

VALERIE ST. PIERRE SMITH

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RESEARCH STATEMENT

Decolonizing and indigenizing Euro-centric western art and design practices, paradigms and processes are the focus of my creative scholarship. Working at the intersection of design, performance, Indigenous knowing, and socially engaged art, I investigate and interrogate established frameworks and inherited models of creating and teaching with the intention of identifying more culturally expansive ones. This includes questioning assumptions of intention, inspiration, analysis, storytelling, appropriation, representation, and production. My scholarship and creative practices are interwoven; dress, adornment, performance, site specific installation, social engagement, essays, workshops, and public conversations are all parallel sites of inquiry.

Using practice-led methodology combining material experimentation, visual and archival research, reflective writing, collaborative performance-making, and social engagement, my Anishinaabe traditional teachings and contemporary Indigeneity inform a relational approach. Materials, stories, collaborators, audiences, and places are considered in relationship to one another.

A central strand of my work examines language and structures through which cultural misappropriation is perpetuated in art and design production and education. Through research presented in "The Three Sisters: Lessons on Inspiration, Appropriation, and Design," "Finding Authentic Voices," "Connective Threads," and the "Pocket Guide to Cultural Appropriation in Design," I identify how research methods, production hierarchies, aesthetic conventions, and assumptions about artistic license reproduce Euro-colonial cultural domination. *Weaving the Strands: Reframing Inspiration, Appropriation, and Representation in Art + Design*, expands this inquiry into a practical framework for culturally responsive and expansive creative work; connecting critical analysis with adaptable tools for artists, makers, critics, producers, and educators. The multi-media, spoken word presentation format of "Gather in Beauty: Starting in a Good Way" fundamentally challenges conventional western research presentation methods.

Collaboration also appears as both method and outcome in my research. Performance, design and storytelling are laboratories for discovering the multiple ways identity parleys between self-definition and cultural construct. Mentorship and teaching extend my research by inviting students and emerging artists to participate in these discoveries, question their own inherited constructs, and contribute their culturally responsive creative voices.

I am excited to be evolving this research, digging even more deeply into the Euro-dominate constructs buried in English and how we speak, write and "translate" the

stories and discourse surrounding performance, design, history, interpretation, creative production, and pedagogy. My recent paper, “Animating Language, Animating Dress,” investigates the English-language constructs shaping our understandings and misunderstandings of dress and how Indigenous language constructs reactivate relationships between dress and story, material, identity, land, and community.

Rooted in the 7 Grandfather teachings, Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth all guide my goal to produce analytically rigorous, culturally expansive, and useful work: work that changes our collective frameworks of creating, storytelling, and teaching.

Honored, my work has been presented at national and international institutions and organizations including ATHE; USITT; Costume Society of America; Central Saint Martins, UAL London; and Banff Centre for Art and Creativity. I was also named a Distinguished Scholar Award in Art and Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Fulbright Scholar Program finalist.