

Carrie Allison
connections of gestures



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Thank you to Rachelle Dickinson for the fruitful conversations while creating and preparing for this exhibition, many of the works wouldn't be what they are without those. I am thrilled to have worked with you and so honoured to have your words lay beside my artworks.

Lastly, thank you to my partner, Jacob, for the endless support and encouragement and Shy for enriching my life more than I could have ever imagined.

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As I write this from Omàmìwininìwag (Algonquin) traditional unceded territories (Ottawa, Ontario), I'm thinking about the implications of relations and gestures across time, space and place – specifically those manifested in materials such as beads and pixels. This is indeed because I am and have been thinking and writing about Carrie Allison's artworks, but also because so much of our lives have been shared across space and isolation in pixels via Zoom and our ancestries carry knowledges across landscapes beyond home territories. Carrie's nêhiyaw/cree, Métis, and European ancestry is rooted in High Prairie, Treaty 8, Alberta, but she grew up on the unceded lands of the Tsawwassen, Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. She currently lives in K'jipuktuk (Halifax) in Mi'kma'ki (Mi'kmaq territories) My dad's family are British, Irish and Red River Métis from Treaty 1, Selkirk, Manitoba, and my mom is from Newfoundland. What we share, though very differently, is the comfort and responsibility that comes with our relations and the certainty that art carries knowledges across time and place.

Perhaps because I have not seen Carrie's artwork beyond the screen, nor seen the exhibition, my experience of Carrie's works is remarkable. Although I think it is simply that Carrie's works are remarkable. I most often see her artwork in my mind in the morning, between sleeping and wakefulness. I see

/ feel the thread sliding through the beads and stitched to the video of a shoreline and a flower, reminding my body of how it feels to bead and to smell the cool damp of a river's edge. And in semi-consciousness, the beads shift from tiny to massive in my mind's eye, from movement to stillness, and I can hear the burble of water moving through plants on the shore. Carrie's work evokes for me physical and emotional sensations, perhaps because I've beaded, perhaps not. Regardless, there is an emotional and physical quiet that settles in during both my watching and my recollections of her work.



image: *Miyosamiki*, 2020
stills from beaded animation

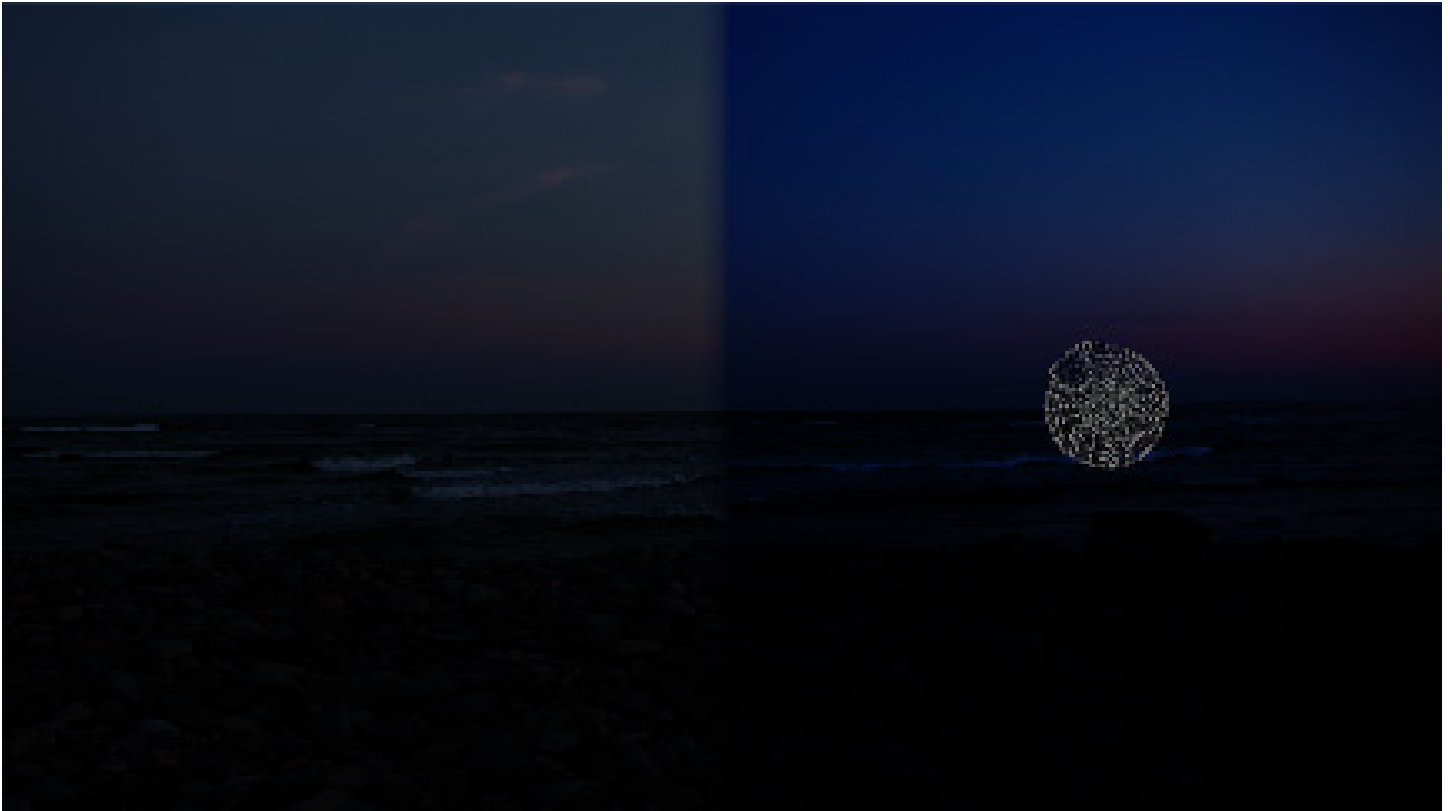


image: *The Pull of the Moon*, 2021, beaded animation over video, (still)

Such quietness is akin to meditation, like watching someone braid their hair or watching machines cut the threading in screws: the movement engenders a stillness. I'm not referring to a feeling of anticipation, but to being aware of being so far in process that your mind becomes quiet, and the body's motions become smooth. I have experienced such a sensation as a maker, but rarely when I am viewing artworks. In the quiet of process there is awe and occasionally a conscious appreciation for space and the time to simply be. Within this sensation, there is often an increased awareness of materials and methods: their origins, their sources, and connections, all made present in the moment through the physical act of creating.

In *connections of gestures* process is a medium, along with beads, thread, video, stop motion animation, felt, wood, needles, and sketches. The durational performance of beading, interventions into video and layering

of imagery illuminates Carrie's presence, authority (authorship), and her accountability in art making – what she calls “material responsibility.” Each piece in the show is a reflection on intergenerational Indigenous knowledges, navigating her settler privilege and an expression of her commitment to “honouring the past and considering future permissibility.” By providing the source beadworks as well as photo documentation in the exhibition with the video, we are shown the relevance of all stages of making as invaluable parts of art, critical scholarship and the art market. We are also shown, in greater detail than with finished works, how Carrie does beadwork, and those with whom she is in relation, both settler and Indigenous. “In Indigenous ontologies, all beings and things have particular qualities and capabilities by virtue of their taking form always and only in a relational context. The identity of ‘things’ in the world is not understood as discrete or independent, but emerges through, and as,

relations with everything else.” (Jones and Hoskins 2016, 80) The artwork in *connections of gestures* show how tributaries of relations can flow together as an honouring and an “ethic of reciprocity”, an ongoing demonstration of material responsibility and agency that makes Carrie’s work so compelling.

“An ethic of reciprocity is a practice of attending to the way our existence is interdependent with networks of relations of other humans and non-humans. It is a practice of considering the consequences of our actions—including our research—for all the communities with which we are in relation and on which our being depends. In reaching beyond the scale of the personal, an ethic of reciprocity becomes more than an individual morality. It is also a politics...” (Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt 2020, 340.)

For different reasons, I am aware of the ethics of care integral to honouring both Indigenous

and settler ancestry, and attempting to respect the ongoing violence of settler colonialism and Indigenous self-determination: how to speak without speaking for, how to honour protocol, in ways that don’t assume belonging, considering relationships to materials and the extent to which we feel Indigenous, relative to what communities recognize out indigeneity, and most importantly how to work in ways that honour the values of all our ancestors and lived experience, without impinging on the rights and values of Indigenous folks. It is a responsive and reflective process that is outward looking and full of care.

To Honour: Process as medium

The performance of process in *To Honour* (2019) is mesmerising to me – the video is being beaded and unbeaded, demonstrating most deliberately the ways in which Carrie enacts the connections of beadwork with the land, waters, other beaders, and her



image: *To Honour*, 2029, toho and miyuki beads on felt, 20”x14”

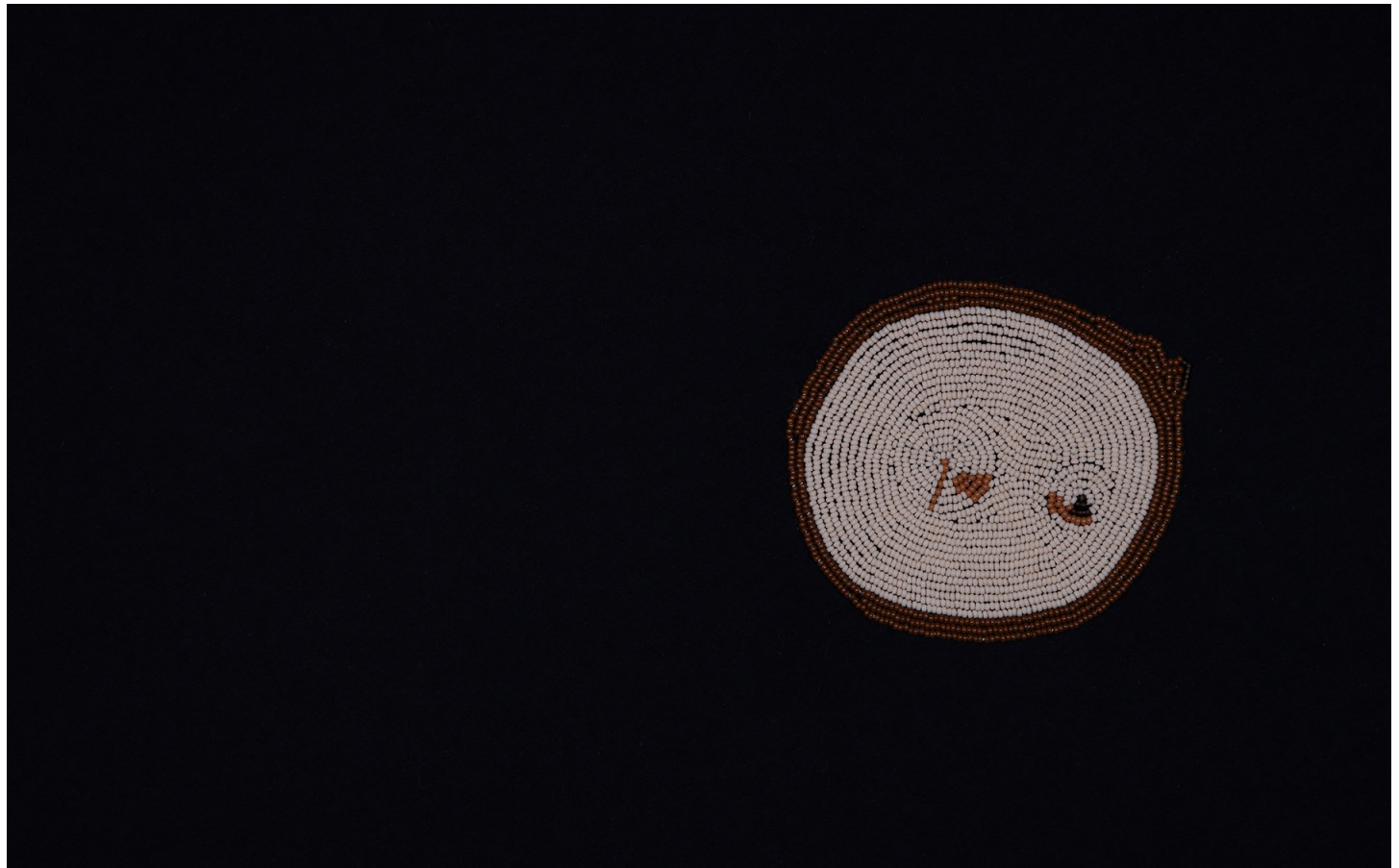


image: *Reading the Past*, 2020, toho and miyuki beads on felt, 20"x14"

ancestors. The deliberateness of the inserted animation into video taken by Carrie is a demonstration of process as relations and a reminder perhaps that regardless of how something looks, those relations run deep. The aesthetics of the video works communicate and make literal how being in process feels, what it requires and how it can help navigate, as an Indigenous person with settler ancestry, our current cultural and political climate.

This is one of the many reasons I love Carrie's work and struggle to write about it with grace. To be more specific here, Carrie's works are rich and often dense, the process of merging customary beading methods within digital formats complicates interpretation, though certainly not because Indigenous material innovation is new. Rather, it complicates interpretation because I struggle to find language to bring into the flow of discussion how innovation in Indigenous making is a long established method of expressing connections to human, ancestral and non-human relations.

Beading requires patience, fine motor skills, and time. Add to that stop motion and video editing, and you have durational performance works that are demonstrated in the spaciousness of Carrie's aesthetic and the installation programme at ArtSpace. While we viewers are not subjected to the physical rigour of Carrie's process, we are provided the space to reflect on ethics of care and the emphatic responsibility that comes with working in relation.

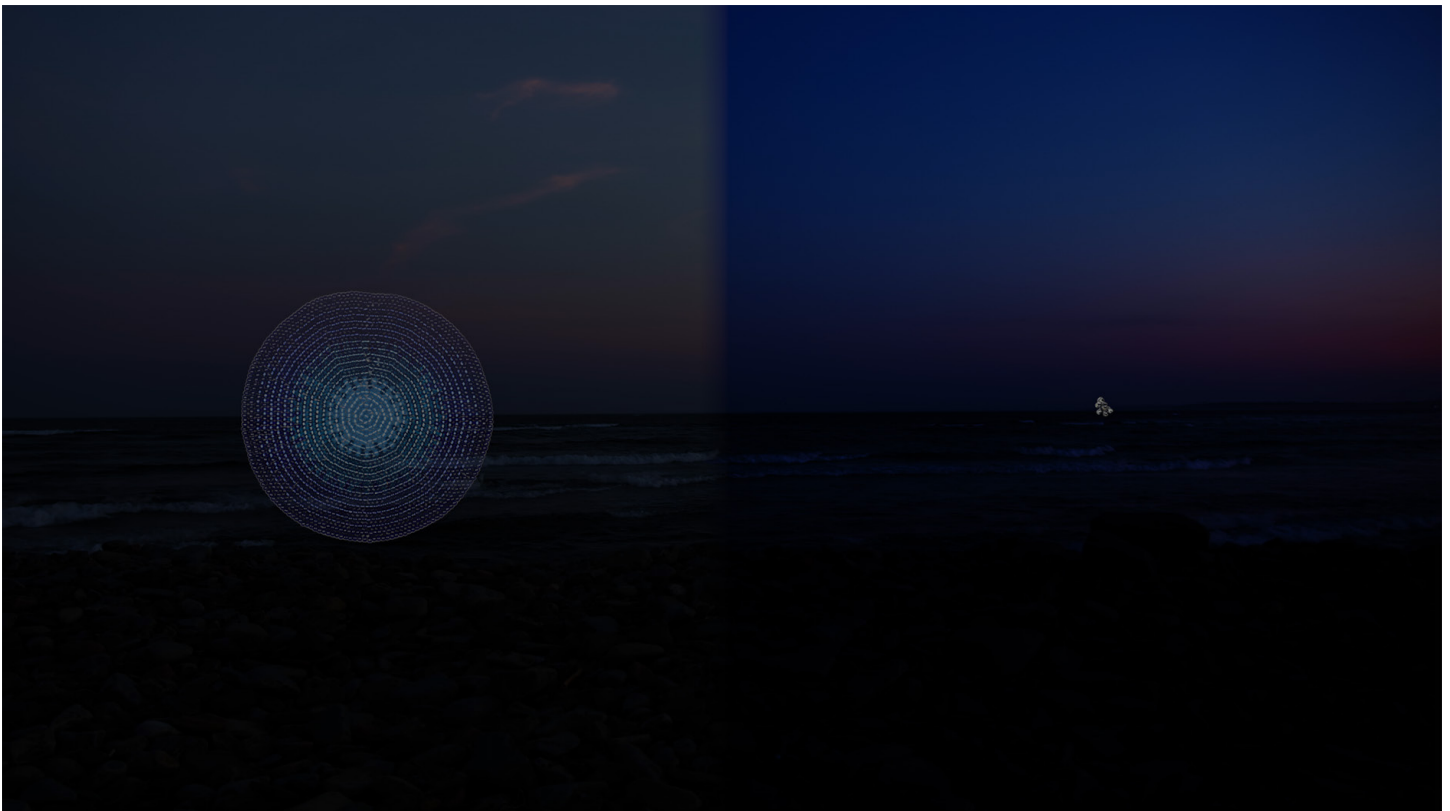
Whether we are in the gallery or looking at Carrie's works online, the composition of the video works and presentation of the beaded source works as finished serial framed artworks, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the rigour and work involved in beading. Artists' relationships to their materials are so often the way in which they connect with teachings about their practice, connect with their communities, and with their ancestral relations.

The minute gestures of Carrie's work – stringing one, two three seed beads onto the thread and tacking it to the support, then stopping to take a picture of those three seed beads on the support and picking up another couple of beads with the threaded needle, stitching them to the support, and stopping to take a photo – connect Carrie (and us in a way), to the people who have taught her how to bead, the women in her family, to the beads and thread used to learn to bead, those collected as part of settler colonialism in Canada and stored in museums, to the people who killed moose, and the moose who provided the hair, hide and sinew for sewing and adorning clothing and meat for food, and the people tanned the hides and traded those

hides for stroud and glass beads, which were carried across the ocean and to the lands of Indigenous people. The beads Carrie picks up with her needle is loaded with Indigenous knowledge, white settler colonialism, agency, dispossession, reclamation, and ancestry.

connections of gestures is decolonial action in which hundreds of years of knowledge are honoured through the documentation of minute gestures captured by Carrie in her home studio, during a pandemic, in between breastfeeding her son, research, and patiently waiting for me to get this essay finished.

Rachelle Dickenson

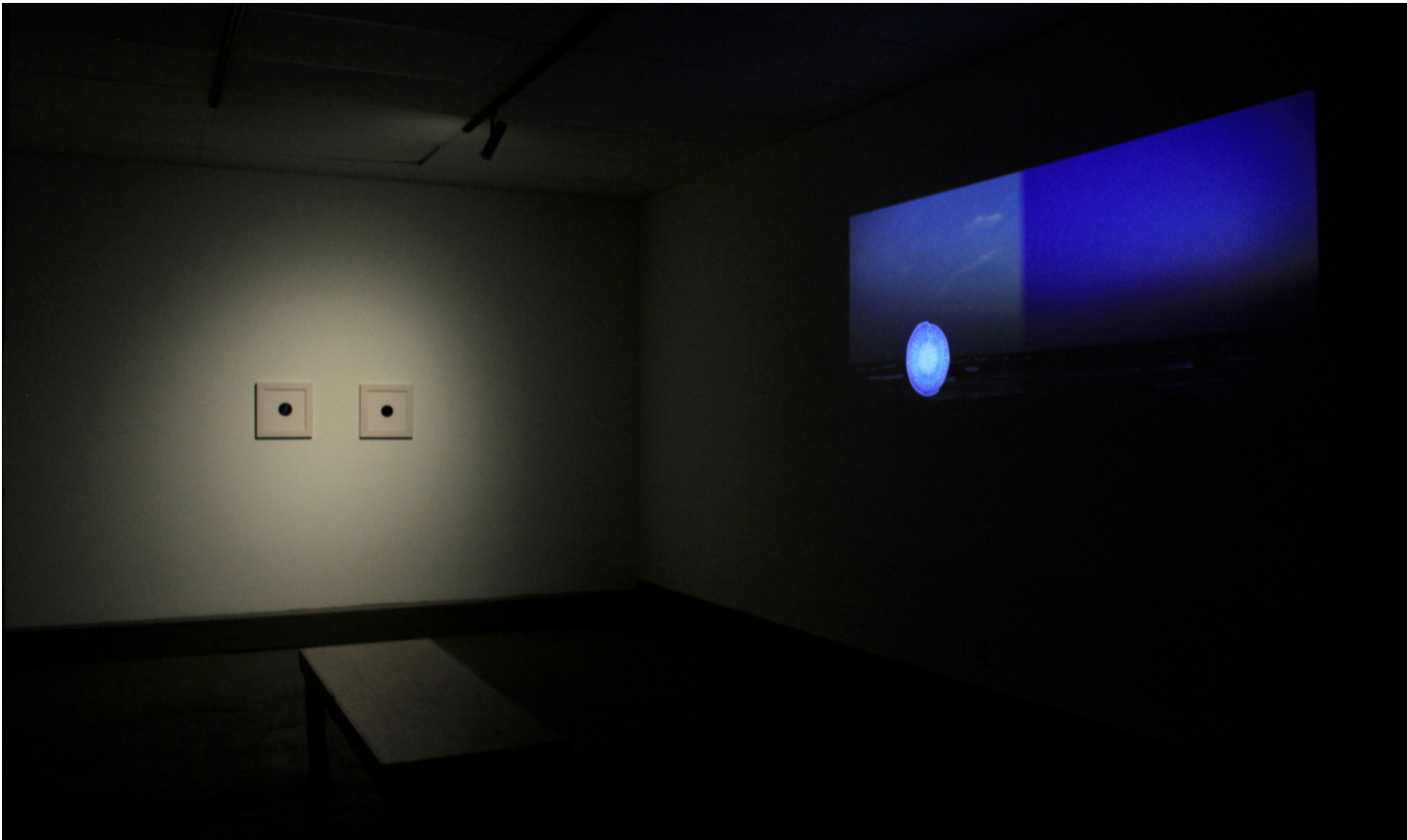


Installation Images

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