

Kevin McKenzie: *Resurrection*



The exhibition *Resurrection* presents powerful sculptural installations consisting of resin-cast buffalo skulls illuminated by neon and LED lights by nēhiyawak (Plains Cree) and Métis Saskatchewan artist Kevin McKenzie. McKenzie positions these Indigenous spiritual motifs in dialogue with Christian symbolism, mixing religious iconographies to offer compelling hybrid sculptural forms that suggest cultural negotiation, validation and critique. This hybridization represents a form of self-portraiture for the artist, referencing McKenzie's own experience as an Indigenous person raised with Catholicism and having to negotiate an identity blended between two cultures and two spiritualities. Significant to our present time, in light of the calls to action for Truth and Reconciliation, these works invite viewers to consider the colonial impact of Christianity on Indigenous cultures, as well as issues surrounding cultural alienation, assimilation, commodification and identity.

The exhibition presents three distinct bodies of work; *Ghost and God*, dating from 2003, which represents a significant transition in McKenzie's practice and is a catalyst for his subsequent sculptural works, and two more recent series, *Father*,

Son and Holy Ghost II and *The 12 Apostles*, from 2017. Elegant and powerful, *Ghost and God* is an iconic piece for McKenzie. Resulting from an artist residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts, this work inspired him to not only play with juxtaposing religious symbols but to push his experimentation with industrial materials, such as resin, liquid plastic, Plexiglas, carbon fibre and neon. The translucency of the Plexiglas cross and liquid plastic bison skull amplify the experience of the sacredness of these historic and religious icons, while the neon suggests an underlying investigation of popular culture, commercialism and industrialization. *Father, Son and Holy Ghost II* is an evolution in these concerns and practice, positioning the sacredness of the bison image in relation to the sanctity of the Christian trinity, perhaps likening the bison skull to a cross form and alluding to an alternate embodiment of suffering and sacrifice. Suggestive of a Prairie Gothic sensibility, a genre which is known for its dark narratives of tragic loss, *The 12 Apostles* introduces a contrasting, moodier, and perhaps even punk, aesthetic. Assembling found objects, like the mass-produced, glow-in-the-dark crucifixes, onto his sculptural forms, McKenzie introduces a playful element of kitsch. This assemblage, combined with his use of painterly drips and splatters, also references modernist works of art, reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* that are also hybrid works that associate painting, sculpture, collage and assemblage with various objects from everyday life. References to art history, pop culture and consumerism, in light of the spiritual iconography in this series, build on McKenzie's investigation into what contemporary societies deem sacred. These bodies of work are culturally and conceptually charged pieces, offering viewers layers of meaning to engage with and interpret.

Kevin McKenzie is Cree/Métis, born and raised in Regina. His family is a member of the Cowessess First Nation of Saskatchewan. McKenzie received his BFA, and is currently a candidate for the MFA program, at the University of Regina. He has exhibited nationally and internationally, including the exhibitions *Transformer: Native Art in Light and Sound*, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute, New York; *Don't Stop Me Now*, National Gallery of Canada; and *If We Never Met*, Pataka Art Gallery Museum, New Zealand. His work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the MacKenzie Art Gallery, and the Saskatchewan Arts Board, among many others.

Resurrection is co-curated by Jennifer McRorie, Curatorial Director of MJM&AG, and Joanne Marion, Curator/Director of the Esplanade Art Gallery, Medicine Hat, AB.