



30 Kent Monkman

oc 1965 –

Si je t'aime prends garde à toi

acrylic on canvas, initialed *MCET* and dated *MMVII*, 2007
36 × 24 in, 91.4 × 61 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the Artist by the present
Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

David Liss and Shirley Madill, *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief*, Art Gallery of Hamilton and Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, 2008, reproduced page 92 and listed page 48

Kent Monkman, “Tonto Takes Charge—Miss Chief Eagle Testickle: A Portrait,” *The Walrus*, May 12, 2008, reproduced <https://thewalrus.ca/2008-05-detail/>
Sara Angel, “The Look of Love, the Art of Affection,” Art Canada Institute, February 2021, the related canvas *Icon for a New Empire* reproduced, https://www.aci-iac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Art-Canada-Institute-Newsletter_The-Look-of-Love-The-Art-of-Affection.pdf
Penny Stamps and Kent Monkman, “Kent Monkman: Causes of Modernity,” PBS, January 14, 2022, reproduced title card and discussed 20:40–21:05, <https://www.pbs.org/video/kent-monkman-casualties-of-modernity-from-the-vault-zrzmr4/>

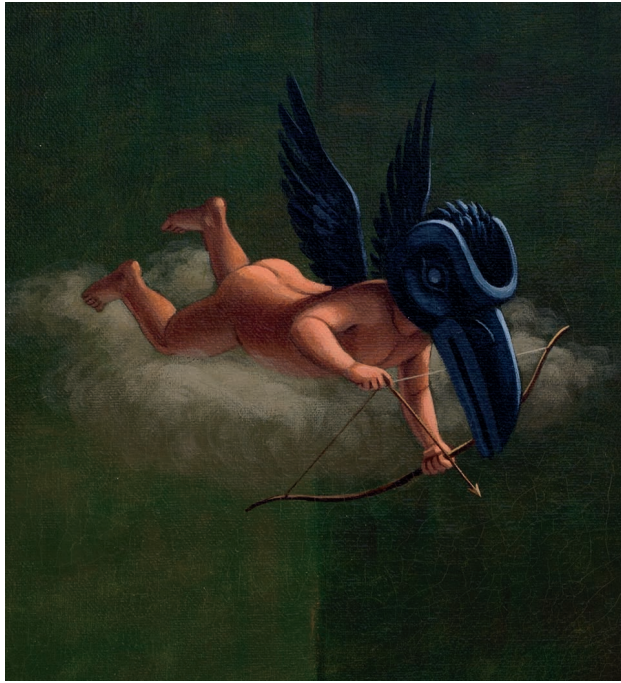
EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Hamilton, *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief*, June 7 – August 26, 2007, traveling in 2007–2010 to the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto; Saint Mary’s University Art Gallery, Halifax; Glenbow Museum, Calgary; and Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

KNOWN FOR HIS provocative interventions into Western European and American art history, Cree artist Kent Monkman grew up in Winnipeg, passionate about art and profoundly aware of how colonialism had affected Indigenous communities. Drawing on early studies and experiences in illustration and theatre, his portfolio includes painting, photography, installation, film and performance. Through his gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, a shape-shifting, supernatural being, he creates opportunities to confront colonial injustice, challenge received notions of history, advocate for social change, and honour the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples.

Monkman began his art career as a painter. He accumulated sound knowledge of art history through personal research and visits to art museums in Canada and the United States. Of particular interest to him was the work of American painters such as George Catlin and Albert Bierstadt, photographer Edward S. Curtis, and Canadian painters Cornelius Krieghoff, Paul Kane and the Group of Seven. The aesthetic of “New World” landscape painting or “the so-called *west* of the nineteenth century”¹ interested him, and he began recreating the picturesque and sublime landscapes of what he considered as North American colonialism by playfully inserting dramatic scenes of sex and violence between European and Indigenous peoples. From there, he expanded his oeuvre, producing a body of work that subverts the established canon of European art history through quoting historical paintings and sculptures that share stories of European domination and the obliteration of North American Indigenous cultures.

Although he first visited Europe when he was in his early 20s, it was later, from 2000 onward, that Monkman made a point of traveling annually to visit art museums. These visits allowed him to connect with the work of European artists whose work ranged from history painting to modernism. At a time when he was



TOP AND BOTTOM: details

standing on the cusp of global acclamation, these trips opened the door to new challenges and barriers to assail. What he discovered, in his words, was that “Europeans have no concept of Indigenous people.... They don’t know what colonization really means.”²

Monkman’s experiences in Europe led him to challenge the accuracy of European historical works by co-opting the methodology of history painting, thereby aiming to deconstruct the authority of nineteenth-century perceptions and representations of Indigenous peoples. The work *Si je t’aime prends garde à toi* (2007) is an excellent example of his approach.³ Monkman’s painting echoes a work by the French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme titled *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1890), which visually tells the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor, who after creating the statue of Galatea, falls in love with it.⁴

In Monkman’s rendition, a white male sculptor engages in a kiss with a sculpture of an Indigenous person who comes alive. Monkman’s painting has definite homoerotic overtones, yet there is more to the message upon deciphering the painting’s elements. In the background is a rendition of another similar statue of an Indigenous person slumped over on his horse, spear pointed downwards as if in defeat. This image is a direct quotation from a bronze statue by the American sculptor James Earle Fraser titled *The End of the Trail* (1894), which referenced the myth of the demise of Indigenous peoples at the hands of the colonial government of the United States. It was Fraser’s way of attempting to bring Indigenous peoples back to life. Contrary to this myth and belief of a “disappearing race,” Indigenous peoples continue to exist. Monkman has made reference to such warriors on horseback in other paintings, such as *Not the End of the Trail* (2004), part of the *Trilogy of Saint Thomas* series.

Monkman also places a cupid in the background, only his cupid transforms into the Trickster Raven, who prepares to shoot an arrow towards the couple. The Raven appears again represented as the mask on the lower ledge. Also in the background are various accoutrements including a buckskin shirt, a shield, and bows and arrows. Monkman’s Pygmalion is clothed wearing moccasins, buckskin leggings, a beaded belt and a bright blue shirt. The Indigenous person is naked. In Monkman’s painting, pygmalionism is less about being in love and more about power relations. It emphasizes the desire for the other, a fantasy from thousands of years ago, yet still in existence. For the sculptor in the painting, the construction of the Indigenous person is his fantasy, signifying the desire for the cultural other (i.e., colonial desire).⁵ This is a fantasy—something that he cannot possess in real life. The painting “boldly subverts the dominant heteronormative and colonial narratives represented in...the historical works.”⁶

As this work reflects, Monkman is situated within art historical criticism as rewriting the Western art historical canon—but it is crucial to note that he does so with a Swampy Cree holistic world view. Believing that art can be a powerful force for social change, and inspired by Indigenous resistance and resilience, past and present, Monkman focuses on how to transform darkness to create a transcendent experience.



We thank Shirley Madill, executive director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, for contributing the above essay. She co-curated *Kent Monkman: Triumph of Mischief*, a 2007 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and also curated *Kent Monkman: The Four Continents* at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery.

1. Gerald McMaster, “The Geography of Hope,” in *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief* (Hamilton, ON: Art Gallery of Hamilton), exhibition catalogue, 95.

2. Melissa Martin, “Once Inspired, Now Inspiring,” Canadian Press, October 6, 2017.

3. Translated from the French, the title would read, “If I love you, take care of or watch yourself.”

4. Psychologists term this “pygmalionism,” an attraction to statues or some representation of the human form.

5. See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), where he calls attention to colonial desire as a “desiring machine with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion,” 98.

6. Sara Angel, “The Look of Love, the Art of Affection,” Art Canada Institute, e-news, February 2021.

ESTIMATE: \$80,000 - 100,000