

We witness Skull Mountain twice in the film: where the spotted fawn leads the character to the mountain, and in a photo hung in her photography darkroom. This is depicting the slaughter of the buffalo and colonial land policies that took place on the land we now call Canada. The slaughter of the buffalo led to the gradual and horrible starvation and death of many Indigenous peoples.



Skull Mountain from *Four Faces of the Moon*, 2016. Mixed media.

How do you think slaughtering the buffalo and colonial land policies go hand-in-hand?

Head to the back wall of the North Gallery to the films.

What do you notice about the artistic and cultural style of these films?

Four Faces of the Moon follows the animated journey of an Indigenous photographer as she travels through time. She witnesses moments in her family's history and strengthens her connection to her Métis, Cree and Anishnaabe ancestors. This is a personal story, told in four chapters through the eyes of director and writer Amanda Strong. The oral and written history of her family reveals the story—we witness the impact and legacy of the railways, the slaughter of the buffalo and colonial land policies. The film contains no English language, relying on sound, image and Indigenous voices to tell the story.

This multi-layered approach to storytelling may leave you with more questions than answers: it is an invitation to look into your own understanding of history, legacy and the importance in knowing who you are and where you come from.

The number 4 is represented in various ways throughout this film—including in the title. What do you think the significance of the number 4 could be in an Indigenous context?

How to Steal a Canoe is the story of a young Nishnaabeg woman and an elder Nishnaabeg man rescuing a canoe from a museum and returning it to the lake it was meant to be with. On a deeper level, we witness the act of stealing back the precious parts of us that were, as Indigenous people, always ours in the first place.

The audio in the film conveys the story both through music and storytelling. Spoken lyrics were recorded by Nishnaabeg poet Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. The original score was composed by Cree cellist Cris Derksen.

What components of personification (inanimate objects being portrayed as having human characteristics) are you witnessing? Why might canoes be displayed in such a human way in this film?

Biidaaban—Since time immemorial Indigenous people have harvested sap from trees to produce syrup, a practice that continues today. Two main characters, Biidaaban, a young Indigenous gender-fluid person, and Sabe, an Ancient shape shifter, set out to harvest sap

from sugar maples in their urban environment and private neighbourhoods of the city. Biidaaban can see traces of time, people, creatures and land. By harvesting syrup in this way they are continuing the work of their ancestors.

Ancestors and animals such as Ghost Caribou and Ghost Wolf are embedded within the landscape, but only Biidaaban can see them. These visuals reverberate throughout the work to draw from the past but what we see is steadfast in the present.

What dichotomies (contrasts) do you observe as the film displays both traditional Indigenous knowledges/practices and adaptations to modern Indigenous knowledges/practices?

Flood is driven by a haunting, yet progressive, sound design with two main characters, Spider Woman and Thunderbird. Together, they act as vessels, composing and carrying the story of an Indigenous youth named Thunder, navigating her way through a colonial flood. Spider Woman battles against an old Ghost Judge who frenetically writes history from the side of oppression and displacement. The Ghost Judge fills the entire world with his writings and law.

Flood leaves the viewer to wonder: whose truth is real?

What tactics do we use to decolonize, fight back and move forward?

About the Artist

Amanda Strong is a Michif interdisciplinary artist with a focus on filmmaking, stop motion animations and media art. Currently based on unceded Coast Salish territories also known as Vancouver, BC, Canada. Strong received a BAA in Interpretative Illustration and a



Diploma in Applied Photography from the Sheridan Institute. With a cross-disciplinary focus, common themes of her work are reclamation of Indigenous histories, lineage, language and culture. Strong is the Owner/Director/Producer of Spotted Fawn Productions Inc. (SFP). Under her direction, SFP utilizes a multi-layered approach and unconventional methods that are centered in collaboration on all aspects of their work.

Spotted Fawn Productions (SFP) was founded in 2010 and incorporated in 2014 by Michif Owner/Director/Producer Amanda Strong. SFP is an Indigenous led production company that is creative, community oriented with a focus on illustration, stop motion, 2D, 3D and virtual reality animations.

Our mission is to provide mentorship and training opportunities for emerging and diverse artists. We do this by creating space for Indigenous people, women and non-binary individuals to engage in the many aspects of film, animation and production. Together we create innovative, layered digital projects with compelling characters, art and stories. Through acts of reclamation and collaboration we are telling our own stories, in our own voice, lifting up and empowering the future of Indigenous storytelling in film. The works you are seeing here are the sets from the films playing in the North gallery.

<https://www.spottedfawnproductions.com/>

Amanda Strong iskocîsa (little fires)



Amanda Strong. *House—Small Scale* from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.

This guide is intended to give some insight into the artist's process and ideas. It provides interesting bits of information paired with questions that ask you to think about the works from your own perspective. We hope you enjoy the experience!

[TwoRiversGallery.ca](https://www.tworiversgallery.ca)

iskocîsa (phoenetics: is-sko-chay-sah) focuses on a series of four short films by Michif interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker Amanda Strong and offers a window into the artistic process associated with stop motion animation. Screened as part of this exhibition, *Four Faces of the Moon* (2016), *How to Steal a Canoe* (2016), *Biidaaban* (2017), and *Flood* (2017), utilize techniques of stop motion animation while *Flood* also incorporates shadow puppetry. *iskocîsa* provides the opportunity to view these remarkable films and a chance to encounter the sets, props and puppets integral to their making.

As you enter the gallery, what are you seeing? What thoughts come to mind as you observe all these sets, characters, and stories frozen in time? Look to the right and the left of the door. What is happening here? What traumas may the character at the desk have experienced? What do you think the wagon full of glass bottles symbolizes?

Displayed here are additional puppets and props used in *Four Faces of the Moon*. Look closely at the character sitting at the desk with another character pulling a wagon full of glass bottles. Hauling bottles may represent the character carrying their trauma with them (e.g. alcoholism), or they may symbolize the act of trying to clean up the trauma left by residential schools.

Continue to the right of the door.

Biidaaban

Here we are in Biidaaban's basement with Sabe, an Ancient shape shifter. Sabe guides Biidaaban through harvesting maple sap and reassures them that it is their responsibility to engage in their cultural practices even though they are in a city.



Basement from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.

There is a bulletin board in the background. What components reflective of Biidaaban's culture and sugar maple sap harvesting do you see here?

Displayed here is Biidaaban's home—they live in the basement.



House—Small Scale from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.

Do you notice the small bird design painted on Biidaaban's door? They paint this on the trees they plan to harvest from as well. What do you think the significance of this bird design could be?

In the next set, we see a young gender-fluid person named Biidaaban about to harvest maple sap to produce syrup. This is an

Indigenous practice that continues today, however, for many urban Indigenous people, such as Biidaaban, it takes place on trees within city limits—which often creates conflict with settlers/colonial powers.



House—Large Scale from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.



Powerlines from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.

What are you notice about the contents of Biidaaban's yard? Why might these objects be there?

There is an electrical current that travels along the lines—hovering over the maple trees. This gives the impression that colonial ways of being (e.g. electricity) are embedded in modern Indigenous practices which can oftentimes make them dangerous.

What else are you seeing in this set?



Houses from *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*, 2017. Mixed media.

Here we have the neighbourhood houses that come to life and attack Biidaaban when they collect maple sap from the trees. These are representative of colonial powers trying to stop Biidaaban from practicing their traditions. Thankfully, Ghost Caribou, Ghost Wolf (their Ancestors), and Sabe save Biidaaban.

Why might houses be represented as colonial powers trying to repress Indigenous practices and traditions?

Flood

The classroom has stacks of paper surrounding the character. Colonial knowledge values the written word, while many Indigenous Nations value oral/spoken knowledges. The erasure of Indigenous oral knowledges, and their replacement by colonial written words, comes with a lot of implications, first and foremost the erasure of Indigenous languages.



Classroom from *Flood*, 2017. Mixed media.

What significance does this title have in relation to this classroom set?

Four Faces of the Moon



Rifle Pit from *Four Faces of the Moon*, 2016. Mixed media.

In the rifle pit, we see the settler people and the Indigenous people shooting at each other.

Based on the themes of this exhibition and processes of colonization, what do you think these characters are fighting over? What do you think roles of the railroad could have been in the process of colonization?

The construction of the railroad on the land we now call Canada made it easier to transport goods, services, and, unfortunately, to relocate Indigenous people away from their



Train from *Four Faces of the Moon*, 2016. Mixed media.

lands to more undesirable locations so their lands could be stolen.

The photos in the dark room appear to tell a story of the slaughter of the buffalo, colonial land policies/stolen land, genocide, the loss of cultural knowledge, and the character's Ancestors. The photos help guide the viewers through the film. Watching the character witness moments in her family's history strengthens her connection to her Métis, Cree, and Anishnaabe Ancestors.



Darkroom from *Four Faces of the Moon*, 2016. Mixed media.

What do you notice in the background/walls of the darkroom? How do these pieces contribute to the story Amanda is telling us?

Continue down the middle of the South Gallery.

How to Steal a Canoe

Here we are witnessing the character in the forest with the canoe she has "stolen" from a warehouse of already-stolen canoes.



Forest Set from *How to Steal a Canoe*, 2016. Mixed media.

What does it mean for this character to "steal" something that belongs to her Indigenous Nation?

In this set, we can observe Biidaaban, Sabe, Ghost Caribou, and Ghost Wolf (Biidaaban's Ancestors). These characters represent drawing upon cultural knowledge from the past (Biidaaban's Ancestors' knowledge) and applying it to the present.

How do you draw upon your Ancestors' knowledge to help you in the present?

Continue into the North Gallery.