

Dan's Personal Letter

My name is Dan Cardinal McCartney, and this is my individual account of Contemporary Calgary's Collider (2019) residency for Planetary (2020). I have requested my work kwayask ê-pimohtêyân (I Walk the Line) to be removed before the exhibition reopened post lockdown.

The full joint letter and additional individual letters can be found at this [LINK \(https://jointletterto.cc/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/).

First and foremost, I pay my respects to the original people of this land as my ancestors have always lived in the northern boreal. Thank you to Kootsisáw (Tsuut'ina), Mohkínstsis (Blackfoot), and Wincheesh-pah (Stoney Nakoda) who have called this home beyond living memory. I want to also thank the members of the Métis Nation of Region #3. I moved away from my home to further my arts education, but also to find safety outside of the oil driven city of Fort McMurray. I am eternally grateful as a Mikisew Cree, Suline Dene, and Métis queer person to live here.

Black Lives Matter is what sparked this conversation with Contemporary Calgary, and I acknowledge this movement and Black people with respect. The nomination based system of Contemporary Calgary hardly included racialized artists and Indigenous artists, but it completely excluded Black artists. Contemporary Calgary names us as BIPOC, yet fails to acknowledge the lack of Black artists to fully construct that umbrella title of BIPOC. There were no obvious curatorial attempts by the gallery to include Black artists in the iterations of the Collider residency.

I stand in solidarity with my fellow Indigenous and racialized artists out of care for the collective experience, but also for each individual truth. Thank you to Teresa Tam, Richelle Bear Hat, Alia Shahab, Brittney Bear Hat, and Rocio Graham. I am in constant awe of all of your courage, but also I am humbled by your inclusivity and kindness. Ironically, I believe I have spent more time outside of the actual residency with other Collider participants than I did when at the gallery. However, we still found one another, despite everything. To everyone reading this letter, I hope that you understand the gift that has been given by sharing their experiences.

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When I was first invited to the Collider residency, I was informed that I would be the last artist to join. I was the only Two Spirit, trans artist in the entire residency. The nomination based system failed to include any Black artists and only extended to a few racialized artists of different backgrounds, very few LGBTQ2S+ artists, and even more few artists of intersecting marginalizations. The residency consisted of 36 artists, yet it was predominantly white. Looking at the mostly white presenting floor staff, upper management, and board of directors - this seems to be a pattern within Contemporary Calgary.

During my time at the residency, the only curatorial contact I had with Contemporary Calgary concerned their public programming. This included the poorly communicated artist talk which I will expand on later, and physical placement of my work within the Planetary exhibit. Though this may seem innocuous to some, the resulting ignorance and insensitivity formed much of my experience with Contemporary Calgary.

My work kwayask ê-pimohtêyân (I Walk the Line) was made throughout the residency and was large and vulnerable, inhabiting almost the entire wall and often floor space of my studio. The research and work responded to intergenerational effects of white supremacy on my Two Spirit body and mind, as well as the

correlation between residential schools, foster care survival, and lateral violence. Many of these are subject matters that I consider in my overall arts practice that I have had the opportunity to exhibit on a local, and national scale previous to this residency. When I was creating this work, I was met with disdain, passive aggressive comments, and confusion. It seemed to be that most of the upper management was unaware of the type of work I do. Comments queried the validity of my project, and how after months it finally 'looked like something.' White artists were allowed to use their studios in full capacity - with clutter, tools, supplies in use. When I did the same, Contemporary Calgary management made comments both privately to me and publicly (in front of other artists and guests) about the 'state' of my studio and joked about its 'dirtiness'.

During the residency, I was working a full-time artist run centre internship and could only access the studio during the late evening. The studio was patrolled by security once or twice an evening and on some nights I was unfortunate enough to be sitting at my desk during the patrols. As a masculine presenting Two-Spirit Indigenous person, security men (always white guards) bring with them a radiation of terror. However, being alone in an empty building with no white people around to assure the officers that my presence here was okay, was especially difficult. Though I was always at my studio, either reading, writing, or making, I was always approached. Who was I, what was I doing there, could he see my ID card to prove it.

The disorganization leading up to my artist talk has been unparalleled by any other arts institution that I have previously exhibited with. I believe that Contemporary Calgary should facilitate meaningful programming by offering extra support to staff and artists to effectively work together. In addition to the difficult subject matter of my talk, I was put under a lot of stress beforehand from lighting and building issues that lasted right up until the public arrived.

I was informed that I was to give a land acknowledgment in a careless, last minute suggestion. I believe as an Indigenous person that these acknowledgments must be done in a respectful way that requires preparation and care.

I refuse to have my work ethic questioned by rich white people. I refuse to be ashamed of how I keep my studio, as I am not dirty. I refuse to be scared by rough security officers, as I am not a savage. I refuse to be ashamed of my subject matter, as I know my body and lived experiences are not worthless. Contemporary Calgary needs to understand that they have produced a racist environment that is not conducive for creativity.

If your art organization is not ready to support marginalized people, if the people who run it are not ready to listen and learn from the marginalized people they have already involved, and if the marginalized people are being used as tools of diversity for public facing programming, then your institution does not deserve to work with marginalized people. Contemporary Calgary shirks responsibility for its negligence and paints itself as a generous institution giving opportunities to local artists. It's apparent that Contemporary Calgary is driven only by profit and prestige. They can no longer pretend that there is some sort of community or any type of care that is encompassed by this capitalist, colonial framework.

Following the residency, I have felt continuously disheartened by Contemporary Calgary's defensive, and at times aggressive responses to us. When privately sharing our experiences with Contemporary Calgary's

upper management and board, we were met with manipulation and surface level pandering. It aches me to see the disrespect towards the artists that I have had the privilege to work with, as we all deserve much more than what has been offered.

Though this may seem like I am trying to tear Contemporary Calgary down, I am not. I am an artist that wants arts to flourish, and who believes that local artists of various descent deserve more than what Contemporary Calgary is currently offering. I believe that one of the best funded galleries in Mohkínstsis, with a board and upper staff of highly educated and affluent people, with a huge public reach and expansive gallery space, can do better. I encourage Contemporary Calgary to implement actual changes in order to grow beyond the familiar white supremacy, to push past reactionary victimization to make realistic steps on being the huge 'Canadian' gallery powerhouse that they want to rush into being.

These necessary changes require bravery that I know that is difficult to muster, but it needs to be done regardless. This letter is constructed with the hope of correction, and not of punishment as I refuse to use colonial tactics of covert manipulation, degradation, and dehumanization that was inflicted on my ancestors and family. Contemporary Calgary needs to learn that racialized people are not disposable, and that **we are human**.

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To the Mohkínstsis arts community, please remember the racism permeates the very structures in which we are all collectively working within. Contemporary Calgary is only one example of a racist institution in this city. Use this as an opportunity to look within your own predominantly white boards, staff, and programming that you have upheld. If you feel relief in knowing that you may now point a finger to a larger organization, please understand that you are willfully ignoring the needs in your own community. I believe wholeheartedly that this change can be done collaboratively. I have suffered under your collective racism (and transphobia) especially through this past year, but my ancestor's resiliency runs hot through my veins, and you all will not shame me into silence any longer.