punch color and bring joy, and I thought that was just wonderful to see. So, I am hoping they do the work of reconciliation, I hope that when we undertake that bundle of reconciliation, we put that heart into it, and that circular approach, cause it's hard, it's really hard. But if we go to the basics, go back to the heart, go back to the circle, and we involve our child mind and put our children and Elders in the centre, we each take ourselves around that as adults and people of that age who can stand and protect that inner circle, I think we are going to be okay.

There is another aspect to it. This is why I love working with you Helanna, you were so open. We took children's book illustrations, we took about three original paintings, and then I said, "do you want some artefacts from my private collection?" and then all of a sudden [Helanna says] "yeah, let's do it!" And the reason I felt so strongly about offering that narrative, is those artefacts explain the illustration, because my illustrations can be a little bit abstract, so a kid who doesn't know what a cradleboard, or a moss bag, or maybe a pair of moccasins are, these artefacts help to understand the visual narrative in my work, especially the children's book illustrations.





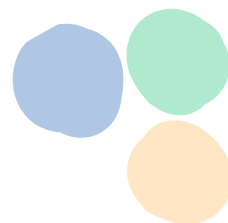
Photo Credit: Louis Lafferty Photography

So a lot of the display items are real moss bags, my family's cradleboard...I also have toys; all my son's moccasins, from his first stage of life, are in a little circle with a little toy horse the kids played with. These are real toys played with by little Métis kids of recent. I feel that there is a lot of beautiful play, joy, and I think reconciliation doesn't always have to be so serious. It should be fun. We should be able to bring out the puppets and we should be able to bring out those things, because it is hard heavy lifting work.

I have done a thesis on Opikinawasowin with my Elders in my circle, and I did the Master's degree because I was working in the content with my Auntie Elsie—who couldn't be with us [today], she is doing family circles right now—I was working as her helper, doing the work, and they felt that they weren't getting any younger, and they asked me to do a Master's degree with the oral methodology. I am happy that I did a Master's thesis, with oral interviews, in my community, of traditional parenting knowledge. So, this show really comes out of a snapshot of a lot of really important conversations, and a lot of work to put our kids, and our Métis kids, back in the centre. And I can tell you, as any parent who has read, say in the 70s, 80s, and even 90s [to their kids], there were no Métis kids books. So now, my dear young lady who I am mentoring has a young son... she can read to her son, today, Métis books, so her little boy knows who he is, sees himself in the literature, and sees these things in his library, which I didn't have that opportunity. I could find books about Mexico...and see kids in Mexico playing in my children's books, and children from all over the world... but we didn't have any Métis [children's books]. So today that is different. Reconciliation is happening and I just pray that it stays child centered and embodied in love.



Discussion Circle Themes



"Stay grounded but be visionary."

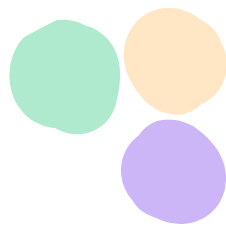
Leah Marie Dorion

On May 19, 2023, a group of volunteer participants came together for the discussion circle at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre located on Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis.⁸ We began the discussion circle in a good way with a tobacco offering to Elder Curtis and Leah Dorion followed by a smudge ceremony and prayer led by Elder Curtis. Before we began the discussion, I outlined the intention of coming together: that museums need to be brave spaces and that Reconciliation in museums means supporting the Indigenous voices who speak truth to power, and that this discussion circle would embrace and respect this. Everyone had the opportunity to introduce themselves and say why they wanted to take part. The first half of the circle started with an artist talk with Leah and then the group evaluated *Opikinawasowin*, reviewing its successes, challenges, and things to consider for future projects. After a wellness break the discussion focused on the themes of reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination and engagement in museums to help identify areas in which museums can actively participate in anti-racism and reconciliation. At the end of the circle, each participant received a pack of poppy seeds from my garden collected the previous summer as small token of appreciation.

There were multiple recurring themes throughout the discussion on what is working in the Saskatchewan museum sector and what is still needed to be done and improved upon. The following section consists of simple and clear statements written from these themes and the interpretation Elder Curtis, Leah, and myself made during our final meeting post-discussion circle.

⁸ As outlined in the methodology section, the project received approval from the USask Behavioural Research Ethics Board.





Reconciliation can happen in museums

"What is required is for you to listen in this moment."

jake moore


Museology is not a very old practice, but it is very colonial. Actively participating in reconciliation efforts, such as repatriation, is a way in which museums can be justice-oriented in righting historical wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples.

- Foster brave spaces. Museum must do so carefully to make sure additional harm isn't being done to Indigenous peoples.
- Activism has a place in museums. Museum staff need to be sharing and advocating for truth in order for healing to happen.
- Museum staff need to be allies and accept and support Indigenous artistic practices and methods of healing, creating a culture of care. [UNDRIP](#) should be reflected at all levels of museum governance, in exhibits, programming, and outreach activities.
- Indigenous mentorship and learning initiatives should be fostered in museum spaces.
- Museum staff need to step outside of their own circles and push to challenge themselves to learn and grow in anti-racism practices, reconciliation, and actively engage with the cultures being displayed in museum spaces on a regular basis.
- Institutional collaboration and partnerships are needed to hold each other accountable and assist with one another's initiatives. Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) networks are one way in which knowledge can be shared effectively.

"I am proud of the Mann Art Gallery and the Diefenbaker Canada Centre for their collaboration in this reconciliation initiative and opening the doors to future partnerships."

Leah Marie Dorion, May 31, 2023



- 
- Museums must share their knowledge and resources with Indigenous museums, groups, and artists. This can include monetary support, providing space in existing museums for Indigenous peoples and supporting them in creating their own museums.
 - Compensation for Indigenous partners in projects needs to be equitable, accounting for time, labour, and knowledge.
 - Museums of any size, no matter how much or little gallery space they have, can host Indigenous exhibits and programming. Small, intimate spaces can be perfect for certain stories to be shared.
 - The onus of repatriation belongs to museums. Museum staff should question how Indigenous objects and collections came to be at the museum and seek out repatriation processes.

Moved to Action is accompanied by *More than Giving Back: Repatriation Toolkit* for museums to utilize in repatriation initiatives.

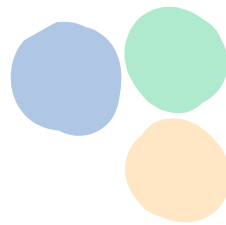
Indigenous representation in museums matter

“[Representation in museums] can make an impact on Indigenous children in establishing their Indigenous identity at a young age.”

Kelly Fiddler

People are more likely to visit a museum if they feel they are represented and supported in exhibits, programs, and outreach initiatives.

- Exhibits like *Opikinawasowin* are an important shift away from the ‘idealized’ viewer of traditional museology. *Opikinawasowin* physically shifted the space to be viewed by children rather than adults. It helped people, Indigenous or settler, to understand and appreciate Métis culture as it was presented.
- Language is important. The authorial voice of Indigenous exhibits and programs must be that of the community and should be represented in their language.
- Oral histories need to be recognized alongside other settler forms of recordings. Museum staff should understand that it might not fit within traditional museum exhibition and research practices and explore ways in which to actively represent it.



True engagement takes time

"Have the courage to try."

Leah Marie Dorion

- Be ok with the silence, have patience, and acknowledge the timing might not always align between institutions and community when seeking engagement with Indigenous Elders, partners, and groups.
- Museum staff should be going out into the community in a good way to engage and support Indigenous initiatives.
- The onus is on the museum to provide resources when engaging with Indigenous communities.
- When engaging with Indigenous communities on projects, short or long term, museums and their staff need to decentralize control from the institution to the people and recognize the voice of authority is the one from the culture/history being represented.
- Museum staff might not get always get engagement right, but it is important for them to keep trying to make their efforts stronger.
- Curators should be encouraged and supported by their museums to engage with Indigenous artists and expand farther than just displaying art, culture, history. Artists should be welcomed and financially supported in coming into the museum space to share their stories and teachings with visitors themselves.
- The importance of community/artist led programming cannot be overstated. Creating shared experiences between visitors and the community is a strong way for people to learn. When the person leading an activity is part of the culture, sharing the history of the stories being told, personal connections can be made, especially for children.
- Hands-on activities led by Indigenous educators complement stories and art and should be empowered in museum settings.

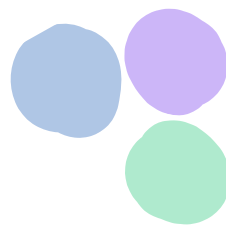


Moving Forward

With every project there is the chance to look back at what went well and what could be improved upon. For future Indigenous exhibits and programs like *Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children*, the following were identified by the discussion circle participants as things to continue doing and those that need to be planned for:

- Show support for Indigenous communities by attending cultural events, taking part in anti-racism educations, and advocating for Indigenous initiatives.
- Engage with Indigenous Elders at all stages of the project, from beginning to end. Maintain the relationship post-project.
- Translation of exhibit, programming, and engagement materials into the language(s) of Indigenous communities represented, not just English and French. Money and time need to be budgeted for appropriately.
- Accountability of the DCC to secure funding for Indigenous-led programming in order for more hands-on engagement to take place in the exhibit space.
- Review the governance policies and procedures of the DCC for compliance with UNDRIP.

Reconciliation is never over. *Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums* is only part of my reconciliation journey, and I am eager to continue with this work and use the knowledge and experience gained through collaborative curation with Leah and during the discussion circle with Elder Curtis and the rest of the participants. I hope that by initiating discussion like this and sharing the results with members of the community and museum professionals, will lead to better understanding and appreciation of UNDRIP and Indigenous self-determination in Saskatchewan museums.



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St. Denis, Dr. Verna. 'Journey Towards Understanding Racism and Anti-Racism'. māmowī āsohtētān University of Saskatchewan 4th Annual Internal Truth and Reconciliation Forum. March 26, 2021.

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Resource Recommendations

Canadian Museums Association. [*More than Giving Back: Repatriation Toolkit*](#). 2022.

Canadian Museums Association. [*Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums*](#). 2022.

Canadian Museums Association. [*Small Museums Handbook*](#). 2023.

Museums Association of Saskatchewan. [*Standards for Saskatchewan Museums, 6th Edition*](#). 2022.

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Power and Privilege in Saskatchewan Museums

Report Highlights

Discussion Circle Participants

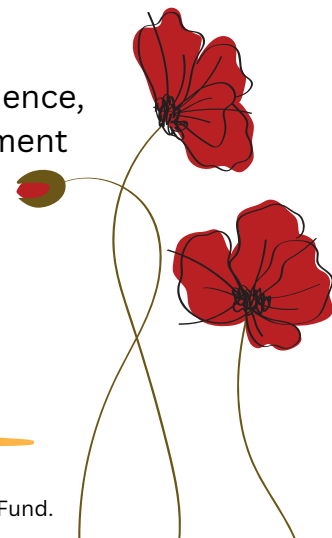
London Boothman
Elder Curtis Breaton
Deborah Buffalo
Leah Marie Dorion
Brianna Fiddler
Kelly Fiddler
Helanna Gessner
Tara-Leigh Heslip
Tarah Hogue
jake moore
Emma Morris

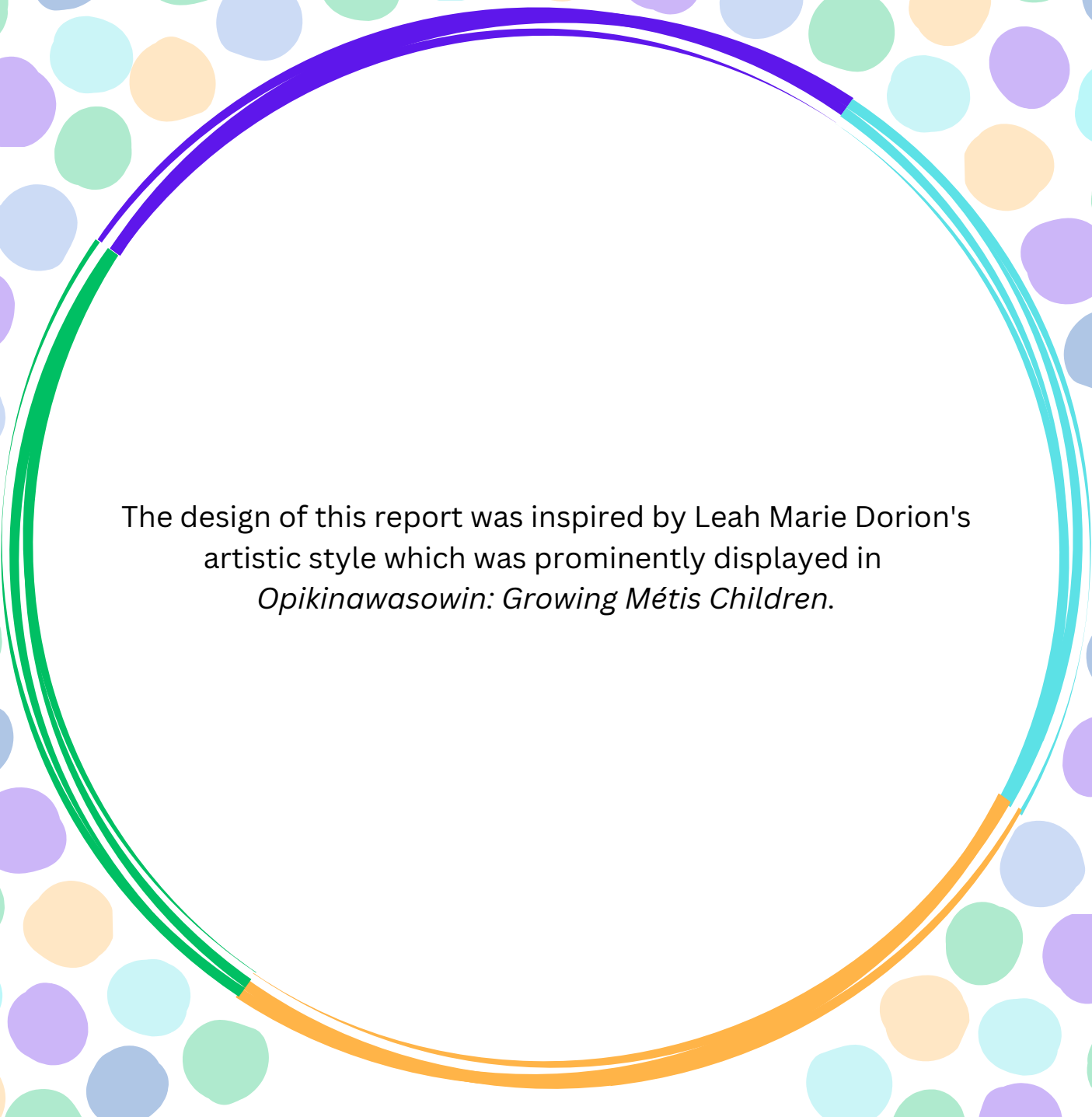
stay grounded but be visionary

Reconciliation **can** happen in museums
with open minds and open hearts.

- Being **represented** in museums matters.
- Recognize that Indigenous Peoples are the **voice of authority** for their own culture and history.
- Society needs to learn the **truth** in order for healing to happen.
- Museum staff need to be **allies** and support Indigenous artistic practices and methods of healing.
- The onus is on museums to secure and **share resources** when partnering with Indigenous communities.
- True **engagement** takes time. Be ok with the silence, have patience, and know that the timing of relationship building and engagement might not always align between institution and community.
- Step outside your own circle and challenge yourself to **learn and grow**.

Have the courage to try.





The design of this report was inspired by Leah Marie Dorion's
artistic style which was prominently displayed in
Opikinawasowin: Growing Métis Children.



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