

MODERN DANCE AND CROSS CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS AS A RESULT KAREN JAMIESON'S RAINFOREST AND AHASIW KITOTCIGAN MASKEGON-ISKWEW, (MESTIKUSOWIN) (HOLOCAUST)

The Damming Issues of Cultural Appropriation after the short journey and death of Donald Ghostkeeper and the long journey in Karen Jamieson Cross Cultural collaboration Gawa Gyani

ABSTRACT

MESTIKUSOWIN (HOLOCAUST) WAS A BITING AND JARRING COMMENT ON THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL PRACTICES AS GHOSTKEEPER SETS FOUR PERFORMERS THROUGH SLASHING, JUMPING AND BOUNDING IMAGES OF CONTROL AND ECSTASY AS THE NUNS MOUNTED THE INDIAN GIRL AND A PRIEST POURS MILK OVER THE NATIVE PERFORMERS BODY."... RAINFOREST CAUSED A DOUBLE RIPPLE IN THE CRITICISM HELD AGAINST HER; ...ROUSE A PRIMAL RESPONSE FROM INDIGENOUS AUDIENCE MEMBERS WHO QUESTIONED THE VALIDITY OF HER SHOW.

Donald Morin

Modern Dance, Teacher Jodie Vandekerkhove

**Modern Dance and Cross Cultural collaborations as a result Karen Jamieson’s Rainforest,
And Ahasiw Kitotcigan Maskegon-Iskwew, (MESTIKUSOWIN) (HOLOCAUST)**

(The Damming Issues of Cultural Appropriation after the short journey and death of Donald Ghostkeeper and the long journey in Karen Jamieson Cross Cultural collaboration Gawa Gyani.)



Gawa Gyani Dance Presentation, Tokyo, Japan, 1994. Still from Native Revisionist Creations documentary of Japan three day performances NRC Inc., 1995. Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Internet Re-release, 2019.

On the Karen Jamieson Dance Company latest website, it states “Jamieson’s vision is to reveal the power of dance as an art form with potential to transform, engage, captivate, heal, and to impart knowledge available only to the dancing body; believing the power of contemporary dance transcends cultures, languages, histories and traditions by connecting us all at a very primal level.”¹

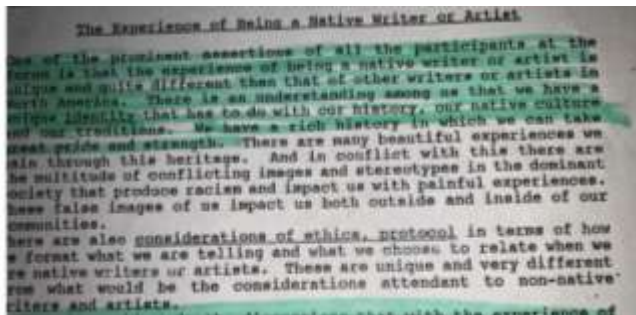
That was all evident after the year 1987 when Karen Jamieson presented Rainforest , a modern dance event at the former Arcadian hall 6th and Main street Vancouver, May 1987. It was suggested that we go and see Ms. Jamieson’s latest work Rainforest. A darkened stage area, cultural diverse dancers begin their work, dancers reacting to the mystical score with a cacophony of light and bound movements, darting across the stage, twisting, turning and throwing themselves in the air to be caught by the other performers. A vibrant event which painted the dark moody greenery of West Coast rainforest, indigenous imagery, motifs, and sounds that played off the Coastal Salish culture, lifestyle, and Native cultural iconography. “Composers were Bruce Ruddel and Sal Ferreras”².



Gawa Gyani Dance Presentation, Tokyo, Japan, 1994. Still from Native Revisionist Creations documentary of Japan three day performances NRC Inc., 1995. Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Internet Re-release, 2019. Slow Low Non-pedal movement.

Continues,

I have seen Sal's work before in other local productions and found the work intriguing and enlightening. 1987, I was an eager art student lost in the assimilated world of Canadian society. Totally void of my current knowledge of my 60s scoop years, I was the white Indian trying to be the white man I was not, or even close to finding my body and voice as an artist. I was fascinated by the various dance shows I saw during my student years, works by Barbara Bourget, Jennifer Mascal, Trish Brown and the works of the teachers. Seeing Karen's work at the time was my first introduction to modern dance with some relationship to west coast culture and the Coast Salish people of the time. I did see one of her early works avec Terminal City Dance, somewhere in Chinatown are, but again, it was a student oriented venture, and I was more fascinated that it took place in a third floor walk up warehouse space and it was, cool and experimental in nature. With Rainforest, it come to my attention that various



Detail from Compilation of notes taken from Indigenous Forum on Cultural appropriation, and telling our Own Stories, organized by Margo Kane, early 1990. Simon Baker Room Vancouver Native Friendship Centre, Vancouver BC. Eagle Feathers Film & Music

Indigenous senior artists in the city were critical of Ms. Jamieson's work on Rainforest and cultural appropriation, cultural protocol, and permission to incorporate indigenous motifs in her work with out no regard for First Nations People, whose very culture was central around Coastal Motifs, signified in her work.

Spirit Song Native Indian Theatre Company was giving young native performer a strong

foundation in understanding of Native protocol avec Artistic Director Margo Kane, and her values with respect to western methodology of Theatre, and the theatricalization of various Native Legends and Myths from West Coast to Plains Indigenous People. How Raven stole Day Light from Seagull, or How Coyote trick Bear in releasing daylight. It involve movement work, voice and workshopping legends into theatrical presentations.

However, that all changed July 11th, 1990. A monumental year for Indigenous People across Canada, particularly artists. Young and old, trained, untrained, tradition artists, assimilated artists.



Spirit Song, 1980s, Bride of Evening Star directed by Sadie Worn Staff, Summer Theatre Program, involved drama, movement, voice studies. Vancouver Island Tour. Contact sheet Detail NRC Inc., 1992.

Continues,

QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES
(A GROUP EXHIBITION AND PERFORMANCE)

MESTIKUSOWIN (HOLOCAUST)

a performance by
Ahasiw Kitotcigan Maskegon-Iskwew
(Donald Ghoskeeper)

For Modern Dance, Indigenous Artist the Late Ahasiw Kitotcigan Maskegon-Iskwew (Christian Name Donald Ghostkeeper) 1958 to 2006. was a young choreographer and performance artist who left his mark on the SFU Dance Community and then left the academic realm to run The International Pitt Gallery in Gastown, Vancouver among other notable positions in his short life. His "QUESTIONAL PRACTICE (A GROUP EXHIBITION AND PERFORMANCE) event MESTIKUSOWIN (HOLOCAUST)"³

was a biting and jarring comment on the residential school practices as Donald sets four performers through slashing, jumping and bounding images of control and ecstasy as the Nuns mounted the Indian girl and a priest pours milk over the Native performers body. As a Performer, it was an intense performance event which shocked the audience with its abrasive portrayal of the practices portrayed in the event. Margo Kane's Voice over of the matrilinear strength of Native women against the genocidal atrocities of the colonial wars against Native people still haunts me to this day. All four dancers, Ruby Dennis, Gunargie O' Sullivan, Warren Arcan, and Donald Morin with Ahasiw's choreography created excruciating images of the pain and abuse many native people experiences in residential schools and foster homes. Mestikusowin was "a cry from the voices of the dead."⁴ Sept 1990, his work was a 180 degree opposite to Jamieson's work and was an appropriate response to all that was happening across Canada as a result of an awakening of artists across North America (Turtle Island) when The Mohawk women during a Tobacco ceremony were attacked July 11th 5:00 am in the morning by the Quebec Authorities. The structure of Ahasiw's performance was within the 'forms of melodrama and tragedy. The hero was Indian culture expressed through Margo Kane's recorded soundtrack. The villain was Catholic religion and Eurocentric racism expressed by two priest and two nuns. Artist Maggi Guzzi was the predominant Dancer, with the victims the "Indian Children performed by Donald, Warren, Ruby & Gunargie. Set was a dormitory where most of the movement took place with various setup. A Marching in of the new children (performed by warren and Gunargie) colonial hardness, Priest (Ahasiw) uses hard direct movement pointing at the children to knee, pray to his God."⁵

MESTIKUSOWIN is a cry from the voices of the dead. Our ancestors call out to be remembered - that the violence of their dying be known - that the corruption built over their graves be torn away, and that their children achieve a proud and self-determined future. It is also a call to all those offended by the destruction of the innocent, those who would be allies in the reconstruction of a just society.

Continues,



An self inflicting sign of the cross on our bodies, with a crushing blow to the forehead to top off the sign of the cross, repetitive, as The second nun (Emily) looks on gleefully. It was the beginning of the “enactment of the Master/Slave relationship. Dancer were performing as adults but at times with a childlike quality as the older residential student (Morin & Dennis) look after the younger dancers with silent pantomime movements of former days of family, hunting and feasting.”⁶ Sharp contrasting images followed with the aluminum bowels of institutional porridge food marching to religious songs of glory. Donald, Ahasiw, a personal friend was not in favor of the appropriation aspects of Karen’s

work or any other artists without proper respect to protocol and healing and preservation of cultural forms and practices. He was a visionary and ground breaker in presenting native art and thought”

Glenn Alteen, former curator of the Grunt Gallery, wrote: “... Among the first aboriginal artists in Canada working in New Media and Net Art Maskegon-Iskwew’s work as a curator, producer and writer laid important groundwork for Aboriginal artists in these fields and is an important voice in the development of these medias within the aboriginal communities.... This site brings together many of his essential writings, websites and performances allowing them to continue to have an influence in the development of these practices in Canada and beyond.”⁷

Meeting both Karen and Donald opened me up to new ideas. Invited to meet Karen March 10th 91 to discuss her new upcoming work. 1991, Meeting Karen that month began an exciting collaboration which lasted till 1997 on various dance projects. With Gawa Gyani,

“...it was a test of the rehearsal broadcasting system. An experiment on dancers warming up, creating a new dance vocabulary out of Modern dance and northwest dance forms. It was a new work inspired by Rainforest working with masks and carvings of North West Indian People.”⁸

Gawa Gyani, meaning “Finding a just place to resolve conflict”⁹ was a far cry away from the appropriated forms performed in Rainforest. An appropriate usage of the hereditary title considering the criticism that arose from the performance of Rainforest and the critical dialogue that followed to up to the 1991 summer performance at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, BC

Dangeli, Mique'l writes in her theses paper Dancing sovereignty : protocol and politics in northwest coast First Nations dance “...Chapter 1: Gawa Gyani: Navigating the Politics of Gitxsan Ayuuk “It’s been my experience that you navigate within a growing understanding of protocol, acknowledging all the time that your understanding is limited. That is my approach always will be Not having grown up in such a culture, I am just getting glimmerings....”¹⁰.

Understanding is limited, glimmerings defined in some respect Karen's work through her career as an artist. Again Dangeli, Mique'l writes about Karen;

"...has experienced an array of "glimmerings" that shed light on the protocols, songs, dances, histories, and territories of many different Nations. 105 Her approach to navigating protocol, with its emphasis on humility and self-reflection, began early in her career with the turmoil of two separate, but related, performances — Rainforest (1987) and Gawa Gyani (1991)." 11

Between these two bookends of modern dance events Karen was learning new means of finding the pathway to creating new material working out a process of allowing the material given to run the creative process. It was not limited to traditional western rehearsal practices. Indigenous Artists were brought in to the open rehearsal process, a song or dance is shared, the story behind the song or dance, and how "contact" change the structure, narrative, but the tradition essence of the voice remained the same: In the Gitxsan "Coho Song:

Hee hoe hee hee ho 4X

'en deh elkx tsin lewis godt yoom dim ax-sim gew-in ny-hey

Dim am godt diss=sim hee hee ny-ho

A nitt dim an ny-yea- twitlhx lo-sim

2: Nitt alhx nee-ee antlhx het ny ho

Tsa 'gun eye-l-gyacyh lu-kwksum ny-hey

Dimam godt diss-sim nee-hee ny ho

a-nitt dim an ny-yea-twitlhx lo-sum

hee hee hee hee ho 4X

As a result of contact: we see the change in the English translations

Hand me some gin sweetheart

For then we can begin to drink

For you will remember me

As you sing while walking along

It is I speaking

In the same way that your fire speaks to you

For you will remember me

As you sing while walking along" 12

Continues,



Gawa Gyani, Modern Dance. Just before a lament song of the Gitksan people Inc., 1995. Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Internet Re-release, 2019. Fast Non-pedal movement and Slow pedal movement towards centre screen.

This discussion led to the new modern dance collaboration of Traditional and Contemporary Indigenous Artists, dialogue of combining the contemporary ideals of modern dance to a 10,000 tradition that defines the late Ken Harris and late Margaret Harris Gitksan lineage which was told in the oral traditions of their songs and dance, but as well affected by contact. Other songs present the end of a great battle, a lamentation song and movement moment

combining the bound confined movement of tight group work with the tearful lament of warriors lost in battle. This was evident in 1992, as we toured Gawa Gyani in the traditional territory of the Gitksan people, Hazelton, British Columbia. Alice Jeffery's invited the dancers over to her place for seal roast, olichans, and the Coho song sung and danced in her territory.

Both Ahasiw and Karen as choreographers depicted indigenous images in contrasting elements of bound and slow movement processing. Karen's lamentation work was a group slow progression across the stage as the dancers moved and danced the lament song in a most saddening way. Avec Ghostkeeper's depiction in MESTIKUSOWIN, it was the hanging of dead native people in the trees with Margo's mournful wavering voice telling the story of our women being mutilated and warriors hung like slabs of meat. Karen talked of Gawa Gyani being a project six years in developing the concept of the work, after talks with Doreen Jenson, and later Alice Jeffreys who shared her tradition songs and dances and forms. Rainforest caused a double ripple in the criticism held against her; one for appropriating sacred coastal forms, second, not asking permission to utilize such forms in her work; The riveting performances by the dancers, but as well the dark moody set and music, rouse a primal response from indigenous audience members who questioned the validity of her show. That started the fire that began Jamieson's journey as a non-native choreographer attempting to redeem herself from stealing the Coastly iconic images signified in her show. Hearsay thrown out as her being nothing more but another colonial socialite capitalizing on the good will and culture of a conquered people. When the Oka Crisis happened, slightly over three years since the Arcadian Hall performances, it was still a contentious climate in the cultural political arena of native/non-native relations.

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The Chilcotin first nations people were standing up against the Douglas Ranch monopoly, there was tobacco smuggling issues in Akwesasne territory and the Elijah's "No" signification with the failed Meech Lake Accord gave the Indigenous People across a new simple gesture with their "head." A slightly sauntering of the head left to right to left meaning no, "The Indigenous people do not agree with this accord", second we as a people are standing up to all forms of containment, ideological and cultural positioning or appropriation, and any other encroachment on the sovereignty and cultural worth of Indigenous People. Michael Aimes, Director of the Museum of Anthropology wrote in the July 1991, program:

"It all started several years ago when Karen Jamieson expressed an interest in presenting her popular "Rainforest" dance which draws upon Northwest Coast Indian Legends at the Museum of Anthropology. We asked her to defer the project until we could explore more extensively the issues of appropriation her cultural borrowing raised. Do non-native performers have the right to borrow First Nation themes without permission? Who has the authority to grant that permission? What is the value of cultural sharing? Karen readily agreed to further discussions,....on one occasion...Ron Hamilton Nuchan-ulth educator and artist, who referred us to Salish Artist, dancer and playwright Evan Adams,...We next called upon Doreen Jensen, Gitksan artists, teacher, author and consultant at MOA....Doreen introduced the concept of Gawa Gyani,, introduced her to Gitksan artists and hereditary chiefs Alice Jeffrey and Kenneth Harris." This pairing of cultures resulted in the Gawa Gyani Collaboration, "the production of Gawa Gyani and its forerunner Mixk'aax performed at the Vancouver Playhouse, June 7-8, 1991.... Jensen, Jeffrey and Harris were all properly trained in the performance traditions of the Gitksan, including the basic technique of movement, breathing and voice control, by great masters such as Moses Morrison, Stephen Morrison, Mary Blackwater, Mary Johnson, David Milton, and Ernest Myzimm... Doreen Jensen recounts that when she was invited to collaborate there was much discussion in First Nation communities about cultural appropriation, so she was somewhat hesitant to become involved in this project. However, as she followed the media reports of the Meech Lake constitutional debate, and how the participants were struggling to resolve major questions, she realized that her own people have a process or concept –Gawa Gyani—that could be shared for the betterment of society." 13

Native Artists across Canada were speaking up creating works of new creations. Spirit Song created a movement piece based on Chief Seattle's Words from the colonial years. After the raid, cultural camps with artists, dancers, writers and supporters alike sprouted up across the Country in support of the Mohawk people. Gawa Gyani and Mestikusowin were two direct opposites of modern dance performances which presented two alternative views of Indigenous Forms based on Colonial assimilation, and a meeting of cultures during a time of great conflict and strife.

Continues,

Ghostkeeper's usage of striking, biting and jarring images to define the violence and abuse of assimilation practices and institutions. IN the Pitt Gallery poster , he writes:

Canadian culture is based on European colonialism. It carries within it a legacy of the imprisonment and attempted destruction of Indian cultures. The creation of a brave new world for the Christian White Supremist Patriarchal founders of this country was accomplished through a combination of overt atrocity and imposed historical amnesia.

"Canadian culture is based on European colonialism It carries within it a legacy of the imprisonment and attempted destruction of Indian cultures The creation of a brave new world for the Christian White Supremist Patriarchal founders of this country..."¹⁴.

While today, such language would be seen as agitative, racist, and ultra left ideology, it was indicative of how thousands of native people across Canada felt or expressed in their body, voice , culture and art of their given time. The people were tired of the abuse against their people, women and children in



Detail of Dancers from 1991 Gawa Gyani Program du MOA performances. . Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Archives, 2020

society at large. Through economic disparity, class, and privilege standing, the two art centres operated on a different scale of define society through its performance narratives, projects, productions and alternative forms outside the conglomerates of mass culture and high or middle class cultural expectations and happenings. Karen utilized old western forms of modern dance of the twentieth century to meld and mold into the collaborative dance forms of the Gitxsan people from a ten thousand year old narrative. Chief Ken Harris in his UBC Press publication of 1974 Visitors who never left; wrote:

"AYUUK'M NEX (Law of Marriage) has been violated leading to war. In the wake of all Sc'a Waa realizes that only she and her granddaughter have survived the fierce battle. IN her search for a husband for her granddaughter, Sc'a waa appeals to the cosmic world but finds that all creatures of the animal world can be prey to man. Finally intervention comes from the spiritual world and Sca'waa's granddaughter is carried off skywards into "TGEM LAHAE" to be married There she gives birth to three children. These children return to Settle at Damelahamid. Sca' waa herself remains on earth, tucked away with a spruce tree, only her howl is heard on a windy day."¹⁵

A story which is depicted on the doors of the entrance of the MOA, and is only a beginning segment of this monumental dance production. In either cultural events of these two distinct different choreographers, they painted the sensualness and volatile actions of the human condition in unique forms of movement in its modern dance forms of shape , movement and colour.

Continues,

National, local, cultural and political events defined the art of many an artists during the remaining years of the twentieth century. Cultural appropriation, cultural authenticity, and cultural protocol were predominant players on the cultural creation palette of all artist of those final years of urban growth and decay. Modern dance continues to ignite the primal response oof audience members today as social media expanded the reach of performance companies, dancers, artists and cultural activists or politicians., The combination of art, culture, ideology and politics has created new ways of presenting movement in today's post Covide world. Karen Jamieson Dance Company is still operational today and cerate unique works with the Downtown Eastside community, and Donald Ghostkeeper's work remains accessible in the Grunt Gallery archives. Indigenous Modern dance companies exist across Canada, and unfortunately today cultural appropriation is still a factor in popular cultural forms, but more awareness is noted today in indigenous acknowledgement and protocol followed. Ghostkeeper's work created a foundation for new generation of Indigenous performance art and web based digital media artists and perhaps we can give much credit to Karen Jamieson and the consultants from the Gitxsan people who went beyond the hearsay and criticism of a few to create an outstanding work of modern dance, cross cultural collaborations which continues today Miigweech.

FOOTNOTES

1: [Our Story — Karen Jamieson Dance \(kjdance.ca\)](http://kjdance.ca)

2: [Rainforest — Karen Jamieson Dance \(kjdance.ca\)](http://kjdance.ca)

3: Donald Ghostkeeper International Pitt Gallery performance event poster, October 13 & 14th event at 36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990

4: Donald Ghostkeeper International Pitt Gallery performance event poster, October 13 & 14th event at 36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990

5: Donald Ghostkeeper; International Pitt Gallery performance event meeting; September 1990 notes:

Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Archives. Incorporated February 2019, in the province of Alberta. Rehearsal notes from 36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990

Continues,

6: Donald Ghostkeeper; International Pitt Gallery performance event meeting; September 1990 notes:

Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Archives. Incorporated February 2019,

in the province of Alberta. Rehearsal notes from 36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990

7: <https://ghostkeeper.gruntarchives.org/index.html>

8: Karen Jamieson; Karen Jamieson Dance Company performance event meeting; March 1991 notes:

Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Archives. Incorporated February 2019,

in the province of Alberta. Rehearsal notes from 36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990

9: Doreen Jensen, Program Notes Gawa Gyani Museum of Anthropology Premiere performance event July 1991, "Gawa Gyani is the most esteemed Noxnox in the house of Go'anu (Godfrey Good) The title is presently held by Edgar Good – younger brother of Go'anu Gawa Gyani has never been used or has it been permissible to allow strangers to use the title. However, because of a very high regard that we have for our grandson Haxbagwootxw (Ken B Harris) GO'anu will make an exception and will allow Ken to use the title Gawa Gyani with his story Sc'a waa. (The foregoing statement is recorded on a cassette tape Tuesday May 21, 1991 at Kitwancool, BGC by Ken Harris (Program Notes archives du Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation, 2020

10: Dangeli, Mique'l <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0166268>

11: Dangeli, Mique'l <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0166268>

12: Alice Jeffreys: Gitxsan "Coho Song: Karen Jamieson Dance Company performance rehearsal notes

1991. Eagle Feathers Film & Music Manufacturing Corporation Archives. Incorporated February

2019, in the province of Alberta.

13: Michael Aimes Curator and Introductory Program Notes Gawa Gyani Museum of Anthropology

Premiere performance event July 1991.

14. Donald Ghostkeeper International Pitt Gallery performance event poster, October 13 & 14th event at

36 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, 1990.

15. Haxbagwootxw (Ken B Harris) Program Notes Gawa Gyani Museum of Anthropology Premiere performance event July 1991, (From Kenneth Harris . University of B. C. Press 1974.