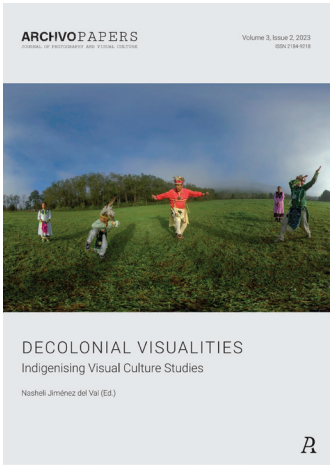

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JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL CULTURE

ISSN (Online) 2184-9218

ESSAY

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Renate Dohmen

To cite this article:
DOHMEN, Renate. "Urban Earthdivers and the Immodest Messiah as Decolonial Worldmakers: The Work of Kent Monkman," *ARCHIVO PAPERS* 3, nº 2 (2023): 31-50. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10038040

Published online: 26 October 2023

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ARTICLE

URBAN EARTHDIVERS AND THE IMMODEST MESSIAH AS DECOLONIAL WORLDMAKERS: THE ART OF KENT MONKMAN

RENATE DOHMEN
Open University, United Kingdom

Abstract

The discussion explores the work of Kent Monkman in view of questions of indigeneity in the visual arts by drawing on the concept of the post-Indian created by the Anishinaabe author and theorist Gerald Vizenor and the figure of the urban earthdiver, where he re-imagines the earthdiving trickster of Native American Indian creation myths as mixed-blood contemporary worldmaker and decolonial agent of change. The propositions inherent in the work will be discussed in relation to notions of the post-abyssal and an ecology of knowledges by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and the conception of "de-linking" as decolonising put forward by Walter Mignolo.

Keywords: Kent Monkman, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter Mignolo, Decolonisation, Postindian

INTRODUCTION

Cree artist Kent Monkman has been described as a "conceptualist" who wants to "say something about civilization",[1] a surprisingly vague reference to the artist's stated aims and poignant critique of the Eurocentric art-historical canon. Arguably, this lacklustre framing underscores the historical marginalization and denigration of Indigenised[2] voices in the visual arts, highlighting the inherent challenges of addressing this legacy.

Monkman unequivocally lays out his goals in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, which he created to tell the Indigenised side of the national story of Canada on the occasion of the country's 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. Monkman states that its artistic intention is "to counter the one-sided version of art history that exalts the European "discovery" of this continent and to celebrate and commemorate the indomitable spirit of Indigenous people".[3] He explains that the aim for his art is not only to "function as a critique of colonization", but also to "authorize Indigenous experience in art history."[4] Moreover, he seeks to excite people about "the enduring power and possibility of history painting, perhaps even reaching across the next hundred and fifty years."[5]

A crucial part of his artistic mission is the acknowledgment and celebration of Indigenised artists' contributions, given that the "the greatest evidence of resilience lies in the creativity of Indigenous artists across the continent."[6] He also draws attention to the specific challenges Indigenised artists face that require "overcoming the intergenerational impact of genocide" and the transformation of "troubled experiences into many forms of transcendent art and expression."[7] Monkman is far from vague in his critique of the European colonisation of the Americas vis-à-vis modern "civilisation". His aim is to put Indigenised art on the map and to critically evaluate colonial histories and its legacies in the visual arts.

This paper will engage with a selection of Monkman's work, encompassing paintings, installations, performances, and film. It will consider the creative endeavour of his artistic alter-ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Miss Chief for short, exploring the artist's unique and potent approaches to the legacies of settler colonialism and Eurocentrism in art history. It will also demonstrate how the perspectives that arise from his parodic approach deploy a decolonial stance that enriches contemporary understandings of Indigenised cultures. To accomplish this, the study will draw on the works of Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor, notably his concepts of the "postindian" and the "urban earthdiver". It will also consider sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos' work on post-abyssal thinking for an ecology of knowledges, which will be discussed in relation to the concept of "delinking" articulated by decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo.

Figure 1.
Kent Monkman, *Death of the Female,* 2014, acrylic on canvas, 84" x 126", courtesy of the artist.

RE-FRAMING CUBISM

Kent Monkman's *Death of the Female* [Figure 1] depicts an urban scene in Winnipeg, Monkman's hometown and a city known for its large Indigenised population. The image shows a black car speeding away and a nude, quasi-Cubist female figure lying on the street; her angular form is clearly inspired by Picasso. It seems she has just been ejected from the car amidst a grey plume of exhaust fumes. Two "Indians" in traditional outfits are watching the scene from the sidewalk while four young men, dressed in jeans, shorts, and T-Shirts, rush to her assistance. They presumably have an Indigenised background as indicated by the long, flowing dark hair of two of the individuals and the tribal masks on the other two. One of them is gesturing towards the traditional chiefs nearby, as the others focus on the female. A Baconesque figure emerges out of the doorframe of the house where the scene is unfolding, while a Mooresque nude is reclining in the front garden. On the roof of the building's front porch, a sniper in military fatigues takes aim at a nearly-nude, diminutive Caucasian figure floating in the air, semi-clad in a fluttering drape, reminiscent of depictions of the crucified Christ. Notably, this Christ-like figure is holding a man-size archery bow with one hand while the other gestures as if shooting an invisible arrow. In fact, he seems to have just dispatched the arrow embedded in the large mattress propped against the dilapidated house on the right side of the painting. The figure is suspended above a large, sunlit red-brick church building with stained glass windows on the left side of the canvas and is oriented towards the street scene unfolding to the right. The painting abounds with a seemingly incongruous mix of references such as "Indian" chiefs in traditional outfits, a Picassoesque female, allusions to modern art masterpieces, as well as a

semi-angelic, Christ-like figure with an archery bow, and an army sniper, challenging the viewer with a perplexing puzzle of references to decipher.

To comprehend Monkman's work, one must first take into account that in European art the flattening of the image plane, a pivotal accomplishment of the modern avant-garde, was linked to the abandonment of societal norms, protocols, and beliefs that artists considered restrictive and conventional. Monkman states that "[t]he last hundred and fifty years of Canada were concurrent with the rise of European Modernism and the emergence of Modern Art. Treaties 1 and 2, the first Numbered Treaties, were signed just eight years after Manet's innovative painting, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), which transformed conventions of pictorial space and set Modernism on its path."[8] The painter's flattening of pictorial space thus echoes the shrinking of space for Indigenised people due to their forced displacement onto reserves a fraction of the size of their original territory.[9] Monkman thus equates the appropriation of so-called primitive styles in modern art and its arrogant sense of entitlement with the land grab of European settlers. He observes that the "Cubist's appropriations of tribal artefacts known as Primitivism were upending European art-making traditions whilst Indigenous traditions and languages were beaten out of Indigenous children in residential schools."[10] He equates Cubism with colonialism, stating that "Picasso's phallic bulls and his butchering of the female nude" epitomise "European aggression against the female spirit … of North American Indigenous societies, many of them matrilineal."[11] Monkman's re-framing of Cubism as a cipher for the plight and violence experienced by Indigenised groups highlights a hidden history of modern art, with Picasso epitomising the cultural aggression of European modernity.

But Monkman does not confine his critique to Primitivism. The "Indian" chiefs depicted in *Death of the Female* are another facet of the destructive trajectory of modernity/coloniality:[12] they stand for the misrepresentation of Indigenised peoples which erases their contemporaneity and denies their future, forever relegating them to the past. The traditional chiefs in the painting are a direct reference to the work of George Catlin, a prominent painter of Indigenised Americans in the nineteenth century. Monkman often takes issue with Catlin's images, which portray stereotypical "authentic Indians" as members of a tragic, doomed, and vanishing race.[13] In *Death of the Female*, Monkman counters Catlin's representations with the young Indigenised men in contemporary attire who come to the aid of the battered female, seeking to raise her to her feet. Their actions imply a readiness to embrace the future by attending to the wounded spirit of Indigenised culture represented by the distressed female.[14]

The image, moreover, links the speeding car to the substantial red-brick church, spelling out the unholy alliance of settler colonialism and the Christian Church in the oppression of Indigenised Americans. In its sunbathed rendition, the building alludes to the holy glow of divine sanction claimed by nineteenth-century settlers and the colonial regime they instituted, while its cultural assassins are

represented by the driver of the black automobile depicted as a Picassoesque bull. Yet it appears that Christ thinks otherwise. He is shown floating in angelic guise above the church, about to symbolically deliver agency to the Indigenised figures by means of an archery bow. Is this why the sniper is taking aim at him?

While these interpretations are compelling and offer valuable insight, questions and ambiguities remain, inviting further exploration. How is the Baconesque figure to be understood? Could the young men also be interpreted as aiding modern art as represented by the Picassoesque *demoiselle*? And why is the arrow sunk into the mattress leaning against the dilapidated house? Who is the Christ-like figure aiming at? The Mooresque reclining nude? The traditional "Indians"? The driver of the speeding car even?

Monkman's work abounds with such ambiguities, indicating that they reflect a deliberate and purposeful artistic stance. In the video *Casualties of Modernity* (2015), which accompanies the multi-media installation with the same name,[15] Miss Chief performs the role of a VIP philanthropist in the guise of Lady Di. She is shown striding through the Modern Wing of a hospital specializing in conditions afflicting Modern and Contemporary Art alongside a Doctor of Modern Art. His patients include Romanticism, Cubism, Conceptual Art, Performance Art, and Painting, all being treated for conditions such as an acute infection of Primitivism, cultural amnesia, spiritual starvation, and Nihilism. One of the patients is a Cubist nude from Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) [Figure 2], who is lying in bed gasping for air.

The video shows Miss Chief at her bedside. She is holding her hand, aghast at the dismal state of the flattened, distorted, and fractured female figure which signifies the sickness of the modern spirit. Moreover, as the hospital visit progresses and Miss Chief is told about the death of painting, she offers to help, stating that "this great tradition must be kept alive."[16]

Figure 2.
Kent Monkman, *Casualties of Modernity*, 2015, video still, collection of the National Gallery of Canada, courtesy of the artist.

When Miss Chief is led into the hospital morgue by the Doctor of Modern Art, she is shown the deceased body of Romanticism in the guise of a male nude in *pallor mortis* stretched out on a mortuary trolley. The doctor refers to the figure as the "first casualty of modernity." When he explains that Romanticism's demise was due to a loss of balance between the two competing traditions of the "art of ancient Greece" and "the ancient cultures discovered in the New World, savages,"[17] Miss Chief exclaims "[o]h yes, I know a lot about the Romantic savage. Europeans projected their fantasies onto us," adding, "I have to admit, I absolutely thrived on the attention. Oh, how I was the toast of Europe."[18] The film, moreover, ends in a resurrection scene with the deathly white figure of Romanticism brought back to life by Miss Chief's touch. The final scene shows Miss Chief and Romanticism striding along a hospital corridor in unison, walking into a bright, dazzling light that increasingly envelopes them, leaving the viewer uncertain whether this is an earthly resurrection, a dream, or whether Miss Chief has joined Romanticism on the "other", "heavenly" side.

THE POSTINDIAN STORIER

The figure of the postindian[19] was created by the Anishinaabe author and scholar Gerald Vizenor in response to the term "Indian" which, he argues, is "an occidental invention" that "superseded the real tribal name" and is devoid of a "referent in tribal languages."[20] Moreover, postindian is related to "survivance", another neologism devised by Vizenor, a composite of survival and resistance. The postindian references a "trickster hermeneutics of liberation" that upends and retells established cultural narratives in ways that create a "counter-causal liberation of the mind" by means of "puzzling inconsistency."[21] The postindian exceeds colonial tropes such as the "vanishing Indian," the "noble savage" or the "ferocious primitive". As Vizenor points out, these conceptions are not only repeated *ad nauseam* in cultural productions but have also become burdensome referents for Indigenised identity, creating a false sense of a unified figure of the "Indian" in lieu of the many tribes of Turtle Island.[22] Vizenor calls "Indians" a "simulation," referencing the "unreal" ideas about Indigenised culture imposed by dominant settler culture.[23] The term "Indian", hence, has flattened the cultural terrain as "[m]ore than a million people, with hundreds of distinct tribal cultures, were simulated as Indians."[24]

He counters this colonial invention through the figure of the postindian warrior as a storier, trickster, and re-fashioner of the colonial simulations of the "Indian"[25] through the creation of new stories. These tales are narratives of survivance which present "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry,"[26] and "undermine the simulations of the unreal in the literature of dominance."[27] They reference Indigenised peoples' contemporaneity, agency, and presence, thus constituting a riposte to colonialism's "manifest manners", i.e. "the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of indian [sic] cultures."[28]

Vizenor argues that, although the colonial invention of the "Indian" lies in the past and current Indigenised peoples are "post-indians", the dominant image of the invented and "authentic Indian" persists in the "literary arts, in popular culture, and history."[29] As he notes, Indigenised peoples remain "burdened with five centuries of inventions"[30] marked by binary structures that revolve around notions of "good and evil", "savagism and civilization"[31] informed by essentialised notions of alterity and gender.[32]

Vizenor further suggests that, since these inventions maintain their unrelenting hold, the only viable response is a "tricky and ironic"[33] reversion, "playful yet unflinching,"[34] and "full of tease."[35] The postindian embraces contradiction, a characteristic of a tribal worldview that contrasts with the colonial dichotomy of either-or.[36] The key distinction between a Western and an Indigenised worldview is that "the Western world would purge evil", while a tribal worldview acknowledges that "[w]e are good and evil; it's not outside, it's in us."[37] To restore balance, one must endorse "contradiction as a way of life."[38] Vizenor's postindian tricksters are "transformational"[39] as they are "constantly in a state of contradiction."[40]

Hence, Vizenor's postindian helps to view Monkman's Miss Chief as a postindian storier who poignantly avoids "victimry" when she boldly professes to have relished her own exoticisation. Described by Monkman as a "gender-fluid, time-travelling, supernatural being" who thrives on "humour, parody and camp" and teases out "the truth behind false histories and cruel experiences,"[41] she enacts the transformational propensities of the postindian trickster-warrior with abandon. Moreover, she champions a notable refusal of counter-reversals that flip the colonizer/colonized equation without dismantling it: while Miss Chief has turned the tables on Picasso, her act of bedside care constitutes a witty play on Primitivist tropes of cultural rejuvenation rather than a reversal of power relations that play into the game of the colonial either-or. Indeed, she professes a keen interest in saving the art of painting and joins forces with the figure of Romanticism who could not be whiter than white in skin tone.

The apparent contradictions in Monkman's work emerge as trickster elements that establish a playful yet powerful approach to unhinging colonial culture's "capture by representation."[42] Monkman's subversion of Primitivist constructions of "Indian" authenticity, moreover, is highly relevant for questions of inclusion and indigeneity in the visual arts. It also situates the work in proximity to the discourse of decolonisation, to which the artist makes a distinct contribution.

DECOLONIAL GENEALOGIES

Approaches to decolonisation vary, and there are differing opinions on what it entails. For Santos, decolonisation has a historical lineage that predates the relatively recent term. As he explains, efforts seeking "to question ... the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise" have "always accompanied the dominant thinking as

a subaltern or marginal stream" even if they have not always been "identified by the term 'decolonization'".[43] This long-standing global history is rejected by the prominent Latin American school of decolonial thinking, which has arisen from the modernity/coloniality collective project,[44] and brought notable scholars such as Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel and Ramón Grosfóguel to international attention.

As a group, they have brought the Latin-American colonial experience into sharp relief. It has firmly established Latin America as the centre of a decolonial critique of European colonialism, offering new perspectives and theoretical approaches, largely redefining the topic of decolonisation. Foregrounding the geo-politics of knowledge, their approach emphasizes the need to shift away from European models to develop the project of decoloniality. Mignolo, for example, distances himself from movements such as postmodernism and postcolonialism even though, historically, they advanced important critiques of modernity and colonialism. He negates this connection, stating that "[c]oloniality and de-coloniality introduces a fracture with both the Eurocentered project of post-modernity and … of post-coloniality."[45] He argues that "[d]e- coloniality starts from other sources,"[46] and "has the *damnés* as its central philosophical and political figure,"[47] that is, "the racially defamed and politically, economically and 'spiritually' … dispossessed."[48] The decoloniality project foregrounds "other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding,"[49] such as Indigenised knowledges, and aims for the "de-colonization of knowledge and of being."[50] Here he differs with Santos, who acknowledges post-colonialism as part of decolonialisation's intellectual lineage.[51]

Further complicating the matter, the aim of the modernity/coloniality project to represent Indigenised experiences of coloniality and respectfully encompass Indigenised knowledges has been rejected by critics who hail from Indigenised and feminist quarters. As they have pointed out, a number of modernity/coloniality thinkers, Mignolo among them, disavow their own settler colonial backgrounds along with the prevalence of internal colonialism and cultural appropriation of Indigenised cultures and knowledge systems within Latin-American nation states.[52] Scholars linked to the modernity/coloniality group have thus been accused of performing what Tuck and Yang call a "settler move to innocence."[53]

Mignolo, moreover, contends that the proponents of the decolonial project remain unburdened by Eurocentric perspectives due to their origins in the Americas south of the United States. According to him, what matters is the foundational experience of being subject to colonialism which he posits the very fact of growing up in Latin America entails; a blanket statement which does not account for racial, gendered, and other differentials of this experience. In contrast to Santos, he establishes geography as an exclusive and defining criterion for decolonial legitimacy, dismissing the potentiality and value of decolonial approaches from other parts of the world.

Mignolo hence advocates a stance of distancing and disconnecting. As he elaborates, "[t]he de-colonial shift … is a project of de-linking."[54] For him, "post-

colonial criticism and theory … is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy,"[55] while decoloniality belongs "literally to a different space" situated beyond "the Eurocentered limits of critical theory."[56] For Santos, who cautions against turning Latin American countries into "sites of new epistemological master narratives," such definitive pronouncements run the danger of becoming a new paradigm of dominance, that is, of "turning the New World into an alternative centrality … and thus falling into the trap of Eurocentric modernity."[57]

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

This divergence in the decolonial field underscores the challenge of breaking free from the pervasive logic of modernity and its deeply entrenched abyssal structures of othering, which Santos references as the "dogmatism of absolute opposition."[58] It also highlights the complexities inherent in seeking to exercise decolonial critiques based on methods governed by a colonial ethos ingrained in existing knowledge systems. Santos' response to this predicament is to propose an attitudinal shift towards a post-abyssal thinking and an ecology of knowledges which avoids such polarizations and rehearsals of grammars of difference, replacing the colonial "either-or" with a post-abyssal "both-and". Such a perspective, he acknowledges, remains largely an aspiration,[59] and its actualization demands a wide-ranging collective effort consisting of as many approaches as there are colonialisms on the ground.[60]

Hence, post-abyssal approaches to decolonisation share a closer alignment with the postindian perspective of Monkman and Vizenor than the approach of the modernity/coloniality collective, as neither Vizenor nor Monkman propose the distancing acts that Mignolo champions. Miss Chief, while unsparingly lampooning colonialism's faults, does not profess a need to walk away from European art and its history, while Vizenor actively engages with European critical theory, ironically demonstrating a penchant for the very postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives the Latin-American school of decoloniality rejects. Vizenor even asserts a rapport between postmodernism and the postindian, stating that "the postmodern sense of presence in oral stories is the creation, the turn and tease of imagination, not the animation or representation of the manifest in written words,"[61] adding that these postmodern conditions are "an invitation to the postindian simulations of tribal survivance."[62]

The affinities do not end there. Vizenor further aligns the postindian and the postmodern by asserting that "the trickster is postmodern."[63] He brings a personal dimension into play when he states that my "grandmother, and my father were postindian immigrants and, in that sense, postmodern natives on the move from the reservation to modernity."[64] He further elaborates on a postindian-postmodern connection: "Lyotard would advance the literature of survivance over manifest manners and dominance,"[65] and draws out yet another close association by declaring that the "postindian mien is survivance over dominance; the postmodern is the

discourse of histories over metanarratives."[66] He further articulates a resonance with the work of Roland Barthes, declaring him in league with the trickster: "Barthes stands … for the comic trickster … [t]he death of the author is the birth of the reader, and the death of social science is the birth of the trickster in modern literature."[67] He also suggests that binarising pronouncements invariably replicate the othering of manifest manners, no matter from which side of the abyssal equation they hail. Indigenised peoples who endorse the stance of tradition have, in his view, fallen for the trope of the invented "Indian". They are actors in a theatre of "historical condolences, … the absolute victims of modernity,"[68] trapped in "essentialist autoposes."[69]

Vizenor is clearly trying to make a point. For him, the framing of the world in terms of difference needs to be undone. He underscores that adopting a stance of counter-reversal will only re-entrench the colonial forces of "manifest manners," that is, the colonial modes of the culture of dominance. He states that "[e]xclusion by natives is *not* resistance (emphasis in original). … One exclusion does not absolve another. … Clearly, the exclusion of natives must end, and the exclusion of others by natives must end without recriminations or victimry."[70] He also warns of deceptive gestures of inclusion by officialdom, such as when "natives" are "embraced by … constitutional democracy," which he characterises as more of the same in contemporary guise. In other words, the "Indian", once cast "as the fugitive on a course of disappearance" has now become "the new measure of cultural diversity"[71] caught in the paradoxical embrace of a measured inclusion designed to uphold difference as a fundamental condition of modernity. For him diversity understood as "representation" only perpetuates the abyssal regime.

In short, for Vizenor the issue is not one of European versus other origins of knowledge, but "institutional values, representationalism and the politics of academic determinism."[72] He is happy to engage with European thinkers and defines the colonial as a culture and politics of "manifest manners" irrespective of the *loci* of their enunciation.[73] It is the violence of representation, fixity, and closure that Vizenor's postindian-postmodern trickster-storiers seek to unhinge. The postindian storiers, he writes, "encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses,"[74] and "surmount the scriptures of manifest manners with new stories," thus enacting a "recreation of the real"[75] in the "ruins of representation."[76] Vizenor's issue, "is not the white man" but rather "the methodology that separates,"[77] and the "words that imprison."[78]

Monkman's work closely aligns with Vizenor's perspective. This is exemplified by Miss Chief's care for Picasso's hospitalised *demoiselle*, an act which, at second glance, is more complex than first assumed. Visually aligned with the stricken woman in *Death of the Female*, whose forms echo the Cubist shapes of the demoiselle and signal the colonial devastation of Indigenised life and culture, the battered female shares a formal connection with the ailing *demoiselle*, alluding to their connectedness across the colonial divide rather than their "otherness". Thus, even though Monkman associates the flattening of forms and its purported

artistic achievement with the colonial grab of Indigenous American land and the erasure of Indigenised cultures, the formal affinity of these two figures suggests a shared experience of suffering from colonial malaise, even if, undoubtedly, the burdens of the abyssal regime fall disproportionately on the shoulders of "othered" parties. In short, Monkman does not reject European art and its histories outright, but selectively and generatively engages with its elements, critically addressing its deceits while playfully building on its legacies, unhinging from the colonial regime of othering, and re-envisioning it as part of the process.

URBAN EARTHDIVERS AS DECOLONIAL WORLDMAKERS

The postindian enactments of Monkman and Vizenor, however, do not only debunk essentialist reversals and endorse postmodern thinkers but they also excel at parodic forms of critique characterised by ambiguity and contradiction. As this final section of the discussion foregrounds, they present a generative approach to the politics of indigeneity epitomised by the figure of the urban earthdiver, Vizenor's reinterpretation of the earthdiver of Indigenised peoples' creation myths, which offers a distinctive, postindian contribution to the decolonial project of a post-abyssal ecology of knowledges. In mythological narratives, the earthdiver's role is to retrieve soil from the depths of primal waters to form the earth. Adapting this mythical figure to the contemporary contexts of Indigenised existence, Vizenor re-casts the earthdiver as contemporary "mixedbloods" who "dive into unknown urban places … into the racial darkness in the cities, to create a new consciousness of coexistence."[79]

His reference to "mixedbloods" must not be take literally. In fact, he rejects a narrow understanding of the "mixedblood," foreclosing a literal or identitarian, hence alterising, understanding of "mixedblood" identity. He states that "blood mixture is not a measurement of consciousness, culture, or human experiences."[80] Rather, it is part of a vision of contemporary earthdiving replete with cultural crossings and blended metaphors. In traditional earthdiver creation myths, he relates, "the cultural hero or tribal trickster asked animals and birds to dive for the earth."[81] In his contemporary version, earthdiving is transformed into a joint "mixedblood" and white settler affair.

Further, he emphasises that "[c]reation myths are not time bound", they take "place in the telling, in present-tense metaphors."[82] He also expounds that it is the task of the "Métis earthdivers and new urban shamans …[to] summon the white world to dive,"[83] adding that "[e]arthdivers, tricksters, shamans, poets, dream back the earth."[84] He further suggests that "Métis earthdivers speak a new language"[85] which, like the Métis, originates "between communal tribal cultures and the cultures that oppose traditional connections, the cultures that would own and market the earth."[86] He adds, "[w]hen the mixedblood earthdiver summons the white world to dive like the otter and beaver and muskrat in search of the earth, and federal

funds, he is both animal and trickster, both white and tribal."[87] In other words, the urban earthdiver is a trickster figure whose very nature is to "straddle oppositions" regardless of cultural origins or assigned positions in the divisive dynamics of the colonial regime.[88]

Adopting a postindian-postmodern outlook, Vizenor not only critiques the paradigm of "manifest manners," but also radically breaks with its confines, classifications, and *modi operandi*, as evidenced by his mixedblood, trickster earthdivers who are perpetually shapeshifting and eluding capture. They double up as urban shamans and worldmakers who defy racial boundaries and bloodcount-based notions of authenticity, thereby envisaging a space of post-abyssal co-existence.

Figure 3.
Detail, Kent Monkman, *Trappers of Men,* 2006, acrylic on canvas, 262 x 415 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of the artist.

Monkman, likewise, thematises the figure of the urban earthdiver in his work. An example here is Miss Chief's blinding apparition in *Trappers of Men* [Figure 3] where she satirically undermines conventional perceptions of the traditional "Indian" as well as gender norms associated with the female nude and art history's notion of the allegorical figure. Prominently placed in the central foreground of the image, she is graced by golden tresses, proudly displays an imposing masculine six-pack and an erect male member enveloped in a flowing fuchsia drape. She challenges preconceived ideas about indigeneity and established notions of femininity and masculinity, also re-envisaging the female trope of the allegorical figure in European of art with humour, panache, and style. Miss Chief, moreover, envisages herself as a beacon of hope and a source of sustenance for her people, proclaiming:

> So many of our people grew up broken – is it any wonder that they fill prisons, crowd the wards, and line sidewalks, lost in the cycle of self-loathing, trauma and

addiction? I shine brightly for these souls through the darkness, slaying savage masculine force with the dazzling power of my beauty and allure. I am the light. I am both gentle man and fierce woman. I am all there is, as you are. Walk towards me, my children, fall into step and let the drum guide you. You will be reborn, free to rise again with the buffalo.[89]

Figure 4.
Kent Monkman, *Le Petit déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 84" x 126", National Bank Collection, courtesy of the artist.

A similar message of new beginnings is evident in *Le petit déjeuner sur l'herbe* (2014) [Figure 4], where Monkman re-stories Manet's seminal painting from an Indigenised perspective. Similar to *Death of the Female*, this work is not restricted to concerns with art history, social critique or reportage, even though Picassoesque Cubist female nudes represent the violence against Indigenised peoples. An ominous black car with a number plate that links it to the Christian Church is parked on the street. Some of the Picassoesque female figures crouch or stand in the doorways while others have collapsed on the street. Four human-sized angels are hovering above the scene. Two of them are carrying off what seems to be an abstract sculpture of the female form by Henry Moore. Another is gesturing towards this act of removal while the fourth angel is pointing to heaven with one hand. With the other, he is ringing a bell as if to usher in the coming of a new era of change, hope, and redemption, arguably presenting a vision of postindian earthdivers in action in the guise of angelic figures in the tradition of European art.

Returning to *Death of the Female*, the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the young men who assist the distressed female now suggests a further possibility. While it is probable that these individuals are young, Indigenised men, it is worth noting that, in principle, some could also be earthdiving white men. This is because two of the four men have flowing long hair, a trope often associated with

the traditional "Indian," while the other two have short hair and wear tribal facial masks. This difference in representation could hint at a difference between them, with the tribal masks potentially serving as markers for white urban earthdivers. They might, however, also function as an "authenticating" element for young Indigenised men with short hair. What matters here is not the certainty of their status, but the potential for ambiguity inherent in their portrayal, which adds depth and complexity to the image and fosters the fluid and transformative meaning-making of postindian narratives.

A discussion by art historian Lucy Lippard emphasises such a dynamic understanding of Monkman's work. She argues that his art is about finding a language beyond reductive identity politics, which the artist describes as "the space between cultures that's quite fluid, where different cultures are borrowing from each other and gaining and losing to each other, … and the sins of modernist 'primitivism' can be included in this process, as well as the ludicrous accusations that Indigenous artists are 'derivative' of modernists appropriating their own imagery."[90] She also cites a further comment by Monkman on his ongoing quest to find "the right language and sources to talk about that space, which is hard to find."[91] She highlights his adoption of the role of the "immodest messiah"[92] as part of this quest. He not only brings hope and relief to his people but also, in a 2012 performance, generously extended an invitation "to everybody… whose heart is in the right place"[93] to join Indigenised peoples, underscoring Monkman's commitment to urban earthdiving in the Vizenorian sense.

THE ART OF HOSPICING: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Monkman's approach to cultural critique goes beyond the mere act of reversing the gaze and counter-exclusion. It subverts binary paradigms, eschews definitive conclusions, and presents itself in a multifaceted, humorous, and parodic manner that is both powerful and playful. It also fundamentally embraces generative approaches for reimagining the narratives of art and the cultural representation of Indigenised communities epitomised by the figure of the postindian earthdiver. These elements have been suggested as a method inherent in his work, which not only addresses issues of indigeneity in the visual arts but also offers valuable insights for approaches to decolonisation in a broader sense. This is, for example, demonstrated in the striking scene that concludes the video *Casualties of Modernity*. It shows Miss Chief and the resurrected, white-bodied personification of Romanticism striding together into a dazzling bright light. The quasi-mythical tableau evokes the possibility of a new, post-abyssal "creation story" for art history that reframes modernity/coloniality and ushers in a culture of decolonial co-existence beyond the representational politics of diversity marked by gestures of inclusion.

Monkman emphasises resilience and care within his work, exemplified in works such as *Death of the Female* where the broken spirit of Indigenised cultures

is assisted and metaphorically raised back on her feet. Such restorative action, however, is not reserved for Indigenised cultures. When Monkman tongue-in-cheek critiques modernity in *Casualties of Modernity*, we witness masterpieces of modern art in intensive care with Miss Chief, who is tending to their needs, enacting a form of artistic "hospicing." As Indigenised scholar Andreotti points out, "hospicing modernity" requires the work of "processing its teachings" and "composting its waste," acts that are vital for "new, fertile soil for other possibilities of existence to emerge."[94] Hospicing, therefore, needs to be recognised as central to Monkman's approach to decolonial reframing. Moreover, it includes acts of "self-hospicing". As Monkman emphasises, the work of Indigenised artists involves the emotional labour of facing the intergenerational trauma of genocide and the "troubled experiences" that characterise the life of Indigenised peoples. As he explains, "[h]ere in the cities, my people struggle."[95] They are "[c]rowded into the ghettos in these prairie and northern towns" and are "broken and bleeding from the wounds of our parents and grandparents."[96]

In other words, when Miss Chief adopts the guise of the immodest messiah leading the way to a better future, her modelling of the role of the postindian storier-worldmaker entails the task of transmuting collective aspects of colonial cultures through parodic critique, (self)-hospicing and imaginative re-envisioning. When she generously extends an open invitation to join Indigenised peoples in this undertaking, it also signifies a call to engage with another dimension of earthdiving, the journey of diving into the depths of the trauma created by colonial rule. The seeding of a postindian, post-abyssal future of new beginnings and connectivities, therefore, entails not only critique and re-envisioning, but also the hospicing of the self and collective aspects of culture. In short, it takes mettle, wit, and perseverance to live up to the Vizenorian image of the earthdiving postindian warrior, to tease one's histories, colonial or otherwise, and loosen the seams of cultural difference which, as Vizenor has observed, "get even tighter as more studies are conducted to eliminate all of the loose ends and ambiguities, and to explain every doubt and nuance."[97] Via Miss Chief, Monkman thus models a creative, critical perspective that imparts valuable lessons about hospicing, contradictions and decolonial re-envisioning, making a poignant and significant contribution to prevalent debates of diversity and inclusion in the visual arts.

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1 Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures (London: Zed Books, 2014), 2.

2 I have chosen to use the term "Indigenised" instead of "Indigenous" because it conveys the idea of imposed, essentialized labels that are cultural constructs. It also highlights the cultural plurality of the diverse communities which inhabited Turtle Island prior to colonisation, countering the misleading notion of a shared characteristic denoting a lower level of "civilisation".

3 Kent Monkman, "Introduction," in Kent Monkman: Shame and Prejudice: a Story of Resilience (London: Black Dog Press, 2020), 20.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Treaties 1 and 2 were the first of 11 post-Confederation Treaties negotiated between 1871 and 1921 between First Nations peoples and the Crown (Canada). First Nation is a term used to describe Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit. It came into common usage in Canada during the 1970s and will refer to the Canadian context in this discussion, despite its broader usage in recent times.

9 Monkman, "Introduction," 19.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 For a discussion of the term, see Walter Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.
13 Lucy Lippard, "Dashed Hopes and Beauty: The Urban Rez Paintings," in Kent Monkman: Shame and Prejudice: a Story of Resilience (London: Black Dog Press, 2020), 206.
14 See Monkman, "Introduction," 19 and Monkman, "Urban Rez," 143.
15 The exhibition was created for the BMO Project Room, Toronto, and was on display January to November 2015.
16 Kent Monkman, "Casualties of Modernity (video)," transcript.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 For discussions of the postindian in relation to Monkman's work, see David McIntosh, "Kent Monkman's Postindian Diva Warrior: From Simulacral Historian to Embodied Liberator," Fuse Magazine 20, no. 3 (2009): 12–23, and Renate Dohmen, "The Artist as Postindian Warrior: Saviourism, Appropriation and Care in the Art of Kent Monkman," REG|AC 7: Indigenous Epistemologies and Artistic Imagination, no. 1 (2020): 409–42.
20 Gerald Vizenor, Manifest Manners. Narratives on Postindian Survivance (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 11.
21 Ibid, 66 and 77; see also David Carlson, "Trickster Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader: Gerald Vizenor's Constitutional Praxis," Studies in American Indian Literatures 23, no. 4 (2011): 13–47.
22 Robert Lee, "Gerald Vizenor: Postindian Gamester," in A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction, ed. David Seed (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 506.
23 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 8.
24 Vizenor cited in Robert Lee, "Introduction," in Shadow Distance: A Gerald Vizenor Reader, ed. Gerald Robert Vizenor (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), IX–XXIX, XII–XIII.
25 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 11.
26 Gerald Vizenor, Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.
27 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 12.
28 Ibid, VII.
29 Gerald Vizenor and Robert Lee. Postindian Conversations. American Indian Lives (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 84.
30 Ibid, 85.
31 Ibid, 83.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 84.
34 Lee, "Introduction," in Postindian Conversations, 3.
35 Ibid.
36 See Helmbrecht Breinig and Klaus Lösch, "Gerald Vizenor, Interviewed by Helmbrecht Breinig and Klaus Lösch," in American Contradictions. Interviews with Nine American Writers, ed. Wolfgang Binder and Helmbrecht Breinig (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995), 149.
37 Ibid, 148.
38 Ibid, 149.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid, 151.
41 Monkman, "Introduction," 16.
42 Ibid.
43 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 110; and Epistemologies of the Global South. Justice Against Epistemicide (London: Routledge,

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44 The group began meeting in 1998. See Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," Cultural Studies 21, no. 2–3 (2007), 449.

45 Mignolo, "Delinking," 452.

46 Ibid, 452.

47 Ibid, 458.

48 Ibid, 456.

49 Ibid, 453.

50 Ibid, 492.

51 For example Santos, Epistemologies of the South, 26-27.

52 See Silva Rivera Cusicanqui, "Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization," The South Atlantic Quarterly 111, no. 1 (2012): 95–109; Kathryn Furlong et al., "Everyday Practices, Everyday Water: From Foucault to Rivera-Cusicanqui (with a Few Stops in Between)," Water 11 (2019): 1–17; and Breny Mendoza, "Can the Subaltern Save Us?" Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society 1, no. 1 (2018): 109–22.

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54 Mignolo, "Delinking," 452.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid, 485.

57 Santos, The End of the Cognitive Empire, 117.

58 Ibid, 118.

59 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking. From Global Lines to Ecologies," Eurozine, 9 (2016), 10.

60 Ibid., 6.

61 Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 95.

62 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 66.

63 Gerald Vizenor, "Introduction," in Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures (Norman, OK.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 3-16.

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65 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 169.

66 Ibid, 167.

67 Gerald Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games," in Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures, ed. Gerald Robert Vizenor (Norman, OK.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 202.

68 Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 91.

69 Ibid, 93.

70 Ibid, 87.

71 Ibid, 98.

72 Vizenor, "Introduction," 5.

73 See Vizenor, Fugitive Poses, 181ff.

74 Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 4.

75 Ibid, 5.

76 Ibid, 9.

77 Interview, cited in Kimberley Blaeser, Gerald Vizenor, Writing in the Oral Tradition (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 42.

78 Ibid, 43.

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80 Ibid, IX.

81 Ibid, X.

82 Ibid, 12.

83 Ibid, XVI.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid, XIX.

87 Ibid, XVII.

88 See Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse," 188.

89 Monkman, "Incarceration," Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience, 105

90 Lippard, "Dashed Hopes and Beauty," 208.

91 Ibid, 208.

92 Ibid, 208.

93 Monkman quoted in Lippard, "Dashed Hopes and Beauty," 208.

94 Vanessa de Oliveira Machado, Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2021), 37-38. Vanessa Machado de Oliveira is more commonly known as Vanessa Andreotti.

95 Monkman, "Urban Rez," Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience, 143.

96 Ibid.

97 Lee, "Discursive Narratives," 79.