

Postscript 83
Dear Cole

PETER MORIN

on “Dazhän Kwändür ch’e (This is a Story)”

COLE PAULS

Dear Cole,

First, a deep and resounding congratulations on your solo exhibition, “Dazhän Kwändür ch’e (This is a Story),” at Artspeak. It is such a privilege to be in relation to your artistic offerings and your work is so much medicine for so many of us. And, truthfully, I still feel a bit sad that I couldn’t be in the actual physical space with the work cuz I know it would have been beautiful to see all of your drawings dancing, laughing, singing, crying and visiting together. I will hold this dream in my heart.

I wanted to also say thank you to the Artspeak team for sending over such beautiful documentation of your exhibition.

I’m always so grateful to your relations – Millie and Jack Pauls. These connections make us who we are in the world. My mom would always say about Millie, *‘my best my friend’*. This is such an old school Tahltan thing to say. And I love how these ways help us to become stronger in who we are. Millie and Jack and our grandmother Dinah Creyke were *‘best my friends’* also.

I wanted to write the English word relationality here, but I don't want to try and explain what I mean by the Indigenous practice of building family and force that Indigenous praxis into their relational box. There is also something about the word(s) Northern, Northern Indigenous, North. The words can sound mysterious to some, and for folks like us, these words sound like home. When I think about Millie, and the last time I seen her, we were in the Dease Lake Grocery store. She was either on her way to, or coming from, a Land Protectors action. She was happy. She was energized. And she was sharing about the hard work of being a part of the land. I'll never forget that, and I will never forget how she included me in the work by sharing her stories because she didn't have to. This act of care will live deeply inside my body forever. Cole, you are doing the same thing by including/inviting me to witness your exhibition.

This is only a small part of what I love about being from where we are from. These territories, where are Relations and Ancestors come from, demand care and respect. It is also the acknowledgement that our Ancestors develop and built these incredible and sophisticated systems to support collective survival. We are not individual Crows. We are not individual

Wolves. We are people who have responsibilities and accountabilities to the collective. We are all crows together. we are all wolves together. And my Uncle Sidney told me that the wolves take care of the land, and the crows take care of the river. This is medicine for so many of us.

I guess I should explain a little bit of what I mean by *medicine*. We also live so deeply inside the value systems that hold up Western/European spaces. Perhaps inside of this Western knowledge system it would look like this: medicine = sickness = healing = doctor = prescription. These days I've been working to physically/mentally/spiritually/emotionally lift their English words as a strategy to understand what Indigenous meaning is hiding underneath. We have been here longer than Canadian colonialism. This awareness is especially useful when I'm trying to understand what these words can mean spoken from an Indigenous mouth/body. In doing this work, I've learned that when I use the word *medicine*, I'm talking about Indigenous power. I don't know if you know this book – *Trail of the Spirit: Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed* (2006). The book is offered to us by Dene Elder George Blondin. If you haven't already, you should read this book.

In thinking about this letter, and in dreaming about your work, I kept thinking about the cut lines between the images. I guess we could also call them squares. Squares with drawings that will become the pages of a new Cole Pauls book. I had to take a few days with trying to understand the spaces in-between. In my thinking, I kept returning to incredible thinkers like Homi Bhabha and post-colonial thinking. I could feel that edge and how it spoke to room. That edge felt important for considering the body. Then I started thinking about that walk along from edge to edge to edge. Even the words in each of the panels has/had an edge for eyes to move along. Art can be so treacherous. You can easily fall into something unimagined and full of possibility. In doing this thinking work, the edges reminded me of cutting up meat. [So, I made a stew for my family.](#)

Perhaps, it's about how we can see deeper into the work. The elk was killed by my cousin and gifted to our family. The elk walks the land just like your pen walks the paper/page. My cousin walks the land following the elk just that like body walks from panel-to-panel inside the space of your installation. And perhaps, eyes swallow the words. Perhaps, there is

something about lineages here also. This work kept me thinking about artistic inheritances and lineages.

I've been thinking a lot about memory lately. There is a lot of reasons to think about and make work about memory. The family story/stories remind us that we are alive. Before so many of my mom's sibling group got Alzheimer's, they would sit together and tell stories of their childhood. There would be so much laughter, and the whole time their storytelling voices getting louder and louder. Cole, I know that you understand. This turned me towards artistic lineages and our shared work as Tahltan Artists. The aesthetics are Didene. That's clear to me. I started thinking about future-ing Tahltan aesthetics. How does a zine become Tahltan, or Tahltan/Tutchone? And how does a Tahltan/Tutchone illustrator see themselves reflected in the art/history of our people? Maybe these are silly questions. I was reading a book recently called *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988) by Umberto Eco. I don't know if you've read this book, and I don't know if you need to. In the book, Eco's primary narrator asks a probing question to the reader about an unimagined future that could happen 3000 years forward from a key moment in the story's development. The whole book is a well-researched

romp through a brilliant global conspiracy/theory. But that's not the point here. I started thinking about your work in the chain of artistic events that make artistic futures. Tahltan art/histories = Tahltan art/futures. In thinking about your exhibition, I started imagining Tahltan Artists who were living 3000 years in the past, who were dreaming about telling family stories through drawings made by ink pens walking over paper. It's the idea that our Ancestors have never not imagined us. Cole, I wonder what you imagine for our artists 3000 years from now.

Finally, in this extremely long letter, I wanted to give something back to you Cole. I find you and your work inspiring. You are medicine for so many. I hope that you never forget that. I started to look for examples of dialogue, Tahltan-specific dialogues. The following come from two textual sources. The first is brought forward to us Tahltan readers by James Teit, and the second is from Robert Campbell. I don't want to give space to the issues embedded within historical documents, so I've highlighted only the conversations that emerge in these texts. I do need to say that I've kept the original text format.

Found Historic Tahltan Dialogues (James Teit):¹

1. The chief said, “Come in and side down, and tell me why you have come here!” The man said, “I have come to get back my friend.” The chief answered, “He cannot go back with you. He is my nephew, and you did not treat him well.” The hunter said, “It was my brother-in-law, and not I; for myself, I always treated him well.” The chief said, “Well, if some one of you does wrong, it is just the same as if you yourself had done wrong.”
2. They told the people, “Now we have come back. Why did you not answer us when we came back from our trip?” The people said to them, “You were drowned.”
3. Then they thanked the man, saying, “We are poor, lowly people, and you invited us to the feast. Thank you!” He answered, “I asked every one to the feast, but no one

¹ Teit, James A. “Tahltan Tales.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 32, no. 124 (1919): 198–250. <https://doi.org/10.2307/534980>.

responded. Then I tried you, and I am glad you came. You have eaten now. My heart is at ease now regarded my deceased friends. I shall sleep well to-night. Thank you!"

4. He said, "Let the winter months be the same in number as the fingers on my hand." Beaver said, "No," and held up his tail, which had many cracks or scratches on it. He said, "Let the winter months be the same in number as the scratches on my tail." Now they quarrelled and argued. Porcupine got angry and bit off his thumb. Then holding up his hand with the four fingers, he said emphatically, "There must be only four winter months."
5. Then a voice asked, "Why do you steal our spear-head?" Raven answered, "I wanted to copy it. I notice that you are fishing; and I cannot fish, for I have no spearhead." He added, "Where are you?" He felt about, but did not feel anything. The ghosts were talking to him, and he was in a house of ghosts.

6. The people said, “you are a stranger;” and he answered, “Yes, I come from a different place.” They asked from what country and why had he come. He answered, “Oh! I have come from a distant country because I heard something.” They asked him what he had heard. He said, “I heard you caught something.” They answered, “Yes.” He said, “I hear it is a very strange thing. I want to see it. I have come a long way to see this curious thing.”
7. Crow said that he was the chief there, and invited Raven in. He asked the latter what phratry he belonged to; and he answered, “Kātce’de.” Raven then asked Crow the same question; and he answered, “I am Kātce’de also.” Raven then said, “Well, then you will feed me well and keep me over night.”
8. He said, “Brother-in-law, my mother told me that my uncle swallowed people, but I don’t believe it. I don’t think there is any one that swallows people.” Toad said at once, “It is only I who swallow people.” Raven said, “That is strange. How do you do

it?" Toad said, "I will show you. I will swallow you." Raven said, "All right!" and when Toad opened his mouth, Raven jumped in quickly, before he had time to bite.

9. He said to Game-Mother, "The people have plenty of game where I come from. You have not done a wise thing. Calling your children home is no revenge on us, nor does it harm us, for the people are getting all the game they require." She answered, "It cannot be as you say. I have all my children here, so the people can be well off for game." Raven said, "No, all the game cannot be here," and they disputed over this.
10. He went in his canoe out to sea, and there met Kanu'gu. He took hold of Kanu'gu canoe and conversed with him. Raven said to him, "You are a very old man. How old are you?" Kanu'gu said that he did not know. Raven said, "Well, I am very old too. Do you remember very long ago, when all the rocks were rotten?" Kanu'gu said,

“Well, you must be older than I am, for I do not remember that.”

11. He told the bird, “Say that you are my son; and if he asks my name, tell him ‘Skin-Bag.’” The chief asked the bird what was the name of his father; and he answered, “Skin-Bag.” The chief said, “There is no nobleman of that name known to us. Tell your father that my daughter cannot marry a man of low rank.” He asked his daughter if she liked her suitor; and she answered, “No.”
12. Raven said, “Halloo, brother-in-law! what are you doing?” and Grizzly answered, “I am fishing.”
13. Some of the people said, “Let us finish the house before we catch any salmon. If we catch salmon now, they will spoil before the houses are ready.” They thought of houses like those people lived in. Raven said, “No, the houses we shall build do not take long to put up, one two or three days.” He taught the people how to make salmon-drying houses of poles, like those used by the people at the present-day. He said, “If the

drying-house are made too tight, like dwelling-houses, the salmon will not dry well.”

14. Raven said, “I know a medicine. If you take it, no bad luck will come to you.” Kanu’gu asked him what it was; and Raven said, “You must wash some distance away from the house with old urine. The Raven people do that, and wash one another.”
15. She refused several times, saying, “He is my last child, and I do not want to lose him.” At last the boy said to his mother, “Let me go! I shall not meet with any harm.”

Found Historic Tahltan Dialogues (Robert Campbell):²

23, July, 1838 – At early dawn one of the Indian lads awakened us by calling out “Indians! Indians!” and on jumping to our feet we saw a part of some 16 Indians issues from the woods on the hill above the hut. Hoole’s first exclamation was characteristic of him, being “Let us run for our lives” and only threatening him would I divert him from doing so. We hoisted our flag & made signs to the Indians to come over to us. After much hesitation they slowly approached & when they were close to us they called out that they were friends. Again beckoning to them, they began to cross the bridge, the Chief holding out the pipe of peace, which was accordingly smoked and passed round. While this was going on, some of the young men took long poles, fastened on them large

² Campbell, Robert, 1808-1894. 1958. “Two Journals of Robert Campbell (Chief Factor Hudson’s Bay Company) 1808 to 1853: Early Journal - 1808 to 1851, Later Journal - Sept. 1850 to Feb. 1853.” B. BC Historical Books. Seattle: [Shorey’s Book Store]. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0388540>.

hooks (or “Cleeks” as they would be called in Scotland) & in no time had some fine salmon lying on the bank.

... on the top of the hill I lost sight of my companions, included the Nahany Chief, & went down to the closely packed crowd awaiting us below escorted by an Indian who called himself “Jack” & could speak a little broken English. Every word I said in reply to the numberless questions asked me was taken up & yelled by a hundred throats till the surrounding rocks & the valley re-echoed with the sound.

... Here too I first met a remarkable woman, the Chieftainess of the Nahanies. The Nahany tribe over which she & her father a very old man, held sway were then about 500 strong, & like other Indians led a nomadic hunting life. Now & then a few of the lading men visited the coast at the mouth of the Stikine; but the Chieftainess said I was the first White man she ever saw. Unfortunately we had no proper interpreter, so that our conversation was very limited. She commanded the respect not only of her own people, but of the

tribes they had intercourse with. She was a fine looking woman rather about the middle height & about 35 years old. In her actions & personal appearance she was more like the Whites than the pure Indian race. She had a pleasing face lit up with fine intelligent eyes, which when she was excited flashed like fire.

___, Feb, 1839 – her kindness to us was unbounded. She ordered her servants (all leading Indians there had slaves) to cook the best they had for our use, & it was served under her own directions. We partook of a sumptuous repast – the first for many a day – consisting of excellent dried salmon & delicious fresh cariboo meat. I felt painfully humiliated that I could not make a suitable return, or even send her, when she left, with a train of dogs to the south end of the lake (she was then on her way towards “Terror Bridge.”) I could only cherish the wish in silence.

Cole, I know that we will continue to walk the drawn line together over art territories. I'm excited to continue dreaming 3000 years into Tahltan Art/Futures with you.

Never forget that it is the artists who break the trail.

Sogha Sin'lah,

EzekTah (Peter Morin)
Wednesday, Dec 21, 2022

PETER MORIN is a grandson of Tahltan Ancestor Artists. Morin's artistic offerings can be organized around four themes: articulating Land/Knowing, articulating Indigenous Grief/Loss, articulating Community Knowing, and understanding the Creative Agency/Power of the Indigenous body. The work takes place in galleries, in community, in collaboration, and on the land. All of the work is informed by dreams, Ancestors, Family members, and performance art as a research methodology. Initially trained in lithography, Morin's 20 years of artistic practice moves from printmaking to poetry to button blanket making to installation drum making to bead work to performance art. Peter is the son of Janelle Creyke (Crow Clan, Tahltan Nation) and Pierre Morin (French Canadian). Throughout his exhibition and making history, Morin has focused upon his matrilineal inheritances in homage to the matriarchal structuring of the Tahltan Nation, and prioritizes Cross-Ancestral collaborations as a strategy for dismantling colonialism. Morin was longlisted for the Brink and Sobey Awards, in 2013 and 2014, respectively. In 2016, Morin received the Hnatyshyn Foundation Award for Outstanding Achievement by a Canadian Mid-Career Artist. Peter Morin currently holds a tenured appointment in the Faculty of Arts at

the Ontario College of Art and Design University in Toronto, and is the Graduate Program Director of the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design program at OCADU.