

Sonny Assu
Dana Claxton
Glen Coulthard
Gord Hill
Peter Kulchyski
Jaleh Mansoor

RED ON RED

Marianne Nicolson
Skeena Reece
Devin Zane Shaw
Marika Swan
Tania Willard

Indigeneity, Labour, Value

May 11, 2022

Room 1002, Audain Art Centre

Program

- 10:00-10:30 Opening remarks by Dana Claxton and Jaleh Mansoor
- 10:30-11:45 *moderated by Dana Claxton*
Marianne Nicolson, *The Myth of the Neo-Liberal Indigenous Saviour**
Tania Willard, *Labour Pains: Indigenous Story and Work within a Colonial Context of Capitalist Labour**
- 11:45-Noon Break
- Noon-1:15 *moderated by Jaleh Mansoor*
Glen Coulthard, *Once Were Maoists: Third World Currents in Fourth World Anti-Colonialism**
Devin Zane Shaw, *The Far Right, Settler Colonialism, and the Three-Way Fight*
- 1:15-2:30 Lunch
BFA studios, Room 3000
- 2:30-3:45 *moderated by Dana Claxton*
Sonny Assu, *The Speculator Boom: Issue #0**
Marika Swan, *flesh of the tree of life*
- 3:45-4:00 Break
- 4:00-5:15 *moderated by Jaleh Mansoor*
Gord Hill, *Civilization, Colonialism, Capitalism, and Comics*
Peter Kulchyski, *Bush Marxism: Theses on Dialectical Materialism and Indigenous Struggles*
- 5:15 Break
- 5:30-6:00 Skeena Reece Performance, *Good Trade*
BFA studios, Room 3000
- 6:00-6:45 Reception
BFA studios, Room 3000

**Presentations will be delivered via Zoom to gathered participants*

RED on RED: Indigeneity, Labour, Value

RED on RED: Indigeneity, Labour, Value is a two-day gathering, which invites community and public participation, of artists, writers, researchers, and activists seeking to together probe and imagine ways of overcoming impasses in decolonial horizons through creative alternatives to traditional academic events. We meet on unceded ancestral Musqueam territory on May 11 to share art and research that explore the by-turns antagonistic and yet mutually embracing questions of racialization and of labour—both grounds of capital's vociferous extractive techniques. We take both racialized oppression and value-productive exploitation to share a conjuncture that necessitates surmounting common external constraints imposed by capital's colonization of everyday life, a second order of colonization compounding that of settler-state colonization. While the Indian Act dispossessed First Nations peoples of their resources and forms of life, the seemingly "free" sale of remaining lands and resources, including that of the labour-power of Indigenous peoples, might be understood as anything but free, and instead as another order of coercive compulsion by capital and another round of dispossession possibly posing as self-determination.

Some shared questions to ponder together: To what extent have struggles against colonial oppression and the capitalist exploitation of labour-power—above all Indigenous labour—lived in the shadow of each other's blind spots? Does the sale (rather than seizure) of land and resources embedded within it liberate or doubly dispossess Indigenous peoples who continue to be stewards of the land, even as that sale might enrich the dispossessed in the short term? Is the sale of labour-power one such resource or does it afford Indigenous peoples a path to self-determination within community? Is the value-productive sale of the commodity labour-power in the transactional and abstract space of the labour market just another form of colonial capture? Is decolonization authentically possible within a capitalist social rubric in which impersonal and transactional social relations dissolve community? (What would life outside a market-mediated relation look like for most of us now, and especially for those who seek sovereignty within and against the colonial state? What does overcoming the settler state and the forms of possession it has sewn in us [identity, property] mean for Turtle Island now in practical

terms, in everyday life?) And what of unseen Indigenous cultural and spiritual labour, unknown labour that is only shared within communities and for Indigenous witnesses? What is the value of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural labour that facilitates ideas of social justice within institutional structures such as UBC? What are artists and historians doing to acknowledge the labour value of culture and how is this knowledge disseminated to students?

We hope to take these questions on through forms of embodied engagement, of art, performance practices, and through sharing research and conversation. We also hope to open these questions up to our communities across what is known as UBC and as Vancouver on these unceded and traditional territories of the x̣ẉməθḳẉəy' əm (Musqueam), sel' íl' wítulh (Tsleil-Waututh), and ṣḳwx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish Coast Salish) peoples.

Dana Claxton and Jaleh Mansoor
May 2022



Sonny Assu

Presenter: *The Speculator Boom: Issue #0*

Sonny Assu will present his ongoing body of work *The Speculator Boom*, a series on love and revenge! As an eighties kid / nineties teen, Assu read and collected comic-book titles such as the X-men, the New Mutants, and Spiderman. At that time, publishers began flooding the market with special “collectable”

issues. The Speculator Boom era saw fandom turn into collecting anything and everything with the promise of a payoff in the future.

Having kicked off his career in 2001 with a unique merger of Kwakwaka'wakw aesthetics and pop culture, Assu came full circle in his practice in 2017, returning to comic books as an exploration of self. He started re-collecting and destroying the comics of his youth to redefine the meaning of their value. In doing so, he discovered a rare glimpse of Indigenous inclusion beyond the ever-present stereotypes in consumer pop culture.

Sonny Assu (Ligwiłda'xw of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations) was raised in North Delta, BC, over 250 km away from his ancestral home on Vancouver Island. Having been raised as your everyday average suburbanite, it wasn't until he was eight years old that he uncovered his Kwakwaka'wakw heritage. Later in life, this discovery would be the conceptual focal point that helped launch his unique art practice. Assu explores multiple mediums and materials through a lens of pop culture, nostalgia, decolonialism, and Indigenous Futurism. Assu often imbues his work with autobiographical, humorous, and political connotations to deal with the realities of being Indigenous in the colonial state of Canada. Assu received his BFA from Emily Carr University in 2002 and his MFA from Concordia University in 2017. After living and working in Vancouver and Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal), he has settled with his family in łam' atax' w (Campbell River, BC).



Dana Claxton
Moderator

Dana Claxton is a critically acclaimed internationally exhibiting artist. She works in film, video, photography, single and multi-channel video installation, and performance art. Her practice investigates Indigenous beauty, the body, the socio-political, and the spiritual.

Her work has been shown internationally at the Museum of Modern Art (NYC), Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC), Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis), Sundance Film Festival, Salt Lake City (UT), Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art (Indianapolis), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, AU), Nasher Gallery of Art at Duke University (Durham, NC), and the Institute of Contemporary Art (Minneapolis). Her work is held in Canadian public and private collections, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the MacKenzie Art Gallery, and the Audain Museum, and internationally in the Seattle Art Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Minneapolis. She has received numerous awards including the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2020), the Scotiabank Photography Award (2020), the VIVA Award (2001), the Eiteljorg Fellowship (2007), the Hnatyshyn Award (2019), and the YWCA Women of Distinction Award (2019). In 2018-19, she had a solo survey exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Fringing the Cube*. She is head and a professor in the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia. She is a member of Wood Mountain Lakota First Nations located in southwest Saskatchewan and she resides in Vancouver.



Glen Coulthard

Presenter: *Once Were Maoists:
Third World Currents in Fourth World
Anti-Colonialism*

This presentation will provide a history of Red Power radicalization and Indigenous-Marxist cross-fertilization. It examines the political work undertaken by a small but dedicated cadre of Native organizers going by the name Native Alliance for

Red Power (NARP) in Vancouver from 1967 to 1975. It argues that their political organizing and theory-building borrowed substantively and productively from a Third World-adapted Marxism that provided an appealing international language of political contestation that they not only inherited but also sought to radically transform through a critical engagement with their own cultural traditions and land-based struggles. Not unlike many radicalized communities of colour during this period, NARP molded and adapted the insights they gleaned from Third World Marxism abroad into their own critiques of racial capitalism, patriarchy, and internal colonialism at home.

Glen Coulthard is Yellowknives Dene and an associate professor in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program and the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)—winner of the 2016 Caribbean Philosophical Association’s Frantz Fanon Award for Outstanding Book; the Canadian Political Science Association’s CB Macpherson Award for Best Book in Political Theory, published in English or French, in 2014–15; and the Rik Davidson Studies in Political Economy Award for Best Book in 2016. He is also a co-founder of Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, a decolonial, Indigenous, land-based post-secondary program operating on his traditional territories in Denendeh (Northwest Territories).



Gord Hill

Presenter: *Civilization, Colonialism, Capitalism, and Comics*

This presentation examines the historical development of civilization and colonialism, leading to the rise of capitalism as the dominant global socio-economic system, using the comic art of Gord Hill (Kwakwaka'wakw) as a visual guide.

Gord Hill is an Indigenous writer, artist, and activist of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation. He is the author and illustrator of *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book*, *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book*, and *The Antifa Comic Book* (all three published by Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver), as well as the author of *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance* (AK Press, Oakland). His art and writings have been published in numerous periodicals, including *Briarpatch*, *Canadian Dimension*, *Redwire*, *Red Rising Magazine*, *The Dominion*, *Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec*, *Intotemak*, *Seattle Weekly*, and *Broken Pencil*.



Peter Kulchyski

Presenter: *Bush Marxism: Theses on Dialectical Materialism and Indigenous Struggles*

"Mode of production" is the key Marxist analytical category for thinking through Indigenous struggle, and on that basis, alliances must be built with working-class struggles: attempts to characterize Indigenous peoples as workers actually feed the totalizing (assimilationist) agenda of the State on Indigenous peoples, a State that has tried to force that identity onto them (through residential schools, for example). The paper will deploy a set of theses that

work through the implications of this insight in terms of the critical value of the concept totalization, the historical shifts in State approaches to Indigenous issues; the theses will include a critique of the attempts to theorize Indigenous politics as working-class politics (e.g., Frances Widdowson; Ron Bourgeault); will review Indigenous gendered labour roles as primary producers through the fur-trade period; will discuss E.P. Thompson's relevance to current Indigenous struggles given both his work about customary rights and, more famously, about the historical development of working-class consciousness.

Peter Kulchyski is a professor and activist based in the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba. His most recent book is *Report of an Inquiry into an Injustice* (University of Manitoba Press, 2018). He works with northern Indigenous communities in Nunavut, Denendeh, and northern Manitou ba'a, and has been a member of a wide variety of Indigenous justice grassroots groups and the national defenders of the land network.



Jaleh Mansoor
Moderator

Jaleh Mansoor is an associate professor of art history at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, where she teaches modern and contemporary art history with an emphasis on Post WWII European art. Her areas of interest, in addition to art and its histories, include formalism, Marxist feminism, Frankfurt School theory, and art as technology. Mansoor's first monographic book, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia*, was published by Duke University Press in 2016. She has written extensively for various journals, magazines, and art institutions, including *October*, *Art Margins*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*, *Camera Austria*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Dia*, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and in numerous edited volumes. She co-edited an anthology of essays addressing Jacques Rancière's articulations of politics and aesthetics entitled

Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics (Duke University Press, 2010).

Her current primary project, entitled *Universal Prostitution: A Counter History of Abstraction Crossing Modernism, 1888–2008*, is under contract with Duke University Press. It traces the historical and structural entwinement of aesthetic and real (or concrete) abstraction—defined as the extraction of labour-power valorized by transactional exchange on the market—over twentieth-century art to offer a comprehensive account of the political economic forces that motivated modernist abstraction and the advent of post-humanism.



Marianne Nicolson

Presenter: *The Myth of the Neo-Liberal Indigenous Saviour*

The current big push by federal and provincial governments in Canada in relation to Indigenous Nations is economic assimilation. This assimilation is being promoted through negotiation frameworks with industry and a strong campaign to indoctrinate Indigenous

communities into colonial business models. These frameworks distract and ignore the fundamental issues of “land back” as well as the spiritual relationship of communities and lands that are essential to the maintenance of Indigenous worldview. Healing and reconciliation from a colonial viewpoint are promoted as dependent on economic integration; however, integration into neo-liberal economic frameworks is the ultimate death blow to Indigenous collectivity and spirituality through its promotion of a value system that upholds individuality, patriarchy, and land exploitation as “resource.”

Marianne Nicolson is an artist activist of the Musgamakw Dzawada’enuxw First Nations, which are part of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwak’wala-speaking peoples) of the Pacific Northwest Coast. She is trained in both traditional Kwakwaka’wakw forms and culture and contemporary gallery and museum-

based practice. She holds a bachelor of fine arts (1996) from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and a master of fine arts (2000), master of arts in linguistics and anthropology (2005), and a PhD in linguistics and anthropology with a focus on space as expressed in the Kwak'waka language (2013) all from the University of Victoria. Nicolson works as a Kwakwaka'wakw cultural researcher and historian, as well as an advocate for Indigenous land rights. Her practice is multi-disciplinary, encompassing photography, painting, carving, video, installation, monumental public art, writing, and speaking. All her work is political in nature and seeks to uphold Kwakwaka'wakw traditional philosophy and worldview through contemporary mediums and technology. Exhibitions include the 17th Biennale of Sydney, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, Nuit Blanche in Toronto, Museum Arnhem, among many others. Major monumental public artworks are situated in Vancouver International Airport, the Canadian Embassy in Amman, and the Canadian Embassy in Paris.



Skeena Reece

Performance: *Good Trade*

Indigenous labour, you can say, all boils down to a good trade; however, from my perspective as a Tsimshian/Cree, I can say that I have seen the way that Indian money works and it isn't simply about the exchange of goods and services. My short film *Master Gestures* shows the gestures that hold cultural knowledge in them—cultural knowledge that has been passed down and within these simple gestures, a grand idea. Legacy and the passing on of belief can be seen in the way a person removes their hat, nods their head, pays someone with cloth and tobacco. A borrowed term from theatre, “master gesture” belies the telling action of the character encompassed into one gesture or action, which tells you what you need to know about them. I am responding to what Indigenous labour is from an artist's perspective. I will present another master gesture. The action I will present says a lot about my people, particularly my West Coast family and similar cultures along the coast of British Columbia.

This gesture says many things; mainly it is the intangible nature of Indigenous commerce, an engrained intuition to fill a need without an expectation of reciprocity. Although the action is often paid, it is not expected. The symbiosis of an intact society garners many roles and responsibilities that are filled by willing participants. The expertise honed by many years of experience creates a plethora of professionals in their fields. This particular action will show you how this skill is used, useful, and valuable.

Skeena Reece is a Tsimshian/Gitksan and Cree artist based on the West Coast of British Columbia. She has garnered national and international attention, most notably for *Raven: On the Colonial Fleet* (2010), her bold installation and performance work presented as part of the celebrated group exhibition *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*. Her multidisciplinary practice includes performance art, spoken word, humour, "sacred clowning," writing, music, video/film, photography, and visual art. She studied media art at Emily Carr University. She was the recipient of the Hnatyshyn Foundation REVEAL Indigenous Art Award (2017), the British Columbia Award for Excellence in the Arts (2012), and the VIVA Award (2014). For *Savage* (2010), Reece won a Leo Award for Best Performance in a Short Film. She performed at the 17th Sydney Biennale, Australia. Recent exhibitions include *Interior Infinite* at the Polygon Gallery (2021) and the Women & Masks research conference at Boston University. Reece is currently working on a transcript for a Maria Hupfield publication for her residency at the New School, New York.



Devin Zane Shaw

Presenter: *The Far Right, Settler Colonialism, and the Three-Way Fight*

This talk explores the relationship between the far right and settler colonialism. I argue that orthodox definitions of fascism cannot explain this relationship. Instead, a three-way fight perspective grounded in the revolutionary theory of Black and Indigenous

struggles can illuminate the far-right reaction to crises of settlerism and settler-colonialism.

Devin Zane Shaw is the author of numerous books, including *Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), *Egalitarian Moments: From Descartes to Rancière* (Bloomsbury, 2016), and the recent multi-author collaboration *On Necrocapitalism: A Plague Journal* (Kersplebedeb, 2021). He is co-editor of the book series *Living Existentialism*, published by Rowman and Littlefield. He teaches philosophy at a community college in so-called British Columbia.



Marika Swan

Presenter: *flesh of the tree of life*

A third-generation carver, Marika Swan (Tla-o-qui-aht) shares some of her research into the commodification of the coastal carving arts starting with early trade and theft up until her own experiences navigating the commercial art scene.

Marika Echachis Swan / ɬ' upinup is a mother and artist of mixed Tla-o-qui-aht, Scottish, and Irish descent. Her main creative practice is woodblock printmaking, often layered with other visual art techniques, such as carving, stencil, and photography. With no formal arts training, Marika has developed her own contemporary take on the iconic Nuu-chah-nulth aesthetic through mentorship, study, and fearless experimentation. Her evocative work is a voice for Nuu-chah-nulth cultural values from an uncompromising, feminist perspective.

Currently based out of her home territory of Tla-o-qui-aht (surrounding Tofino, BC), Marika balances her creative practice with various community arts projects. For several years, Marika has been working closely with the development of the Carving on the Edge Festival, creating an elevated platform to celebrate both the traditional and contemporary coastal carving

arts. Through her work with the festival, Marika began developing a community-led research project called The Nuu-chah-nulth Living Archive, locating and documenting the vast bodies of ancestral belongings and materials from her community that are now held in various museums and institutions all over the world. In its current evolution, it hosts information on hundreds of belongings, audio recordings, archival photos, and songs on a private database for Nuu-chah-nulth community members, creating a virtual space for shared ownership and knowledge sharing. Through this project, Marika is actively creating deeper connections with local culture-keepers to stimulate community discussion and cultural revitalization. The Nuu-chah-nulth Living Archive works in partnership with the Tla-o-qui-aht Repatriation Committee (of which Marika is a founding member) as well as various other local cultural education initiatives.

Through engaging with these ancestral treasures, Marika has studied traditional Tla-o-qui-aht form and style extensively. Following in the wake of artists such as her father, Joe David, that took such sincere care in reviving the purity and perfection of classic traditional form, Marika continues to push the art form into new spaces. Still rooted in Nuu-chah-nulth worldviews, her work speaks directly to the stories that are relevant to her community now.



Tania Willard

Presenter: *Labour Pains: Indigenous Story and Work within a Colonial Context of Capitalist Labour*

I will discuss and share early works from the series *Red Flags Red Skin*, a comics series on Indigenous labour, as a background to labour as a consistent theme in my practice. I will then move into recent work that is less illustrative but which employs concepts of labour, land, and value within my specific experience as a mixed Secwepemc / settler woman making family and art on the land on an Indian reserve and all of its attendant labours and pains.

Tania Willard, Secwepemc Nation and settler heritage, works within the shifting ideas around contemporary and traditional, often working with bodies of knowledge and skills that are conceptually linked to her interest in intersections between Indigenous and other cultures. Willard's curatorial work includes the touring exhibition *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* (2012-14), co-curated with Kathleen Ritter. In 2016, Willard received the Hnatyshyn Foundation Award for Curatorial Excellence as well as a City of Vancouver Book Award for the exhibition catalogue *Unceded Territories: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun*. Willard's artistic projects have been exhibited widely and collections of her work include the Vancouver Art Gallery, Kamloops Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery, among others. Her public art projects include *Rule of the Trees*, a public art project at Commercial-Broadway SkyTrain station in Vancouver, and *If the Drumming Stops*, with artists Peter Morin and Cheryl L'Hirondelle, on the lands of the Papaschase First Nation in Edmonton. Willard was recognized with the Shadbolt Foundation VIVA Award for outstanding achievement and commitment in her art practice in 2020. Willard's ongoing collaborative project BUSH gallery is a land-based gallery grounded in Indigenous knowledges. Willard is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at UBC Okanagan in Syilx territories, and her current research intersects with land-based art practices.

Acknowledgements

What began as a class-trade in fall 2015 became an exploration of commons and differences, of identity and difference, in the best ways. We learned that we had common ground sutured by a red thread / red sinew and that our independent interests in labour, autonomy, value, and political actions were shared—so we became comrades. Claxton was teaching a Gramsci seminar and Mansoor was teaching a seminar on Autonomia, and this led to collaborating on several labour-related projects. RED on RED is the final culmination of this journey in the form of a gathering to share some of these interests with the community.

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We acknowledge that the UBC Vancouver campus is situated within the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam).