

FINAL REPORT
Ruth Wynn Woodward Professor: Dana Claxton (2009-2010)

I held the Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowed Chair for the school year 2009–2010 in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia. The RWWP is a prestigious appointment and it has been one of the most engaging, intellectually stimulating events of my academic career thus far. What made this appointment so amazing was that all these women (the students, staff and my assistant) provided the necessary support to enable me to teach, make art, perform research, organize events and work in an academic environment which was nurturing, creative, friendly and affirmative. I believe I was the first First Nations person to hold the RWWP chair, in addition, to being one of the first professional exhibiting artists. This created an opportunity for students and faculty to engage with my cultural and artistic background and vice-versa.

My tenure encompassed three areas:

- Teaching
- Public outreach
- Research

Teaching: I taught two classes during my term.

- *Topics in Contemporary First Nations Women’s Art.* This 300-level survey class explored Aboriginal women’s art-making from visual, performance and media art to contemporary and traditional practices. The class considered how aboriginal women artists are re/creating their/our own female identity and other concerns through subverting systems of representation and power. The course discussed concepts of aboriginality in the context of cultural production and contemporary art. Key discussions for the class were to identify and determine what visual conversations and discourse(s) are taking place within the art works and we discussed themes and issues in which contemporary art is engaged.

Outcome: The greatest outcome was that students were exposed to contemporary art by aboriginal women and contemporary art in general.

- *Who’s Your Momma: Earth, Women and Duty.* This course considered a relationship to the natural world and the shared responsibility and ethics of “earth caring.” We investigated the role of woman and considered what a feminist ecological citizenship is and the contributions this community has made to the environmental movement. The concept that “wherever we live, we reside on a living being” was explored through First Nations traditional knowledges and the concept of “mother earth” was unpacked. The three streams of discussion were: Eco-feminism, Indigenous Womens’ Earth Knowledges and Environmental Justice.

Outcome: Students seriously engaged in discussions about their own womanhood and the possibility that women can be nurturing and earth caregivers without getting caught in the claim that female nurturing is an essentialist position.

Public Outreach

“Unpacking the Indigenous Female Body,” Symposium and Performance Event, Friday, April 23 and Saturday, April 24, 2010.

The performances: Lori Blondeau and Skeena Reece created new works to specifically respond to my research regarding Indian woman and the film trilogy *A Man Called Horse*.

The Symposium: Scholars from across Canada and the United States submitted abstracts to address the theme of how the Indigenous female body has been represented in general, in both historical and contemporary times. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, Director of the C.N. Gorman Museum at University of California-Davis and Associate Professor in the Department of Native American Studies (also at UC-Davis) presented the keynote address exploring broader issues concerning aboriginal womanhood and Visual Sovereignty. The event was a resounding success with a book to follow, hopefully. Funding for “**Unpacking the Indigenous Female Body**” came from the RWWP office housed in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies; SFU Office of the President, SFU Office of the Vice President, Academic; SFU Office of the Vice President, Research; SFU Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, SFU Office for Aboriginal Peoples; grunt gallery; and The Western Front.

Other community outreach initiatives were ongoing throughout the year. This involved representing SFU’s Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies as follows:

May 12–Aug 1, 2010 Artist’s Talk, 17th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

May 1–Jun 6, 2010 Primary Exhibition *The Mechanical Bride*. CONTACT Photography Festival MOCCA, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto. Visit <<http://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/primary-exhibitions/181>>.

Mar 25, 2010 Beautiful Dreamers: new avant-garde feminist art cabaret, Vancity Theatre, Vancouver. Visit <http://www.sistahoodcelebration.com/festival_calendarTOC.php?mo=1&yr=2010>.

Mar 13, 2010 “WACKO: A disco ceremony for Michael Jackson,” Victoria.

Feb 10-13, 2010 Panelist, *The Politics of Hope: Contemporary American Indian Art*, “The Age of Enlargement,” College Art Association 98th Annual Conference, Chicago.

- Feb 12–28, 2010 Cultural Olympiad 2010 and Saskatchewan Pavilion Artists, Windsor Gallery, Regina.
- Jan 28–Mar 27, 2010 Claxton, Dana, Bradley, M, Mitchell, Allyson, and Yael, B.H., curated by Janice Hladki “*FIERCE: Women's Hot-Blooded Film/Video*,” McMaster Museum of Art, McMaster University, Hamilton.
- Jan 23–Sep 12, 2010 “*Border Zones: Attempting to Reshape the Museum*,” UBC Museum of Anthropology. Visit http://www.borderzones.ca/reviews_prov_02.html.
- Nov 3–6, 2009 Exhibition, “*To Mark On Surface—a three channel installation*,” University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, Lethbridge.
- Oct 17, 2009 Moderator, “*The Evolution of Indigenous Filmmaking*,” imagineNATIVE FILM + MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL, Toronto.
- Oct 16 2009 Curator, “*A Decade In Retrospect: 10 Years of Dramatic Programming at imagineNATIVE*,” imagineNATIVE FILM + MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL, Al Green Theatre, Toronto.
- Oct 15, 2009 Burlesque performance, “*Her Sugar Is?*” imagineNATIVE FILM + MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL, NON COMPLIANCE: EXPERIMENTAL SHORTS PROGRAM, Al Green Theatre, Toronto.
- Sep 10–Oct 3, 2009 Lecture and Exhibition, “*The Barbarian*,” curated by Paul Wong, ONMAIN Gallery, Vancouver.

Research

My proposed research project was to locate and unpack the representation of Lakota Sioux women in the film trilogy of *A Man Called Horse*. I began my research during my tenure and continue to gather data. At some point, I will write an extended essay, and perhaps make a video project. In addition, I made a short video work titled *Scream*, which featured women screaming from 40 horror films, with the intention that the scream turned into a powerful roar!

Published Text During my Tenure

Border Zones: Attempting to Reshape the Museum Visit http://www.borderzones.ca/reviews_prov_02.html.

What is Aboriginal Screen Culture? imagineNATIVE FILM + MEDIA ARTS Visit <http://www.imagenative.org/program.php?id=67>.

Comments

My tenure as RWWP was successful, productive and enhanced my professional development. I applied for a SSHRC grant and was not successful. The feedback I received regarding my application will be very helpful for future applications. I circulate in a varied professional community from international, national and regional arts and culture circles to the academic world. During my tenure as the RWWP many of my Canadian colleagues had heard of RWWP and were very pleased about my appointment. My colleagues made the suggestion that all universities should offer a research/creation Chair for professional artists in general. I do recognize the need for artists to have such an opportunity. In addition, during my appointment, I was interviewed and offered a Tenure Track position in the Department of Visual Art, Art History and Theory with the University of British Columbia. I have accepted the position and do believe my position as the RWWP contributed to my appointment!

Final Thoughts

Many thanks to the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies committee for making this Professorship available to me.

Many thanks to Catherine Murray, Chair of the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies for her overall insight and commitment to my practice. I am grateful to Esther Harrison for her devotion to the RWWP and her incredible generosity, GSWS Manager, Roberta Neilson for her administrative flair which she demonstrated with such grace and openness, and Kathryn Hunter, Department Secretary for her support and friendliness.

This opportunity allowed me to work for a year without being concerned about income. In the past, as a professional artist my income varied and I worked from contract to contract, sessional to sessional teaching position, or as an Adjunct, which entailed a year-to-year contract. During my term, I could focus on teaching, making art and research. The RWWP was a fantastic opportunity for me and I am very grateful for my time with Simon Fraser University and the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies.