

BARRY ACE

Occlude

13 ¾ x 10 ¾ in, 34.9 x 27 cm

Barry Ace

1958 –

COVID-19 Suite

photo transfer, electronic components, glass beads on paper

PROVENANCE

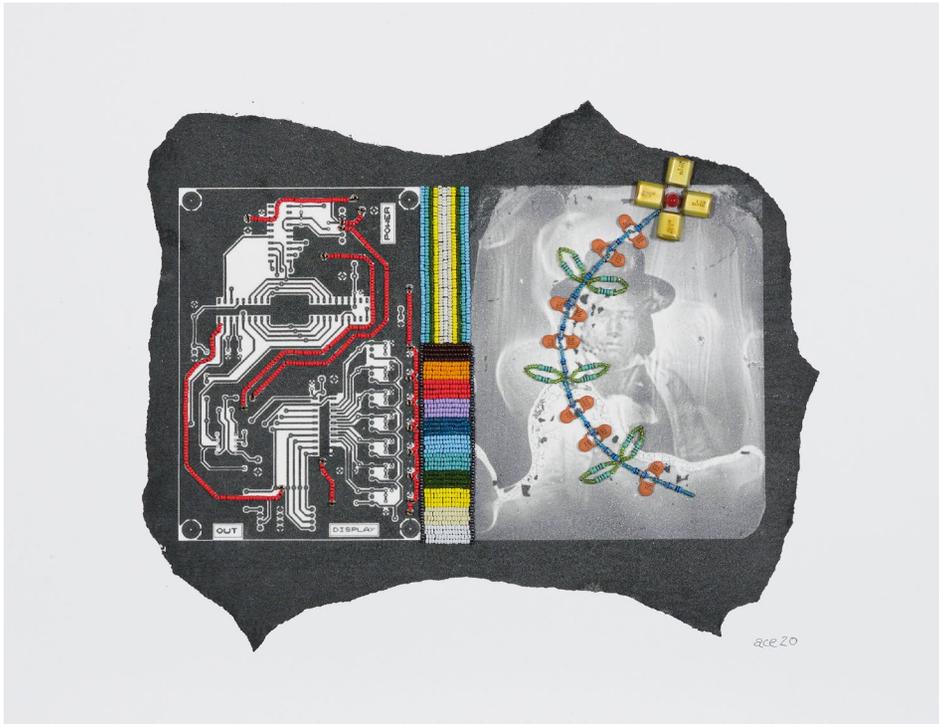
Collection of the Artist

AN IMAGE OF a shadow—the dark outline of the artist Barry Ace—begins this series. An iPhone framed between his hands indicates the action of snapping a selfie. To the left of the silhouette, his face is in the foreground. The emotion in the eyes peering over Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) is hard to read; is it a smile or a person locked in terror? The mask obstructs the usual physical cues that communicate someone's sentiment. The dizzying radial motion of lines diffusing from both inside and outside of the frame add to the perplexity of what is happening. Where does one element end and another begin?

The ambiguity of the title *Occlude*, also adds to the confusion. Meaning to “close up or block off,” it asks the question—what is being stopped? Is the threat coming from the inside or out? Red beaded lines hit the edge of the image haphazardly but do not enter—are they a boundary of safety or the inability of a lifeline to get through? The flowers provide a clue. The assemblage of electronic resistors, capacitors and light-emitting diodes is a motif often used by Ace, that references the beaded medicine flowers seen in the material culture of the Anishinaabeg. The word for bead, *manidominens*, translates as a little “spirit berry,” which carries within it the capacity to transmit power and healing. A petal on each side is sewn onto the self-portrait, a summoning for good medicine.

In the photomontage, a digitally sourced image file of a regulatory PPE mask covers the lower half of the artist's face, concealing his emotional state in the original image taken at an art exhibition in 2015 when the world was full of possibilities and freedom of movement. By the spring of 2020, it was impossible to understand the full impact of Covid, including the societal as well as financial costs due to our ongoing restrictions of movement. As with many artists, Ace's career was halted abruptly. In lockdown, he began a rigorous daily routine of art production, a way out of confinement, if only in his imagination.

The result, Ace's *Covid-19 Series*, is an intimate look into the life of a contemporary artist during a global pandemic. For Ace, the pandemic also evoked the nebulous



BARRY ACE
Resuscitate
10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm



BARRY ACE
Pathogen
10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm



BARRY ACE
Protection

13 ¾ x 10 ⅝ in, 34.9 x 27 cm

terror at the start of the spread of AIDS in the 1980s. He witnessed many in his community die, and watched how homophobia was the occlusion that blocked necessary medical help as well as human compassion to a vulnerable population rapidly being wiped out. Covid is also a reminder of the statistics on deaths due to smallpox that plagued the Americas post-contact, the spread of the disease hastened by the virus of racism.

In 1918, as World War I ended and troops returned home, the Spanish Flu spread to North America including the region around Manitoulin Island where Ace was born. In the work *Influenza* the photomontage includes an archival image of Ace's great-aunt Melvina holding his father Cecil as an infant. His father was born right after the pandemic, and his great-aunt was a survivor. The photograph is juxtaposed with a headline from a newspaper at the time: "Those who are most susceptible to it." Tiny red seed beads scatter beyond the boundary "coming out like a swarm" on the other side, the medicine flower. Throughout the series, flowers continue to appear, evoking the charge of healing energy.

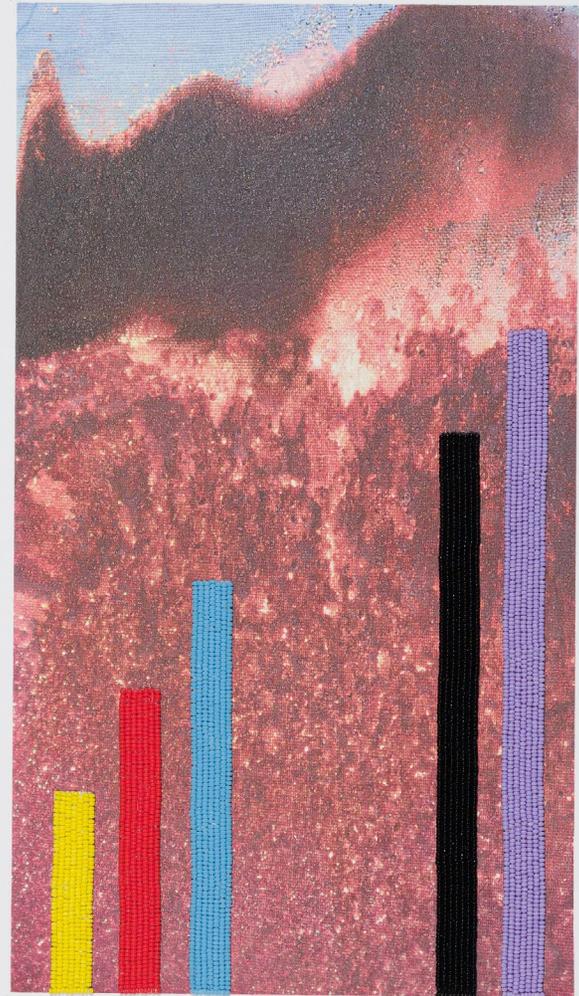
Also throughout, Ace has integrated other archival images of Indigenous people. In *Pathogen*, the work that ignited the series, an unidentified Indigenous man squares his body in the direction of the camera. A chemical mishap during the exposure of the glass plate has produced a halo effect that encircles him. The image is constrained between beaded soundwaves, alluding to how one's voice carries both the information about the disease, as well as the disease itself in aerosol particles. In the 1800s, European and North American ethnographers and photographers were rushing to record what was termed "The Vanishing Race," his portrait a possible result of the urgency to document Indigenous populations before they died out.

In *Protection*, the portrait is of a known historical figure, Maungwudaus, (Great Hero) an educator, translator, performer and an advocate for the rights of his people. Anishinaabe, he was born circa 1807 near Mississauga, Ontario but throughout his life he travelled far, touring the United Kingdom, Belgium and France with a dance troupe. While on tour in 1845, he was invited to private receptions with royalty and intelligentsia where he championed Indigenous rights. As he had received a smallpox immunization, he survived the European tour, but many in his troupe did not, including his wife and several children.



ace20

BARRY ACE
Quarantine
 13 3/4 x 10 5/8 in, 34.9 x 27 cm



ace20

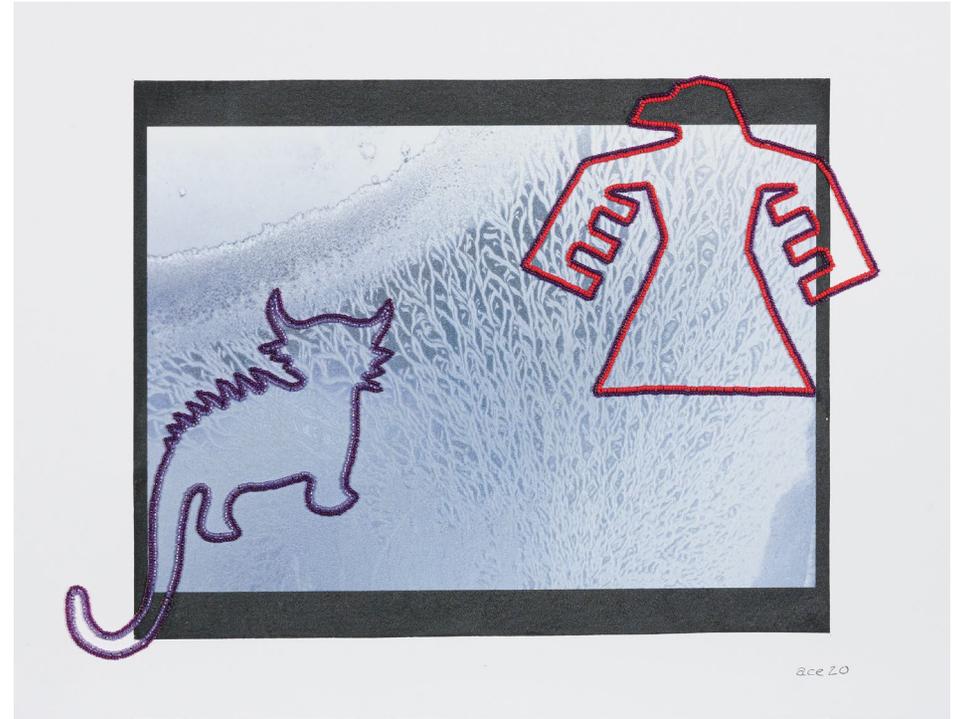
BARRY ACE
Rate of Infection
 13 3/4 x 10 5/8 in, 34.9 x 27 cm



BARRY ACE
Codification
 10 ¾ x 13 ¾ in, 27 x 34.9 cm

Layered onto the image of Maungwudaus, Ace has beaded a Thunderbird (*Binesi*), a winged spirit in Anishinaabe mythology. In the lower half, Ace has placed another atop an image of digital circuitry. As the Thunderbird is a metaphor for protection and power, so too is the circuitry, each a conduit through which energy flows and a message is carried, whether it be a prayer or a medical alert. Anishinaabe symbols are paired with electronic and digital ephemera in contrast, as well as to draw parallels between these two forms of communication—mythological and technological. Ace notes how both myth and technology require a prescribed set of protocols, whether through ritual or programmed code.

Protocols may be ordered into categories, such as healing rituals, that a culture can access during times of crisis. *Codification* is the act of ordering them, and in the work so titled, Ace pairs a circuit board schematic with sketches by Shingwauk (1773–1854), an Anishinaabe *Ogimaa* (Chief), an advocate for Indigenous rights. The drawings depict the spirit beings of the Anishinaabe legends, the Thunderbird as well as the *Mishibijiw*, the underwater panther. At the shoreline, before embarking



BARRY ACE
Dormant
 10 ¾ x 13 ¾ in, 27 x 34.9 cm

on a journey across a body of water, rituals would be conducted to appease its spirit, whose realm is in the watery depths. Failure to perform the protocols could lead to devastating effects such as loss of life from a stormy voyage. “The *Mishibijiw* references how you have to respect signs; if you don’t, there can be repercussions.” Combined with the digital imagery and e-waste ephemera, the signifiers of Anishinaabe power and healing also come to represent the protocols for personal protection during Covid. In the face of a global urgency, when the codification of rules of conduct that ensure physical protection are formalized into policy as well as law, not respecting them may lead to loss of life.

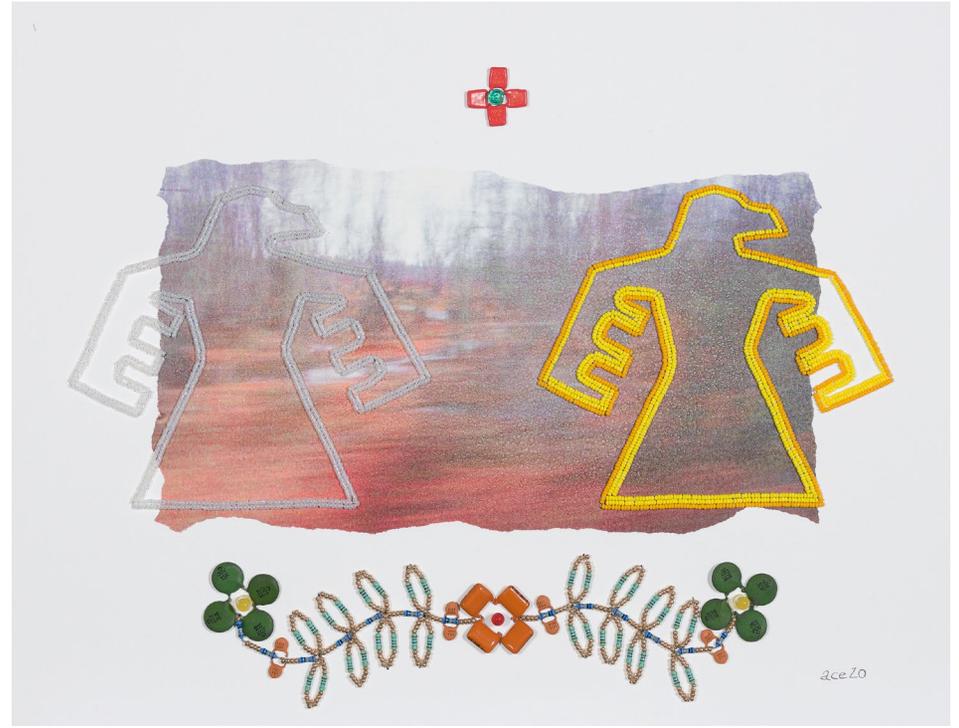
For the photomontages, combining digitally sourced archival images along with his own repository of iPhone “pics” is strategic. Ace inserts biographical provenance while also asserting a linkage to precedents of Indigenous “survivance.” He establishes a vital relationship to other Indigenous people—both named and unnamed—and whose lives, as with his own, were interrupted by the forces of external threats, and ones, like viral infections and racism, that are often intertwined.



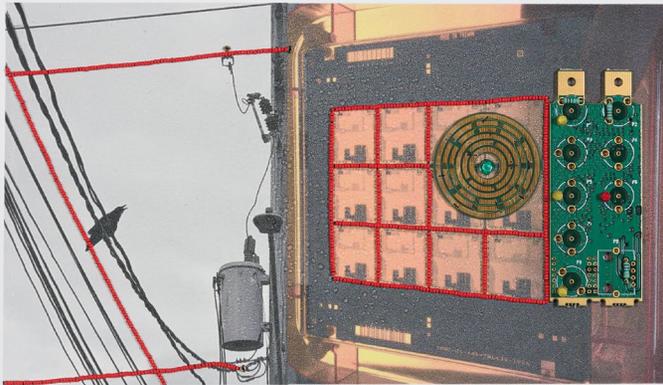
TOP: **BARRY ACE**
Transmission
 13 3/4 x 10 1/2 in, 34.9 x 27cm

TOP RIGHT: **BARRY ACE**
Journey
 10 1/2 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm

BOTTOM RIGHT: **BARRY ACE**
Influenza
 10 1/2 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm



ace20



ace 20

BARRY ACE
Premonitory

13 ¾ × 10 ¾ in, 34.9 × 27 cm

Affected by the news of yet another racialized person's life being extinguished by police brutality, as part of the series Ace beaded a single black square in solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Ace "felt helpless," both with the ongoing uncertainty of Covid-19 and witnessing "two simultaneous pandemics" take lives unnecessarily, a stark reminder that racism does not pause for pandemics.

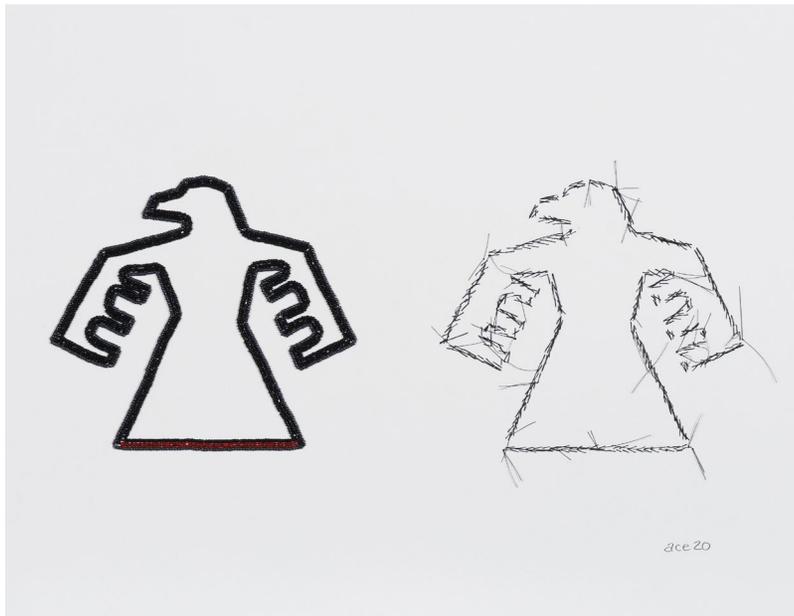
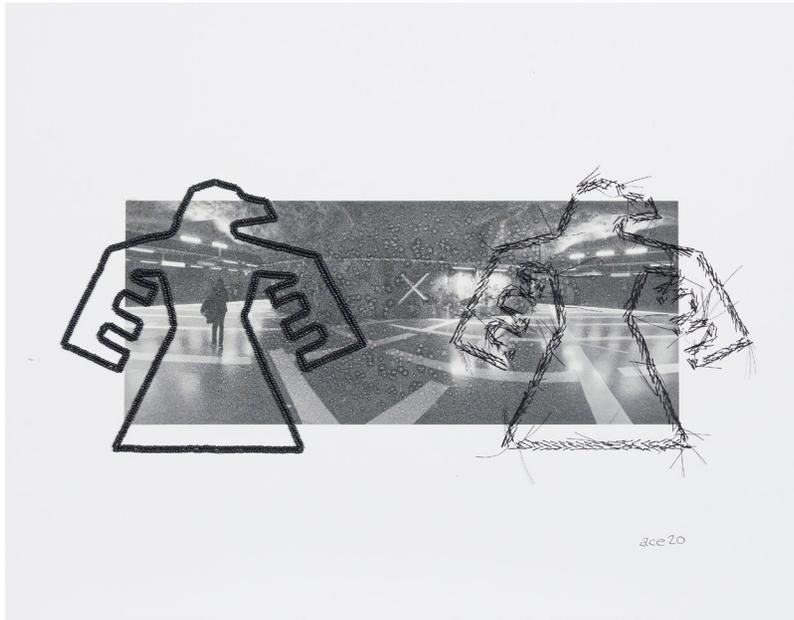
Ace's *Covid-19 Series* is an autobiographical document of his past and present experiences, as well as his concerns at this historical moment. He also mixes his distinctive Anishinaabe aesthetic with one of his major artistic influences. The



ace 20

BARRY ACE
#BlackLivesMatter

10 ¾ × 13 ¾ in, 27 × 34.9 cm



BARRY ACE
Physical Distance / Presence
and Absence (double-sided)
10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm



BARRY ACE
Contact Tracing
10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in, 27 x 34.9 cm

dual work *Physical Distance / Presence and Absence*, is an homage to the late Richard Hambleton (1952 – 2017) who, with his lurking “Shadowman” graffiti, was a fixture in New York’s East Village art scene at its height in the mid-1980s. Here, Ace presents a minimalist aesthetic. The outline of one Thunderbird, a precise and defined beaded border, contrasts with evidence of threading from the underside of its companion. Normally hidden, in the loose fragments of cut thread Ace saw a similarity to Hambleton’s “splash technique that rendered the image simultaneously in motion and decay.” In Hambleton’s work Ace also sees a “stark reminder of the presence and absence in the AIDS plague years.” Ace transforms the Thunderbirds into a potent symbol of Indigenous continuance documenting family stories of survival from previous pandemics—living through the AIDS crisis, now Covid.

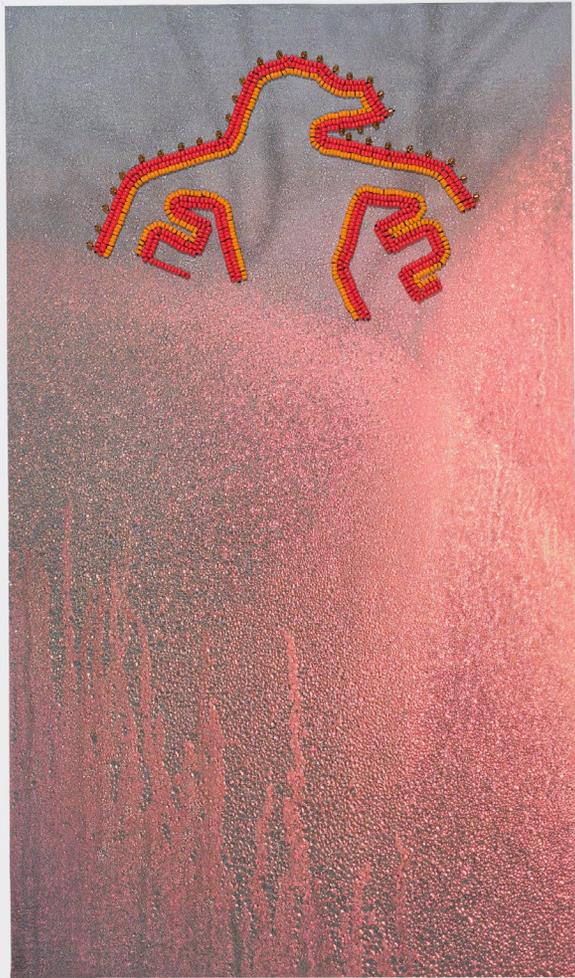


ace 20

In the final work of the series Ace has beaded a Caduceus layering, what has come to represent the universal symbol for health on top of a digital image of traditional Anishinaabe beadwork. Healing flowers stretch out from an embedded circuit board. The *Niigaanaasnok* (morning star), the brightest light at *Biidaaban* (dawn), a powerful symbol of sacred medicine for the Anishinaabeg, crowns all the elements. Ace does not see the work as an ending, rather a "semicolon" in the ongoing Covid narrative. We still exist on the threshold between pre- and post-Covid, and between those who will survive the virus and those who will succumb to it. Installed as groupings of four, two frames stand apart. *Occlude* is positioned on its own, isolated as the artist's life was during lockdown. *Physical Distance/Absence and Presence* project out from the wall, enabling the viewer to experience the Thunderbirds from both perspectives. The groupings could resemble the cell of the Covid-19 virus with its extended spikes; they can also be interpreted as the symbol for the *Niigaanaasnok*, its brilliance still present at the break of a new *Biidaaban*.

PRICE: \$68,500

BARRY ACE
Ossuary
13 ¾ x 10 ⅞ in, 34.9 x 27 cm



ace 20

BARRY ACE
Herd Immunity
13 3/4 x 10 3/8 in, 34.9 x 27 cm



ace 20

BARRY ACE
Vaccine
13 3/4 x 10 3/8 in, 34.9 x 27 cm



TOP: Installation view of *COVID-19 Suite*