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Abstract

In this thesis I investigate mimetic Indigenous artwork as a productive site of settler colonial disruption. More specifically, I attend to the potential of these artworks to disorient romantic habits of viewing landscapes. Framed as a critique of settler logics, I argue that the underlying ideologies of Euro-American romantic landscape art have tracked from the 19th-century to today to produce an illusory, aestheticized view of nature as grand and empty, distancing settlers from the material realities of land use and the violence of settler colonialism. In a contributory attempt to decolonize settler understandings of and relations to land, I look to artworks by Indigenous artists Kent Monkman and Nicholas Galanin as examples of subversive critique, claiming that through mimetic, intertextual techniques, their works strategically engage with settler colonial systems as a challenge to romantic settler land relations, prompting new engagement with memory, land, and place. Using decolonial studies and visual rhetoric as centralizing frameworks, I constellate concepts such as détournement (Debord, 1959), moral shock (Jasper, 1997) and settler common sense (Rifkin, 2013) to highlight the ways that these artworks disrupt settler land logics and work to fracture the "settler sublime." This thesis ultimately advocates for a critical rupture in romantic conceptions of land; while mimetic Indigenous artworks may not constitute a paradigm shift on their own, they actively work to dismantle settler ideologies, creating space for Indigenous epistemologies to emerge.

Keywords: Indigenous art, visual culture, landscape, decoloniality, settler sublime

Indigenous Artistic Activism and the (Re)envisioned Landscape: Decolonizing Settler Land Knowledge

By
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B.A., Clemson University, 2022

Thesis
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Chapter 1: Visual narratives of colonization & the settler landscape

Introduction

My partner and I recently took a trip to Watkins Glen State Park in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Like the many tourists and hikers around us, we moved through the gorges and waterfalls in awe of their grandeur. When we left, however, I felt an unclassifiable sense of melancholy, a sort of unsettling wistfulness. What was it about this experience of land left me feeling this way? How could I feel so connected and disconnected at the same time? Author and activist David Truer (2021) does a nice job responding to these questions, as he writes that national parks "were intended to be natural cathedrals: protected landscapes where people could worship the sublime. They offer Americans the thrill of looking back over their shoulder at a world without humans or technology. Many visit them to find something that exists outside or beyond us, to experience an awesome sense of scale, to contemplate our smallness and our ephemerality" (para. 3). Truer describes the state in which I left Watkins Glen State Park: I was struck by the greatness and beauty of the landscape while simultaneously nostalgic for a time where I, and everyone around me, would not pollute this natural space.

Truer goes on to remind us that "the idea of a virgin American wilderness—an Eden untouched by humans and devoid of sin—is an illusion" (para. 3). The idea of an Edenic, virgin land is a rhetorical construction. Notably, one that aided in the development of American national identity. The idea, premised on the absence of humans and the untouched beauty and potential of the land, meant that Indigenous people were strategically erased from national memory. But, because this land was rhetorically constructed as both owned and distanced, as an indulgent "there" versus "here," white settlers absolved themselves of responsibility. Now, as

explained by Dylan Robinson (2022) we participate in a sort of "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989), or "the curious phenomenon of people's longing for what they themselves have destroyed. . . what we might call the *settler sublime*" (pp. 71-72). The "settler sublime" can further help explain my experience at Watkins Glen. More broadly, the concept sustains the parameters of whiteness and coloniality in ecological discourse and discussions of land – environmentalism becomes an aesthetic, a longing for an illusion. Most notably, the settler sublime appropriates Indigenous knowledges, simultaneously erasing and co-opting the experiences and relationships Indigenous people hold with the land. Of the many informative signs in Watkins Glen State Park, just one was dedicated to letting visitors know that the Seneca once inhabited the land prior to European settlers.

The ways in which white settlers have positioned ourselves as distanced witness to the devastation and exploitation of land and Indigenous peoples as opposed to participants can be investigated from a variety of rhetorical sources. A part of this project will critique specifically the visual construction of romantic landscapes, prominent in the shaping of settler identity and the coinciding settler sublime. These romantic landscape artworks are examples of the ways that settlers use nature as an escape, and many are still canonized and hung in prestigious museums across the world (Miner, 2018). Museums preserve these paintings as a way of preserving the past (Dickinson et al., p. 28), and as noted by Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "To be collected means to be valued, and, in the case of museums, it means to be valued institutionally" (p. 89). These artworks are undoubtedly linked to the origination of settler land relations and hold in them deep histories of national identity. They've participated in the foundation of knowledge that sustains commitments to settler futurity today. Although romantic paintings are not as culturally predominant as in the 19th-century and other styles have taken significance, the paintings primed

ideas about land ownership and provoked an emotional affect that remains deeply embedded in whiteness. We see re-circulated romantic images of landscape through all sorts of visual artifacts and media such as photography, documentary, and, as described in my own experience, state parks. In visually reshaping genres of historical narrative, it encourages settler viewers to reconsider understandings of land and place as shaped through history, fracturing the romantic schema of settler land relations. At a critical time of environmental awareness, we must resist tipping backwards into the associations of nature (associations that exhibit pristine natural environments that were, in reality, violated by colonization, resource extraction, and ecological damage) that developed from romantic landscape art, as these paintings encourage reflection on the beauty and fragility of the natural world from the distanced position of the white settler. These images and the naturalness that they portray provide a sense of nostalgia that we must resist. Romanticization of a pre-modernized past leads us back into settler constructs of and relationships to land. What we need, as argued by Indigenous and decolonial scholars such as Tiara Na'puti, is a move towards Indigeneity in environmental discourses and beyond, and to center Indigenous perspective in conversations of land.

This project looks to Indigenous art as decolonial acts of subversion. As Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes (2014) write in a special issue of *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, "Indigenous art disrupts colonial hegemony by fracturing the sensible architecture of experience that is constitutive of the aesthetic regime itself - the normative order, or 'distribution of the sensible' - that frames both political and artistic potentialities, as such" (pp. I-II). Disruption is of crucial importance, and Indigenous art is a rich and arguably under-attended site of it. I wonder alongside artist, activist, and scholar Dylan Miner (2018), who writes: "Over the past year, as I have watched the increasing violence against Indigenous, Black, Latinx,

immigrant, trans, queer, and female bodies and communities, I wonder how better understanding the history of art - and telling stories about it - facilitates the dismantling of systems that are intimately linked with art" (p. 136). I see this project interacting with work primarily from visual rhetoric and decolonial studies, but also heavily involved in public memory, Native American and Indigenous Studies, protest rhetoric, public space, sociology, and the constellations of affect produced in/between these spheres. In this chapter, I outline the nationalist rhetoric of 19th-century romantic landscape art and the ways in which these artworks have shaped and continue to shape setter knowledge and romantic associations of land. I focus on the socio-historical context of 19th-century romantic landscape paintings as significant rhetorical objects in the development of settler logics and strategic Indigenous erasure, attending to the memory politics surrounding them as cultural artifacts and the visual and ideological re-circulations of their presence in modern day. Chapters two and three look to art by Indigenous artists Kent Monkman and Nicholas Galanin as examples of subversive artistic activism (and simultaneous destructive mockery) of these settler structures, arguing that we can turn to works such as these in looking for ways to break from settler norms and make space for decolonial, land-focused futures.

Disfiguring the "aesthetic evidence" of settler identity

Using land and landscape as a centralizing motif in linking Monkman and Galanin's resistive visual rhetoric, I argue that these artists rupture the idealistic, harmonious association of man and nature as produced through colonial art history and tied to settler identity, forcing a process of decolonial actuality – rather than an imagined settler "sublime" – connected to material land and Indigenous presence. Kent Monkman is a Cree visual artist from Canada known for his painting, sculpture, instillation, and performance. Monkman is known for subverting settler colonial modes of representation by intersecting conventions of art history and

Indigenous knowledge of gender and sexuality, ritual, and survival. His paintings work specifically within Euro-American conventions of romantic landscape art to intrude upon imperial associations of cultural aesthetics, history, and land. Nicholas Galanin is a Tlingit and Unangax̂ artist from Alaska. His work is rooted in Indigenous connection to land and engages with critical social and environmental advocacy. Many of his projects work directly with/on the land. While uniquely independent, artworks from these artists were chosen in conversation because they demonstrate disruptive mimetic strategies that rupture settler land logics as tied to the settler sublime. Using critical mimetic and parodic techniques, these artists strategically engage with settler colonial systems as a challenge to and mockery of settler land logics. This said, whereas the artworks I've chosen to look at from Monkman are displayed in what can be understood as pre-authored white-space of the art museum (Dickenson et. al) and work most immediately to disrupt settler memory, the artwork I've chosen to look at from Galanin is an instillation in what – although settler-occupied land and still symbolically and materially constructed as white-space – is considered public in a more raw sense, "naturally" accessible in the day-to-day as an intrusion in the surrounding physical place.[1]

While settler logics and colonial structures restrict discourses of body and land, Indigenous art offers a productive and revisionary method of decolonization and a site for Indigenous resistance and resurgence: "the task of decolonial artists, scholars and activists is not simply to offer amendments or edits to the current world, but to display the mutual sacrifice and relationality needed to sabotage colonial systems of thought and power for the purpose of liberatory alternatives" (Martineau and Ritskes, p. II). Many Indigenous artists have engaged in contesting the colonial parameters of memory and material landscape. A change is needed in the

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[1] While this project is heavily structured by conceptual frameworks, it is limited to U.S. settler colonial contexts, and would require additional attention to and contextualization of Canadian settler colonial contexts in a larger project.

modern discourses and consequences of settler land logics, and "more rigorous attention is needed to the means of survival by which philosophical alternatives to colonial-capitalist exploitation have arrived in the present" (Horton, p. 77). As Christopher P. Heuer and Rebecca Zorach (2018) write in the introduction of *Ecologies, agents, terrains*, visual art suggests "the possibility of changing consciousness as a way of creating change" (p. x). This requires a challenge to the established temporal and spatial boundaries of settler colonial memory and aesthetics.

Settler knowledges of land and narratives of the sublime are deeply rooted in settler visual culture as continually (re)produced through history. Romanticism emerged in the first quarter of the 19th-century, established as a foundational element of American nationalism after the War of 1812. Angela Miller (1996) writes in *The Empire of the Eye* that nationalism "sought to particularize identity through race, environment, and history." Americans constructed a national identity using all of these, but specifically "during the decades of romantic nationalism, environment was preeminent" (p. 7). Romantic nationalism was fueled by the natural features of the "new" continent, a seeming "objective" evidence to Americans' burgeoning identity post-war. Iyko Day (2016) similarly writes in *Alien Capital* that national identity was "defined as a product of the landscape," as Americans possessed "a romantic reverence for and spiritual identification to land as a symbolic anchor for their aestheticized 'defense' of national identity" (pp. 78-79). The construction of America's nationhood, with its grounding in the environment and natural landscape, utilized landscape paintings as evidential relics of their prophetic claim to success.

The artwork produced an evocative romantic associationism that emphasized the vacancy and purity of the land in connection to national identity and the newness of the nation. Gareth E.

John (2001) writes in "Cultural Nationalism, Westward Expansion and the Production of Imperial Landscape" that associationism functions so that "viewed objects set off a sequence of ideas or emotions in the imagination, so that 'trains of pleasing or solemn thought arise spontaneously within our minds'" (p. 181). These paintings arguably acted as a cognitive bridge between the natural landscape and the "prophecy" of national conquest. This bridge did little to ground white settlers in material effects and functioned instead to further distance us from responsibility. Miller explains: "Americans' vaunted love of nature proved to be a contradictory amalgam of desire and memory better served by images than by the thing itself, a dream possession . . . The creation of a mental image in manner that served memory and desire was the object of American landscape art in these decades" (p. 18). White settlers saw the American landscape as an idealized possession, with romantic landscape paintings catering to their desires. What came with these paintings was a sense of distance, a never truly *being there* yet a claim of prophetic possession.

As WJT Mitchell writes in "Imperial Landscape," "Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package … Landscape is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism" (p. 5). 19th-century romantic artwork became synonymous with the land itself and with the values that their representation evoked – "it is not only a natural scene, and not just a representation of a natural scene, but a *natural* representation of a natural scene, a trace or icon of nature *in* nature itself, as if nature were imprinting and encoding its essential structures on our perceptual apparatus" (Mitchell, p. 15). Both the paintings and the land itself became associated as the aesthetic property of white settler colonists, fetishizing the land's extractive

potential (E Cram, 2022) and naturalizing the violence of settler colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous people from the landscape.

These objects were able to function as powerful rhetorical resources that, through time, transformed romantic myths into deeply sedimented and seemingly natural sociocultural beliefs. Manufactured to fit the historical and colonial context in which they existed, the nationalist associationism produced by the landscape paintings tied the ownership of land to a developing imperialist ideology, posited as a natural and organic occurrence: "these semiotic features of landscape, and the historical narratives they generate, are tailor made for the discourse of imperialism, which conceives itself precisely (and simultaneously) as an expansion of landscape understood as inevitable, progressive development in history, and expansion of 'culture' and 'civilization' into a 'natural' space in a progress that is itself narrated as 'natural'" (Mitchell, p. 17). Further, the myth of prophecy as represented in these romanticized paintings acted as lawful evidence. Steven Hoelscher (2020) writes that representations of landscapes, commonly through painting, "justified to governing elites the seemingly inherent correctness–the naturalness and taken-for-granted-ness–of their claims to property ownership" (p. 115). This illusion of "inherent correctness" and "naturalness" coincided with the idea of manifest destiny to justify land possession and its violent processes. And, despite this material violence, white settlers absolved themselves of responsibility: white sublimity resided in the settler illusion.

Within the visual rhetoric – and subsequently the very material product – of these romantic landscapes, as the nation was constructed as destined to expand, Natives were constructed as destined to vanish. Throughout the 19th-century "nationalists painted a spectral picture of the Indians' future complicit with Jacksonian policy designed to rid eastern lands of Native Americans" (John, p. 177). Romantic artists' paintings appropriated Natives for artistic

legitimacy, a romantic record to the development of national identity and a romanticization and defense of manifest destiny. As quoted in a profile by the Smithsonian American Art Museum (2015), American artist George Caitlin – known for the "documentation" of "the vanishing Indian" and of the American frontier – "resolved to paint as many Native Americans as possible in their unadulterated, natural state" (p. 1). As Miner describes Catlin in "From Big Knives to Big Pipelines," Catlin was "the quintessential colonialist American painter, whose nineteenth-century paintings participated in a sort of salvage ethnology" (pp.138-139). Catlin's paintings are still today regarded as "a great cultural treasure, offering rare insight into native cultures and a crucial chapter in American history" (Smithsonian), as George Catlin "mobilized his descriptions and images of the northern plains to assert his vision of the western landscape as Indian country, projecting a naturalistic, 'scientific' and purportedly authentic view of what was perceived as a rapidly fading scene" (John, p. 176). The destiny of Natives, as depicted by Catlin and other romantic artists such as John Mix Stanley, Alfred Jacob Miller, Albert Bierstadt, Paul Kane, and more, would be inevitable.

Further, Indigenous representation in these artists' work contributed to an experience of aesthetic beauty *for* the settler subject and for settler identification. In other words, Euro-American settlers defined themselves through the othering and the inevitable erasure narratives of Natives. National identity was constituted "through difference with the native indian population, whose presence in the landscape marks the point of origin beyond which the landscape of progress has advanced" (Miller, p. 164). Not only did the artwork function for settlers to further define their national identity, but the artistic depictions of Natives also functioned to perform a sort of colonial closure. In this way the paintings were functioning as a memory object. In "Rhetoric/Memory/Place" Blair, Dickenson, and Ott write that "if history can

be said to be judged by its adherence to protocols of evidence, we might say that public memory is assessed in terms of its effectivity . . . we must acknowledge public memory to be 'invented,' not in the large sense of a fabrication, but in the more limited sense that public memories are constructed of rhetorical resources" (pp. 9-13). Romantic landscape paintings and paintings of Indigenous erasure do not passively align with American memory narratives, but they actively worked to construct them. These paintings influenced how Americans perceived Natives, the land, and themselves, and situated this influence into a broader historical context. American national memory is built on its own construction of "the vanishing Indian" while ecological and land discourses today appropriate Indigenous knowledge within the distanced illusion of the settler sublime.

This distance, sustained by settler collective memory and land logics, is ever-present today. As described by Moran and Berbary (2021), settler places are "made" through hegemonic expressions of meaning as tied to romantic notions of land and premised on "the notion that progress is good when it serves the unquenchable neoliberal capitalist and settler colonial imperatives" (p. 655). A place does not necessarily have to look like a 19th-century painting in order to evoke sentiment of the sublime. This said, modern day placemaking can be considered "inextricable from the historical and pervasive violence of settler colonialism" (Moran & Berbary, p. 646), highlighting the dangerous pervasiveness of the sublime as an active and material consequence through history.

In the following chapters I focus on the mimetic qualities of Monkman's and Galanin's work. In doing so, I understand mimicry not in the sense of flattening Indigenous art into a colonial aesthetic or as an amendment to or a blending of existing colonial systems, and also not simply as a binary refusal to accept settler representations of history and their subsequent effects,

but as a repossession – a subversive artistic activism that opens new space for material, world-building alternatives (Horton, 2012). It is neither a top-down nor a ground-up approach, but a confusing of contexts, or a disruption of the smooth linearity with which settler colonists view reality. As argued by Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel (2014) in "Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations," there is a need to focus decolonial work outside of a binary, as "this binary, at times, has the effect of treating settler colonialism as a meta-structure, thus erasing both its contingency and the dynamics that co-constitute racist, patriarchal, homonationalist, ablest, and capitalist settler colonialism" (p. 9). In Monkman and Galanin's art, settler logics are not placed as an oppositional binary, but are instead ruptured from within.

Homi K. Bhabha (1984) writes in *Of Mimicry and Man* that mimicry is "a complex strategy of reform" and "poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledge and disciplinary powers" (pp. 122-123). He explains mimicry as an ambivalent process that is not simply an act of assimilation but is subversive. This subversion has the power to disrupt colonial power dynamics, as mimicry and mockery by colonized subjects can reveal the instability and invented-ness of the colonial order. Horton (2012) writes in "Of Mimicry and Drag" that "For Bhabha, colonial power is founded on ambivalence because it is simultaneously dependent on and made vulnerable by mimetic acts" (p. 169). Critiques of Bhabha highlight risks of considering mimicry the exclusive site of decolonial struggle and resistance and argue that Bhabha's concept of mimicry places too much emphasis on the influence of the colonizer's culture and representation, which may diminish the agency of the colonized individuals (Horton, 2012). In my theoretical approach, I take from Bhabha the idea that mimicry performs to expose the symbolic expressions of power and that the colonizer relies upon the colonized to build

identity. However, I also rely upon the idea that mimetic resistance is not permanently bound to settler representational practices, but it facilitates the re-presencing of Indigenous history and knowledge. Kirt H. Wilson (2003) discusses the concept of *mimesis* in "The Racial Politics of Imitation in the Nineteenth Century." Though the text focuses on Black activists in the 19th-century, he touches upon Native activism and his argument can be applied broadly. He writes, "the interpretation of *mimêsis* labels the imitator and either sustains or reconstitutes power relations within the context of mimetic performance" (p. 94). I argue that mimicry or *mimesis* goes beyond imitation and is not a passive act – in my analysis I consider mimicry a decolonial method that breaches settler logics and simultaneously resists assimilation into colonial power structures.

Further, I link the concept of détournement, an artistic method and subversive decolonial strategy influenced by Marxist ideals (Dubord, 1959). As McKenzie Wark writes, "Détournement treats all of culture as common property to begin with, and openly announces its rights. Moreover, it treats this commons not as an object of reverence, as a collective memory of the best of what was thought and said, but as an active place of agency. Détournement dissolves the rituals of knowledge in an active remembering that calls collective being into existence" (p. 152). Monkman and Galanin appropriate romantic settler objects to subvert their authority, strategically utilizing – and subsequently disorienting – the anticipated affective response. Martineau (2015) writes, "détournement proposes the possibility of appropriating not simply images and representation, but power relations . . . By devaluing previous value, *détournement* opens the possibility for new valuations to be made" (p. 79). In the following chapters, I conceptualize the concept of mimicry and détournement in concert as they function similarly to destabilize the authority of settler colonial objects. It is through this destabilization, I argue, that

settler logics are challenged, creating a productive disorientation to interrupt the constant yet often unnoticed reproductions of the settler sublime.

This said, my project is guided by the following questions: How have romantic constructions of landscape shaped settler perceptions of land? How have these romantic associations persisted and solidified into unquestioned and seemingly unrecognized logics, and what are the material consequences? How do these logics affect the ways we – white settlers – view, create, and exist in the spaces around us? How does mimetic Indigenous art disrupt settler logics temporally and spatially, and how do these artists use mimicry and mimetic symbols to subvert (rather than certify) colonial structures? What is it about the mimetic, intertextual nature of the artworks that confronts settler colonial epistemes, while simultaneously breaking from the resistive binaries that define them? And importantly, what potential does this process of disoriented viewing hold? I look to this question asked by Jessica Horton (2018): "What kind of 'eco-art history' might we compose to confront, critique, and cross traumatic divisions engendered by settler colonialism, a process out of which our discipline was forged and with which it remains entangled?" (p. 77). Most fundamentally, though, I am guided by the broader, crucial question asked by Taylor N. Johnson and Danielle Endres (2021) in "Decolonizing Settler Public Address: The Role of Settler Scholars" which is: "how can we, as well as others in the field of rhetoric, not only recognize the land and life of Indigenous peoples but also participate in the destruction of colonial structures and ideas?" (p. 334).

Theoretical approach and reading methods: concepts in conversation

Mitchell writes in *Picture Theory* that a "rhetoric of images" exists in a "double sense": "first, as a study of 'what to say about images'" and also "as a study of 'what images say'" (p. 9). Further, Finnegan and Bruce (2021) state that the field of visual rhetoric "was positioned to

address questions not only of what images communicated formally but how they are taken up by viewers" (p. 90). The visual is world-building not strictly because of what images communicate but because of their reception and the meaning-making that the visual inspires. What we can say about certain images and what those images do is never fixed, as it relies on layered contexts and histories. Images hold active influence in how we understand ourselves and the world: "symbolic images do more than simply represent an external reality; rather, they are potent instruments in shaping that very reality" (Hoelscher, p.116).

Further, Finnegan writes that "The pictorial turn, the specter of iconophobia, and the relationship between images and texts are not abstract problems of interpretation apart from politics but are rather embedded in the modes of critical engagement we enact. A viable visual rhetoric project should recognize this challenge" (pp. 237-238). In rhetorical studies specifically, we look to the visual to understand motivation, engagement, attention, and influence: "What rhetoric can contribute to these conversations is a capacity to foreground questions of how we are invited or taught or encouraged to attend (or not), how the very practice of attention or discourses about attention are rhetorically situated, fraught, facilitated, or challenged by changing visual forms" (Bruce and Finnegan, p. 101).

Part of what makes visual rhetoric a rich site of influence and therefore deserving of significant engagement is the affect-producing potential of the visual. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) explain that affect is a visceral force of encounter that can "drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" (p. 1). Attending to affect is attention of the "yet-ness of a body's affectual doings and undoings" (p. 3), as affect is a significant force in a drive for knowing, charging viewers with agentic potential. Sara Ahmed writes that affect "is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (p. 29). Affect plays

play a crucial role in shaping and sustaining relationships with ideas, values, and objects over time and, notably, through visual culture. Seemingly, then, decolonizing settler knowledges calls for an affective disruption. Ahmed continues: "To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing… To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival" (pp. 31-33). Visual affect specifically, I argue, prompts a critical engagement with the contexts and conditions of its creation, making mimetic decolonial artworks subversive sites of intervention.

In this project, I ask: how have settler knowledges of landscape as a romantic sublime developed and persisted? How do settler land logics rely upon the simultaneous exploitation of and reverence for land, and how is this built from Indigenous erasure? In what ways do détourned visuals impact understandings of land, and how far might this impact reach? What do the conditions of settler memory mean for decolonial art, and how do Indigenous artists encourage settlers to disidentify with colonial notions of land and myths of the "vanishing Indian"? How do Monkman and Galanin expose the historical illusion of vacant land as circulated and repeated in settler identity and memory, breaking apart historical myths of prophetic land ownership and re-centering land around Indigenous knowledge and experience? I attend not just to the artworks themselves, but to the unchallenged assumptions and settler epistemes that activate them. I look to settler logics of space and place that have grown and morphed from 19th-century romantic visual rhetoric through today, and the material manifestations of this history.

Although 19th-century paintings themselves do not hold the same cultural significance as they did in the context of the 19th century romantic period and the artistic traditions of traditional

painting have since changed, Miner reminds us that "unlike painting . . . colonialism has not ended" (p. 142). It is the structure of settler colonialism that garners attention in studying romantic landscapes and their decolonial responses. Therefore, it is necessary in this project to understand the meaning of settler colonialism, specifically as it relates to Indigenous erasure. Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel write that "settler colonialism is conceptually distinct from other kinds of colonialism, in that it is rooted in the elimination of Indigenous peoples, polities and relationships from and with the land … [it] is a way of governing through a naturalized nation state that erases Indigenous peoples and implicates us all, however well-intentioned we are, or differentially located" (pp. 7-8). Similarly, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) explain that "settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain" (p. 5). Settler colonialism is not just the construction of a new nation state, but it relies on Indigenous erasure and full domination over the human and non-human. And, as Tuck and Yang remind us, "settler colonialism is a structure and not an event" (p. 5) – it is a persistent and pervasive structural process.

In discussing settler colonialism as a dominating structure, it is easy to avoid looking at it at the day-to-day level. However, settler colonialism must be "conceptualized in terms of its everyday modalities, what Rifkin (2013) calls 'settler colonial common sense'" (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, Corntassel, p. 8). Settler colonialism operationalizes itself in a variety of forms. The everyday manifestations of settler colonialism are deeply ingrained in the settler colonial mindset and inform how settlers perceive and interact with Indigenous peoples, lands, and histories. Questioning and dismantling settler colonial common sense is essential for decolonization efforts

and the recognition of Indigenous rights and sovereignty; it is necessary if we are to move away from settler relationships to land and move towards centering Indigenous knowledge.

My project argues that Indigenous art is a generative site where "settler colonial common sense" can be challenged, as to engage in decolonial work necessitates "interrupting the normative forms and materialities of public art that interpellate the 'public' as settler subjects" (Robinson, p. 71). Monkman and Galanin's work resists the visual and the material operation of settler logics and disrupts the linear progress of settler futurity. J. Anthony Blair (2012) argues in "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" that visual imagery has the power to trigger emotions, associations, and responses that are not under the direct control of the viewer, and visual texts need not be created with the intent of cooperative audience engagement, as visual imagery has the power "to evoke involuntary reactions—reactions that must be consciously countered by the recipient if their power is to be at all defused" (p. 54). Blair argues that visual arguments have a unique power to grab the viewer's attention and affect them on a more subconscious level. I argue that it is the combination of the visual modality and the mimetic properties of Monkman and Galanin's art that makes them such effective decolonial objects; the typical ease with which settlers can slip into context-bound habits of viewing – habits used in viewing 19th-century romantic landscapes – is thrown into confusion, forcing a conscious engagement with violent settler histories and existing notions of land.

The process of breaching settler habits of viewing is also a breaching of memory. As noted by Barbie Zelizer (1995) in "The Shape of Memory Studies," "collective memory often resides in the artifacts that mark its existence" (p. 232). Romantic landscape paintings are a rhetorical resource rooted in nationalism that produce an affective response and relationship to land grounded in white possessiveness. Further, these relationships have very material effects

that go beyond the artifacts that create them. E Cram (2022) writes in *Violent Inheritances:* "Land and feeling attached to that land as westerners pervade most stories throughout the West . . . To question the production of that affective attachment to 'openness' is to ground spaciousness as a feeling rooted in violence. Moreover, it opened the possibility of rooting stories and memory within the vast infrastructure that made normative inheritance feel so natural" (p. xi). Indigenous art challenges the notion that settler land relations are natural and uncontested and questions the affective attachment to "openness" and landscapes as rhetorically constructed through settler history. These artworks reveal that this attachment is not merely an appreciation but, in fact, is rooted in a history of violence and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and their lands. The settler sublime is not a pure, untarnished appreciation of nature but is intertwined with the complex and destructive history of settler colonialism. To challenge settler connections to land is to challenge the memory politics that uphold them.

Here, I pause to ask: how could I, a white settler brought up in a white family and learning in settler institutions, possibly know what questions to ask? What right do I have to investigate these artworks from my position? As Derrel Wanzer-Serrano (2018) reminds us in "Decolonial Rhetoric and Future Yet-to-Become," "Our scholarly spaces are occupied territories in many senses of the term" (p. 327). The field of rhetoric is rooted in traditional Western academic conventions that uphold coloniality. Additionally, there is an academic habit of speaking for others, as "settler colonial studies can re-empower non-Indigenous academic voices while marginalizing Indigenous resistance" (Eve and Tuck, p. 8). Michael Lechuga (2020) similarly states in "An anticolonial future: reassembling the way we do rhetoric" that "many of us who are trained in the study of rhetoric typically learn in and/or work at institutions that reproduce white settler assemblages" (p. 384).

To work against this, Lechuga calls for a dislodging of these conventions by questioning rhetoric's traditional methodological approaches. Lechuga proposes praxis-driven theory that aligns "with activists to cocreate a political future outside and beyond the settler imaginary" (p. 384). He writes that instead of privileging academic traditions and methods bound within coloniality, we should "start by observing and working with activists who are developing an on-the-ground-theory for meeting violent power where it occurs . . . we must study those actively dismantling organizations of the white settler assemblage and learn alongside those with shared values, regardless of academic achievement or intellectual resources" (p. 378). In writing about Indigenous texts within a Western academic context, I aim not to simply align the artworks with existing theory or argue for inclusion into existing frameworks, but privilege the art and artists as an agential source of decolonial rupture. In drawing methodologically from Amanda Morris and Casey R. Schmitt (2018), I aim to note the places in which they diverge from colonial conventions, rather than align them to it. My goal is to "gradually remove the academic frame in favor of the rhetor's voice" (p. 160) letting the artists and artworks exist independent of my analysis. In other words, I do not intend for this project to be an analysis of artist intent, but a call to attend to Indigenous art as part of a de-stabilizing, decolonial practice.

Rhetorical scholars have worked to un-settle the field and explore how scholars can work to decolonize in practice. Matthew Houdek (2021) explores how one might "smuggle alternative epistemologies into the discipline to transform it" (p. 271). He writes:

> smuggling is a decolonial practice that names the cross-disciplinary border-jumping process of bringing in bits and pieces of alternative epistemologies through the fissures within rhetoric's underlying epistemic terrain to expose its fault lines, reveal its instability, and pry open enough space to build new worlds . . . bringing in these bits and

> pieces of Indigenous frameworks through critique ruptures or creates tensions within rhetoric's Western, white, settler epistemological frameworks and through which one might imagine, build, and sustain new disciplinary formations and horizons of thought. (pp. 279-280)

To bring in Indigenous frameworks through critique is to take part in the large and demanding project of disruption. This is not an immediate process, as this is not the same as inclusion. Lisa Flores (2018) writes, "I don't think that there is mere inclusion. Even as inclusion tokenizes and excludes, each moment is also a fissure. On its own, perhaps barely registering. But together, accumulating, the moments manufacture something more" (p. 352). Tiara R. Na'puti (2019) also provides insight into how we might break from Western ways of knowing and being and move towards Indigeneity. She writes that "We have an individual and collective responsibility to do something different through an intellectual genealogy that 'destabilize[s] particular notions of and about indigeneity to challenge naturalized processes of essentialism and erasure. Such a genealogy considers indigeneity as necessary to untangle Whiteness in disciplinary epistemologies and oft-repeated intellectual commitments that perpetuate colonialism in our field" (p. 496). Decolonial work requires deep and sustained commitment to challenge colonial projects and discourses and a re-centering of Indigeneity in our scholarship. I argue that the artworks with which this project engages function as a rupture, a "cross-disciplinary border-jumping" that creates space for alternatives (Lechuga).

Again, I do not argue that it is my work that is doing the rupturing, but Monkman and Galanin's. I emphasize Indigenous art as a subversion of settler structures that opens new space for material, world-building alternatives. Decolonial work is a multifaceted process that goes beyond critiquing colonialism; it actively seeks to rectify the historical and ongoing injustices

experienced by Indigenous populations, including land repatriation: "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically" (Eve and Tuck, p. 7). As described by Martineau and Ritskes, "Decolonial art does not abdicate or abandon the present; it reinscribes indigeneity on the land, as the radical alterity of an already before, an always elsewhere from colonialism" (p. V).

Chapters preview: Monkman and Galanin

It is my aim to contribute to the critical task of decolonization within the field, and to attend to Indigenous arts' disruptive potentialities outside of academia and in the every-day. As a non-Native engaging with this work, I acknowledge the degrees of distance and difference that Monkman's paintings generate for Native and non-Native audiences, and the ways that settler colonialism unavoidably mediates the ways in which I observe. That being said, it is from a non-Native position in which I aim to describe how these works deconstruct settler colonialist methods of knowing, and bring to light the transformative possibilities of artistic techniques.

Chapter Two of this thesis focuses on Monkman's work. I look at two specific paintings: *Trappers of Men* and *Welcoming the Newcomers*. *Trappers of Men* (2006) appropriates Albert Bierstadt's 1868 painting, *Among the Sierra Nevada* (Bundock, 2023). *Welcoming the Newcomers* is part of two-panel painting exhibition titled *mistikôsiwak: Wooden Boat People,* commissioned by the Met in 2019. In this chapter, I attend to the ways that Monkman's paintings activate a conscious engagement with colonial histories for settler viewers and re-visualizes Indigeneity. In focusing on Monkman's use of mimetic détournement, I call attention to the ways

public memory and "settler time" (Rifkin) are fractured, dismantling settler notions of national identity and land.

Chapter Three focuses on Galanin's work. The installation I look to is titled *Never Forget*, an appropriation of the Hollywood sign located in Palm Springs, California. As explained by Galanin, this work engages directly with the land back movement as evoked through mimicry and intertextual correction. In this chapter I investigate the ways that Galanin's art disturbs "settler colonial common sense" (Rifkin) and normalized settler habits, focusing on settler placemaking and the way that the installation disrupts the day-to-day. I investigate how settler sense of place has been shaped through romantic visual histories. I look specifically Palm Springs as an urbanized space that comes to be "made" through the white epistemic and aesthetic norms of the settler sublime, as it is within these dense and illusory colonial white spaces where Galanin works to rupture.

To conclude, I discuss how both artworks breach parameters of whiteness and coloniality in ecological discourse and discussions of land, de-legitimizing the distanced settler sublime and creating space for Indigenous futures. It is my goal to contribute to the conversation of un-settling settler colonialism as present through the settler sublime, and I propose that we look to Indigenous art to respond to the question of where we might look to get there.

Chapter Two: Kent Monkman and the deconstruction of settler landscape myths

Visual culture & romantic settler myths

In the third grade around Thanksgiving time we made shoebox dioramas of Native American life. I remember making the small figures out of clay: rocks, trees, buffalo, a tipi. The scene, densely confined to the box, was meant to teach us about an era of American history, a distinct period in the national timeline. This scene was nothing like the landscape paintings printed in our history textbooks as we grew and were taught stories of contact in the "New World" and manifest destiny.

Linked directly to national narratives of progress, the visual rhetoric of 19th-century landscapes were prominent in the shaping of romantic settler land logics, as the images came to function aesthetically as a sort of settler fantasy. Romantic art depicted empty, expansive landscapes emphasized through dramatic use of light and shadow, embedded with prophetic and nationalistic undertones. Through this romantic form and style, the land itself became inseparable from the artistic constructions of it (Mitchell, 2008), and Indigenous presence was visually erased from this settler colonial record. Now, our understanding of land is sustained by the "settler sublime" (Robinson, 2022; García, 2022), or a nostalgic longing for a beautifully vast and uninhabited nature that never truly existed.

Kent Monkman's landscape paintings can be considered a critical intervention into the settler sublime: using the traditional conventions of 19th-century Euro-American painting, Monkman intrudes upon imperial associations of cultural aesthetics and forces a new engagement with the question of sovereignty, authority and remembering. This critical engagement holds potential for viewers to reimagine history as distinct from the presumed universality of settler colonial narratives. As stated by David Garneau (2020), Monkman's work

goes beyond historical recovery to include “Indigenous fantasies to compete with Western ones” (p. 34). In order to disrupt romantic notions of landscape and focus instead on the material realities of land as tied to settler colonialism, it is necessary to subvert the settler memory archives as significantly produced by art history. But, in returning to centralizing questions of this thesis: why is it that this technique is able to generate such a responsive affect? How does Monkman expose the historical illusion of vacant land as circulated and perpetuated in settler identity and memory, breaking apart myths of prophetic land ownership and re-centering land around Indigenous knowledge and experience? What is it about Monkman’s paintings that confronts settler colonial remembering, while simultaneously breaking from the resistive binaries that define it?

As 19th-century romantic landscape artworks were manufactured to fit the colonial context in which they existed, they functioned to simultaneously support an “inevitable” imperialistic expansion and generate an empty, romantic conceptualization of land. This romantic response, as described by Adria Imada (2013), functions as a sort of “settler nostalgia,” a settler-embodied response that allows for both the extermination and possession of land while still remaining “centered as melancholic witness” (p. 39). Elaborating on Renato Rosaldo’s (1989) concept of “imperialist nostalgia,” settler nostalgia as a response to romantic landscapes employs “a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination” (p. 108). Dylan Robinson (2022) and María Elena García (2022) further expand on this notion with the term “settler sublime,” what I understand as a sort of illusory settler aesthetic that obscures material realities of colonial violence through a romantic nostalgia. Further, functioning as a form of propaganda, the romantic artworks promoted the notion of “the vanishing race,” a concept that proved persuasive to the white Euro-

North American audience and played a significant role in advancing westward expansion and the seizure of Indigenous land. While historically tied to 19th-century artwork during a period of settler expansion and Indigenous dispossession, the settler sublime continues to sustain discourses of land and space, and landscapes continue to be idealized for their beautiful "emptiness."

Artworks of the settler sublime have further come to represent and participate in white settler memory. Beyond evoking an affective nostalgic response, landscape artwork has functioned as a historical relic, a testament to the progress and successes of a settler nation. Many 19th-century art history paintings are still canonized in art history and hung in prestigious Euro-American museums (Miner, 2018), as museums preserve these paintings as a way of narrativizing the past and shaping collective national memory (Dickinson et al.).Through a visually romanticized landscape, expansion and exploitation of land was crafted as prophetic, symbolically embedding the idea of manifest destiny into the land and into settler memory.

Romanticized depictions of landscapes, although different in form, are now deeply embedded in white settler sensibilities. We see re-circulated romanticizations of landscape through all sorts of visual and experiential artifacts and media (Robinson; Rosaldo; García). The visual rhetoric of modern romantic landscapes need not be consciously tied to 19th-century contexts to produce the effects of the settler sublime. In order to work towards meaningful and positioned engagement with land and decolonial ways of being, the settler sublime must be both realized and resisted. As argued by Indigenous and decolonial scholars such as Tiara Na'puti (2019), we must center Indigenous perspective in conversations of land. In visually rewriting genres of historical narrative, Kent Monkman's artwork encourages settler viewers to reconsider

understandings of land as shaped through history, fracturing the romantic schema of settler land relations.

Known for subverting settler colonial modes of representation by appropriating conventions of art history, Monkman works specifically within the artistic conventions of 19th-century romantic landscape paintings and Euro-American artists to intrude upon imperial associations of history and land. He repopulates vacant romantic landscapes with Indigenous presence and uses vibrant rather than neutral colors to combat settler concepts of prophecy and the inevitable "vanishing Indian." To do this, he engages in a critical and parodic détournement to unsettle romantic imperialism as produced by these canonized artworks and the memory politics that come with them. I argue that, because settler epistemologies are so deeply embedded in collective memory, Monkman's work functions to disrupt settler practices of viewing and, subsequently, subvert the storied histories that maintain settler identity and promote settler futurity. Yoon-Ramirez and Ramirez (2021) write that "transformative feelings are an essential component of decolonial projects" (p. 115), as processes of visual disruption can deny settlers an "easy escape from guilt or settler desire to know" (p. 124). Neetu Khanna (2020) similarly states that any study of colonial power must make legible the visceral logics of the colonized subject so that we may interrupt their incessant repetitions," as "embodied repositories of racialized memories continue to play out recursively *because they remain unrecognized"* (p. 8). By disrupting collective settler memories of colonial history and national development, embodied settler experiences and unnoticed imperial logics can begin to crack, making space for productive decolonial work. Towards these ends, I look to art by Kent Monkman as an example of subversive artistic activism (and simultaneous destructive mockery) of settler structures, arguing

that we can turn to Indigenous art in looking for ways to break from settler norms and make space for decolonial futures.

It is my goal that this work will function as a chisel in the large project of decolonial rhetoric, acting as a call to attend to the disruptive potential of Indigenous artwork. As a white settler myself, I specifically call upon white settler scholars to do the work of noticing the ways that settler narratives operate in our everyday experiences, particularly experiences and ways of being that are constructed and maintained through visual culture (Yoon-Ramirex & Ramirez 2021). As Lechuga (2020) reminds us, "settler colonialism leverages rhetoric to facilitate the material arrangement of ideological power on lands and bodies" (p. 378). To contribute to the large project of decolonialism is to recognize, question, and denaturalize settler epistemologies and Western hegemonic narratives (Lechuga; Wanzer, 2012), as within this reflexive critique spaces are created "through which one might imagine, build, and sustain new disciplinary formations and horizons of thought" (Houdek 2021, p. 279-280). It is necessary that we question the ways in which we know – or the ways in which we *think* that we know – and how these practices of knowledge production serve, consciously or subconsciously, to support settler futurity. Indigenous art, arguably, is a fertile site of epistemological disruption, as "the construction of settlers as knowers fortifies unconscious expectations that art and its discourses, like other forms of knowledge, should work to reaffirm settlers' privilege, perceptions, and feelings" (Yoon-Ramirex & Ramirez, p. 123). As powerfully explained by Cree/Dene scholar Martineau Jarrett (2015), "Decolonizing art-making not only contests colonizing narratives and mythologies, it gives form and voice to transversal movements within and against Empire" (p. 13).

The following chapter will attend to the ways that Kent Monkman's paintings activate a critical engagement with colonial histories for settler viewers and re-visualizes Indigenous history. In a visual analysis, I look at two specific works: *Trappers of Men* and *Welcoming the Newcomers*. *Trappers of Men* (2006) appropriates Albert Bierstadt's 1868 painting, *Among the Sierra Nevada* (Bundock, 2023). *Welcoming the Newcomers* is part of two-panel painting exhibition titled *mistikôsiwak: Wooden Boat People,* commissioned by the Met in 2019. Chosen because of their direct appropriation of art history conventions and contexts, these paintings simultaneously mimic and mock the validity of settler narratives. More specifically, *Welcoming the Newcomers* pulls intertextually from various historical Western artworks to directly challenge romantic myths of European contact and "the vanishing Indian," narratives central to the creation and development of settler sublime. Further, in *Trappers of Men,* Monkman restores Indigenous presence into the empty landscape, again subverting nostalgic settler viewing practices.

In focusing on Monkman's strategic and parodic appropriation of the Western art canon, I call attention to the ways that mimetic parody can function as a decolonial act of subversion. In doing so, I use the concept of détournement – a rhetorical strategy that Casey Kelly (2014) defines "a subversive *mis*appropriation of dominant discourse designed to disassemble and imitate texts until they clearly display their oppressive qualities" (p. 3) – in conversation with notions of mimicry as a navigation and subversion of power structures (Bhabha, 1984; Wilson, 2003) and a destabilizing of the white settler gaze (James, 2023). I will call attention to the ways "settler colonial common sense" and "settler time" (Rifkin) are fractured, dismantling settler notions of national identity, land, and memory.

"Settler common sense": space, time & memory

The everyday manifestations of settler colonialism are deeply ingrained in the settler mindset and inform how settlers perceive and interact with Indigenous peoples, lands, and histories. This said, settler colonialism must be understood "in terms of its everyday modalities, what Rifkin (2013) calls 'settler colonial common sense'" (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, p. 8). Settler colonial common sense refers to the pervasive ideas and practices that normalize settler colonialism in everyday life. Settler common sense shapes and is shaped by perceptions and material realities through seemingly self-evident presumptions about things like language, land and space, memory, and identity. Further, it refers to the naturalization of underpinning processes that settler nations use to establish control over Indigenous lands and people, and the simultaneous erasure of violent histories, allowing for the construction and maintenance of narratives that justify settler presence and sustain settler futurity.

Rifkin (2017) also develops the concept of "settler time" to address the ways in which Native peoples are imagined, historically and modernly, within non-Native, settler constructs. He explains that it is important to recognize normalization of settler perceptions and temporalities, and he encourages a new conception of "temporal sovereignty" – "the role of time (as narrative, as experience, as immanent materiality of continuity and change) in struggles over Indigenous landedness, governance, and everyday socialities" (p. x) – rather than using colonial frameworks as a predetermined background. "From this perspective," he writes, "such resistance appears not as a refusal of the modern but as an expression of alternative experiences of time that persist alongside settler imperatives, and are affected by them, while not being reducible to them" (p. 38). He argues against the imposition of linear settler time as a universal method of narrativizing the past, as within settler time Indigeneity can only ever be conceptualized in terms of its

colonial history. By emphasizing the need to recognize non-colonial temporalities, Rifkin explains that it is not a matter of rearranging existing perceptions on the same linear system but reimagining the system altogether.

This said, Monkman's work is not simply a matter of adding to the existing historical narrative, but of restructuring the frameworks with which we conceive it. Disrupting the normative frameworks of settler common sense and settler time is a necessary step in breaking down the structures that they maintain, as in order to work towards meaningful and material decolonial work in everyday life, we must first work to fracture the unmarked episteme of settler experience.

A Shift in Agency: détournement as an oppositional memory practice

Monkman's appropriation of 19th-century Euro-American art is not an attempt to amend or merge existing colonial systems, and it goes beyond a simple rejection of settler representations of history. It is instead, I argue, a repossession, or a subversion of settler structures that creates space for decolonial alternatives (Horton, 2012). McGeough, Palczewski, and Lake (2017) explore the opportunity for oppositional memory practices through refutative visual counter-argument. They write that visual arguments can refute each other "through *transformation,* in which an image is recontextualized in a new visual frame, such that its polarity is modified or reversed through association with different images" (p. 235). Further, "The principle of refutation," they write, "does not require negation, only, more broadly, *answerability*" (p. 236). Monkman's rhetorical use of visual mimicry acts as an oppositional memory practice that shifts agency from the Western art canon towards an Indigenous epistemology, a challenge to the settler memory politics that have shaped modern day land relations.

While Monkman's use of mimicry exposes weaknesses of settler collective memory and therefore disrupts settler relations to land, his work goes beyond imitation as a navigation of power structures or a provocative performance (Bhabha, 1984; Wilson, 2003). The mimetic practice in Monkman's work, I argue, functions to disrupt settler logics of space, time, and memory, contesting the erasure of Indigenous life and settler destiny as narrativized through colonial art history. The practice is, I claim, a form of détournement, as it is an artistic method and subversive decolonial strategy that creates opportunity for skepticism and critique. Originally, détournement was developed by the Situationist International (SI), an avant-garde, anti-authoritarian movement that emerged in Europe and was active from 1957 to 1972. Influenced by Marxist ideas, the SI aimed to critique and challenge the commodification of everyday life in capitalist societies and sought to create situations that disrupted the passivity of spectators, encouraging an active and critical engagement with the capitalist environment. A prominent leader in the SI movement was Guy Debord (1959), who stated, broadly, that détournement entails "the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble" (p. 55).

More recently, Casey Ryan Kelly (2014) analyzes the employment of détournement in the 1969 American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island. Détournement, writes Kelly, "is a rhetorical practice that enacts the symbolic process of decolonization, a near imperative for American Indian cultural survival in a neocolonial age. More generally, détournement is a subversive rhetorical device that invites audiences to adopt comic skepticism toward hegemonic texts" (p. 3). Kelly argues that the protest rhetoric of the Alcatraz Island occupation "[reappropriated] the dominant language of American colonialism… [inviting] like-minded audiences to adopt an anti-colonial stance of irreverence and suspicion toward Euro-American political discourse" (p. 2). The rhetorical strategy seeks to reveal the hidden motives behind

ostensibly well-intentioned messages of those in power and "desacralizes the lofty political principles and stylized language used to obscure the colonial assumptions at work in dominant texts" (p. 44). Monkman's art invites settler viewers to adopt an anti-colonial stance, as he exposes the fabrication of settler land relations and settler nationalism.

McKenzie Wark (2009) describes détournement as "a diversion, a detour, a seduction, a plagiarism, an appropriation, even perhaps a hijacking" (p. 145). Monkman's use of traditional art conventions employs, arguably, all of these descriptions – by enticing the settler viewer, Monkman is then able to disrupt the process of viewing, forcing a repurposed gaze beyond the bounds of settler common sense. Further, because 19th-century romantic artwork simultaneously erased and appropriated Indigenous life, Monkman's repainting of history within the dominant genre revokes the canonized authority of the artworks themselves, delegitimizing settler narratives constructed and maintained by these works. As Wark writes, "The key to détournement is not to appropriate the image, but to appropriate the power of appropriation itself" (p. 146).

Within Monkman's art is an un-settling of settler logics not as one end of a resistive binary but as a subversion of the colonial gaze within more complex spaces of creation. This resistance is not bound to settler representational practices, but it facilitates the re-presencing of Indigenous history and knowledge. Martineau calls this mimetic subversive practice an "interventionist aesthetic," a visual politic of resistance that works towards social transformation (p. 79). Détournement, he writes, "offers a technique for Indigenous People to reappropriate the language of our subjection and reconfigure the terms of our resistance" (p. 80). Monkman's work reverses the agency within the colonial genre's history, visually narrating Indigenous presence unbound by settler logics.

Monkman's intervention

Kent Monkman is a Cree visual artist known for his painting, sculpture, instillation, and performance. After learning of his family history of forced Euro-Canadian assimilation through government residential schools, he began focusing his art on the re-visualization and representation of Indigenous history (Griffey, 2019). Monkman is known for subverting settler colonial modes of representation by entangling conventions of art history and Indigenous resiliency. He states in an interview for the *Toronto Star*: "History is a narrative; it's a collection of stories sanctioned by the ruling power, and reinforced through words and images that suit them. That was the whole point of taking on history painting: to authorize these moments that have been swept under the rug for generations" (Whyte, 2017). Monkman's work is intentionally challenging to viewers and is meant to encourage a re-evaluation of the histories brought to its viewership. His paintings are chaotic and complex in style, but the détourned character of traditional landscape paintings encourages a broad appeal, and, though in different ways and with different intent, the work speaks to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.

Several historic works have inspired Monkman's interest in landscape painting (Madill, 2022). For example, the Group of Seven, a collective of Canadian landscape painters formed in the early 20th century, were known for their nationalistic depictions of the Canadian wilderness. Similarly, the Hudson River School and 19th-century painters such as Paul Kane (1810–1871), John Mix Stanley (1814–1872), George Catlin (1796–1872), Thomas Cole (1801–1848), and Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902) were known for depicting "the expanding frontier with sublime mountains and valleys" (Madill). Within the visual rhetoric of these romantic landscapes, as the nation was illustrated by wild, virgin lands and prophetic destiny, Natives were depicted as destined to vanish. These artworks did not passively align with American

memory narratives, but they actively worked to construct them. Settler national memory is built from its own construction of "the vanishing Indian" while land discourses continue to appropriate Indigenous knowledge within the distanced illusion of the settler sublime.

It is important to note that Monkman has had a significant amount of criticism surrounding his work from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Becker 2020; Garneau 2020; Martin 2020; Porter 2020). Some of Monkman's paintings engage with themes of sexual violence, specifically sexual violence against Native women. Monkman has been criticized for attempting to implicate settler audiences in feeling the trauma and violence of colonial histories, without appropriately speaking to Indigenous women about how they felt about it (Porter). Monkman has responded apologetically to these critiques in saying that certain paintings of his may not have expressed his intent clearly, and they may have missed the mark (Becker). Others criticize Monkman for recreating the same colonial tropes that he claims to reverse (Martin), participating in a sort of politic of inclusion or conforming to authority rather than directly contesting the settler aesthetics and nationalist visual rhetoric used against Indigenous communities. It cannot go unacknowledged that there are risks and limitations in using forms of mimicry as a subversive method. However, within these limits, it can be argued that "it is a necessary risk when the colonizers' politics and culture confront the marginalized at every turn" (Kelly, 15). In looking to Monkman's art as a practice of anticolonial critique, I do not claim that détournement is the best or most appropriate decolonial method across contexts, or that Monkman's work speaks consistently to or for all Indigenous communities. However, I do strongly argue that détournement has the potential to interpellate settler audiences in a manner that disrupts the settler colonial common sense so deeply engrained in settler nations. I, as a white settler, look to Monkman's work as a productive site of decolonial intervention; as I

participate in the quotidian practices of settler common sense as constantly constructed through and supported by visual settler culture, I aim to disrupt these ways of thinking and being not simply as an acknowledgement of difference but at the level of my daily being.

Trappers of Men

Figure 1

Trappers of Men (2006)

Acrylic on canvas. 84 × 144 in. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Art.

Monkman's *Trappers of Men* (2006), a part of his *The Moral Landscape* series, responds directly to Albert Bierstadt's 1868 painting, *Among the Sierra Nevada,* which is considered one of Bierstadt's most influential paintings and played a role in shaping the perception of the American West in the 19th-century (see Fig. 2) (Belitz 2012; Saenz). Bierstadt's painting idealizes the natural world as dreamscape, at once dominated and empty. Further, "depictions of Native Americans are rarely found in Bierstadt's paintings, which might reflect the common assumptions of the time that Native Americans were either regarded as non-existent, a vanishing

race destined to disappear from the face of the earth in the near future, or a threat to civilization" (Belitz p. 22). Today, *Among the Sierra Nevada* and other similar artworks are part of prestigious collections at art museums such as the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., where they continue to be celebrated as significant relics of history and national identity.

Figure 2

Among the Sierra Nevada, California (1868)

Oil on canvas. 72 x 120 ⅛ in. Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Monkman's *Trappers of Men* repopulates the landscape with people. The colors are vivified, and lighting is changed to represent a midday scene rather than a fading sunset. As noted by Elyse Clinning (2014) and Chris Bundock (2023), Monkman intertextually populates the setting with various recognizable figures, including explorers Alexander Mackenzie and Lewis and Clark, and painters Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian, and George Catlin. There are also visual citations such as Botticelli's The Birth of Venus (1485–86) and George Stubbs's Whistlejacket (1762) (Bundock, p. 345). Whereas Bierstadt frames the territory as an Eden

untouched by humans, Monkman disrupts this by populating the land with diverse characters who exploited landscapes like Bierstadt's, challenging their historical significance. These figures, replacing Bierstadt's deer, satirize the artist's romanticized view of nature (Belitz). For example, seen in the image are explorers Lewis and Clark, seeking directions from a Lakota man (Bundock; Clinning). Monkman critiques the historical expeditions driven by exploitive economic interests, exposing myths of settler discovery. The painting also includes 20th-century artists Mondrian and Pollock in a comical struggle, a ridiculing of their Western legacies (Clinning, p. 33). Monkman's portrayal of Edward S. Curtis, a photographer known for The North American Indian series, highlights the attempted practice of salvage ethnography of native culture by settler artists (Clinning, pp. 31-35). In engaging in a critical détournement of these figures, Monkman challenges the heroism and authority portrayed in 19th-century art, urging a reevaluation of historical legacies and fracturing the architectural figures of settler memory. Monkman repurposes these familiar figures to subvert their settler associations, unsettling normalized symbols and, in doing so, reconfigures a temporally sovereign narrative of populated land. The Western figures upholding an "amalgam of desire and memory" (Miller, 1996) are toppled in a parodic dismissal of authority.

What came with paintings such as Bierstadt's was a romantic distance that allowed settlers to value land for both its vast "emptiness" and for its given role in the development of a settler nation. It is this conflicting logic and romantic distance that still today remains unquestioned in settler land discourse, entwining sublime perceptions of land and national memory. In *Trappers of Men* Monkman ruptures this distance, confronting settler colonial common sense and prompting viewers to critically examine settler histories. Monkman's appropriation of Bierstadt's romantic landscape becomes part of the performance of Monkman's

intertextual work. In other words, the sublime landscape is not the subject of the painting, but becomes the setting to a more complex scene. Whereas Natives were traditionally subjected to the exoticizing yet distanced gaze of the settler audience, Monkman now reclaims the scene, and historical colonial figures and symbols become détourned, now parodically a part of the spectacle. The inversion of perspective challenges established dynamics of power and engages viewers in a critical reflection on the deeply ingrained beliefs and assumptions of settler common sense.

At quick glance, a settler viewer might not even notice the detailed revisions within the work and instead focus on the grand landscape as visually familiar within the settler sublime. *Trappers of Men* requires viewers to *look closer,* spending time with each revision and unavoidably participating in a process of viewing with unfamiliar complexity, outside colonial bounds. Of Monkman's mimetic work, Garneau (2020) writes: "Viewers know that even though he mimics 19th-century Romantic landscape painting, he does not subscribe to that genre's ideologies of *terra nullius*, manifest destiny, homophobia and so on." While it is not guaranteed that settler engagement will not lapse into habits of viewing tied to colonial narratives (Thomas, 2022), it will at the least, I argue, stimulate a critical engagement with settler colonial art history, prompting viewers to contend with national narratives and collective memories of emptiness and destiny as painted by artists such as Albert Bierstadt. Monkman's appropriative mimicry prevents the work from being conceptually defined or absorbed by settler logics, as the work's détourned properties don't give settler viewers the option to take conceptual ownership – it is unconsumable.

Welcoming the Newcomers

Monkman's scenes of intertextual repopulation, recognizable yet détourned, confuse the linear, romantic narratives of imperial expansion. The alteration of affectively familiar scenes interrupts processes of settler viewing and, by extension, of knowing. This process can be initiated with different images and with varied intensities. Like *Trappers of Men,* this next work paints recognizable figures into the landscape, engaging the settler viewer through a similar mode of critical détournement. However, while *Trappers of Men* works more subtly to combat settler narratives of unpopulated land in an era of romantic finale, *Welcoming the Newcomers* refutes European contact myths through a striking re-presencing of Indigenous life.

Figure 3

Welcoming the Newcomers (2019)

Acrylic on canvas. 132 x 264 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Welcoming the Newcomers is part of a two painting instillation titled *Mistikôsiwak*, a Cree word used to describe "wooden boat people" referring to the French settlers who arrived in wooden boats (Monkman). Commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) in 2019

as the first Great Hall commission, the painting is a depiction of the arrival of Europeans to what is now known as America. The Great Hall has been the "majestic" main entry of the MET for over a century (The Met). The grandiose entryway welcomes visitors to the museum and is a centralizing space that connects various wings and galleries within the museum. The architecture features high ceilings, monumental columns, and elegant design. The space, arguably, evokes a similar sort of sublimity as 19th-century romantic landscapes: upon entering the museum, settler museum-goers are captivated by the white-space, impassioned by a sense of imperialist nostalgia. Although there has been a recent move to decolonize museums (Phillips 2014; Lonetree 2012), the institutions have played a significant role in perpetuating colonial narratives that center the perspectives of the colonizer. Indigenous history and artifacts are exoticized, and whiteness is reflected in the artwork, exhibits, and narratives that museums often display as historical fact. As stated by Dickinson, Ott, and Eric (2005),

> In promoting this memory, the museum materially and symbolically constitutes and reconstitutes the modernist story of the US nation state . . . In functioning as sites of forgetting, museums have the potential to cleanse, absolve or relieve visitors of painful, conflictual histories . . . Objects are not simply representations of the past, they are concrete fragments of the past, and thus they solidify memory, asserting that this particular past really happened; objects stand as embodied testaments to a particular memory. (p. 103)

Monkman's *Mistikôsiwak* displayed at 132 x 264 inches in this space arguably functions as a form of resistance in itself. However, the act of collaboration between the MET and Monkman is not in itself a concluded decolonial practice. As Amy Lonetree reminds us, "we must not allow these narratives of collaboration to become too tidy or celebratory, or we could become

complacent… Doing so obscures the glaring power imbalances that remain" (pp. 22-24). This said, the method in which settler viewers are critically addressed in Monkman's work disturbs any sense of complacency. Immediately upon entering the space, typical viewing practices are disrupted by the détourned images, and audiences are forced to confront the historical myth of settler contact and discovery.

Every figure in *Welcoming the Newcomers* serves a (de)constructive purpose, as Monkman cross-references a number of Euro-American paintings and sculptures as an act of historical correction (Monkman; Collins, 2020; R. Phillips & M. Phillips, n.d.; Taylor, 2019). Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips detail these intertextual corrections in "Decolonizing History Painting." They explain that the figure of the Indigenous woman laying with a hand over her breast is a re-creation of Thomas Crawford's *Mexican Girl Dying* (1848), a marble sculpture inspired by William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843). Crawford's sculpture depicts a wounded Indigenous woman in feathered garments who, as understood by the cross she holds, has adopted Christianity and lays – in despair yet "redeemed" – as she dies. Monkman's recreation of this woman removes the inaccurate feathered garments and the narrative of Christian deliverance, bringing life and color back to the woman's body. The woman is still wounded, but the violence is not marbleized, and the act of colonization is recognized as an unjustifiable harm. The male figures standing at the back of the painting are in reference to romantic bronze sculptures of Indigenous men sought-after by American art collectors in the 19th century (R. Phillips & M. Phillips). Again, life and color animate the figures, and they hold strong stances as the land is encroached upon by foreign invaders, pushing back against the myth of the vanishing Indian. The man sitting to the very left of the painting is a recreation of Augustus Saint-Gaudens' *Hiawatha* (1874), an Onondaga leader and co-founder of the

Haudenosaunee confederacy who is historically confused by writers and artists with a prominent Ojibwe leader. Like the dying woman, Monkman corrects the stereotyped garments, and adds historically accurate beads and tattoos. The family figure in Monkman's painting is a recreation of Eugène Delacroix's painting *The Natchez* (1823-35). Delacroix's romantic painting of a Natchez man and woman, in the process of fleeing a French attack, birth a child and look upon it with fatigued faces. The family in Monkman's painting are depicted joyfully, not slouching in despair but sitting prideful (R. Phillips & M. Phillips). Alongside the paintings in the Great Hall, the museum placed signage that designate works referenced by Monkman and the galleries in which they can be located (Collins, 2020).

Though this is not the extent of the references in the painting, the figures collectively function to repossess Indigenous history as sovereign and distinct from colonial myths of manifest destiny and doctrine of discovery. Indigenous representation in 19th-century Euro-American artwork shaped an aesthetic experience for settler viewers, facilitating settler identity as bound within national progress narratives. Further, traditional Euro-American landscape paintings and depictions of European arrival hold with them an event-status, or an authoritative mono-narrativity. Monkman's recreation of these figures and placement of them in this moment of arrival pushes directly against the event-status of colonial landscape paintings. Instead of creating entirely new figures, Monkman draws upon the work of colonial artists to correct the settler ideologies in which they were and are still imagined and to make clear that Indigenous history is not a part of settler nationalist narratives and cannot be accurately represented within them. Further, the colonial artworks which Monkman revises were created across different stories and in different years, disrupting the linearity of settler time that upholds national memory. The forward timeline of prophecy and progress is no longer cleanly documented

through art history, destabilizing the collective national memory supported by art history. Monkman unflattens Indigenous experience from the frameworks of settler colonial memory and reclaims sovereignty over Indigenous experience, refuting the narrative of “the vanishing Indian” as visualized in 19th-century Euro-American artwork.

Monkman’s detailed re-creations of these settler artworks not only returns historical accuracy to these figures but strategically draws from their traditional form and style to détourne the image. Like *Trappers of Men*, the painting is bright, as Monkman uses vivid colors that contrast with the traditionally earthy tones used in history painting. The dramatic cloudscape evokes a sense of power, but they do not draw upon the prophetic force of the sublime. Instead, with Indigenous peoples from various moments in history populating the rocky shoreline, the clouds seem to be a harbinger of the settler violence to come (Collins). By misappropriating these styles, Monkman disrupts the colonial myths embedded within them and repossesses historical agency. Viewers are called to critically engage with these re-presentations, as the paintings encourage a skepticism towards the settler colonial common sense that has rhetorically and materially perpetuated arrival myths. The alternative narrative within a familiar style challenges viewers to consider the colonial violence present within the original images, exposing their romanticized presentations of national settler history.

A new and notable figure not re-imagined from 19th-century artists is Monkman’s gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, or Miss Chief, directly under the sun’s rays. Monkman states that Miss Chief was created, in part, “to offer an Indigenous perspective on the European settlers and to also present a very empowered point of view of Indigenous sexuality pre-contact” (The Met). Heteronationalism was a key component in crafting settler ideology and in the erasure of Indigenous cultures, as settlers imposed binary Western gender and sexual

norms, attempting to erase Indigenous understandings and practices and enforcing a settler subjectivity of white heteronormativity (Morgensen 2011). Prior to settler colonization, Indigenous understanding of gender and sexuality was fluid; Monkman states in an interview, "In old Cree there were no words to distinguish gender because it just didn't matter. A person's gender or their sexuality was irrelevant and there were no words for it. There was a more fluid understanding and acceptance of sexuality" (Barringer, 2020). Further, the settler portrayal of empty land aligns with the paternalistic belief that settlers were the custodians of these lands, bringing civilization and progress. Monkman "defies the colonial erasure of queer Native bodies by restoring them into the dominant visual record" (Garneau, 2020, p. 34), as Miss Chief implicates the viewer historically and aesthetically, her presence breaking the fourth wall of the "history" painting and unsettling settler memory practices and traditions.

Additionally, as explained by Monkman, Miss Chief refers to the Cree Creator who is a trickster character, known to humorously subvert conventions but to also act as a protector. Within this cultural context, Miss Chief adds an element of play to Monkman's paintings, while simultaneously challenging the constraints of dominant settler culture. She contests and provides an alternative to the paternalistic protectionism of settler nationalism, queering settler logics and the art history archive (Cram, 2016). Additionally, the presence of Miss Chief in Monkman's paintings challenges the subjectivity of 19th-century colonial artists (Swanson, 2005), as Miss Chief is a way of mocking "the self-aggrandisement of the original artists like George Catlin, who would occasionally place themselves in their work" (Monkman, p. 20024). Monkman writes that Miss Chief is a figure that can "live inside the work and look at the Europeans. Reverse the gaze." He says, "I enjoy letter her rampage through art history" (McGillis, 2019). In *Welcoming*

the Newcomers, Miss Chief stares directly at the viewer, reversing the imposing gaze of the settler and fracturing the imagined distance in a powerful rhetoric of détournement.

Indigenous art as decolonial praxis

Although the viewing processes of *Wooden Boat People* and *Trappers of Men* are each unique to the prominence or subtleties of the figures and techniques in the work, the subversive appropriation of colonial art history functions similarly in each as a site of disruptive potential. Monkman's work disrupts the idealized and illusory depiction of nature and European settlement typically portrayed in landscape paintings and initiates a process of decolonial reality grounded in Indigenous presence. The affective potential of the visual and the subversive method of mimetic détournement function together to fracture settler colonial imaginaries and the collective memories that they sustain. Martineau (2011) writes that Indigenous art is "mobilized in creative contention with a violent system that continues to seek our assimilation and elimination" (p. 4). Settler logics of land and romantic notions of the sublime are uncontestably connected to Indigenous erasure as narrated through national art history. In looking to Indigenous art such as Monkman's as a decolonial praxis, we can further participate in acts of "smuggling" (Houdek) and "cross-disciplinary boarder jumping" (Lechuga) to decolonize by challenging the quotidian practices and habits of settler common sense (Rifkin, 2013). Monkman's critical hijacking of the 19th-century romantic art canon goes beyond mere recognition of Indigenous presence using the same logics and timelines through which Indigeneity has been strategically erased; it "moves beyond sheer incidence and toward agency" (Black 2007, p. 191).

Chapter 3: Nicholas Galanin's *Never Forget* and the re-narration of Palm Springs

Introduction

There is a sort of fantastical appeal to beautiful landscapes. This appeal becomes particularly whimsical when there's an attractive history tied to the space, as these histories turn to narratives that then form living memories that further shape the story of the place. We see beautiful images of landscapes on social media, in tourism and lifestyle journalism, as art and photography, and further in places that are seemingly disconnected from their storied context, such as desktop backgrounds. As a white settler viewing these images, I'm drawn in not by the idea of the physical place itself, but by the affective response that these images evoke.

Landscapes, to the settler, are rarely conceptualized as physical space; they are instead a distorted and admired aesthetic. This aestheticization of landscapes reinforces an illusion that divorces the land from its material contexts and shapes it instead to function as a symbol that is both owned and greater than us. Physically, the space must remain open and natural so that we can access a sort of craved wildness, yet the space must also fill the practical needs of white desirability. Arguably, this desire tracks back to – or should I say tracks *with* – the mindset of manifest destiny, as "the invention of the 'natural sublime' during the eighteenth century continues to determine our engagement with 'nature' and 'the natural'" (Duffy, 2013, p. 1).[2] While the violent histories of settler colonialism and manifest destiny have faded from prominence in settler national memory, the romantic aestheticization of landscapes sustains through the creation of white settler spaces.

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[2] Duffy describes "natural sublime" as a phenomenon of popular imagination and cultural investment in wild and pristine spaces as partially constructed through eighteenth-century writings in romantic-period Europe.

In this chapter, I attend to the larger area of Palm Springs as a place constructed and idealized through the settler sublime, or the simultaneous longing for and idealized possession of natural landscapes that perpetuates romantic and nostalgic illusions (Robinson, 2022; García, 2020). This concept, I argue, sustains the parameters of whiteness and coloniality in discourses of land and space, functioning rhetorically through “the aestheticization of politics and commerce, making material realities (e.g. racialized dispossession and inequality) melt away” (García, p. 100). While there are undoubtedly countless spaces in settler nations worthy of decolonial critique, the construction of Palm Springs as a place of white sublimity makes it a particularly fertile site for disruption, as Palm Springs has and is still undergoing incessant colonial processes of dispossession guised as beautification and progress. Bringing the material realities of these processes to public consciousness can, ideally, motivate material reparations. To realize and make known methods of unsettling within the settler sublime that prompt a decolonial encounter with space, I turn to Indigenous artist Nicholas Galanin and his 2021 installation, *Never Forget.*

Galanin’s Intervention

Nicholas Galanin is a multi-disciplinary artist from Sitka, Alaska, his work “inspired by generations of Lingít & Unangax̂ creative production and knowledge connected to the land” (Galanin). With a heavy dedication to Indigenous land reclamation as expressed through a multitude of varying media and materials, Galanin’s artwork resists assimilation into dominant logics of settler colonialism, making clear the falsities and realities of settler progress narratives, past and present. In his artist statement, he writes: “I use my work to explore adaptation, resilience, survival, active cultural amnesia, dream, memory, cultural resurgence, connection to and disconnection from the land.” Strategically engaging with dimensions of the past, present,

and future, Galanin's work unsettles collective settler memory, exposing responsibility still to be accounted for. In centering much of his work on Indigenous land relations, settler viewers are confronted with the constructed-ness of the settler sublime. In a reversal of power, Galanin forces settlers into a new awareness that urges a confrontation with place.

The following chapter focuses specifically on Galanin's 2021 installation *Never Forget,* created for the Desert X biennial outdoor art exhibit set in Coachella Valley, California. The structure spells out "INDIAN LAND" and is identical in scale and form to the Los Angeles "*HOLLYWOOD*" landmark (see Figure 4). The *HOLLYWOOD* sign – originally "*HOLLYWOODLAND*"– was constructed in Palm Springs in 1923 and functioned as a real-estate advertisement for a white-only, elite suburbia (Smith, 2023). Costing the equivalent of about a quarter-million US dollars, the sign was lit by 4,000 bulbs, "which in four separate bursts flashed 'HOLLY' – 'WOOD' – 'LAND' – 'HOLLYWOODLAND'" (Smith, p. 6). A flashing beacon of white privilege, the sign was part of a larger project of "beautification" and "urban renewal," a project that dispossessed local Natives and minority residents from the space: "Because Native Americans owned a prime square mile of downtown land . . . city pioneers and their political heirs endeavored to secure jurisdiction over the reservation land in the downtown core . . . By 1938 the city's year-round population was approximately 3,000, only fifty of whom were Native American" (Kray, 2004, p. 92). With Hollywood celebrities and white elites claiming ownership of the space both physically and imaginatively, Palm Springs became a prime example of the on-going project of colonization.

Figure 4

Never Forget

It is with this historical lens that Galanin created *Never Forget*, as the structure is “a monumental invitation to landowners: to seek out in Indigenous leadership for land relationships, to center Indigenous knowledge in creating sustainable practices, to contribute to real rent initiatives, and to transfer land titles and rights to Indigenous nations and communities” (Galanin, 2021). Beyond asking viewers to simply recognize that settler colonialism is an ongoing practice, *Never Forget* is a direct call to action to participate in Indigenous-led activism and the Land Back movement, working towards returning Indigenous lands to Indigenous peoples and reclaiming “everything stolen” including “land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare,

governance, medicines, and kinship" (LANDBACK 2021; Galanin 2021). Prioritizing the Land Back movement establishes an ultimate priority of operational and tangible decolonization work. As Eve and Tuck (2012) write, "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically" (p. 7). To support Land Back as a settler is to participate beyond acknowledgement of Indigenous presence and move towards decolonial ways of being in material realities of the day-to-day. Further, because settlers often register settler colonialism as a closed chapter in the distant past, "Land Back is really a synonym for decolonization and dismantling white supremacy" (Pieratos et al., 2021, p. 51), as it works to dismantle the more thickly veiled policies, practices, and illusions of modern day colonialism.

"Like no other place on earth": Palm Springs and the Settler Sublime

Arguably, Palm Springs and the dazzling allure of Hollywood generate a similar kind of illusion as the "vast" and "virgin lands" colonized in the nineteenth century. Palm Springs provided the perfect conditions for the reproduction of the settler illusion. In an appeal to the settler sublime, the open ruggedness of the Los Angeles desert enticed filmmakers and builders and, continuing the narrative of white destiny, the space was waiting to be "made" (Kray, 2004). Of the history of settler development, Agua Caliente Tribal Member Moraino Patencio states in an interview:

> The Indian Canyons and Tahquitz Canyon are examples of the real world for us . . . Everything else that we've built with the cities that have developed on the Reservation, that's all an artificial world that's been created through waves of different Europeans and lastly California becoming part of the United States. Each wave brought their own idea

> about the reality they wanted to establish for themselves but none of that was real to us. Only when we can go back into the canyons, do we understand what our real world is like, and how we lived in line with nature, the true reality, and survived for millennia before any of these artificial concepts were created (De Crinis 2022, p. 69).

Patencio highlights the “artificial” reality of the space as constructed and narrativized within settler illusions. Today, with its desert landscapes and luxurious estates, white experience is curated as an aesthetic, catering to the settler sublime. Further, the intentionality behind this curation is taken for granted as a mythical norm or simply ignored. In a 2016 interview for the *Desert Sun*, Cora Crawford, who moved to Palm Springs in the mid-nineties and lived in low income reservation housing with her husband, stated: “When I got to California, I thought everything was beautiful. . . It was beautiful for… the white people” (Conrad, para. 21). Palm Springs continues to be a space of whiteness. The desert is commodified and transformed into an exclusive, picturesque setting for luxury homes, resorts, and leisure, marketed as natural escape. Further, as the space was turned into a site of filmmaking, Hollywood's representation of nature perpetuated the myth of untamed wilderness and empty romantic landscapes waiting to be conquered, mirroring the settler's distorted aestheticization of land. The film industry has a long history of portraying the American West and other landscapes in alignment with settler ideologies (Kray p. 85), sustaining doctrine of discovery narratives and the erasure and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in connection to the land.

The language that Palm Springs is described with in travel blogs, home journals, and tourist-driven media aligns closely with language constitutive of the settler sublime. The place is marked as both lavish and pure, simultaneously developed and natural. Travel writer Craig Tansley (2022) writes for Escape.com, “Courses and clubhouses dominate the landscape –

iridescent green against the browns and yellows of the mountains and the desert" (para. 8). Tansley first notes that the place is "dominated" by spaces of privileged leisure, followed by a romantic image of the landscape. Seemingly, this combination, consciously or not, is employed to make the process of settler development appear natural or to render harmless immoralities of settler placemaking and extravagance. *Visit Greater Palm Springs,* the primary site for tourists looking to travel to the city, clearly markets itself as a place of sublimity. In describing the area of the Coachella Valley, their website states: "Coachella Valley is like no other place on earth. Some might even say it's magical. Health-seekers, adventurers, artists, and more have flocked here since the early 1900s in search of inspiration, solitude, and serenity. Here, there's room to breathe and just *be*, frolicking among the palm oases, hidden waterfalls, and blooming bougainvillea beneath sun-kissed skies." The "Visit Palm Springs" Instagram account compliments this language with images, constructing an aesthetic simultaneously natural, nostalgic, and expensive (see Figure 5 & 6).

Figure 5

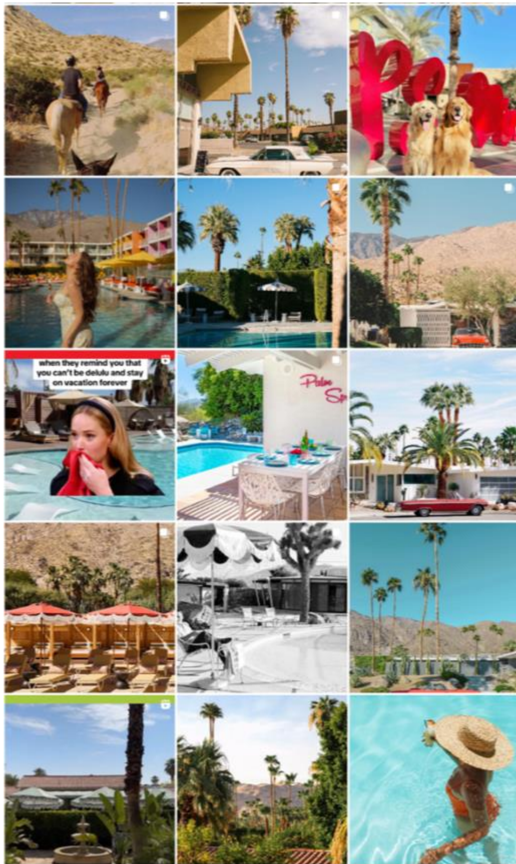

Figure 6

Palm springs is constructed with the same logics in which settlers first visualized land in the nineteenth-century – it is treasured not just for its empty and wild beauty, but for its extractive potential (E Cram, 2022). Further, deepening the appeal to a sort of luxurious settler escapism, Palm Springs is also admired for its connection to Hollywood history and the film industry. In the same travel blog, Tansley writes, "The three-quarter moon is lighting up the mountains and the palm fronds dance on the evening breeze . . . Perhaps it's the tequila, or the beautiful people all around me, but I wonder if I'm in the movies. Greater Palm Springs is like this. It's intoxicating. I'll stumble on the odd ugly roadway, but for the most part, I could be Elvis Presley cruising in his Cadillac convertible when he lived here in 1966" (para. 5). Drawing upon the glamour of Hollywood's history further constructs the space as fantasy. Visitors come to the

space to experience not just the greatness of the natural landscape but to participate in the charming fictions of white Hollywood. The glamourous aesthetic, depicted using retro filters and symbols (see Figure 7 & 8), pulls from Hollywood histories while masking them as projects of colonization and settler placemaking.

Figure 7

Figure 8

When driven by settler agendas, processes of "placemaking" – or revitalization, urban renewal, upscaling, gentrification, etc. – are driven by the notions of "progress" as a nationalistic imperative. Despite enticing verbiage, practices of "placemaking" are "dependent on the racialized, eliminatory telos of settler colonialism" (Dahmann, 2018). As explained by Robyn Moran and Lisbeth Berbary (2021) in "Placemaking as Unmaking," just as settlers claimed ownership of the so-called "virgin" land, "the notion of urban space as underused and in need of

'revitalization' (i.e., urbs nullius) treats places as empty and void of meaning, ready to be made more meaningful through placemaking, rendering placemaking inextricable from the historical and pervasive violence of settler colonialism and gentrification" (p. 646). Concepts of placemaking, then, are a process of displacement, a myth of settler progress (Moran & Berbary, 2021). Seawright (2014) writes:

> Place, as it is articulated through a Western knowledge system, intersects with a social epistemology that normalizes domination through systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and anthropocentrism, among other modes of domination. As a result, these epistemic norms curate conceptions of place, and come to bear on the way one knows oneself, others, and one's relation to the natural world. (p. 555)

Settler conceptions of place are constructed by "an epistemic genealogy," a knowledge framework that establishes "what is known… how things come to be known… how the world is to be interpreted according to what is known… and how the self is known in relation to perceived reality" (Seawright, p. 557). These conceptions are not innately fixed, but have been and continue to be shaped by national interests under the guise of destiny and progress through public discourses. And, in settler colonial contexts, Indigenous removal is an essential dimension of so-called "placemaking."

As Palm Springs was crafted into a leisure economy, local Natives, specifically the Agua Caliente band of Cahuilla Indians, and other minority groups were strategically removed from the city (De Crinis, 2022). Economic disparities grew as the environment was further conceptualized as a dreamlike white-space, entwined with the celebrity culture that it sustained. Hollywood – and the elite spaces physically and imaginatively within it – became a "[city] of the imagination" (Braudy, 2011). This idea still largely holds today, as Palm Springs is a popular

vacation destination known for its golf courses, high-cost accommodations, and luxury appeal, with the Hollywood sign a famed national landmark. Smith et al. (2023) write that "the HOLLYWOOD sign is an essential and essentialized feature of the Los Angeles landscape, with countless visitors seeking physical or visual proximity to the sign itself. As place-name markers often assume importance when the context of their fame is otherwise ungraspable . . . glimpsing the HOLLYWOOD sign is a way of making the myth tangible, or even participating in it oneself" (p. 7). The *HOLLYWOOD* sign allows visitors to participate in the culture of glamour associated with the city, further constructing a place of settler fantasy through ritual. Visitors coming to the space are expecting to participate in these fantasies. Galanin's installation, however, works to disrupt this process of engagement.

Never Forget was commissioned by Desert X, a not-for-profit biennial outdoor art exhibition located in Coachella Valley. As described on the Desert X website, the mission of the organization is "to create and present international contemporary art exhibitions that engage with desert environments through site-specific installations by acclaimed artists from around the world." While Desert X outwardly sets goals to bring awareness to Native communities and Indigenous land relations by working with Indigenous artists, these goals seemingly come from within colonial boundaries, as the space was initially described in romantic language, evoking an image of a Western frontier. Prior to the first exhibition in 2017, the Desert X artistic director Neville Wakefield "referred to the desert as a place where 'anything' could happen" and founder Susan Davis "framed the setting as mysterious and alluring" (Wagley, 2023, para. 5). To settler viewers, then, the space is conceptualized as a natural canvas, valued simultaneously for its untouchability and its extractability. These two qualities mark the dual-perception at work within the settler sublime, as settler viewers come to this space seeking awe-inspiring landscapes while

also conceptualizing the land as aesthetic property. This being said, Desert X is itself a place of settler colonial romance.

Additionally, there was no foundational acknowledgement by the organization of the class disparities in the region, despite these histories being essential to understanding local Native relations (Cheng and DeLara 2019). What is now known as Coachella Valley is Cahuilla ancestral territory. While the Desert X website includes a land acknowledgement recognizing "the Cahuilla People as the original stewards of the land on which Desert X takes place," acknowledgements are futile in the absence of tangible reparations. As described by Cheng and De Lara, "the idea that including marginalized spaces in art installations is somehow reparative is incomplete without addressing the devastating imbalances of power that elite racialized cultural institutions wield in the landscape" (p. 1080). Without actionable consideration of the broader socio-economic context of the space and the organization's involvement as an institutional actor, Desert X becomes another settler fetish (Cheng and De Lara, E Cram).

This being said, this chapter is not a critique of artist participation in the biennial or of the biennial itself, despite the organization's investment in Indigenous relations and racial disparity "not to remake the landscape but to package it for tourist consumption" (Cheng and De Lara, 2019, p. 1090). Rather, I focus this chapter on the ways Galanin strategically manipulates romantic settler land relations through the use of mimetic techniques. I argue that Galanin's citational mimicking goes beyond imitation meant to critique or expose the weaknesses of settler structures (Bhabha, 1984; Wilson, 2003). Instead, while the mimetic techniques function similarly to the imitative method of détournement – "a subversive *mis*appropriation of dominant discourse designed to disassemble and imitate texts until they clearly display their oppressive qualities" (Kelly, 2014, p. 3) – I argue that, in this context, the method of imitation entirely

reverses the agential positions, provoking a reflexive response for the settler viewer. I pull theoretically from Kesha James' (2023) notion of *"repurposing the white gaze,"* a method of destabilizing practices of viewing to "render normative depictions… strange and fallible" (p. 3). Of subversive mimetic practices, James writes: "imitation is not a reification of that which it mimics, meaning that imitating dominant logics does not communicate its promotion or advancement. Instead, the original representation is corrupted once mimicked. . . Imitation thus enables the original representation to be recognized through a familiar lens, but in that same frame obstructs this representation, communicating to viewers a new meaning about that which is copied" (pp. 5-6). While *Never Forget* is recognizable stylistically, its détourned alterations render it strangely unfamiliar to the settler viewer, creating a disidentificatory experience that makes space for decolonial progress.

In this chapter, I pull from the conceptual frameworks of mimicry, détournement, and repurposing the white gaze, but analysis is not tied strictly to one theory. In attending to *Never Forget* as a decolonial artwork, I analyze Galanin's imitation as a disorienting method, or a strategic interruption in settler practices of viewing. These interruptive moments, I argue, create the "fissures" through which alternative epistemologies might take space (Flores 2018, Houdek 2021). I draw from social movement scholar James M. Jasper's (1997) concept of "moral shock" to conceptualize the affective process initiated by this disoriented viewing. Positioned as a settler and intended as a critique of settler logics, I argue that in a reversal of power, *Never Forget* jars settler viewers into a grounded awareness of our own distanced position, forcing us to contend with settler privilege as it relates to the land.

Moral shock & fracturing settler logics

Before any form of conscious reflexivity might occur, an emotional unsettling must first take place. James M. Jasper explains that while explicit awareness of why one feels a certain moral obligation can take significant reflexive labor, "moral shocks and other reactions often begin at the 'gut level'" (p. 154). These "gut level" reactions likely do not come with already intelligible context or a plan for actionable response. In fact, there may be no conscious understanding of the emotional response at all. However, the moral shock can effectively serve as a catalyst in achieving a desired outcome, prompting those who experience it to seek out educational resources as a result of this increased consciousness. Jasper writes that a moral shock is something that "gets our attention and makes us realize the world is different from how it seemed to us. It requires some rebuilding some of our feelings or of our thinking about the world to make things right again, so it's a puzzle. It's a challenge to who we are and how we view the world" (Jasper, 2023). *Never Forget* functions, I argue, as a moral shock to settler land logics. Because settler understandings of land and space are so deeply embedded in our very being and the violence of colonial histories and the ways that whiteness is and has been central to the development of settler places through time has been significantly obscured, deep emotional rupture is necessary to prompt meaningful involvement in decolonial work.

Deborah Gould (2009) describes the embodied process of Jasper's moral shock as a "cognitive-affective state" (p. 134), writing that "a moral shock generates bodily intensities, affective states, that are themselves motivational and provide a strong impetus to make sense of what one is feeling. . . a moral shock creates such a disjunctive experience that sense-making takes on greater urgency, and new ways of understanding oneself and the world, and the relation between the two, are brought to the fore" (pp. 134-135). It is the disjunctive-ness of the process

of moral shock that spurs an affective state of *unknowing* and therefore prompts those who experience it to seek understanding from new or neglected perspective. Gould writes, "a moral shock jars you into a state of disbelief that forces you to reconsider your habitual going-along" (p. 134). Moral shock disrupts the habitual, taken-for-granted-ness of settler sensibilities, or settler common sense (Rifkin, 2013).

Further, these embodied moments of moral shock act, as defined by Pezzullo (2001) and adapted from Farrell (1993), as a form of "critical interruption," or a destabilization of taken-for-granted narratives and norms. Moral shock can be used strategically to shake deeply sedimented logics, prompting a reflexive response as an "invitational challenge" to the continuity of dominant discourse (Farrell, 1991, p. 203). Farrell writes, "the phenomenon of rhetorical interruption juxtaposes the assumptions, norms, and practices of a people so as to prompt a reappraisal of where they are culturally, what they are doing, and where they are going" (p. 258). While the intentions and goals of a moral shock may not be clear to the agent at the time, the produced affective state nevertheless fractures dominant narratives. Caitlin Bruce (2015) engages with a similar sort of "cognitive-affective state" (Gould) as it relates directly to art, suggesting that public art can function as an "affect generator," or a "supercharged image that enables multiple claims and performances of solidarity and identification to take place" (p. 45). She writes, "Public art can amplify or disrupt particular affects by communicating particular feelings, thus making them more contagious, in this way uncomfortable art offers a vehicle for social critique" (2016, p. 17). *Never Forget* critically disrupts settler sensibilities of land and place so deeply ingrained within our collective consciousness, producing an affective discomfort that, at the least, makes possible the creation of space for new discourse.

To prompt settler viewers into decolonial ways of thinking and being, Galanin mimics the renowned *HOLLYWOOD* sign in an act of visual citation. By imitating the sign, Galanin engages the settler viewer, as *Never Forget* is designed with the landscape of the Coachella Valley and the wider environment of Palm Springs in mind. The transformative value of the imitated sign comes from the larger landscapes of which it is a part. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) explain that "The signifier—the place—is itself an object of attention and desire . . . This signifier commands attention, because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity" (p. 26). Here, the narratives of Hollywood and Palm Springs are the signifier: viewers arrive at the installation already immersed in the illusory, romantic narratives of the place, which themselves are part of larger narratives of the settler sublime. As described by Dickinson, Ott, Aoki (2006), "in addition to being part of a larger physical landscape, historical and cultural sites are also part of a larger cognitive landscape, which is sometimes referred to as a 'dreamscape' . . . In other words, experience of a particular place comprises not just the tangible materials available in that place, but also the full range of memorized images that persons bring with them" (p. 30). Settler experience of place is not only determined by our immediate physicality or our material environment but also by the "dreamscape" constructed by national interest through time. Further, these landscapes, part of our larger collective memory, rely on "material and/or symbolic supports—language, ritual performances, communication technologies, objects, and places—that work in various ways to consummate individuals' attachment to the group" (p. 10). Arguably, then, the *HOLLYWOOD* sign, part of the larger memory landscape of the space, functions as a memory object and cultural relic that both symbolizes and reinforces settler presence and authority.

The *HOLLYWOOD* sign, "emblematic of prestige and cultural capital" (Smith et al., 2023), is recognizable both nationally and internationally. It is not the word itself that produces its meaning, but the visual associations of the sign with the place, or "the enregistered qualia that support its widespread legibility" (Smith et al., 2023). The sign becomes part of a larger cognitive landscape with which the sign – and all of its associations, meanings, and histories – are, at least tacitly, understood. Further, this cognitive landscape necessitates particular affective responses and behaviors, as "effort to participate in a memory place's rhetoric almost certainly predisposes its visitors to respond in certain ways, enthymematically prefiguring the rhetoric of the place" (Blair et al., p. 26). Prior to being physically present in the space, the stage is already set – settler visitors participate in an unspoken anticipation, a prefigured affective response that aligns with the rhetoric of Coachella Valley. This prefiguration of *being* in a place is deeply embedded in white experience; it is expected yet not necessarily recognized, what Mark Rifkin (2013) calls "settler common sense." Expecting "inspiration, solitude, and serenity" (*Visit Greater Palm Springs)*, settlers arrive at the space already immersed in the sublime. By visually citing the *HOLLYWOOD* sign, Galanin is engaging not just the larger landscapes of meaning that settlers bring with them to the space, but the visceral responses that these memories ignite.

However, the initial affective appeal of the installation is not followed by appeasement. Galanin strategically engages this appeal through mimetic citation to then disrupt processes of viewing with a détourned symbol, producing the "gut-level" effect of a moral shock (Jasper). Smith, Järlehed, and Jaworski (2023) write that "Such consciously interdiscursive citational acts are deliberately 'entangled' with the preceding discourse event, as actors distinguish their voices through deploying some form of 'quotation marks' around the cited event while other elements

are 'deformed'" (p. 9). While *Never Forget* is identical in style and scale to the modern *HOLLYWOOD* sign and references the original "*HOLLYWOODLAND*," it reads "INDIAN LAND." Galanin imitatively "quotes" the settler meanings and associations that come with Hollywood – particularly the "placemaking" histories of "*HOLLYWOODLAND"* – while visually disrupting the affective response that these associations would typically arouse. The détourned sign "strategically interferes with its own consumption" (James, p. 3), making strange the settler viewers' expected experience. Because *Never Forget* mimics "*HOLLYWOODLAND*," it is embedded within the political and cultural economy produced by settler logics (Smith et al., p. 26). However, instead of the typical ease with which settlers participate in place-based practices of viewing, viewers are shaken from their accustomed experience, the built distance between themselves and the physical land removed. The imitative sign functions as a shock that visually repurposes the settler gaze (Jasper, James). While the settler viewer longs for an awe-inspiring experience in line with the constructed sublimity that surrounds them, *Never Forget* mimetically entices but then thwarts the settler logics that would typically ensue. The shock occurs as an emotional response to the disruptive break in viewing experience. Unsettled, the romantic illusion of Palm Springs as a settler space begins to break apart, with *INDIAN LAND* now holding authority of the space.

Within the layers of mimesis, Galanin intentionally uses the term "Indian" in a reclamation of agential power. He explains:

> The term *Indian* is a refusal to acknowledge sovereignty, and seeks to erase the diversity of over five hundred distinct nations preexisting the invasion of this continent by Europeans. Indigenous land and Indigenous communities remain unique, resilient, complex, and beautiful despite over five hundred years of occupation by violent settler

> states. *Never Forget* refuses to legitimize settler occupation, and reframes a word of generic reduction to call for collective action.

Intentionally using the term "Indian" it is not simply a binary refusal to accept settler logics, but an invalidation of the term's settler use and a recognition of continued Indigenous presence and resilience through time. Further, the phrase "INDIAN LAND" also mimics the hollow language of land acknowledgements. As Galanin notes, "Land Acknowledgements have become popular in the twenty-first century, with cultural and government entities paying lip service to Indigenous existence, without the meaningful action of land return to Indigenous nations." Institutional land acknowledgements habitually describe Indigenous land using language of gratitude, erasing colonial violence by suggesting land was given willingly (Ambo & Beardall, 2022). Further, land acknowledgements have come to function as a symbolic act of land restitution that produces no real effect other than to relieve settler feelings of guilt and responsibility, or what Eve and Tuck term "settler moves to innocence" (p. 10). By mimicking land acknowledgements, Galanin reminds settler viewers that verbal acknowledgement alone is not a decolonial act, as these processes have been strategically crafted and comfortably absorbed into settler habits without any real disruption. *Never Forget,* through its layered mimicry, forces settlers to contend with all aspects of privilege from a place of discomfort outside of settler colonial logics and norms.

The installation also encourages a detachment from linear settler time and the historicization of Indigenous presence, as the statement "INDIAN LAND" registers in the "now" versus marking what once was and has since concluded. As Galanin writes, "Never Forget marks what is." While collective memory is often conceptualized as ideas of or about the past, it is, arguably, a function of the present. As Jason Edward Black (2007) writes, "collective memory is the ongoing, active past that contributes to present and future public cultures" (p. 192). *Never*

Forget refuses commemoration, reminding viewers that "memory is always a phenomenon of the present" (Blair et al., 2010). The installation is not simply acknowledging that Indigenous peoples were once stewards of the land, but it is marking the physical land at the present moment in which it is viewed. As Galanin notes, "the most important part of the work is the land that it's on." Further, the very title of the piece – *Never Forget* – calls out settler practices of remembering and forgetting in the present tense. As many scholars and activists have noted, temporality is a problematic obstacle in reconciliation and settler responsibility discourse, as "the state's rigid historical temporalization of the problem in need of reconciling [leads to an] inability to adequately transform the structure of dispossession that continues to frame Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 120). *Never Forget* refuses dominant logics of time and collective amnesia, denying the settler narrative that Indigenous culture is a concluded event, a completed era of time which in turn marked the "beginning" of settler society and the potential of a new nation. It is an intervention against settler forgetting, exposing a truth obscured by whiteness. *Never Forget* makes clear that the land was, is, and has always been Indigenous land despite settler logics and narratives that explain otherwise, and settlers viewing the installation are presently surrounded by this Indigenous space.

By mimicking the *HOLLYWOOD* sign, Galanin creates a disidentificatory experience for settler viewers, manipulating the ability to connect with the scene and therefore removing any possibility of conceptual ownership. This lack of connection does not act to distance the viewer but exposes the illusion of the settler sublime and creates possibility for productive decolonial response. Galanin writes that "This work is trying to invite everyone to understand these histories and to participate," encouraging viewers to educate themselves from a grounded position. While settler logics are deeply embedded in the space and shape the memory landscape

of which the installation is a part, *Never Forget* offers the means and perspective to separate settler dreamscapes from the material realities of settler violence by fracturing, even if just from the "gut-level" (Jasper), the deeply embedded logics of settler land relations. It is from within the space of these fractures, I argue, that settler viewers might seek out alternative epistemologies and work to understand the realities of settler placemaking.

Reconstituting everyday practice & facing settler privilege

The subversive use of mimicry in *Never Forget* is not effective because it eases settlers into a new mindset or makes it easier to learn and adopt new mindsets through familiarity, but because it abruptly fractures existing settler colonial schemas deeply embedded in Euro-American memory. However, I cannot make the claim that *Never Forget* guarantees an affective, transformative moral shock from all viewers, nor do I claim that mimetic techniques are the most consistent or effective method of settler colonial critique. Further, I do not argue that simply viewing the installation counts as conclusive decolonial work, just as reading a land acknowledgement doesn't bring material reparations to Indigenous communities. As mentioned above, productive decolonial work must be rooted in observable, land-based outcomes. What I do argue is that *Never Forget* can prompt settlers to seek out the material realities that places like Palm Springs do such an effective job camouflaging. And, in seeking out these histories, connections can be made through and across time to understand the ongoing process of settler colonial placemaking. Understanding these processes as presently at work in our day-to-day can begin to transform white settler epistemologies and contribute to larger projects of decolonization.

Within and beyond citationality as a mimetic technique, part of what makes Galanin's *Never Forget* an effective decolonial artwork is its ability to intrude upon the daily habits and

rituals of settler viewers. In order to resist settler logics that are continuously made and remade as part of everyday life, we must first recognize and then interrogate the ways in which these settler logics become ingrained, unquestioned, and accepted as part of our daily existence. As Mark Rifkin (2013) explains, decolonial efforts rarely focus on the taken-for-grantedness of settler experience. He writes:

> In order to conceptualize the mundane dynamics of settler colonialism, the quotidian feelings and tendencies through which it is continually reconstituted and experienced as the horizon of everyday potentiality, we may need to shift from an explicit attention to articulations of Native sovereignty and toward an exploration of the processes through which settler geographies are lived as ordinary, non-reflexive conditions of possibility. . . We need to ask how the regularities of settler colonialism are materialized in and through quotidian non-Native sensations, inclinations, and trajectories. (p. 323)

Never Forget challenges daily processes of settler meaning-making, processes that are so embedded in our being that they are not really registered as “processes” in the procedural sense of the term despite their material effect. As Rifkin explains, “The continuing assertion and exertion of settler sovereignty may be described… as saturating rather than determining, as exerting pressures on the everyday life of non-Natives in ways that are formative and that influence ‘practical consciousness’ without taking a singular form” (p. 331). The deep “saturation” of setter sovereignty requires an unsettling of settler consciousness – *Never Forget,* in “presenting a truth that’s not chosen to be told” (Galanin), disrupts the habitual transition between viewing and processing, and, ideally further, between processing and being.

By engaging with Indigenous artworks like *Never Forget,* we can participate in decolonial justice efforts not as some kind of grand act within colonial bounds, but as a process of constant reflexive adjustments to the settler structures and memory landscapes that shape our daily being. Couthard et al. (2014) write: “Being a non-Indigenous person in an Indigenous

cultural space… effects a reversal of usual power dynamics encountered within the everyday of mainstream society . . . [Settlers] are forced to understand themselves in relation to the limits of their knowledge" (p. 155). As seen in Galanin's work, recognizing the space as "INDIAN LAND" prompts transformative discomfort (Couthard et al.) through an unsettling of settler schemas. Provoked by an initial imitative appeal, the installation prompts further exploration of a "conscious self-awareness for the purpose of thinking and acting differently" (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014, p. 153). At the moment of viewing, whether a conscious process or not, settler domination of the land is revoked, and settlers are forced to view the installation from beyond colonial bounds, each viewer now becoming a potential agent of decolonial action as a result of the visual shock. *Never Forget* fractures the notion of settler sublime and invalidates colonial narratives of place, encouraging viewers to undergo the daily work of contending with settler privilege.

Conclusion

Contending with settler privilege is not a small feat. While *Never Forget* encourages decolonial action, it does not instantly transform settler mindsets. Further, even if settlers are prompted to seek education through an affective shock, there is no guarantee that this education will be employed reflexively in everyday practice. What I argue is that, because settler logics are so thoroughly sedimented into our very being, we must look to Indigenous art like *Never Forget* to fracture our settler sensibilities, as it from within these "critical ruptures where normative, colonial categories and binaries break down and are broken open" (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014, p. II). While mimetic Indigenous artworks are not a paradigm shift in themselves, they work towards breaking down settler ideologies to make space for alternative epistemologies and, most importantly, material effect. Attending to mimetic Indigenous art as a catalyst for decolonial action is a productive site of decolonial and rhetorical inquiry, as it responds to Michael

Lechuga's call for a praxis-driven theory that aligns "with activists to cocreate a political future outside and beyond the settler imaginary" (2020, p. 384). Decolonial aesthetics seeks "*to recognize and open options for liberating the senses*," as "to destabilize the pervasive mythology of colonialism (and its aesthetics) is to re-constitute and re-narrate spaces beyond and elsewhere" (Martineau and Ritskes, p. II-III). In a mimetic appeal to the settler subconscious, Nicholas Galanin participates in the process of re-narration of Palm Springs as a white settler space, fracturing the experience of *being* in the space and visually re-claiming the land as "Indigenous land."

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Seeking disorientation & decolonial praxis

Sara Ahmed (2006) writes that "moments of disorientation are vital" (p. 157). As I've argued in this thesis, it's through moments of disorientation – or shock, interruption, fracturing, and so on – that challenge settler land logics. The settler sublime as an ideology has tracked from 19th-century romantic landscape art to today as a visually and discursively constructed norm, a norm that sustains settler futurity and erases Indigenous life from national narratives and collective memory. The ideology of the sublime governs the material conditions through which land is physically used, and while traditional romantic landscape art has faded from prominence, the settler sublime persists through re-circulated and modernized forms, and settler colonialism and its manifestations have not concluded. In order to make space for decolonial ways of thinking of and living on physical land, we must seek out moments of disorientation as created by artists such as Monkman and Galanin.

In Chapter One, I outlined the ways in which the settler sublime was visually embedded in nationalist narratives in the 19th-century, and I analyzed their enduring influence on settler perceptions and romanticized ideals about land as simultaneously empty and extractable, the land becoming associated as the aesthetic property of white settler colonists (E Cram, 2022). I described how, as the land was portrayed as destined for development, 19th-century artists strategically portrayed Indigenous life as destined to vanish. I introduced Rifkin's (2013) notion of settler common sense, and I explained that questioning and dismantling settler colonial common sense is essential for decolonization efforts and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty.

In Chapter Two, I turned to two of Kent Monkman's mimetic landscape paintings, *Trappers of Men* and *mistikôsiwak:Wooden Boat People*, as critical interventions into the settler sublime, and I explained the ways that these works intrude upon settler collective memory and associations of cultural aesthetics. I discussed Rifkin's (2013; 2017) notion of settler time and settler common sense, and, focusing on Monkman's strategic and parodic appropriation of the Western art canon, I called attention to the ways that mimetic parody can function as a decolonial act of subversion. In doing so, I combined elements of mimicry (Bhabha 1984; Wilson 2003) and détournement (Dubord 1959; Wark 2009; Kelly 2014) to argue that the combination of the visual and mimetic properties of Monkman's paintings makes them effective decolonial objects, as these techniques prevent the work from being conceptually defined or absorbed by settler logics and force a new engagement with colonial histories.

I continue to investigate the decolonial value of mimetic artwork Chapter Three, where I looked to Nicholas Galanin's *Never Forget,* attending to the larger area of Palm Springs as a place constructed and idealized through the settler sublime. I argued that Palm Springs, with its history of dispossession and white settler placemaking, was constructed through romantic and nostalgic illusions (Robinson, 2022; García, 2020), and that Galanin's installation functions as a moral shock (Jasper, 1997) that critically interrupts (Farrell, 1993; Pezzullo 2001) settler sensibilities of land and place, producing an affective discomfort that makes space for new discourse. I further adapt the concepts of mimicry and détournement and pull also from Kesha James' (2023) notion of *"repurposing the white gaze"* to explain how Galanin's installation disrupts settler processes of viewing, forcing us to contend with settler privilege as it relates to placemaking and land.

While I passionately argue that mimetic art is exceptionally productive in its affect-producing abilities, I would be remiss not to address certain limitations to these claims as it relates to the actualities of culture. I must attend to the reality that “too often decolonization becomes reduced to efforts to ‘decolonize the mind’ – those of us in the academy are often particularly guilty of this – and fails to recognize the very real, very physical effects that colonization has on peoples” (Sium et al., 2012, p. V). This said, the process of viewing through mimetic détournement is not inherently radicalizing, and change – let alone revolutionary change – is not guaranteed. Moral shock is seemingly inconsequential if not followed by a material change in habit. As Sara Ahmed notes, “The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces . . . The point is *what we do* with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do” (p. 158, emphasis added). If nothing is done beyond viewing these artworks, then material effects of colonization sustain through the cultural structures of settler futurity. I argue, however, that by paying attention to these visual sites of decolonization, the seemingly unmoving structures of settler colonialism begin to sway. This movement necessitates strikes from multiple angles, as “the desired outcomes of decolonization are diverse and located at multiple sites in multiple forms . . . Decolonization demands the valuing of Indigenous sovereignty in its material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms” (Sium et al., p. I-V). This process of change through viewing is neither immediate nor complete, but it holds significant agential power. We can understand disorienting, decolonial artworks such as Monkman and Galanin’s “not as a unified, linear movement, but as a modality of power located at multiple, micropolitical sites” (Pickering-Iazzi, 1995, p. xiii), each work a unique and strategic intervention.

I also feel compelled to address the limitations of “using the master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984) to enact decolonial change. In this thesis, I do not mean to argue that forms of mimicry are the sole or the most effective method of disrupting deeply rooted colonial narratives. Indigenous art consists of richly varied practices and intentions that aren’t created with the purpose of affecting settler consciousness and, if it is a purpose, mimicry or détournement might not be a chosen tool. I argue specifically that visual mimicry can be an effective method in disrupting settler logics of land as understood through time and place, and attention should be paid to the psychological processes that these methods inspire and the disruptive qualities that they possess. In this context, working within settler epistemologies to appropriate them delegitimatizes their authority and exposes the constructedness of these logics through time. As observed by Ahmed, “disorientation might begin with the strangeness of familiar objects” (p. 162). Additionally, if the romantic narratives of manifest destiny and settler sublime were constructed so heavily through the settler visual record, then visual counternarratives, I argue, hold the same strength of influence, if not greater. The illusory nature of the settler sublime and the ways that settler narratives “tend toward imperceptibility in their totalities and live within social relationships, cultural imaginations, and modes of historical preservation” (E Cram, 2022, p. 7) necessitates a delegitimizing fracture of consciousness specifically. By working from within to appropriate existing dominant narratives, using mimetic tools can reveal settler logics not as inherently natural, and can instead “challenge naturalized processes of essentialism and erasure” (Na’puti, 2019, p. 496).

This thesis is not meant as a project of speaking for Indigenous communities but speaking to and with white settlers about productive sites for decolonial disruption. This said, I write this thesis as a white settler complicit in the romanticization of illusory landscape aesthetics. I write

from within a privileged institutional space, a place of selective storytelling and exclusive meaning-making. I live, work, and learn on occupied land, and I benefit from the structures of settler colonialism. I navigated this project with a curiosity and determination to unsettle my own habits, to investigate the construction and persistence of the settler sublime and to learn from Indigenous artists visually rupturing these romantic logics. This a project developed through noticing/viewing/listening/learning from artworks where I have found myself disoriented as a white settler with commitment to the project of decolonizing landscapes. Using Kent Monkman and Nicholas Galanin's work as uniquely independent yet impactful examples, I argued that mimetic decolonial artworks can enable viewers to "feel, sense, and think outside of/in opposition to/against settler colonial logics" (Yoon-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2021, p. 114). In doing so, I attempted to take part in Lechuga's (2020) urge for rhetorical scholars to question their academic habits and approaches by "denaturalizing practices of settler reproduction and recognizing practices of knowledge production that happen outside of the halls of the academy" (p. 378). Further, I aimed to engage in Darrel Allan Wanzer's (2012) call to white rhetorical scholars to adopt "an ethic of decolonial love," which "requires those who benefit most from the epistemic violence of the West to renounce their privilege, give the gift of hearing, and engage in forms of praxis that can more productively negotiate the borderlands between inside and outside, in thought and in being." Decolonization involves more than just critiquing colonialism, it involves actively seeking places and moments that transform our being.

To conclude, a quote from Indigenous artist and scholar Jarrett Martineau, whose work has been hugely inspiring in this project; he writes:

> Indigenous creativity is an originary becoming: a resurgent movement of re-emergence and return. Within its currents we can discover possibilities for invention, innovation and transformation to guide our evolving practices of creation. Decolonizing art-making disrupts the pacifying effects of normative enclosure, where indigeneity remains a force

> for survival . . . in the breaks created by collective resistance, in ruptural sites of illegibility and strategic opacities forged through resurgent creativity, emergent spaces of decolonial becoming are possible. (2015, p. 283-284)

Returning to my experience at Watkins Glen, whereas I sought sublimity in the wildness of the landscape as a yearning to experience a sort of nostalgic satisfaction, to experience something somehow greater than myself, I now recognize the harm in positioning myself as distanced witness. While this recognition in itself is neither sufficient nor complete, it marks a valuable moment of decolonial rupture, evidencing the transformative potential of disoriented viewing as produced by Indigenous art.

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Vita

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