

PAGEANT

NATALIE KING

CURATED BY RYAN RICE



Natalie King, *Miss Gay Ojibwe*, 2020

whimsy

Unapologetically, Natalie King is inspired by shiny objects and things that glow. Her creative practice is a whimsical display of dignity, magnificence and splendour. Brazen in color, vibrant in spirit and sprinkled with just the right amount of glitter, King's bold audacious style exudes from her paintings, posturing pride and defiance in alignment and in concert with the theory of survivance, granting permission for confidence and self-assurance to be embraced. She leans critically into an inherent and negotiated femininity and collapses multiplicities of Indigeneity and queerness side by side. It is no surprise that she cites the flamboyant 90s iconic Lisa Frank retro-brand of fanciful consumed musings as an inspiration, alongside an innate influence of traditional and contemporary Indigenous aesthetics, saturated and adorned in regalia, beadwork and ribbon-work.

Centred on facets of representation and presence, the exhibition ***Pageant*** is about inhabiting and indulging an outwardly fluid status of one's realities and identities put on glorious display. This prospect invites King's work to toy with socio-political and cultural expectations through a proactive measure to take up and occupy space and be realized with a sense of hope, spotlighted and centred in a shining light with dignity and prominence. The body of work resonates historically with the late Anishinaabe Rama First Nation artist Arthur Shilling's transformative expressionistic portraiture, including his 30- foot mural *The Beauty of My People* (amongst others of King's kin contemporaries), ***Pageant*** imparts a meditative and spiritually encouraged colorful palette as a tool to imagine other possibilities. This culturally-based informed color spectrum offers a dazzling effect to camouflage and tease out binaries embedded in a façade of beauty to spark conversations of desire, belonging and reverence. Although from different times and lived experiences, both Shilling and King represent aspects of collective cultural identity experiences within oppressive social systems through a return to our colorful selves. King states, "I'm capturing survivance and desire, countering damage-centred narratives that are tied to Indigenous communities and the conspicuous consumption of queer Indigenous trauma."¹

The procession of dazzling works presented in ***Pageant*** is a provocation through which we can bear witness to the strength that is drawn from King's interpretation of the bold and joyful pride she associates with as a mechanism to reclaim and detract from a colonial imposition on Indigenous queer bodies. The exhibition is poised centrally around the spirited painting *Miss Gay Ojibwe*, which indulges with the vitality of pageantry associated with empowerment, flamboyance and imagination. The painting embodies desires of acceptance, authenticity and glorifies achieved and/or enacted freedoms interpreted through King's own emotional labour of self-reflection, acceptance and community care. For this work to advance anti-colonial intentions, King works through a lens that she identifies as pleasure-centred resistance to allow for "ways in which we present ourselves and the communities we are from."²

Pageant represents a love letter of belonging, storying the timeless narratives of hope, healing and vulnerability that seldom discriminate. Together, the works in the exhibition are offered as good medicine and propose a tangible framework to accept, decolonize and reconnect our relationships with each other and to the land to ensure that all aspects of cultural continuity are embraced in order for glimmering futures to thrive for the benefit of everyone.

Ryan Rice

Guest Curator – *Natalie King: Pageant*

December 2, 2021

Centre[3] for Artistic + Social Practice

¹ Artist Statement / Correspondence with Artist / Curator, November 2021

² Ibid



Natalie King, *The Ascension of Abundance*, 2021



Natalie King, *Weightless bountiful glimmers of light across Turtle Island*, 2021



Natalie King, *Braided Endearment*, 2021

artist bio

Natalie King is a queer interdisciplinary Anishinaabe artist, facilitator and member of Timiskaming First Nation. King's interdisciplinary arts practice ranges from video, painting, sculpture and installation as well as community engagement, curation and arts administration. King is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xpace Cultural Centre in *tsí Tkaròn:to*.

Often involving portrayals of queer femmes, King's works are about embracing the ambiguity and multiplicities of identity within the Anishinaabe queer femme experience(s) and futurities. King's practice engages and operates from a firmly critical, anti-colonial, non-oppressive and future-bound perspective, reclaiming the realities of lived lives through frameworks of desire and survivance.

curator bio

Ryan Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka of Kahnawake, is a curator, Associate Professor and the Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts and Science at OCAD University. His institutional and independent curatorial career spans 30 years in community, museums, artist run centres and galleries. Rice's writing on contemporary Onkwehón:we art has been published in numerous periodicals and exhibition catalogues, and he has lectured widely. In 2021, Rice was appointed Curator, Indigenous Art at Onsite Gallery (OCAD) and is currently developing two public art commissions as the Indigenous Public Art Curator with Waterfront Toronto.



Natalie King, *Queer NDN Joy bound beyond space / time*, 2021

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Main Gallery

February 25 – April 16, 2022

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Centre[3] for Artistic + Social Practice acknowledges that its organization, located in Hamilton, is on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations whose presence here reaches back to time immemorial. Centre[3] recognizes the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples, cultures and lands in what is now known as Canada and is committed to healing and decolonizing together through the arts.

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