

## THE WRITING ON THE WALL: The Work of Joane Cardinal-Schubert Edited by Lindsey V. Sharman

ISBN 978-1-55238-950-8

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

**Cover Art:** The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE:** This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

# UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

# UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work:
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work:
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work:
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



**Acknowledgement:** We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <a href="http://www.re-press.org">http://www.re-press.org</a>



# REMEMBERING JOANE CARDINAL-SCHUBERT

# BY MONIQUE WESTRA

I was never an intimate friend of Joane's. It would be more accurate to characterize our association over a thirty-year period as respectful, collegial, and warm rather than close. I first met her in 1977 as a newcomer to the city of Calgary. Joane was a curator at the University of Calgary Art Gallery where I gave a series of lectures. Over time, we had many meaningful conversations and I came to appreciate her acuity of mind, her wit, and her chutzpah. During her lifetime, Joane was a formidable presence in the art community of Calgary. Everyone knew who she was and what she stood for. She was widely held in great esteem. Even people who were cowed by her intellect, acerbic wit, and assertive personality greatly respected her. It is no exaggeration to say that Joane Cardinal-Schubert was a larger-than-life cultural icon. So when news of her death at the age of sixty-seven spread, it seemed impossible that this irrepressible and indefatigable woman was gone. Gone but not silenced, for her powerful voice continues to resonate. Indeed, although she died less than ten years ago, her legacy is already undeniable. Joane Cardinal-Schubert is studied in university courses and art colleges across the country. Her life and work is the subject of an academic dissertation, scholarly books, and articles. Her art is in major collections across Canada and elsewhere.

Remarkably, when Joane was already fatally afflicted with cancer in 2009, she organized Narrative Quest, a huge and significant exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. After she died, it became clear that the exhibition represented more than a survey of contemporary art. It revealed Joane's tremendous impact, especially among First Nations artists. In a panel discussion, a number of artists spoke about the extraordinary extent of Joane's influence on their lives and art. For many younger artists, she was a true friend, confidante, and mentor who actively encouraged them to embrace their identities as Indigenous artists. Her influence extended far beyond art and the vagaries of style. Indeed, her role was seminal in affecting the outlook of a whole generation of artists: Joane Cardinal-Schubert nurtured consciousness, instilling a sense of identity, pride, and self-awareness.

Her prodigious body of work, produced over a period of more than forty years, encompasses many mediums in the visual arts including painting, sculpture, mixed media, video, and installation. In addition to being a great artist, Joane was also a prolific writer. Like Vincent van Gogh and Emily Carr, she wrote extensively about her own

art. She also wrote short stories, poetry, prose, commentaries, critical essays, and plays. She was a curator, lecturer, writer, and set designer. And throughout her life, she was passionately engaged with First Nations issues as a fervent activist and outspoken lobbyist. Known for her fierce intelligence, humour, and compassion, she could also be feisty and combative. Hers was a life lived to the fullest, with the intensity and passion of someone who knew who she was.

Although her productions were many and various, Joane Cardinal-Schubert may be best remembered for her visual art, striking for its depth of meaning, its beauty, and complexity, its idiosyncratic symbolism, narrative focus, its layers, vibrant colours, and intricate compositions. Joane's art was often incisive and provocative. Although she did not hesitate to express outrage and anger in words and images, these were not the primary emotions that propelled her life's work. She wanted to share her joy and celebrate the positives of Indigenous peoples through art. She was able to absorb and derive meaning from memories, stories, events, people, objects, and experiences, and use them as raw material for her art. In 1992 she described her inclusive process in the following way: "I pour in all those

experiences, the good with the bad, and within the composition, their energies are transformed into beauty and a new truth."<sup>2</sup>

I have always been struck by the intensity, beauty, and complexity of Joane's art. In spite of its variety, it is a cohesive body of work. With its myriad connections and overlaps, the conceptual framework of her art is circular: "I exist at the centre of a big circle. My 'stories' are circular, the end and the beginning linked, referenced ... and I can cross over the circle and spin off into little circles rediscovering aspects I have missed or that remained undeveloped in previous works. Sometimes I cross that circle as a challenge to rediscover, to find out what I missed at first glance."3 I believe that this is contemporary art at its finest: profoundly meaningful, nuanced, intensely personal yet universally relevant, aesthetically beautiful, and enriched through a unique lexicon of iconographical symbols and metaphors.

One such example is *Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt* (fig. 23), a 1991 mixed media work on paper. With high value contrasts and dynamic compositional structure, it is visually intriguing. Like most of Joane's work, this is not an easy read. It contains numerous elements, integrated into

the composition, each of which needs to be examined to derive meaning. Collaged in the upper left quadrant is a black and white photograph. It shows a young woman with a broad grin, looking out at the spectator with perky confidence. She seems lively and gutsy, an impression enhanced by the asymmetry of her thick black hair gathered into a ponytail that falls over one shoulder.

This photograph was first seen as a multiple, mounted on a huge blackboard that was a part of a large installation entitled Preservation of a Species: DECON-STRUCTIVISTS. It was created for Indigena, a groundbreaking exhibition of First Nations contemporary art organized by the Museum of Civilization that toured around the country in 1991-92. The installation required viewers to look uncomfortably through awkwardly placed red and clear glass windows in a wall to see works within an enclosed space, alluding to the artist's interest in peering into walled-in construction sites. Enclosed by several blackboards, each inscribed with handwritten messages in chalk, the installation also invoked the experience of a traditional schoolroom. One blackboard featured photographs of the artist, in different sizes, arrayed in an orderly manner on the surface. The pictures



23. Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt, 1991 93.5 x 121 cm 36.75" x 47.5"

Mixed media on paper

Collection of Glenbow; purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisitions Assistance Program/oeuvre achetée avec l'aide du programme d'aide aux acquisitions du Conseil des Arts du Canada and with funds from Glenbow Collections Endowment Fund, 2000

are the kind of fun photographs that we used to have taken in a photo booth at Woolworths. Other photographs show the artist's parents and herself as a little girl with her mother. These familial images seem benign and ordinary, reinforcing the idea of the artist as someone just like me and you. But what sets her apart is her designation as a non-status Indian. The brief text, angrily scrawled in chalk, is a searing indictment of the racism implicit in Canada's Indian Act, with its outrageous rules to determine by degree the authenticity of one's Indianness, as it were. The message is powerful and intended to make the viewer both physically and psychologically uneasy.

The setting of the schoolroom is significant because it vividly recalls the devastating residential school experience of Indigenous people in Canada, a wrenching issue Joane addressed in a compact but emotionally charged installation created one year earlier, in 1989, on site in Montreal at the Articule Gallery. It was called simply *The Lesson* (fig. 24). *The Lesson* depicts a claustrophobic classroom, with chairs tied together with ropes, their seats topped by apples pierced with screw hooks, and chalkboards covered with strident texts written by hand about many of the past and present injustices that

was reconstructed in nearly twenty venues across Canada and the United States. In one venue at the Toronto International Powwow in 1999, installed ten years after it was first created, more than 2,500 people viewed the exhibition. One of the chalkboards, the "Memory Wall," invited Indigenous people to write their names and thoughts on the board. Many of the visitors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, left in tears. *The Lesson* was recreated by the artist for the last time at Masters Gallery Ltd in June, 2009, a few months before the artist's death.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the blackboard and school-room setting appears in another work of the early 1990s entitled, ironically, *Where the Truth is Written – Usually* (fig. 25). It shows an American flag with maple leaves instead of stars as an unframed painting on raw canvas attached to a flag pole of lodge-pole pine, flanked on one side by a column of handwritten inscriptions in chalk; there is no discursive text here – just label copy, as in a museum display.

The artist returned to this image years later, reworking it in a 2008 painting called *Flag II*. The image of the stars and stripes is part of the modernist canon, and was made



24. *The Lesson*, first installed 1989
Installation, dimensions variable
chairs, whistles, books, apples, rope, mirror, chalk
Installation view, Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools
(September 6-December 1, 2013)
From the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, UBC.

famous by Jasper Johns, who stripped the American flag of meaning and reduced it to formal elements - design, colour juxtaposition, balance, and composition. But Joane's Flag II subverts the simple elegance of the modernist emblem and turns it into a biting and ironic commentary. By substituting Canadian maple leafs for American stars, Joane is subtly drawing attention to the increasing encroachment of America into Canada which she describes as "the innocuous erosion of our power base as individuals and possibly of our sovereignty." The integrity, rigidity, and regularity of the horizontal strips are broken by uneven edges and the integration into the design of two large triangles, representing both mountains and teepees. The red and white stripes are further disrupted with the silhouettes of wolves.

I am interweaving its stripes with historic realities, piercing it with aspects of history, adding truth, i.e. the introduction of Canadian wolf populations to American parks subsequently shot by ranchers when wolves left the park boundary is not unlike the historic fate of many

American Indians who followed the Buffalo, or strayed from designated land ... In honour of those wolf spirits I am returning the stars to their place dispersed sporadically in the sky as the milky way or as the Blackfoot refer to it "the wolf way." But the placement of the hands and the maple leaves contain a warning.<sup>5</sup>

Further reference to the decimation of Indigenous populations is also contained in the aforementioned *Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt*. The red dots along the right sleeve are symbols for smallpox and act as a reminder of the fate of many Native populations as a result of European contact.

When she created this work, various events taking place in the artist's life were profoundly upsetting. Her studio had been robbed, leaving her feeling violated, angry, and vulnerable. During this time she was writing a play with a group of Native women where heated discussions arose about racism, representation, and social injustice. Both the bingo card and the "Silver Screen" movie ticket in *Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt* reference First Nations



25. Detail of Where the Truth is Written - Usually, 1991 76.2 x 152.4 cm 30" x 60" Oil on canvas flag with lodgepole pine flag pole From the Estate of Joane Cardinal-Schubert

stereotypes, and are remnants of research for a character in the play she was writing.

Most prominently sited within the painting is a collaged letter, its circumference bordered by stencilled maple leaves. This work is part of her *Letters to Emily* series, which Joane described as "diarized recordings of the day" in both text and images. Instead of "Dear Diary," she addresses Canadian artist Emily Carr in a series of letters – as if Carr were still alive to receive them. I became familiar with this piece as art curator at the Glenbow Museum during preparations for our 2007-08 Emily Carr exhibition. Joane and I exchanged emails about Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt, which was already in the museum collection. As this collage was part of her Letters to Emily series, it seemed an appropriate addition to the exhibition. In this letter to Emily, Joane wittily comments on the predominance of men in Canadian art history; she makes mocking references to academia and art historians who presume to know, and reminds Emily of the small-mindedness and intolerance of neighbours who mocked and ignored her in Victoria.

### Dear Emily,

I was really knocked out the other day when I was in Ottawa perusing the Group of Seven even though I studied them in school and know their names - you have to know them to pass the course -Ijust had never realized that they were all men. Poor Emily. I guess you didn't even think about that there might be a bias. I think that you were just too busy working and doing what you wanted to realize that that was one thing not in your favour. Of course I really don't know what you were thinking but some people do. They have spent years of their lives reconstructing your life and painting. Too bad they just didn't ask people while they are still alive but I guess they would lose control.

Regards,

#### Ioane Cardinal-Schubert

PS I want to apologize for all those people who used to cross the street when they saw you coming. I think you should know they all talk about what a great friend you were to them.

Joane Cardinal-Schubert relates to Emily Carr as a strong-willed, unconventional woman but also as someone who, like herself, loved nature, and was hyper-attuned, if you will, to the sensory stimulation and beauty of the land of her birth. The letters to Emily continued throughout Joane's career. *Emily in Raven Hat Mode* (2007) is another whimsical painting of Emily Carr. In her explanation of this painting, Joane wrote:

Long fascinated with the life of Emily Carr, I have been writing her letters for several years. Some of these are text based, some paintings, some installations. The approach is that Emily, an "unconventional artist," housekeeper, gardener, traveller is just far away and that the past, present, and future meld into one ... Here she is envisioned, just back from France and England, throwing off her learned Western European art regimes, she looks at trees coloured by a coastal view - while wearing one of her hats.

The text of the letter to Emily included in the painting reads:

The question remains with me, Emily. Would you ever have understood how to paint the cathedrals of the forest, as they pierced the Sky, without the interventive use of the visual text of the poles? Or were you as some have referenced — just engaged in stealing horses?

Regards, jcs6

The notion of stealing horses is a pun. It refers both to a historical Native practice, and also to the contemporary idea of cultural appropriation, a contentious concept within postmodern ideology. Emily Carr was criticized because of her extensive use of First Nations images, especially totem poles. There is also a certain irony here because Joane's schematic representation of horses is itself derived from an earlier source, namely the petroglyphs in Writingon-Stone Provincial Park. Joane made an extensive study of this imagery, among the earliest known drawings by Native peoples in North America. She made copies on site and looked at archival photographs to find

scenes, eroded by time and no longer legible on the rock face. She was fascinated by the stories and images of her ancient forebears and adopted many of the simplified conventions into her own art.

Joane's stylized representation of horses in motion is a primary example. They are always shown in profile with heads thrust forward and tailless hind quarters rounded. Many of the shorthand, simplified graphic images, derived from Writing-on-Stone, were incorporated into her own expansive iconography and symbolic lexicon. The horse image recurs in hundreds of her works because of the importance of horses to First Nations peoples. She has written about how she was affected by horses: "Their physical beauty and form, unsaddled, unbridled within the landscape, close up and within the stories of horses told by my parents both horse people."

Joane's schematic representation of horses gains power through repetition, variations in scale and colour, groupings, and strategic placement within the composition. Although she understood the potency of multiples in her works, she also created many works focused on a single object surrounded or surmounted by symbolic elements hovering or floating in its sphere.

In one stunning 1996 series, the central object is a magnified detail of a huge vessel. Joane refers to it as a Gourd, a direct reference to a Native prophecy, known as the Gourd of Ashes, that foretold a nuclear explosion. "They said the gourd of ashes would fall from the air. It will make people like blades of grass in the prairie fire and things will not grow for many seasons." In this sequence of highly charged images, we see amphorae decorated with horses, bears, and deer in profile processions, and sketchy drawings of warriors derived from pictographs, set within a fiery realm as nuclear towers rise ominously in the background.

Another series that takes as its focus a single object, rich in meaning and associations, is based on the warshirt, as in the early *Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt*. In creating a self portrait, Joane continues a long art historical tradition. She does not paint herself by looking in a mirror but instead presents herself both directly through the collaged photograph and also indirectly through metaphor. The title of the work – and titles are very important in Joane's work – is declaratory. In this work, she identifies herself as a creator, and specifically as a woman artist like Emily Carr. She also represents herself as a garment

specific to culture and gender. Traditional Plains First Nations warshirts were awarded to men who demonstrated acts of bravery and reflected personal achievement. Here, it is appropriated by a woman as an emblem of pride.

In Self Portrait as an Indian Warshirt, the red shirt is shown as interwoven, like a tipi hide, onto black lodgepole pine. The converging black poles create a dynamic compositional structure, enlivened by asymmetry and high contrast. The visual clues laid out across its surface reveal aspects of the artist's identity, related to her life and also to Native cultural traditions and history. Below her photo is an image of a landscape protected by an arch, the sacred sweat lodge shape. The imagery grew out of the artist's dismay about the thousands of Native artifacts and sacred objects having been removed from the lives of the people they represent, and languishing in museum collections around the world. By creating her own warshirt, she reconnected to her ancestral history. In this painting the garment is red, the colour of life. In other works, it is pale umber and textured to resemble tanned hide from which they were made. In many paintings in the warshirt series, the shirt is monumentalized, splayed across the pictorial surface. It is presented frontally and flattened out to form a bold symmetrical pattern superimposed with objects that extend its meaning, including symbols that are both universal and personal. "Many years ago, I decided that we all wore warshirts – indicators in our dress of our personal powers that almost serve as fair warnings. Historically, aboriginal people have been viewed with an 'anthro/ethno gaze' as dead people and I wanted to change that."

Among the more visually complex works in the Warshirt series is the spectacular My Mother's Vision, The Warshirt Series in the Garden II. In a highly charged field of vivid red on a black ground, under the protective dome of the sweat lodge, is a dazzling array of overlapping, intertwined images including warshirts, intersecting lodgepoles, silhouettes of bears, and twenty hands. The powerful thrust is centrifugal, pushing outward in all directions, directed by the splayed fingers of the hands. The imprint of the open hand is one of the oldest symbols of humanity, first seen in the spray-painted negative images in prehistoric caves. As the title says, this painting was inspired by Joane's mother. Joane was profoundly influenced by both her parents.



26. Modern Dancer - Grandmother's Thimble Dress Dream, 2006 119.38 x 81.28 cm 47" x 32" Oil and acrylic on canvas Private Collection

27. When We Saw Our Grandmother's Dress, 2007 121.9 x 80 cm 48" x 31.5" Acrylic on paper Fulton Family Collection

This Kainai dress, now in the collection of the Royal Alberta Museum, was obtained by James Carnegie, the Ninth Earl of Southesk while on a trip through western Canada from 1859-1860. Although the primary goal of the trip was to hunt big game, Carnegie also collected objects from the communities he encountered during his travels. The "Southesk Collection" had been kept in the family's castle in Scotland for nearly 150 years before being offered for sale in May 2006 at Sotheby's auction house in New York. With letters of support from Métis and First Nations leaders in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and with financial help from the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Ministry of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, the Royal Alberta Museum was able to purchase this dress, along with several other Blackfoot, Plains Cree, Métis, Nakoda and Anishinaabe items. This dress accounted for nearly half of the \$1.1M raised by the museum.



She spoke often in our conversations of how inspirational they were for her: "My parents taught us to look at each day as a new beginning. That tomorrow is a new day – I hold this belief close – it has served me well. No recriminations, just belief that things change, things get better and I have a part to play in that – I take the responsibility seriously." In particular, she acknowledges a great debt of gratitude to her father: "I was pointed at an early age toward the direction of creating things. It was my father who literally placed me in art school. I am looking and I am seeing with the eyes he taught me to use."

Joane's grandparents also played a seminal role in her life and helped her to understand and love her heritage. "There is nothing more powerful than to know who you are ... the people you come from." Modern Dancer – Grandmother's Thimble Dress Dream, 2006 (fig. 26) is less a portrait of than a tribute to her grandmother, and takes as its point of departure a simple thimble that belonged to her grandmother. The thimble is a reminder of sewing and handicraft associated with women. The painting depicts a close-up of a young female dancer dressed in a jingle dress in a powwow. Although she is a dancer, we do

not see her legs, yet her swaying movement is subtle and graceful. The figure is cropped at the top and bottom, brought very close to the picture plane and monumentalized. The focus of our attention is on the dress and its encoded symbols. In her unpublished writing, Joane provided a detailed explanation of each decorative element in the painting:

The cowrie shells on the upper bodice are symbolic of change and travel, holding the ocean, they reached the prairie through trade, dance and commerce. The thimble notations on the skirt were influenced by my Grandmother's thimble, found in the drawer of her treadle machine, many years ago. Like myself she was a sewer, constructing her own dresses of her design. The dress hem and sleeves are trimmed with a traditional porcupine quillwork. The small bead dots on the dress sleeves are a memory of my grandmother's dress. The dancer carefully holds an eagle feather - it is a wing tip feather - part of the hand of the



28. Phoenix Rising, c. 1999 50.8 x 40.6 cm 16" x 20" Oil on canvas Collection of Glenbow; gift of Tamar Zenith, 2008 eagle ... that allows the eagle to soar ... This is an actual feather that was given to me as a gift ... The dancer lightly, carefully holds it.

The eagle is featured in many of Joane's works, symbolic of power, strength, and freedom, as in the brightly coloured 1999 painting Phoenix Rising (fig. 28) in the collection of the Glenbow Museum. Eagles are represented as black silhouettes in the lower blue section. As birds can move between the earth and the sky, they are transformative. The main symbolism in this painting is a sweat lodge - which is a traditional place of healing and purification. The wavy lines and the red on the outside could be interpreted as heat and power emanating from within. The figure in the centre of the composition is in the same place as the fire would be in the sweat lodge. It is also very birdlike - the arms are outstretched like wings and the parallel lines at the base are like tail feathers, another reference to transformation. The other, elongated red figure is the "phoenix rising," traditionally associated with rebirth and the emergence of life from death. Both figures are painted in the simplified style of the petroglyphs at

Writing-on-Stone. They each have a strong central vertical line, which is like a soul or spirit line. Overall, the painting projects a powerful message about healing and transcendence.

The Glenbow Collection includes another beautiful and haunting work called Dawn Quilt (fig. 29). In this 1999 painting, the eagle becomes a part of the repetitive checkerboard pattern on a quilt. In this way, the artist brings together inside and outside, power and fragility by portraying the eagle within the comforting, protective embrace of the blanket. The eagle is also associated with Joane's mother, because of a vision she had seen during a sweat. Through its flight into a higher realm the eagle symbolizes transcendence. The flat, repetitive pattern of the counterpane quilt is set against an expansive, luminous sky a magical indigo realm gradually ascended by sketchy, ghostlike creatures. The buffalo is associated with the First Nations of the plains, and is frequently represented by the artist. We recognize the familiar recurrent profiles of the horses, which now seem to be less galloping than floating. The sketchy, concentric arches at the top of the picture are a reference to the domed sweat lodge. Commenting on this painting in the



29. Dawn Quilt, 1999 124.5 x 125 cm 49" x 49.5"

Acrylic, oil pastel, gold foil on canvas

Collection of Glenbow; purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisitions Assistance Program/oeuvre achetée avec l'aide du programme d'aide aux acquisitions du Conseil des Arts du Canada, and from the Glenbow Collections Endowment Fund, 2000

exhibition catalogue of *Honouring Tradition* at the Glenbow Museum in 2008, the artist wrote:

The Counterpane series relates in part to my time as a sick child. Confined to bed for many days of each year until I was 10 or so, I learned to entertain myself by imagining that my bedcovers were roads and hills and lakes and rivers ... Here the Counterpane, with its checkerboard format, serves primarily to symbolically honour the beading and the quilting practice of the Kainai. We, as the horse messengers, journey into the future, protected by our ancestors who remain with us always.

It is significant that both of these paintings, with their messages of transcendence and healing, were created shortly after Joane was diagnosed with breast cancer. The paintings remind me of a conversation I had with Joane in 1999. I remember an unusually warm evening in early spring.

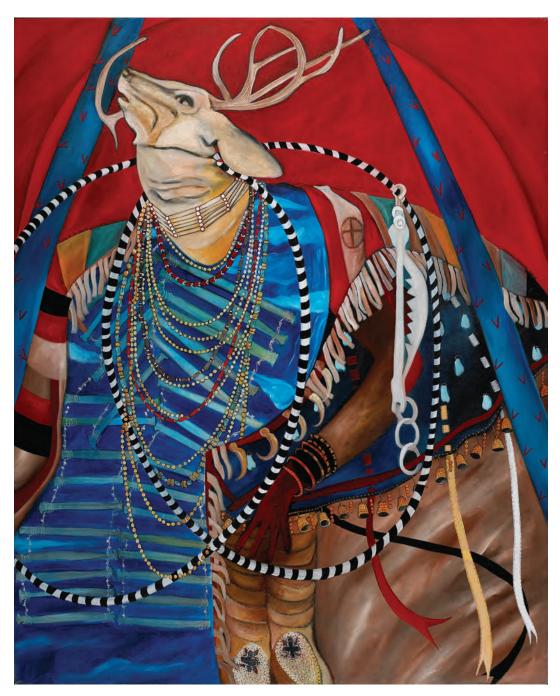
There was a raucous opening party at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at ACAD and I slipped out for some quiet and air. Leaning against the parapet of the landing outside the doors, was Joane Cardinal-Schubert, smoking a cigarette. I had known her for a long time and was happy to see her. The casual greetings we exchanged and our light banter took a serious turn when Joane told me that she had breast cancer. She stated it as a matter of fact, without drama, and did not seem overly disturbed. She was surprised when I told her that I too had breast cancer, diagnosed one year earlier. I talked about the treatment I had received. Joane was adamant that she would refuse all medical interventions. She said this with a certain equanimity. Unlike me, her trust and faith was not with the medical establishment. It seemed to lie elsewhere. Although I admired her courage and her conviction, I remember thinking at the time that her attitude was incomprehensible. But now I understand more. Seeing the art she was creating then, with its potent images of healing and transcendence, I think that art was her therapy, her heritage, her salvation.

#### NOTES

- 1 This text was adapted from a lecture given at MOCA, Calgary in 2012 and at Masters Gallery Ltd in 2015. It is based primarily on unpublished writings by Joane Cardinal-Schubert generously loaned to me by Masters Gallery Ltd, my own response to her work, and personal recollections. Most of the texts cited throughout this essay are taken from Joane's extensive unpublished writings in which she articulated eloquent exegeses of her own work.
- 2 Jennifer Macleod, "Joane Cardinal-Schubert, at the Centre of her Circle," *Galleries West*, December 31, 2002.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *The Lesson* has been recreated several times since Joane Cardinal-Schubert's death under the supervision of Justin Cardinal-Schubert, the artist's son.
- 5 Unpublished writings of the artist from the archives of Masters Gallery Ltd, Calgary.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.



30. Dream Bed Lover - Tipi Flap, 1999
220.9 x 161.3 cm
87" x 63.5"
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of Glenbow; purchased with funds from the Suncor Energy
Foundation, 2008



31. Song Of My Dreambed Dance, 1995 152 x 122 cm 60" x 48" Acrylic on canvas Collection of the National Gallery of Canada: 41762; gift of the Alberta Foundation of the Arts, Edmonton



32. Warshirt for Clayoquot Sound, 1994  $125 \times 97 \text{ cm}$   $49" \times 38"$ 

Acrylic and mixed media collage on paper

Collection of the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program/oeuvre achetée avec l'aide du programme d'aide aux acquisitions du Conseil des arts du Canada, 1997



33. I Hear the Call of the Loon from My Dream Bed, 1995 121.92 x 81.28 cm 48" x 32" Mixed media Collection of Ranchmen's Club, Calgary