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ARTICLES

Expanded Loans as Forms of Indigenous Access, Reconnection, and Sovereignty

Mnaajtood ge Mnaadendaan—Miigwewinan Michi Saagiig Kwewag Miinegoowin Gimaans Zhaganaash Aki 1860 / To Honour and Respect—Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860

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ABSTRACT: Addressing the legacies of colonial collections and enabling Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with or extend sovereignty over ancestral items in museums requires tools in addition to repatriation. This article explores the concept of an expanded loan, which adds to the activities normally connected to a loan to include meaningful forms of Indigenous community engagement with loaned items, including ceremony and out-of-case visits/research sessions. The *To Honour and Respect* project, an expanded loan from the Royal Collection Trust to the Peterborough Museum and Archives in Canada, led by Hiawatha First Nation, is used as a case study to examine the possibilities and tensions raised by expanded loans.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous, loans, Michi Saagiig, reconnection, repatriation, sovereignty

Repatriation has become an increasingly important focus of the museum profession in recent years, particularly in relation to collections of Indigenous cultural items acquired during colonial contexts. Repatriation enables Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with ancestral items, to learn from them and to strengthen cultural knowledge, practices, and identity in the present. It also allows forms of traditional care for ancestral remains and spirits associated with them, and the extension of sovereignty over items removed during colonial contexts.[1] Meeting these needs is critical to the survival of Indigenous Peoples given the damage done by colonial processes, which continues to affect the health of individuals and communities today (on the relationship between colonial damage, healing, and repatriation, see Fforde et al. 2020; Krmpotich 2014: 3–10, 148–161; Thornton 2020). Repatriation is, however, not the only way to meet these needs in relation to ancestral items in museum collections.

This article focuses on another tool for reconnection, which is based on traditional museum loans. We call this tool an expanded loan, as it adds to the activities normally connected to a loan (exhibition, gallery talks) to include meaningful forms of Indigenous community engagement with loaned items, including ceremony, out-of-case visits/research sessions, and community provision of information that will affect how these items are displayed, cared for, and described in museum catalogs when they return. The limited-term nature of loans can also lead to sustained and intense Indigenous community engagement with ancestral items.

While much of the current literature and media reports on Indigenous reconnection focuses on repatriation, there are situations in which repatriation for historic items in museums is not possible or desired at the current moment by the community of origin. There are also situations in which the community decides to take a path other than repatriation in order to honor ancestors' intentions or ongoing relationships with the recipients of items. This article focuses on a recent project in which Indigenous communities took a considered decision to pursue an expanded loan rather than repatriation for such reasons. *Mnaajtood ge Mnaadendaan: Miigwewinan Michi Saagiig Kwewag Miinegoowin Gimaans Zhaganaash Aki 1860 / To Honour and Respect: Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860*—known as the *To Honour and Respect* (THR) project—was a loan, exhibition, and associated activities involving 13 Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg[2] porcupine-quilled birchbark baskets (*makakoon*, plural, in Nishnaabemowin language) from the Royal Collection Trust, United Kingdom (RCT) to the Peterborough Museum and Archives (PMA) in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.[3] The decision to pursue a loan agreement was based on the centuries-long historical relationship between the Mississauga Nation (an alliance of six Nishnaabeg communities in Ontario) with the Crown, and the fact that the makakoon had been made intentionally as a diplomatic gift to the Prince of Wales—the heir to the Crown—when he visited one of these communities, Rice Lake Village (now Hiawatha First Nation) in 1860. "We don't take back gifts," said the chiefs of the Mississauga Nation when approached at the beginning of the THR project. People wished very strongly to reconnect with these ancestors, though, and so a loan was felt to be appropriate.

As we undertake this analysis, we bear in mind and affirm key provisions in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), particularly articles 11, 12 and 31, which focus on overlapping rights of Indigenous Peoples to control, practice, and revitalize cultural knowledge and practices, including the right to use ceremonial and cultural objects. These articles further assert that states shall provide forms of access to such objects, including but not limited to repatriation, developed in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007). These articles are especially important in Canada, where many cultural items removed historically from Indigenous communities now reside in museums at a vast geographical distance from their communities of origin, and where the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) is considering how the adoption of UNDRIP will affect museums across the country (key reports on this issue created for the CMA include Bell and Erickson 2022; Danyluk and Mackenzie 2022).

The *To Honour and Respect* project suggests that expanded loans can be an important form of meaningful reconnection with cultural items for Indigenous communities. While distinctly different from legal repatriation, expanded loans offer opportunities for reclaiming ancestral knowledge and for the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and control over ancestral items. Expanded loans can also be a crucial part of relationship-building between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous museum/heritage institutions as part of a longer-term dialogue about the stewardship of collections.

In offering this case study, we emphasize that expanded loans are not and should not be perceived as a substitute for repatriation in cases where repatriation is needed or desired. Expanded loans are not an acceptable alternative to repatriation by countries or institutions that are reluctant to meet the needs of communities of origin through repatriation. We also acknowledge that loan venues, environmental and security conditions at host venues, transport protocols and loan costs are dictated by lending institutions and art shipping companies, a situation in which the museum profession holds the power and disadvantages Indigenous communities. Indeed, one might argue that loans are a continuation of colonial control over ethnographic objects and peoples: many Indigenous communities have no ready access to museum facilities that are deemed acceptable for loans. They also have no budget for loan costs, which typically include specialist art transport companies, air freight, and business-class flights for couriers who accompany the shipment from the lending institution. Although museums emphasize concepts of care and repair as part

of their work, professional museological standards written into loan agreements and policies can function to continue to separate Indigenous Peoples from their cultural belongings and ancestors: "collections care" within the museum profession implies temperature and humidity controls, security standards, and control over access to items to preserve them physically (Modest and Augustat 2023: 12). These standards are routinely used by lending institutions to decline loans to accessible venues such as community centers or meaningful forms of access such as having items out of case for ceremony. Indigenous approaches to ancestral items often emphasize a different concept of care: care of the living, for whom the effects of colonialism have fractured the transmission of much cultural knowledge and thus destabilized identity; and spiritual, emotional, and cultural care for ancestors and the items they made. We explore how these different expectations and tensions affected the *To Honour and Respect* project while at the same time documenting how the project created meaningful access to important cultural items.

Expanded Loans as a Means of Indigenous Reconnection

In Canada, perhaps the best-known example of expanded museum loans being used to reconnect with ancestral items by Indigenous Peoples is recounted by Gerald Conaty (2015: 107–112) for the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot), where reluctant temporary loans from Glenbow Museum to Siksikaitsitapi ceremonial keepers in the 1990s were extended, then became permanent, then turned into repatriations. Most unusually for museum loans at the time, the items were reincorporated into ceremonies in Siksikaitsitapi communities: the pipes were smoked, other items were danced or worn, and items were handled without gloves and cared for traditionally in the homes of bundle holders. This was a critical step in strengthening ceremonial practices among Siksikaitsitapi nations after historical government attempts to suppress such practices, and led to major provincial policy changes as legislators and museum professionals became aware of how important these items were to the health of Siksikaitsitapi individuals and communities:

> By 1998, the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai had, on loan, more than thirty sacred objects from the Glenbow Museum and the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Some of these had been ceremonially transferred [from one keeper to another] several times, spreading knowledge and extending relationships. Glenbow staff had been taught how important these bundles are to entire communities. Earlier fears that the bundles would fall into disuse or be sold had been quelled, and the appropriateness of returning them [to Blackfoot people] was no longer challenged. (Conaty 2015: 111)

Having developed relationships with Siksikaitsitapi people during a visual repatriation project and with Conaty's mentoring, in 2010, Allison Brown and Laura Peers brought a loan from the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, United Kingdom, of five historic Siksikaitsitapi to Glenbow and then to the Galt Museum in Lethbridge (Peers and Brown 2016; Peers 2013). This was an expanded loan, with dozens of sessions involving out-of-case gentle handling and visiting and the inclusion of one of the shirts in a ceremony held at the Galt Museum.

Other expanded loans include one from the American Museum of Natural History of a bentwood box decorated with clan motifs to the Haida Gwaii Museum in 2017, and the use of this chest by its clan to store and distribute gifts in a potlatch, a major community ceremony attended by hundreds of people (Collison and Levell 2018: 72–73; Lederman 2017). At the Manitoba Museum, former curator Maureen Matthews also developed a program of taking historic sacred pipes (many used for treaty ceremonies to affirm relationships and the sacredness of promises made) out of the museum to annual events in First Nations communities where the pipes were smoked, and teachings related to them were passed to younger generations (Matthews et al. 2021). In all of these examples, as in the THR project, the limited period of the loan structure created an intense process of engagement with ancestral items.

To Honour and Respect: The Loan and Associated Community Activities

In 2023, *Mnaajtood ge Mnaadendaan: Miigwewinan Michi Saagiig Kwewag Miinegoowin Gimaans Zhaganaash Aki 1860 / To Honour and Respect: Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860* brought 13 porcupine-quilled birchbark baskets from Queen Victoria's residence, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight in England, to the PMA in Ontario, Canada, for a seven-month loan and exhibition. The baskets were made by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg women at Rice Lake Village near Peterborough as diplomatic gifts for the Prince of Wales when he visited their community as part of a royal tour in 1860. Remarkably for historic Indigenous items in museum collections, makers' names are still associated with 11 of the 13 baskets, allowing connections to be made with descendants today.[4]

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg had a century-long history of alliance with the British Crown by 1860. They allied with the British from 1760 and fought for them in the War of 1812. When the 18-year-old Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, and heir to the throne, made a royal tour of Canada in 1860, he and his entourage were greeted by Chief Paudash at Rice Lake Village on 7 September. The chief gave a speech in Nishnaabemowin and English, and the women of the village presented the quilled baskets to the prince, along with moccasins and other items.[5]

For Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, the act of the gift and its acceptance constituted a formal, sacred acknowledgment of the alliance itself and of the responsibilities that allies have to aid one another (Miller 2003; White 1982). Neither the prince nor his entourage understood this diplomacy or the expectations of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg around the gift, and the baskets and other items were accepted as souvenirs and examples of Nishnaabeg crafts. The gifts were transferred to the Royal Collection when the prince returned to England in the autumn of 1860 and have been cared for at Swiss Cottage at Osborne House since then (Phillips 2004, 2019).

After visiting the makakoon at Osborne House in 2016, Lori Beavis—an art historian and citizen of Hiawatha First Nation—became determined to make them accessible to her community and convened a circle of knowledge-holders at Hiawatha to share memory and meaning related to the baskets. In 2018, an Indigenous-led planning circle was formed including Chief Laurie Carr (a direct descendant of Chief Paudash) and knowledge-holders from Hiawatha First Nation; a representative from the Mississauga Nation, which links six Michi Saagiig communities;[6] Susan Neale, director of the PMA; and co-curators Lori Beavis and Laura Peers. Early in the project process, Beavis and Peers attended a joint meeting of the Chiefs and Councils from all six Mississauga Nations, and asked whether the project should be a repatriation claim or a loan. The Chiefs and Council members deliberated the question and responded that the baskets had been made intentionally as diplomatic gifts to the Crown: they had not been stolen or acquired under duress but intentionally gifted. Additionally, because the Nishnaabeg continue to have a relationship with the Crown that affects treaties, the ancestors' intentions of the gift should be honored. Their answer was therefore that the baskets should not be repatriated, and the project would involve a loan.

Following this decision, and with an offer from the PMA as the closest museum to Hiawatha with the environmental and security facilities required to act as the host venue, the co-curators successfully sought funding for the loan and associated activities through grants from Heritage Canada (Museums Assistance Program), Canada Council for the Arts, and the Ontario Arts Council. We also began discussions with the Royal Collection Trust about the loan agreement. Trust staff have considerable experience in loaning important works of European art from the Royal Collection to major museums, and the Trust's loan policies, loan contract and expectations of the logistics of the loan reflected typical protocols, with standards laid out for temperature, humidity, and security. The Trust had never before undertaken a loan project with this degree of Indigenous community involvement throughout. Discussions were held about Indigenous protocols for welcoming ancestral items home, including smudging and feasting, and their implications for physical collections care. With considerable goodwill, Trust staff agreed that collections care needed to include spiritual care and love offered by Michi Saagiig people, and planning circle members accepted and responded to the Trust's considerations. Together we worked out protocols for an out-of-case handling session component and for ceremonial activity to welcome and say farewell to ancestors. With the help of colleagues on the City of Peterborough legal team and at the Trust, we negotiated special clauses in the loan agreement to meet needs all round. This process of dialogue was critical in arriving at an acceptance

of each other's needs and understanding that we were all partners in this project. After making transportation arrangements with art handlers in the United Kingdom and Ontario, we welcomed the makakoon/ancestors home in April 2023.

Museological logistics and professional standards for the project existed in parallel with Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg forms of control. During discussions about the scope and nature of the project, Michi Saagiig planning circle members asserted cultural, intellectual, and political sovereignty over these important heritage items: over the way that the baskets would be exhibited and interpreted, the nature of the welcome and farewell ceremonies, and other cultural activities associated with the loan. These issues were paramount to Michi Saagiig team members, for whom this was not just a loan of objects, but an invitation to the spirits of the ancestors who created the makakoon to return to their territory. Acknowledging this, Lori Beavis's exhibition design was a simple circle of cases, so that the ancestors who had been sitting on shelves beside each other for over 160 years at Osborne House could see and converse with each other. Understanding how important this visit would be to Michi Saagiig people, the PMA provided new standalone plexiglass-topped cases that enabled visitors to see all sides of each makak, enhancing the ancestors' powerful presence.

In conversation with knowledge-holders in Michi Saagiig communities, Hiawatha First Nation cultural coordinators guided welcome (arrival) and traveling (departure) ceremonies to be held in the museum that incorporated respectful protocols for interacting with powerful spirits: formal introductions and speech, smudging, feasting (including placing plates of traditional food on top of the ancestors' cases, and then feeding their spirits by sending the food into a sacred dawn-to-dusk fire), honor songs, drumming, and family/community gatherings. These were layered onto standard museological processes for loans before installation into cases. Following standard loan procedure, the crates rested unopened after their flight from England for 24 hours, and then as they were being opened, a fluent Nishnaabemowin speaker welcomed the ancestors in their own language, and they were smudged before being condition reported. As Chief Carr noted, it was important to the community that "the first part of that initial ceremony [included] having them spoken to in Nishnaabemowin." Once the makakoon had been condition reported and installed in their cases, the welcome ceremony accommodated core protocols of visiting, feasting, a pipe ceremony in the gallery, and a sacred fire just outside the front door of the museum. These elements were discussed in the planning phase with RCT staff, who were happy to support Michi Saagiig needs but needed explanation of what these entailed to ensure that their own stewardship protocols were followed. The loan process was in this sense a positive learning opportunity for our lending partner.

The exhibition at the PMA attracted over 7,600 visitors across seven months, a high number for this small museum. Other activity held as part of this expanded loan included 17 workshops, held at powwows and other events across Mississauga Nation communities and at the museum, to teach basic quillwork skills, using designs taken directly from the quilled motifs on the baskets to make small items such as key fobs. Over 220 people participated in the workshops. Working with RCT staff to agree on protocols, we also held three out-of-case visits with the ancestors at the PMA, for small groups of community participants (about 30 altogether) and several supporting project staff to enable gentle touch and sensory learning. We offered 48 Indigenous-led educational tours for adults and school groups, including a visit by the Hiawatha First Nation Child Care group and another of elementary school Nishnaabemowin language students who sang honor songs to the ancestors that they had practiced for weeks. Visitors learned words on a specialized Nishnaabemowin vocabulary collected by language consultant Jon Taylor of Curve Lake, which was featured on an exhibition text panel and a giveaway postcard. Project lead quillworker, Sandra D. Moore of Hiawatha, also created a "Legacy Piece," a fully quilled panel that would stay at Hiawatha when the ancestors returned to England. This piece was crowd-quilled at powwows and other public events by 770 individuals, most of whom had never quilled before (see figure 1).

Over 100 guestbook entries were signed with thanks in Nishnaabemowin, with visitors identifying themselves by community. Two hundred and six public school students attended Indigenous-led exhibition tours and 90 schools have access to resources created for the project about Nishnaabeg history, governance, language and art through the regional school board web site and a copy of the exhibit catalog purchased for each school. Indigenous educators chose to learn more about the exhibit on professional activity days, booking tours for their entire teams.

Figure 1. Legacy Piece: Designed and quilled by Sandra D. Moore of Hiawatha First Nation, with the water area infilled by members of the public at powwows and museum events during the *To Honour and Respect* project, this panel is entitled "We Have Not Forgotten." Photograph by Laura Peers, 2023.

Given studies showing that museum attendance in Canada is almost 20 percent lower among Indigenous attendees than by non-Indigenous Canadians (Dickenson 2021, cited in Ede 2024: 3), the THR team was proud of these markers that indicated that the exhibition provided meaningful access to heritage items for citizens of many Indigenous communities. Just as significantly, the project team and planning circle members noted that the depth and intensity of these interactions were given impetus by the finite dates of the visit imposed by the loan period.

Community Engagement and the Rhythm of the Loan

In considering the usefulness of the expanded loan as a means of creating significant opportunities for reconnection with ancestral items, we realized that the very structure of the loan enhanced community engagement with the exhibition and activities. Members of the public had a limited window of opportunity to visit the ancestors during the loan dates, something that the project's advertising and Facebook page emphasized. Indigenous community members reinforced this in conversation with other members and on their own social media streams, and actively encouraged Michi Saagiig citizens to view the exhibition while they could. A key part of attaining a high level of participation during the loan period was the appointment of a Community Engagement Officer.

The loan window of seven months was a generous one by international standards, but still posed challenges in making the most of the time and getting community members to visit. Despite efforts by museums to consult with Indigenous communities, widespread anecdotal evidence from museum staff in Canada documents a relatively low visitation rate by Indigenous community members who remain uncomfortable within museum spaces due to the colonial narratives that museums exhibited in the past, and the roles of museums in alienating cultural items from Indigenous communities. The THR team was concerned that members of Michi Saagiig communities should have opportunities to visit with the ancestors. As a key element of an Indigenous-centered project, we endeavored to ensure that the museum space was an emotionally and socially safe one for Indigenous visitors. Part of the team's strategy for achieving this involved foregrounding Indigenous perspectives, language, and history on text panels and labels, adding a smudging station at the museum entrance, and including a table with traditional medicines in the gallery space. We also wished to ensure that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives were front and center in all public programming. Discussion of these concerns at the planning stage led us to include in funding applications the costs for a Community Engagement Officer, who would be Indigenous, able to contact Indigenous communities, organizations, and individuals (directly and by social media and networking) and also to deliver Indigenous-led programming in the exhibition space.

Christine Beavis, an Indigenous quillworker, beadwork instructor, and Sixties Scoop survivor[7] from Manitoba who has lived in the Peterborough area for decades, stepped into this role shortly after the ancestors arrived. She reflected on the importance of this post as we prepared this article:

> This position was pivotal toward maintaining continued interest in the project throughout the local and outlying communities for the duration of the exhibition. This meant reaching out to not just the local community, but ensuring each of the six Mississauga Nations maintained involvement in the project for the duration. By engaging over Zoom calls, endless emails and social media, as well actual face-to-face meetings, it was the moccasin telegraph that was most effective in doing what it does best. Spreading the word. I was merely a conduit. I assumed the responsibility of following-up with calls and inquiries. I worked on site with the host Museum, alongside their Manager of Guest Relations to coordinate and facilitate guided tours. Word of the project spread. News that the Ancestors were only visiting for a short time prompted people to mark this project a must-see and high on their list of things to do.
>
> My personal objective was to ensure that once the project was over, the curators wouldn't be faced with any feedback about a certain group or community missing out, or not knowing about the exhibition.

Christine contacted people in each of the six communities who could organize a group visit: youth workers, educators, artists, cultural coordinators, and coordinators for Elders' activities. She also contacted urban Indigenous organizations serving people with a wide range of Indigenous identities in the Peterborough region. We strengthened her direct networking with intense social media and advertising in each community. Together we created a growing wave of Indigenous and non-Indigenous tours, school groups, individual and family visits.

Christine spent time in the gallery to interact with visitors as well as being there to lead booked tours. This proved to be important in creating an Indigenous-led visitor experience, enabling visitors from all backgrounds to enhance their interaction with the ancestors:

> My involvement with the project afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself completely and be invested in the success of the project at ground level. This meant time at the gallery and being present with the ancestors as much as possible. I could not help but assume a caretaking type of role. I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility. Firstly to the Ancestors, as their representative, by ensuring they were respected, understood and honored properly, but secondly to the co-curators, by way of representing the project's objective properly during times of their absence. For this reason, I felt it was most important that I engage with as many visitors as I could in person. I feel that the takeaway is much more meaningful and lasting when one is able to connect in person. This invoked real emotion and meaningful dialogue of great importance that enabled the satisfaction toward thought provoking answers to many of the pertinent questions that arose time and again.

Christine's engagement with visitors strengthened the sense that the exhibit gallery was an Indigenous space and contributed to a positive experience for Indigenous visitors. She listened to their stories of connections with the makakoon and their makers—and to stories of disconnections from them, because of residential school and other colonial interventions in Michi Saagiig history. She supported and encouraged visitors' expressions of respect to the makakoon (which ranged from delighted exclamations about quillwork technique to tears and awe, including songs and items offered to the ancestors) in a way that bridged respect for the ancestors to respect for their descendants. Being willing to listen to peoples' stories was key to ensuring that the exhibition space was one in which Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, experiences, and cultural expressions were foregrounded and honored. Christine's position was written into project grants precisely because this was a loan with a limited window for community engagement with the quilled baskets, to maximize the number of people who could visit and the depth of their engagement.

Expanded Loans as Deep Engagement

Depth of engagement is crucial if expanded loans are to fulfill the needs of Indigenous people in providing access to cultural items. Having a core Indigenous staff member, especially an individual familiar with quillwork who was confident working with a wide variety of audiences, was key to ensuring meaningful and culturally supportive engagement.

The fact that the makers' names are still known for so many of these baskets meant that some Michi Saagiig visitors were able to trace kinship connections with them. People told us that they discussed the baskets and the exhibition with family members, sharing genealogical knowledge, and some returned after learning that they were connected to a specific maker. Many people had family photographs taken of themselves with one of the baskets/ancestors to whom they were connected (figure 2). Others could not trace genealogical links with the makers but felt a very deep sense of kinship with them. One such visitor, Rebecca Loucks from Curve Lake First Nation, reflects:

> I had the incredible opportunity to visit with the ancestors five times from the opening to the closing of the exhibition. I even drove up near the museum once when it was closed for a holiday, just to be near them.
>
> I developed a deep relationship to the makakoon. I could feel the spirit of the grandmothers that created the baskets and felt a huge empathy for them. I felt the loneliness of the makakoon being so far away from the people. They have not been able to hear their language or feel the songs and cultural ways of their people in such a long time. I am not sure if any of my own ancestors helped to create these beautiful baskets but it felt amazing to see them. I can only imagine how the family members from Hiawatha First Nation felt seeing the work of their loved ones from so long ago.
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> I spoke to the makakoon in as much Ojibwe as I knew because I am not a fluent speaker. I sang to them with my voice and my hand drum. I danced for them in my regalia . . . most times [I] would start to cry, overwhelmed by the emotion. I felt them thanking me for singing to them. It was so important to me to fill them up with as much love as I could while they were here. I even sang for them when I knew they were crossing back over the ocean. I promised I would sing for them whenever I thought of them, with love and respect . . .
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> I feel it is very important to our people to see these culturally significant artifacts[8] . . . We have been here since time immemorial and these items prove our history. Some of the artifacts were given as tokens of goodwill and building good relationships, Nation building, with those who they were given to. It shows the people that their good intentions with these offerings are being maintained as they were meant to be and to see the visual proof of the kind, respectful gesture.
>
> I am so very grateful that this exhibition was brought here to our territory and will forever remember the experience. . . . I hope there can be future exhibits such as this and truly hope to see the grandmothers/makakoon in the future. (Email, Loucks to Christine Beavis, 30 January 2024)

The project also hired three Indigenous youth docents who interacted with visitors in the exhibition and supported relevant art activities with children. All three attended an out-of-case workshop and found the experience deeply moving:

Figure 2. Descendants of Nancy Naugon: [L to R] Lynda Booth, Lynda's daughter Laura Howard, Lynda's granddaughters Kaydence Howard and Katelyn Miller, Lynda's daughter Rebecca Booth. Photograph by Laura Peers, 2023. Used with permission of the family. The makak (quilled birchbark basket) is by Nancy Naugon, 1860, Royal Collection Trust RCIN 84335.

> I got to meet my ancestors for the first time in person in 163 years and actually touch them and connect with their spirit (out of case). Sarah [Taunchy] and Polly [Soper, makers of two of the makakoon] took me back in time and gave me a gift. They brought me home. This has been the most sacred day of my reconnection journey. (Docent, Facebook post, 21 October 2023)

The out-of-case visits—added to maximize community engagement and take greatest advantage of the loan period—were particularly important for participants. Often held in museums in Canada for Indigenous community members, and increasingly held in the United Kingdom for Indigenous research visitors, these sessions are seldom held during loans with borrowed items. They are incredibly important in reaffirming Indigenous knowledge and history and supporting reclamation of cultural practices (see, for example, Gadoua 2014: 324, 333–336; Krmpotich and Peers 2013:169–177). In these sessions, people felt that ancestors were literally with them in the room; they could be touched and, like living Elders, the ancestors taught participants. This was especially important for those who had no Elders to teach them because of residential school or living off reservation or being adopted. When asked to sum up her experience of an

Figure 3. Quilled birchbark basket (1860), Hannah McCue. RCIN 84337. The reverse side of the basket also bears quilled cursive writing, "Presented to the Prince of Wales." When she made this creel-shaped basket in 1860, Hannah McCue was 37, with three children from one to fifteen years old. She was married to interpreter James McCue. Image: Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III, 2023.

out-of-case session in one word, Georgie Horton-Baptiste said, "reconnection": "it's a tangible piece that we could hold in our hands, from our past, from our collective past . . . so many of us, through no choice of our own, [were] adopted or our parents picked us up and left the rez and we lost that connection [with community, with a collective past]. So just that: reconnection." (Interview, January 2024) Quillworkers found these sessions especially useful in challenging them to improve their work. One quilled box by Betsy Simons, and quilled cursive writing on a work by Hannah McCue, most often captured the quillworkers' attention. Simons's work utilizes a technique in which a knot is tied in the middle of a porcupine quill and both ends inserted into the bark, creating a textured surface that she used as flower petals. It was only when images of the work were amplified many times with a digital magnifier that the quillworkers truly understood the depth of the artist's skills and dexterity to create texture with the thinnest of quills—much finer than people work with today. In McCue's work the ingenuity of the quilled words in cursive writing, *Presented to the Prince of Wales—Hannah McCue, Rice Lake* proved remarkable as it not only identified the maker but also her highly developed skills (see figure 3).

Depth of engagement was also seen in participants' reflections on the presence of the ancestors in supporting the endangered art of quillwork and the endangered Michi Saagiig dialect of Nishnaabemowin. Colonial processes, especially residential schools, have had dire effects on these elements of Michi Saagiig culture. As language consultant Jon Taylor stated, "When you don't use something, like doing that type of artwork, and you don't use those words that go along with it, you're going to lose it. And it's really important that we keep both. Without our culture, we don't have our language and without language, we don't have culture" (Taylor in Beavis and Peers 2023: 55). Michi Saagiig participants understood the

Figure 4. Janet McCue and Linda McCue singing an honor song to the ancestors during the final Open House. Citizens of Curve Lake First Nation, Janet and Linda are knowledge-keepers, cultural educators, and social justice advocates. Photograph by Sarah Van Ryn, 2023. Used with permission.

opportunity that the loan offered for not simply viewing an exhibition, but also strengthening cultural knowledge and identity.

The structure of the loan meant that as we approached the time when the ancestors would return to England, there was an upswing in the number of guided tours and daily attendance numbers. Visitor engagement also became more emotionally and spiritually intense. Standing in the gallery and delivering programs, interacting with community members, Christine witnessed people bringing their families to see the exhibition, grandmothers introducing the ancestors to their grandchildren, people singing to the ancestors, Rebecca's dance in full regalia to honor them, children and adults speaking halting Nishnaabemowin to them, words of gratitude and love. Our final Saturday was an open house, advertised especially to local Indigenous communities, and it was packed (figure 4).

The next day, the museum closed to the public so that Hiawatha First Nation could host a final ceremony. In Michi Saagiig culture one does not say "goodbye" but "see you later," *baamaapii*. The Baamaapii ceremony, like the welcome ceremony, included feasting, smudging, drumming, song, prayer, a sacred fire to send offerings of traditional medicines and foods to the ancestors, and lots of visiting. People were reluctant to leave, and there were tears and final loving touches to the cases as the event ended.

Loans and Sovereignty

The structure of the loan, then, created impetus for visitation and engagement. We were determined to make the most of the seven months we had. We also considered issues of sovereignty, cultural assertion, and diplomacy as we moved through the project. One powerful reason that repatriation is pursued by Indigenous nations is the opportunity it affords to reclaim sovereignty over cultural items that have long been held by museums and controlled by museum policies and expectations. As noted earlier, loan conditions are also determined by lenders, which limits what can be done with borrowed items. Some Michi Saagiig people refused to accept such constraints on what they saw as their own ancestors, and in consequence refused to visit the exhibition. Most, however, saw it as a visit of relatives they had not seen for a long time. Many people also viewed the loan as an important step in the relationship between Michi Saagiig people and the Crown, including the Royal Collection Trust in this sense of alliance renewal.

Loan negotiation can foster relationship development between institutions, and between museums (as lender or host) and Indigenous nations. Relationship development for the *To Honour and Respect* loan included Zoom calls, email exchanges, and a face-to-face visit in the United Kingdom that enabled RCT staff to understand and support Michi Saagiig needs for a longer than usual loan period, the expectation that spirits were being invited to visit, the need to include ceremony in routine loan processes such as uncrating and condition reporting, the need to include water from Rice Lake and plant medicines in the room to have those spirits from home with the ancestors. Equally, planning circle members needed to hear RCT concerns about meeting key Trust stewardship markers, including environmental conditions, security, and ensuring the physical well-being of the makakoon, and Trust protocols for captioning photographs provided by the Trust. Those discussions enabled us to hear what was critical to each party. When we began, neither Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg nor RCT staff entirely understood each other's needs. Over time, we began to understand that our ideas of collections care were different but overlapped significantly. The perception by some Michi Saagiig participants that they were being forced to abide by museum and lender rules shifted, as trust was created and some of those rules were modified.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg also made the choice to proceed diplomatically with this loan to honor the diplomatic nature of the gifts and their ongoing relationship with the Crown, and to build relationships that would affect how the makakoon would be cared for after the loan ended. On the final day, as the ancestors were being packed into their traveling crate to return to England, Hiawatha First Nation made a formal request of the Royal Collection Trust that ceremony would be permitted with the ancestors in England, when community members visited, and that the community wished to discuss how the makakoon were exhibited in future. That will require further dialogue, including with English Heritage, who manage Royal Collection works on display at Osborne House, but the loan process was an important space within which these conversations were able to begin and make real progress.

As noted, not all Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg were satisfied with the loan as a form of access to the makakoon. Chief Laurie Carr of Hiawatha First Nation acknowledged this discomfort, but underscored the comfort given by the presence of the ancestors:

> And all those times when people search, and they get lost sometimes. This piece of this history, this piece of our ancestors, may help to bring them back to that and know that, how strong and proud and wonderful we are. We always talk about how our ancestors stand behind us. And . . . when we have our meetings, we call them in to guide us and to help us with those decisions. And that's part of what these pieces, these ancestors here will bring to us and our young ones.
>
> And I understand people may say that we want to keep them, but they were a gift. They were gifted, but just to be able to have them back here is something we all need to learn about and feel. (Carr in Beavis and Peers 2023: 56)

Chief Carr's conviction that having the ancestors visit could help people in her community argues for the depth of engagement that *To Honour and Respect* was able to achieve.

After the ancestors returned to England, we interviewed key project participants about their reflections on their experience. One of the THR Indigenous youth docents stated, "We need to be able to connect with our history and past more in order to move forward with reconciliation." Expanded loans can be part of

this process. So many historic Indigenous ancestral items are held in museums so far away that community members are unable to access them. If as museum professionals we truly believe that care is a core value for our profession, then we need to care for people as well as collections. Care demands concrete action (Modest and Augustat 2023: 14). It also involves critical professional reflection. Expanded loans planned in conjunction with Indigenous community members are a valid form of meaningful access to ancestral items for Indigenous Peoples. But we need to rethink some aspects of loan policies and procedures. We need to consider how to lower loan costs, we need to rethink security needs for loans (and find creative, low-cost, and low-tech ways to meet those). We need to consider how to support loans to nonstandard venues, how to support the inclusion of fragile historic items in ceremony, how to make loans meaningful to communities of origin. Most of all, we need to see loans as an opportunity for shared responsibility that meets the needs for spiritual and cultural as well as physical care of objects. We hope that the *To Honour and Respect* project stimulates conversations about how museums might create meaningful forms of access for Indigenous Peoples to historic Indigenous items in their collections.

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LORI BEAVIS is the Executive Director of Centre d'art daphne, the first Indigenous artist-run centre in Tiohtià:ke/ Mooniyang/ Montreal, and an independent curator. Her curatorial work articulates narrative and memory in the context of family and cultural history and identity, art education, and self-representation. Identifying as Michi Saagiig (Mississauga) Anishinaabe and Irish-Welsh settler, Beavis is a citizen of Hiawatha First Nation, Rice Lake, Ontario. In 2016, Beavis began working with Hiawatha First Nation to co-create knowledge of the quilled, birchbark makakoon created by women at Rice Lake Village in 1860. She co-curated *To Honour and Respect: Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860,* with Laura Peers.

CHRISTINE BEAVIS is a quillwork and beadwork artist and instructor. She is a Sixties Scoop survivor, originally from the Little Grand Rapids First Nation in Manitoba, who lives and works in the Peterborough area. She served as Community Engagement Officer for the *To Honour and Respect* Project.

NOTES

1. By "sovereignty" we mean the exercise of political authority by a nation (including an Indigenous nation) over another nation. Here, it involves assertions of rights through cultural or genealogical descent over the care and interpretation of items now in museum collections in other nations. We draw on Heather Nicol's definition of sovereignty (2017: 796) as a "discourse in which power relationships are conceptualized, theorized and activated according to historical legacies as well as current landscapes of power." UNDRIP uses the phrase "self-determination," which we take to mean the assertion of rights and authority by an Indigenous entity or nation within a nation-state. On Indigenous sovereignty and its distinction from non-Indigenous (Westphalian) sovereignty and self-determination, see Bauder and Mueller 2023; McNeil 2016: 100–103; Nicol 2017: 796–805.
2. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg are part of a larger linguistic and cultural group, the Anishnaabeg or Ojibwa/ Ojibwe of the Great Lakes. The local dialect uses Nishnaabeg (people) and Nishnaabemowin (language) rather than Anishnaabeg/Anishnaabemowin.

3. "To Honour and Respect: Gifts from the Michi Saagiig Women to the Prince of Wales, 1860." www.tohonourandrespect.ca (accessed 14 August 2024).
4. "S/he Does Quillwork on a Basket: The Women Who Made the Makakoon." www.tohonourandrespect.ca/the-makakoon-their-makers (accessed 14 August 2024).
5. The complete Rice Lake gifts collection may be viewed online at Royal Collection Trust's website: https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/page/1, search for "Mississauga." On the royal tour, see Radforth 2004.
6. Mississauga Nation. Homepage. https://www.mississauganation.com/ (accessed 14 August 2024).
7. In the 1960s, thousands of Indigenous children in Canada were taken or "scooped" from their communities and adopted into non-Indigenous foster care and homes. See Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre. "The Sixties Scoop." The University of British Columbia. https://irshdc.ubc.ca/learn/the-child-welfare-system-and-the-sixties-scoop/ (accessed 14 August 2024).
8. As the word "object," with its connotations of depersonalization, is inappropriate for the makakoon, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg use alternate terms. One of these reclaims an older meaning of "artifact" as simply something made by hand.

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