

Multivocality: narratives, structures, friendships

Tarah Hogue and Ashlee Conery

Találsamkin Siyám Bill Williams and Sesemiya Tracy Williams were advisors to the exhibition *lineages and land bases*, presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February 22nd to August 30th, 2020. The exhibition was curated by Tarah Hogue, a woman of Métis and settler heritage, and, at the time, the Senior Curatorial Fellow, Indigenous Art at the Gallery. Hogue asked her friend and colleague Ashlee Conery, a third-generation settler woman, born and working on the unceded territories of hənq̓mínəm and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh speaking peoples, and, at the time, Curatorial Coordinator—Interpretation at the Gallery, to collaborate on realizing the exhibition. While Találsamkin Siyám's voice remains distinct, Conery and Hogue wrote the following text together, oscillating between an individual "I" and a collective "we."

We took turns writing from our own perspectives, as adjacent to the subjects of the exhibition, as well as weaving our thoughts together to create a bivocal narrative—composed of two but reading as one. The challenges of writing a singular narrative that is nevertheless multiple point, in our context of curation and art interpretation, to the need for multivocality that does not erase or mask the specificity of voice while also being a site of encounter.¹ Using this approach, we reflect on our work together to share the story of Emily Carr and Sewin̓chelwet Sophie Frank, their individual and entangled lives, as well as their creative practices. We also ask how this telling further implicates the telling of what is commonly known as Canadian art history. One way we respond to this question is by using language that tries to both observe the protocols of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh naming traditions as well as reverse the hierarchy of English translations over ancestral

¹Our use of the word "encounter" follows from artists Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin's consideration of the moment of encounter, "wherein that which we carry with us (consciously or unconsciously, willingly or forcibly) interfaces with and imprints upon another body, another collection of experiences and meetings."

terms. For example, the name Sewin̓chelwet is now held by Sewin̓chelwet's great-grandniece, Jamie Williams, who granted permission for its appearance in texts contributing to and stemming from this project.²

Before I was the Senior Curatorial Fellow, Indigenous Art at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Glenn Alteen, the Programming Director of grunt gallery where I had been curator in residence, introduced me to jil weaving. weaving had recently retired from her role as Coordinator of Arts and Culture for the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, where she was part of the City's efforts to engage x̱m̱əθḵw̱əy̱əm [Musqueam], Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh [Squamish], and səliw̱ətaʔ [Tsleil-Waututh] in more equitable government-to-government decision-making processes. This work took place in the context of Vancouver's Year of Reconciliation (June 2013–June 2014), its designation as a City of Reconciliation (2014), and the formal recognition that the city was founded on unceded territories (2014).³ The implications and impacts of these declarations and the events, programs, and policies they catalyzed have been the subject of ongoing civic and scholarly discourse. Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, for example, have discussed reconciliation as "a problematic narrative about Indigenous-settler relations, but also as a site where conversations about what a just future looks like *must* occur."⁴

In 2016, the Park Board engaged in a series of community consultation meetings in the lead-up to a new community-engaged reconciliation program. In the resulting report by the Cree-Métis community planner and facilitator Kamala Todd, Todd writes that restoring "a strong and visible Coast Salish sense of place" is "the crucial first step to the work of building cross-cultural relationships in Vancouver."⁵ This concept was invaluable to me as I thought through my role in relation to the

²Kristina Huneault was the first person to gain permission for the use of this name for her chapter, "Nature and Personhood for Sewin̓chelwet (Sophie Frank) and Emily Carr" in *I'm Not Myself at All: Women Art and Subjectivity in Canada* (Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press 2018), note 76, pp. 340. Találsamkin Siyám further confirmed its use for the exhibition and in this text.

³Peter Meiszner, "City of Vancouver formally declares city is on unceded Aboriginal territory," *Global News*, June 25, 2014, <https://globalnews.ca/news/1416321/city-of-vancouver-formally-declares-city-is-on-unceded-aboriginal-territory/>.

⁴Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, eds., *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015): 8; emphasis in original.

⁵Kamala Todd, "Truth-telling: Indigenous Perspectives on Working with Municipal Governments," Vancouver Park Board Report (2017), 17, <https://parkboardmeetings.vancouver.ca/files/REPORT-TruthTelling-IndigenousPerspectivesOnWorkingWithMunicipalGovernments-2017.pdf>.

Gallery's responsibilities as a settler institution on unceded lands, and is particularly relevant toward understanding the impetus for *lineages and land bases*.

weaving encouraged me to meet with Találsamkin Siyám and introduced me to Lisa Wilcox, a Wampanoag woman and consultant who worked closely with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw [Squamish Nation] in the area of intergovernmental relations for a number of years. It was Wilcox who first told me that Siyám, the great grandnephew of Sewin̓chelwet, heard the oral history of the relationship between Sewin̓chelwet and Carr from his grandmother Sut'elut Monica Williams, Sewin̓chelwet's sister.⁶ Wilcox facilitated a meeting between Siyám, myself, and other Gallery colleagues in July 2018, where we shared food and learned of Sewin̓chelwet and Carr's friendship.

As uninvited guests in these territories, we recognize that much of the vast knowledge, history, and experience embedded in this place remains unknown to us. Our ongoing learning and the response it seeks shaped the project under discussion. We were further encouraged by a subsequent meeting requested by Siyám where he generously offered to share his knowledge of Coast Salish⁷ culture and protocol with the Gallery. Around the time I met Siyám and became aware of this history, in a fortuitous confluence of events, negotiations were underway at the Gallery for the extended loan of Carr's watercolour portrait *Sophie Frank* (1914). As our relationship developed, I came to understand that consideration of Carr's portrait within the context of Siyám's knowledge of the two women's relationship provoked a set of complex questions that implicate the Gallery in multiple ways.

The Gallery's permanent collection holds the largest number of paintings and works on paper by Carr, whose engagement with and representation of Indigenous Peoples and cultural production on the Pacific Northwest Coast has been the focus of much scholarly debate.⁸ Carr and Sewin̓chelwet's relationship has most often been presented within the context of exhibitions and publications focused on Carr and largely disregarding Sewin̓chelwet's own skill as a basketmaker as well as her

⁶Email from Lisa Wilcox to Tarah Hogue, May 28, 2018.

⁷"Coast Salish" is the term Találsamkin Siyám chose to use in this context. Derived more from anthropology than community self-description, the term is often critiqued for flattening differences across distinct Nations that share a common language family.

⁸See, for example, Moray 1993 and 2006; Thom 1987; Cole 2000; Dawn 2006.

community and cultural lineage.⁹ This is especially egregious given the Gallery's participation in the ongoing erasure of x^wməθk^wəyəm, Sk̓wxwú7mesh, and səliwətaɬ visible presence within a city built on unceded lands.¹⁰ Desiring to contribute to “a strong and visible Coast Salish sense of place,” or more precisely, a Sk̓wxwú7mesh sense of place, I knew that we had to place the portrait and the woman it pictured at the centre of an exhibition, even as I understood this repositioning on its own would not achieve lasting change.

Siyám alerted us to a book chapter by the art historian Kristina Huneault entitled “Listening: Nature and Personhood for Emily Carr and Sewiṇchelwet (Sophie Frank).” The chapter collects Huneault’s in-depth research that occurred in dialogue with Sewiṇchelwet’s living descendants and other Sk̓wxwú7mesh community members over a period of three years. In it, Huneault laments that “despite considerable critical attention to Carr’s depictions of Indigenous subject matter, and a still more recent willingness to bring historical works of Northwest Coast art into conjunction with her paintings, there has been no substantive discussion of Frank’s basketry, still less a comparative analysis of the aesthetic concerns and productions of the two women.”¹¹

It is important to consider that the aesthetic terms to which Huneault refers when she discusses Sewiṇchelwet’s basketry are only partially available to a non-Indigenous audience unfamiliar with the techniques and motifs of Sewiṇchelwet’s community. Basketry encompasses a set of skills and specialized knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Teachings of the land figure prominently within this, as Sesemiya, a fifth-generation cedar weaver from the Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, describes:

The knowledge of the materials aligns you with the landscape, and the ancestors know what the plants and animals and language of the place are

⁹ Shirley Bear and Susan Crean’s, “The Presentation of Self in Emily Carr’s Writings,” in *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon* (Vancouver Art Gallery and National Gallery of Canada: 2006) was the first text we encountered that included a specifically Indigenous perspective on Sewiṇchelwet’s and Carr’s relationship — Bear being from the Tobique First Nation.

¹⁰ Jean Barman, “Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver,” *BC Studies* 155, Autumn 2007, 3-30; Ian Thom, lecture, “Work in Progress Curators’ Talks,” Vancouver Art Gallery, March 21, 2017.

¹¹ Huneault, 251.

about. It's important to pray: to ask the creator to ask the ancestors to ask the cedar tree to share its wisdom. You have to go to the plant, to watch and learn from the plant over the course of the seasons. The plants are our teachers.¹²

Sesemiya is described by Huneault as an “attentive observer” of Sewiṇchelwet’s work: “For Williams, what particularly distinguishes Frank’s achievement is her sense of movement, visible in the unusual pinwheel motifs.”¹³ Sesemiya’s perspective on basketry enfold a sense of continuity across species, wherein subjectivity and material expression extend well beyond human beings. The practice of weaving is a point of access into a worldview in which the maker is enmeshed within a creative, spiritual, and land-based lineage. At the same time, these practices are adaptable to changing contexts, as Sesemiya points out in Sewiṇchelwet’s combination of “Salish traditions with technical innovations intended to appeal to a Euro-Canadian clientele.”¹⁴



Sewiṇchelwet Sophie Frank with a child who is possibly Mrs. Tina Cole circa 1919
Courtesy the Museum of North Vancouver Archives, NVMA #7120

¹² Quoted in Huneault, 276.

¹³ Huneault, 272.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Huneault's comparative analysis of Salish basketry—including a single basket securely attributed to Sewiṇchelwet—and Carr's late oil on paper landscape paintings, produced after 1934, provided a framework for bringing these works into dialogue within the Gallery and posed multiple challenges that were responded to throughout the exhibition via contemporary artworks from the permanent collection.¹⁵ In "Listening," Huneault asks, "how has women's artistry brought them into contact with forests, fields, and oceans? And how have these contacts affected their senses of selfhood?"¹⁶ These questions were expanded in *lineages and land bases* to consider subjectivity beyond the human, and to "explore differing understandings of the self in relation to what is typically termed 'the natural world.'" However, female artistry and selfhood remained at the exhibition's centre, with a room at its midpoint (from any direction) in which Carr's portrait, *Sophie Frank* (1914), catalyzed a reframing (following Huneault's terms) of the histories and relations of Sewiṇchelwet and Carr.

Huneault's research also pointed us to the differences between the products of looking *at* nature and those that result from working *with* it—a comparison exemplified in the works of Sewiṇchelwet and Carr. Huneault, like Sesemiya, suggests that the principles behind the aesthetic concerns that these two artists share are best understood through their respective worldviews, which are embedded within the materials and processes of basketry and painting:

Carr's late landscape paintings, particularly the ones made after 1934, are pictorial statements of her faith that everything in the world was "all connected up." Her quest as a painter was to capture that intertwining... Her words are closely echoed by the teachings of Salish makers: "we have learned through experience that everything is interconnected"... Such beliefs, shared across cultures and down through generations, constitute a philosophical bedrock that links Carr's painting to Salish basketry even as cultural differences have meant that the principle of connection has been understood and materialized quite differently across aesthetic practices.¹⁷

¹⁵ These included, in one room of the exhibition, Liz Magor's *Beaver Man* (1977/2010), Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun Letslo:tseitun's *Burying Another Face of Racism on First Nations Soil* (1997), Jin-me Yoon's *A Group of 67* (1997), Jeff Wall's *The Pine on the Corner* (1990), and Karin Bubaš's *Woman with Scorched Redwood* (2007).

¹⁶ Huneault, 248.

¹⁷ Huneault, 251.

Huneault's research dovetails with many publications over the last two decades: Gerta Moray's 1993 thesis on Carr's Indigenous subject matter—researched with the assistance of the Vancouver Art Gallery (and held in its Library); Marcia Crosby's and Shirley Bear and Susan Crean's texts for the 2006 National Gallery of Canada and Vancouver Art Gallery anthology on Emily Carr; and Leslie Dawn's chapter "Revisiting Carr" in his 2006 book *National Visions, National Blindness*. These authors, among others, have laboured to illustrate facts and important narratives outside the recycled modernist reading of Carr's work that forms our image of her blossoming among the Group of Seven, in her correspondence with Mark Tobey, or her late writings; materials that present an edited and narrativized version of herself and the development of Canada.

For decades collections have been built on the idea of Canadian art that coalesced, in one instance, around Carr's first exhibition alongside members of the Group of Seven in 1927—the context in which she became known nationally. This *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* both appropriated Indigenous cultural material as evidence of a distinctly Canadian art history and positioned Carr as a modern iteration or mediator of that aesthetic history. The exhibition was restaged in 2006 by the National Gallery and Vancouver Art Gallery, and this history, as well as that of Carr's relationship to other (predominantly male) settler, modernist painters in Canada and the US, has remained a constant foundation of Carr didactics since 1927.

The work of Huneault, Moray, Crosby, and others intervenes in this common language around Carr and the subtle hierarchies, beginnings, and conclusions that it has implied, and yet the histories they raise remain largely unfamiliar to Gallery visitors as they are rarely included on the surfaces of labels and introductory panels—places where public memory is created and/or reinforced. These and other diversions from the storied development of a distinctly Canadian identity expressed through its art—in which Carr plays a prominent role—continue to be treated as branches or "alternative narratives" rather than roots of her work, evidence of the "manifest manners"¹⁸ of modernism that continue to guide institutional thinking and meaning making.

¹⁸ Gerald Vizenor, in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, defines manifest manners as "the course of dominance, the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of Indian cultures. Manifest manners court the destinies of monotheism, cultural determinism, objectivism, and the structural conceits of savagism and civilization" (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), vi.

Modernism, a key component of colonialism, is a unifying aesthetic history for what is called the western art world (that has regularly replaced the heritage and community context of Indigenous cultural materials with the story of their influence on the invention of modern aesthetic principles). As in many colonies, in Canada the development of national sovereignty hung on the creation of an image of a modern country engaged with modern European ideas of art and design, and yet unique in its interpretations of those ideas. In Carr's case these narratives are relevant, but only alongside the equally important history of her relationships with makers like Sewin̓chelwet and others who occupied a much larger period of Carr's creative and personal life. This includes Carr's childhood friend Mrs. Dennis Douglas, the daughter of Sir James Douglas, first lieutenant-governor of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, and Amelia Douglas, the daughter of a Hudson's Bay factor and a Cree woman. Mrs. Dennis Douglas, the author of "a book of Cowichan folk tales," defended Carr's "documentary paintings of Indian villages, lobbying the Provincial legislature to buy some of Carr's paintings in 1913."¹⁹ Neither of these women appear as constant figures in Carr's exhibition bios—though Douglas's support is often referenced without naming her—and the weavings of Sewin̓chelwet and her contemporaries have limited representation within Canadian art collections.²⁰

The common alternative or parallel narrative to "modernism and Carr" that has been used to compare her practice to that of both settler and Indigenous makers is Carr's spiritualism and its relationship to her work—substantiated with quotes from sources such as her journals, in which she sumptuously describes her perception of the divine in nature, and from her letters with theosophist Lawren Harris. Huneault also draws from this part of Carr's biography to build the link between Carr and Sewin̓chelwet's aesthetic practices. In some respects, this repeats traditional settler arguments about a connection between Carr and the Indigenous subjects she portrayed. However, Huneault does not stray into the myth of "Carr

¹⁹ Gerta Moray, "Northwest Coast native culture and the early Indian paintings of Emily Carr, 1899-1913," PhD dissertation. (University of Toronto, 1993), 85.

²⁰ The Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and the Museum of Vancouver both have collections of Salish basketry; however, basketry—and Coast Salish cultural production more broadly—was not collected by museums with the same vigour as the carvings of the northern Northwest Coast Nations. This established a false hierarchy between the skilled creative output of Indigenous Nations and between gendered forms of production, which continues to shape perceptions to this day.

as mediator” between settler and Indigenous beliefs, recognizing that Carr has no hereditary connection to the ancestors of the territories she explored and occupied. Huneault acknowledges that Carr’s experience of nature, while spiritual, was deeply entangled with the societal and religious beliefs in which she was raised, even as these beliefs evolved over her lifetime. She focuses instead on Carr’s assertions of the interconnectedness of all things, proposing that Sewinchelwet’s and Carr’s very different creative practices both rested on this mutual belief.

Although Sewinchelwet and Carr’s relationship to the materials and subjects of their creative practices are tied to shared social, political, and racial contexts, their roles, agency, and accessible rights within those contexts were very different. The events that coincided with their lives and relationship include, among many other occurrences: the establishment of the St. Paul’s Indian Residential School in North Vancouver in 1899; the displacement of residents from the village of Sen:ákw (where Sewinchelwet’s sister, Sut’elut, lived); the 1907 delegation of Salish chiefs to London, England to petition King Edward VII for their land rights; World War I; and the prevalence of tuberculosis as the era’s leading cause of death, exacerbated by living conditions in residential schools and on reserves. This timeline, expanded upon in the exhibition’s audio guide, puts into context the divergent experiences of these two women whose thirty-three-year-long friendship coexisted with national policies of displacement, assimilation, and willful negligence toward First Nations, Inuit, and Métis that resulted in the widespread loss of life. The clash of Canadian modernist aspirations with Indigenous claims to sovereignty touched these women’s lives yet was never remarked upon in their known correspondence or in Carr’s writings. While it is necessary to take into account these external conditions when looking at their creative practices or Carr’s portrayal of her friend, the dynamics of their personal relationship are perhaps better understood through consideration of the willingness described by Siyám’s introductory account—an attitude that characterizes the intimate exchanges which constitute friendship within or despite one’s context. Siyám’s account encourages us to not lose sight of this very human dimension.

In the process of receiving Siyám’s telling of Sewinchelwet and Carr’s relationship and its influences on Carr’s practice and thought, we were, however, faced with our colleagues’ naming of academic standards for what counts as *fact*. This questioning echoes the requirements that have historically determined the role and reception of oral history by the Canadian government—made clear by the 1997 *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* case. Standing within the relations of this project, this resistance

brought new inflection to Siyám's description of what it meant for Sewinchelwet to share ancestral teachings with Carr, that "their friendship was so strong in such a good way that it was automatically accepted."²¹

In the physical exhibition, we decided to visibly layer voices as an act of resistance to singular institutional narratives. On further reflection I now see this choice, and its friction with the context in which we worked, in the words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha, who writes:

If the project is carried out precisely at the limit where anthropology could be abolished in what it tries to institutionaliz[e], then nobody here is on safe ground. Multivocality, for example, is not necessarily a solution to the problems of centralized and hierarchical knowledge when it is practiced accumulatively—by juxtaposing voices that continue to speak within identified boundaries.

Minh-Ha points to the process of institutionalizing, in which knowledge—and strategies such as multivocality—are appropriated into existing frameworks that, as Ashon Crawley posits, seek "stasis and stillness" through "repeatability and reiteration."²² Crawley writes, "Institutions are categorical distinctions, they are spaces that have been set apart after the repetition and reiteration of particular performances... they are severances and the effect of memorial."²³

Minh-Ha and Crawley converge on processes that favour *becoming* over normative function, form, and style, a convergence within which I found the identities of my person and my role as "curatorial interpretation" productively challenged. A series of questions emerged: how to make explicit the positions taken (and inherited) by the works exhibited; how to make transparent the relations curated by those who have access to an object's contexts, its histories, and its creators; and finally, how to share those rhizomes of meaning, with no one narrative positioned as more important or correct.

We took up these questions in *lineages and land bases* through interpretive materials that also described the parallels set up by their physical installation. This approach

²¹ Audio-recorded conversation with Találsamkin Siyám Bill Williams, February 3, 2020.

²² Ashon Crawley, "Otherwise, Instituting," *Performance Research* 20.4, 86–87.

²³ *Ibid.*, 87.

acknowledged that visitors do not reset as they move about the galleries or between labels; their experience is cumulative and comparative. And as the narrators of these frames, we not only endeavoured to be transparent but to continuously check our own positionality in relation to our words—a component of our working relationship as well as our research. As the exhibition now lives in the pages of this journal, it is important to consider that all voices are further juxtaposed with the content appearing before and after this text—not unlike the experience of moving through exhibitions in an institution. This is the inseverable exchange between things in both physical and cultural relations, between form and content—important to any understanding of this project, our thoughts on friendship and exhibition making, or how a worldview exists within the material of a weaving.

Within the scholarship on Carr, there is much debate as to the truth of her presentation of self and her interactions with Indigenous Peoples. Did she merely replicate the myth of the “vanishing Indian”? Crosby and Cole suggest that we should read her writings as a mixture of memory and literary invention rather than as historical belief.²⁴ This kind of reading, according to Saul Friedlander, is a form of critical inquiry “essential for understanding what connects a past event to its present representation.”²⁵ Building on Friedlander’s ideas, Crosby writes, “by puncturing facile narratives, we contribute to a multivocal history from which no single, overarching meaning emerges unchallenged.”²⁶ However, we are decades into “puncturing facile narratives” and it is evident, in our experience, that institutional practice requires further shifting.

In light of the aforementioned research, Carr and Sewinchelwet’s lives and work clearly demand a continuous presentation of multiple readings and are quickly hollowed within attempts to construct singular or thematic histories. Just as these researchers build on the work of each other, so too must the presentation of history by public-facing institutions. The restrictions of time and resources, of course, add to the difficulty of building research on top of building exhibitions. However, these conditions only further indicate the need for change in the dynamics of this

²⁴ Douglas Cole, “The Invented Indian / The Imagined Emily,” *BC Studies* No 126/126 (Spring/Summer 2000) 147-62; Marcia Crosby, “A Chronology of Love’s Contingencies,” in *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006).

²⁵ Crosby, 158-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

labour. Thinking and producing in relation depends on internal structures that support the work of individuals working as equals within communities engaged in equitable relations with other communities. Both internal and external structures are needed for either to be authentic, functional, or productive. The possibility of being able to continue to build on the knowledge of each last iteration depends on this collaboration, as does the relevance of institutions to their publics. Embracing contradiction and complexity engenders a more nuanced understanding of place and expands the transformative possibilities of the Gallery's role within occupied Indigenous territories.

In our own context, rather than adjudicating Siyám's testimony as fact, our attempt at a multivocal strategy through comparative sets of objects, texts, and audio was intended to test tangible forms of equitable analysis, while keeping in mind Minh Ha's assertion to practice at the limit of what is categorizable. However it remains that edges and limitations are defined by the knowledges of who or what is speaking. Just as scholars have evaluated Carr's work and words with the benefit of hindsight and from their own positionality in time and space, so too may our decisions be justified or judged by present limitations or future evolutions in thought and practice. This potential failure returns us to the question that has hovered around readings of Carr: how can truth be adjudicated in ways that grapple with the often uncomfortable complexities of changing realities, and is it not *truths*? In saying this, we are not apologists of Carr's Victorian-era outlook and its racist colonial underpinnings. We are advocating for curatorial and interpretive approaches that dwell in complex multiplicity rather than smoothing out competing or contradictory claims for the sake of a unified institutional or national narrative. We are by now well aware of the absences that such narratives replicate.

Our approach tried to step from the terms formed in the texts by the authors mentioned, as well as those formed in dialogue with Indigenous individuals and communities. This includes the use of concepts like *survivance*²⁷ that echo what Huneault describes as the teachings of Salish makers who "stress the continuity of

²⁷ Vizenor's term *survivance* first appeared in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1994), where he defines it as follows: "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy."

ancestral knowledge and traditions that have persisted despite the best efforts of the residential school.”²⁸ The artworks, belongings, and interpretive materials presented in *lineages and land bases* were intended to position Carr’s work within the spatial and cultural context of Skwxwú7mesh territory—spatially activating and extending the territorial acknowledgement oft-recited in programmatic contexts yet not often visible to the everyday visitor in the Gallery. We also structured written content following what Huneault describes as “Indigenous art histories’ focus on community, in preference to conventions that too greatly magnify the importance of individuals.”²⁹

This was done, more specifically, through the language and format of Carr and Sewin̓chelwet’s biographies, which were presented on raised panels surrounded by a variety of materials. Carr’s panel included her small watercolour portrait *Sophie Frank* (1914); a 1934 photograph of Carr in her Simcoe Street studio in Victoria, seen with the same portrait on the wall behind her; an iPad displaying the chapter entitled “Sophie” from Carr’s memoir *Klee Wyck*; and a hardcover copy of the original 1941 edition of the book. Sewin̓chelwet’s panel included two historical photographs: one of the weaver posed with a number of her baskets and a young child; and another of a more elderly Sewin̓chelwet with her husband Kwetsím Jimmy Frank and other family members. Also presented were scanned images of four letters: three written by Sewin̓chelwet to Carr in 1915 and 1929; and the fourth written by Kwetsím to Carr following his wife’s passing in 1939.

Considered together, the panels tended to decentre Carr as an individual and the ways in which she has been authorized to speak for Indigenous Peoples;³⁰ instead, they focused on her family and the encounters that shaped her artistic development as well as demonstrating her “love”³¹ for Sewin̓chelwet through visual and textual means. To view Sewin̓chelwet through the lens of Carr’s writing and art is, as Shirley Bear and Susan Crean have observed, “to be forced to contemplate the way

²⁸ Huneault, 253.

²⁹ Huneault, *Ibid.*

³⁰ Crosby, 159.

³¹ In a diary entry dated December 5, 1930, Carr writes that she dreamt of Sophie and notes, “I loved her still” (*Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*, 47); Huneault also notes that Frank’s extant letters to Carr are addressed from “your friend,” “your dear friend,” and “your ever loving friend.” She writes: “My conclusion is that this was no mere epistolary convention is supported by the fact that Frank named one of her children Emily” (356).



Emily Carr in her studio at 646 Simcoe Street, Victoria, BC 1934

Image credit: Harry Upperton Knight Courtesy the City of Victoria Archives, CVA M00699

Carr altered and obfuscated both Sophie and her history.”³² Indeed, in an inscription on the reverse of the *Sophie Frank* portrait, Carr bequeaths the painting to her confidant and editor, Ira Dilworth, which reads:

the original Portrait of Sophie done probably in Vancouver around 1907 or 1908, at my death the property of Ira Dilworth of CBC from his love, Carr, because the life of Sophie meant so much to him. He understood her womanliness & my love for her. To him she was more than just an Indian, she was a symbol.

Huneault similarly argues that Sewinchelwet is:

lost from view behind... the screen of [Carr's] own emotional needs and romantic projections. Even the watercolour portrait Carr made of her friend

³² Bear and Crean, 64.

does little to convey an appreciation of her as a person. In Carr's own words, Sewin̄chelwet was 'a symbol'—of Indianness, of maternity, and of something good and pure that had been damaged and made to suffer.³³

Huneault subsequently notes that, by the 1990s, "critique of Carr's racially determined paternalism" began to intensify, as did the "rediscovery" of Sewin̄chelwet.³⁴ Her own research has served to rediscover or recuperate Sewin̄chelwet for art history, not merely by inserting this woman's life and skilled creative practice into Carr's already well-worn narrative, but by reflecting Salish basketmaking and worldview onto Carr's paintings and her relationships with the land and First Nations of this place. This has produced a more nuanced understanding of Carr's work and its prominence, at the same time centring the community of practice that Sewin̄chelwet belonged to. Huneault deftly describes this practice in ontological terms: "As a process where maker and material come together in an intimate familiarity and sensuous engagement, basketry offers insight about what is entailed in being *in relation*."³⁵

Each artwork or belonging presented in this exhibition had a counterpart. Baskets woven by Sewin̄chelwet, her sister Sut'elut, and Chucháwlut Mary Anne August were exhibited in dialogue with Carr's oil on paper landscape paintings, demonstrating Huneault's assertion that "there is a sense in which the better-known artist's heavily metaphorical depictions of trees find a literal counterpart in the basket's coiled arboreal fibres."³⁶ And, returning to the assertion of survivance and the intergenerational continuity of basketmaking, I included Sesemiya's contemporary dance apron and headband (c. 2017). Finally, we included on labels other Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh weavers working in the early 20th century whose names and practices are largely unrecorded within the art historical contexts written by institutions and collectors. These weavers, initially named in Huneault's chapter, include Chucháwlut Mary Anne August (c. 1881–c. 1971), P'elawk'wia Margaret Baker (c. 1885–1972), Kw'exiliya Madeline Deighton (c. 1858–1948), Skwétsiya or Hak-stn Harriet Johnny (c. 1843–1940), Sut'elut Monica Williams (c. 1875–1972),

³³ Huneault, 250.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 290.

³⁶ Ibid.

Swenámiya Mary Anne Khatsahlano (c. 1881–1970), Sxwelhchálya Mary Anne John (c. 1845/50–c. 1942), Annie Jack (c. 1886–1973), Molly John (c. 1880–1955), Agatha Moody (c. 1887–1967), and Mary Natrall (d. 1959).³⁷

Huneault's comparative focus was extended in the exhibition by a selection of Carr's ceramic objects, produced for the tourist market, which crudely appropriated the iconography of First Nations along the Northwest Coast. Carr's ceramic production is, unsurprisingly, not a celebrated aspect of the artist's oeuvre and sits uncomfortably within the Gallery's permanent collection. In her 1946 autobiography, *Growing Pains*, Carr herself wrote, "I hated myself for prostituting Indian Art; our Indians did not 'pot,' their designs were not intended to ornament clay—but I did keep the Indian design pure."³⁸ The economic impetus for this work—Carr returned to Victoria from Vancouver in 1913, gave up painting for thirteen years, and struggled through years of financial hardship—provided a counterpoint to the economic pressures that resulted in Salish women similarly adapting their practices for the tourist market. The inclusion of a goblet-shaped basket by P'elawk'wia Margaret Baker exemplified the adaptation and innovation of Salish women as basketmaking increasingly became a primary source of income for their families, in spite of the increasing difficulty of sourcing their materials due to the encroachment of settlement and industry on their lands. As Huneault notes, "far from bringing her into the kind of rapturous communion with nature"³⁹ that Carr sought in her paintings, the new circumstances of Skwxwú7mesh existence drew Sewin̓chelwet further from the land: "I buy all our food...I have not been working in my garden for I am in Vancouver every day trying to sell baskets."⁴⁰

The stark realities of Sewin̓chelwet's life, spoken in her own words in letters written to her friend Emily, return us to the relationship between the self and the natural world that *lineages and landbases* sought to explore. This relationship threads through the historical circumstances and societal structures that shaped the world Carr and Sewin̓chelwet were born into—a world that impacted but did not fully determine

³⁷ Ibid., 273–4.

³⁸ Emily Carr, "Growing Pains" in *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, ed. Doris Shadbolt (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 439.

³⁹ Huneault, 271.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Huneault, 271.

their view of one another and the encounters they shared. The skill and sensuous engagement with animate materials embodied in the basketry of Sewin̓chelwet and her contemporaries is knowledge still held in their communities today. The continuity of this practice undermines the modernist narrative of Canadian art history as told through a tradition of landscape painting premised on the erasure of Indigenous presence—a narrative in which Carr is implicated but to which her work and life do not neatly adhere.⁴¹ Rather, Carr and Sewin̓chelwet's relationship and the connection between their creative practices prefigures and extends a critique of the separation of nature and culture taken up by artists in so-called Canada since the 1960s and explored throughout the exhibition. Their contributions compel us to think anew about the meaning of self and its entanglement with the non-human world and to recentre Indigenous understandings and stories of place—which should profoundly alter the way museums engage Indigenous Peoples, collection practices, curation, interpretation, programming, and more. ■

⁴¹In his book *National Visions, National Blindness*, Leslie Dawn also effectively details the fissures within this narrative, from its very inception, in relation to European and settler Canadian art.