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SKAWENNATI

OBORO GALLERY, MONTREAL

Skawennati, a Kanien'kehá:ka new-media artist, is transforming the definition of modern Indigenous artwork. In *She Falls for Ages* (2017), part of her recent exhibition "Tomorrow People," she retells a Haudenosaunee creation story through a sci-fi, feminist lens, using the online virtual world *Second Life* as her medium. The creation story belongs to the beginning of time, but Skawennati's version incorporates a futuristic aesthetic, using sleek graphics and vibrant colours. The storyline integrates notions of community as well as humour, both very important aspects of Indigenous culture. Skawennati modernizes ancient mythologies in a way that is accessible, educational and visually pleasing.

In the video work *Words Before All Else Part 1* (2017), positioned at the beginning of the exhibition to welcome visitors, an avatar recites a Haudenosaunee prayer. It acts as an acknowledgement of the natural world we possess, and is spoken in English, French and Kanien'kéha. Lining the walls are stills from



Skawennati Celestial Tree
(from the series *She Falls for Ages*) 2017 Machinimagraph
ink-jet print 1.18 x 1.18 m
BOTH COURTESY ELLEPHANT

OPPOSITE: **Skawennati Falling Asleep** (from the series *She Falls for Ages*) 2017 Machinimagraph
ink-jet print 85.7 cm x 1.52 m

She Falls for Ages, as well as images of an avatar that Skawennati created of herself. She dismantles the stereotypes of Indigenous portrayal by presenting herself in modern attire while capturing elements of traditional garb. In one image, she has on a futuristic ribbon shirt. In another, she wears a headset and has a smartphone in hand, demonstrating her focus on technology while deconstructing preconceived notions of traditional Indigenous culture. *Generations of Play* (2017) displays three Skawennati avatar dolls made of different materials: corn husk, a Barbie doll and a 3-D printed figurine. This new-media piece is a commentary on past, present and future notions of self-representation and Indigeneity.

"Tomorrow People" introduces a year of Indigenous programming at Oboro for Montreal's 375th-anniversary and Canada's 150th-anniversary celebrations. It dismantles conventional views on contemporary Indigenous art, challenges colonial myths and creates a new narrative for our evolving culture. The exhibition proves that we are not the people of the past but, in fact, the people of the future. We are "Tomorrow People." —ADRIENNE HUARD

TALKING TREATIES

JUMBLIES THEATRE, TORONTO

Treaties are a contentious topic. *Talking Treaties*, a participatory performance project made by Ange Loft, together with Jumbliés Theatre, the Nagamo Collective and First Story Toronto, takes on the subject through an embodied and collaborative process, using interviews, audio responses and symbolic references to connect the dots. Loft describes it as a "humongous installation that moves the way a giant puppet show would, with promenade-style staging." "This project is an experiment in getting people to talk about treaty without having to have all the words," says Loft, who works alongside communities in her non-standard theatre-making practice.

Talking Treaties uses audio interviews as a base to get people to participate in quick-creation performance workshops. To prepare these interviews, the team worked with First Story Toronto, an Aboriginal organization and app.

They interviewed seven (mostly Indigenous) artists and academics about overarching themes in treaty and their understanding of such themes. Audio artists—including Alaska B, Adrienne Marcus Raja and the band LAL—went through the collected interviews to make four five-minute-long audio galleries. Loft then collected a second set of interviews with former Toronto mayor David Miller and the Mississaugas of the New Credit, who were involved in a 2010 land-claims settlement.

Loft says that a treaty can be a "pre-contact verbal agreement with some sort of mnemonic device" or, "thinking of the Treaty of Niagara and the Royal Proclamation, it can be an attempt by an English general to bring some Indigenous practice into sharing a proclamation from the Crown." She explains, "We're spinning something from English language into symbols, with the understanding that we have to come back to polish this chain."

The four audio pieces have been touring academic institutions. "Every word and image we get back in response to these audio pieces," says Loft, "become active parts in the continuation of process. We string together narratives from interview audio and those feed into the scripts for the next group."

This iterative research feeds into the many theatrical workshops, which, in turn, will culminate in a massive spectacle—with live performers and puppets—set to premiere at Historic Fort York in late June. Loft admits that it took more than three years before she herself was comfortable voicing some of the project's short narratives. Of her aims for *Talking Treaties* she says, "I am not helping people be literate in



Audio gallery at George Brown College as part of Ange Loft's *Talking Treaties*. 2015 COURTESY JUMBLIES THEATRE PHOTO LIAM COO