



# SMOKE SIGNALS X REFLECTIONS

JESSE KING | JAKE KIMBLE | KIKKI GUERARD |  
MELISSA JOHNS | MEGAN FEHELEY |

**FEBRUARY 12, 2025 – MARCH 30, 2025**

# CURATORIAL ESSAY

Curated by Gallery TPW's Curatorial Research Fellow — Jesse King  
February 12th, 2025 - March 30th, 2025

Jesse King  
Jake Kimble  
Kikki Guerard  
Melissa Johns  
Megan Feheley

***Smoke Signals x Reflections*** is an extension of its previous successor, ***Celestial Bodies, 2024***. *Celestial Bodies* explored the experience of Indigenous identities who identified as Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer to occupy space for rarely recognized voices—permitting viewers to experience and question the colonial presence of societal norms regarding surrounding topics of gender, and sexuality through desire, euphoria, despair, and dysphoria.

*Smoke Signals x Reflections* focuses on the contemplative journey into the realm of Indigenous identity grounded through connection, joy and longing. *Smoke Signals x Reflections* creates a cohort of artists, designers, and curators called ***The Celestial Collective***. Forging an inviting atmosphere through lived experiences and emotions by all sharing similar journeys. The Celestial Collective encompasses Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer and non-conforming artists who invite visitors into an environment that prioritizes a sense of reciprocity and kinship.

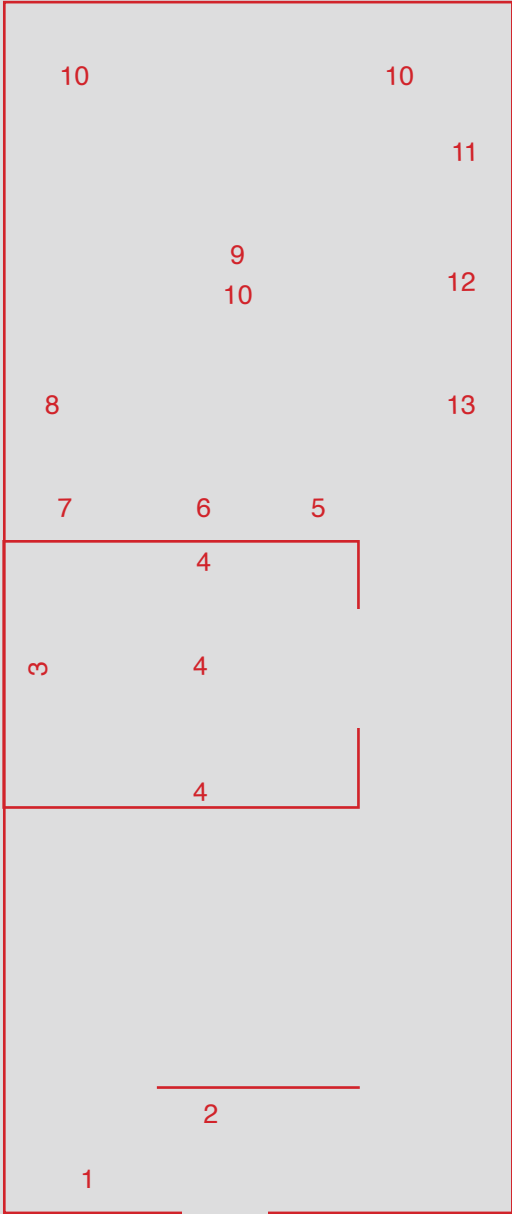
## ***Messages In The Sky***

As I watch myself watch the three crows circle in the sky  
Where the power lines intersect, all I can feel is a sense of longing.

Do the crows know how I'm feeling?  
Do they smell the fear, or are they carefree and happy?  
Are the crows my anxiety?  
Do I stop to greet the crows, or do I follow the power lines into the city?

The exhibition *Smoke Signals x Reflections* is a guiding signal that invites the viewer into themes of reconnection and the act of rekindling our traditional connections of kinship with one another. Through these immersive experiences, the viewer finds themselves positioned in a space created with many forms of broadcasting that serve as conductors for meaningful storytelling through sources of wild posting, TV signals, sounds and immersive experiences.

# FLOOR PLAN



ENTRANCE

# ABOUT THE ARTWORK

## 1. Jesse King

*Velvet Shedding*

3 Deer Antlers: Final Stage - Antler casting, Red Ribbon

1/4" x 10yd

2025

Velvet shedding is the process of a transformative cycle for deers where there is a drop in testosterone, resulting in the loss of their antlers through an ongoing cycle that shows a state of ever-going flux and rebirth.

## 2. Jesse King

*Flaming Lilies*

Medium Format | Vinyl

40" x 40"

2025

## 3. Melissa Johns

*Distant Summers*

3D Video

2025

## 4. Megan Feheley

*breath on coals*

Installation | 12'x10'

(Three Orange Tarpaulins)

2025

In this work, abstracted designs based on birch bark biting (a mark-making practice from the artist's nation that utilizes thin sheets of birch, folded and bitten into to create designs) are cut out of orange tarpaulin. Through this work, tarpaulin is investigated as a medium for transferring knowledge visually in a potential world without birch bark, and here, the artist focuses their anxieties around climate catastrophe, access to land, and transmission of knowledge. In this work, the permanence of plastic stands in duality: at once a product of an inescapable extractivist industry that has been weaponized against Indigenous bodies and land, it is also a material that is utilitarian, inexpensive, and could potentially survive impending climate events whereby birch bark may become scarce, entirely extinct, or in other ways unavailable.

*The artist considers how to create things that are held by these inherent tensions and contradictions.*

## 5. Megan Feheley

*survival kit*

Installation | Glass beads, emergency blanket, steel  
2025

In the survival kit, a collection of pieces incorporating the abstracted patterns of birch bark biting present throughout Feheley's practice are assembled into components of a 'survival kit.' By incorporating the methodology of beadwork and birch bark biting into alternate forms and signifiers, the artist questions how generating and carrying ways of making translate into sustenance.

*The survival kit contains an emergency blanket, flint, a spark, and an ember.*

## 6. Melissa Johns

*Exposure (void) & Exposure (shells)*

Beadwork  
2025

I am not deeply rooted in my body. It seems so counterintuitive, considering the presence required to write this, but the reality is I am clumsy and awkward on the best of days. I prefer stillness to action within the body I inhabit, and it certainly likes to play tricks on me. But I am most in my body when I share it with those I love.

My friend Asha told me that every part of my body is a gift from my ancestors. These inheritances shape how I move through intimacy, humour, and resistance. My favourite parts of myself are theirs—my grandmother's hands, a fat ass from my mother's side—but I use them differently. I want to honour that. I want to honour them. And I want to honor myself—the ways this body loves differently than theirs did. They love me, I love others, and in that, something continues.

Over the years, my practice has shifted significantly towards the work I undertake for my family, preserving and celebrating our histories. As I sift through photos and watch old videos, I see all these parts of myself reflected back at me through my relatives, which is carried through our bodies as readily as what we do with them. I'm realizing that I don't have to hold myself separate from the process, and this collective has allowed me to be a little more playful in finding my own place through the act of memory-making.

I bead my favourite photo of myself next to the ones that were never taken.

I burn away that which I no longer need.

I own my hibernations and hot girl summers in equal measure.  
This body will change. This body will fade.  
But my hands remain through the seasons—steady, creating,  
remembering.

Nia:wen in just the right way to my family, partners, and collaborators.

## 7. Melissa Johns

*Seasonal Lover*

Stereoscopic video

2025

## 8. Kikki Guerard

*kikî-pîkiskwâsin isi kê-kî-nânâhkasîhtâtân*

*(You talked to me on the outside)*

Wool Silk, Fabric Print

55" x 28"

2025

This work reflects absence, memory, and how we honour those taken from us. I never had the privilege of meeting my great-grandmother, but I listened to her guidance, and she talked to me from outside our physical world. I tell her about daydreaming of sitting around my kitchen table with her, drinking red rose tea, and listening to her stories. The transparency of the fabric speaks to how memory and presence exist together. She is both here and not here. I see her in myself and reclaim space for her in creating this piece. She is not forgotten.

## 9. Kikki Guerard

*Redbird*

Beaded Box

2.3" D x 2.5" W x 4.3" H

2025

This Redbird matchbox has been with me since the beginning—used in ceremonies, for lighting medicines, and for being on the land. It represents important moments in my life and understanding of being Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer. Beading this matchbox is a way of honouring its significance. By covering this matchbox in beadwork, I transform it into a testament of care, reciprocity, and survival, bringing warmth in solitude and holding memory.

## 10. The Celestial Collective

*Constellation Spark*

Video Installations / Sound Scape

2025

In both video installations, titled *Constellation Spark*, viewers are invited to witness and experience a blend of touch and ritual. The Celestial Collective occupy the space with interactive movements, capturing meaningful connections and creating a sense of shared space and safety through movement, touch, energy, and interaction with familiar objects. The soundscape unites the space through isolated sounds that can be seen throughout the exhibition.

The pillar of cr-tv's simulates a broadcasting station that anchors the space to signal Two-Spirit artists in The Celestial Collective. Each screen shares a looped video of all members of the collective striking a match on a red bird box, a typical brand often used to spark the beginning of traditional ceremony and medicine, a connection we all share between the cohort. Sparking the match that started the collective and creating signals of connection for all individuals who see themselves in the exhibition *Smoke Signals x Reflections*.

## 11. Jesse King

*Flaming Lilies*

Medium Format | Beaded chromogenic print, walnut frame

38" x 38"

2025

*Flaming Lilies* is a stand-alone series of exploration that dives into a significant look at cultural roots—discussing indigeneity and how gender and identity intersect. King explores their connection to their elders by using the visual signifier of the orange day lily.

"The orange day lily is an essential symbol because, as a child, I remember visiting my reserve in the summers and walking to the lake with my family, passing by church ruins and hearing the stories of residential schooling. Once torn down, Orange Day Lillies grew over the structure, creating a sense of rest and resilience".

King looks at the orange day lily as a perception of longing, the calling to return to the familiar land, and the beauty community holds.

## 12. Megan Feheley

*obliteration fragments*

Charcoal, ashes, and acrylics on birch panel.

36"x26"

2025

Scans of fragments of birch bark bitings the artist has created and worked with in other aspects of their practice, stained with tusche and paint from their role in other creations, are recomposed here as representations of the artist's body and presence. Below, text spells out "obliterate me" in relief, a mixture of crushed charcoal, sweetgrass ashes and acrylic medium, an exploration of how tensions of erasure and removal are inscribed onto the body and experience of the artist. This text is offered in a goading, blasé command, an attempt to encompass many threads in the artist's practice surrounding the erasure of Cree knowledge systems, and their experience as a queer Indigenous person.

## 13. Jake Kimble

*IT'S ALL SO INCREDIBLY LOUD*

Archival inkjet prints, Czech Seed Beads

11" x 14" each

2025

My great-grandmother was a beautiful beader, my grandmother could bead, my mom can kind of, and I can barely. *It's All So Incredibly Loud* talks about having the knowledge of a historical expression inside of you but not having direct access - hence, the two mediums converging physically inside the frame, thinking about how I can utilize beadwork in a way that also represents the overwhelming nature of being alive.



# ARTIST BIOS

**Jesse King**, born Ojibwe from Wasauksing First Nation (Eagle Clan), is based in Toronto. King's work and curatorial interests frequently explore the many facets of identity, including discussions of queerness, gender, and the importance of cultural representation.

King's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in Berlin, Germany, and Tampere, Finland. Their work has been in several independent publications, including fashion magazines such as Wonderland Magazine. King was the Exhibitions and Program Coordinator at imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival for three years, anchoring themselves in celebrating all forms of art through collaboration with national and international artists and galleries.

King works with the AGO as the Curatorial Assistant for Indigenous, Youth and Artists in Residency Projects. King served on the Trinity Square Video board of directors and is now a new board member of The Indigenous Curatorial Collective.

**Jake Kimble** is a multidisciplinary Chipewyan (Dënesųłiné) artist and curator from Treaty 8 territory in the Northwest Territories whose practice revolves around acts of self-care, self-repair, and gender-based ideological refusal. Kimble belongs to the Deninu K'ue First Nation and currently lives, works, and shoots on the stolen territory of x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Holding both a degree in Acting from Vancouver Film School as well as a BFA in Photography from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Through a clever subversion of the everyday aesthetics Kimble also plays with language and ambiguity – something that comes natural with them being a two-spirited artist. Using a funny bone as a tool, Kimble excavates themes of existentialism, narcissism, and the strange, offering an invitation to the audience to examine the absurdities that exist within the everyday so that they too may exhale, unclench, and even chuckle in the spaces where laughter is often lost.

**Kikki Guerard** a Two-Spirit Cree from Treaty 9 territory, Kikki is a creative director, photographer, and storyteller. They are a Taykwa Tagamou First Nation member residing in Tkaron:to. They pursued a post-secondary education in Photography & Marketing at OCAD University. Kikki's work explores themes of identity, revealing the magic and vulnerability of their community. Through the power of visual storytelling, they hope to create spaces for healing and transformation.

**Melissa Johns** is a new media artist and educator from a mixed Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk, Turtle Clan) and French Canadian background, born and based in Tkaronto. Melissa's visual practice manifests at the convergence of contemporary media, using interdisciplinary methods to collect, preserve, and transform fragments of the stories around her. Specializing in virtual reality installations, digital painting, and video art, Melissa's work centers on investigating the narrative potential of these emergent channels.

**Megan Feheley** is an illiw (Moose Cree) interdisciplinary artist based in Toronto. They are currently working towards their BFA in Indigenous Visual Culture at OCAD University, and work predominately in experimental sculpture/installation, beadwork, textiles, painting, and video. Feheley's work has been exhibited internationally in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and nationally in Toronto, Regina, North Bay, Picton and in online presentations. Feheley has had a recent solo exhibition with Xpace Cultural Centre (Toronto, 2020), and was the recipient of the 2022 Virtual Residency with Open Studio (Toronto). They also participated in an award-winning collaboration with the Royal Ontario Museum (Uncover/Recover project, 2019), for which Feheley was the recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award (2019).

# PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

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## **Exhibition Opening**

Thursday, February 13, 2025

Gallery TPW

6PM-8PM

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## **Beading Circle I Open Session**

**with Host Beader Jenna Bjornson (materials provided)**

Thursday, February 27, 2025

Gallery TPW

7PM-9PM

Registration required



## **Panel Discussion**

**Jesse King, Kikki Guerard, Melissa Johns, Megan Feheley**

Saturday, March 1, 2025

Gallery TPW

2PM-4PM

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## **Beading Circle I Closed Session**

**with Host Beader Jenna Bjornson (materials provided)**

**This session is exclusively for Indigenous guests**

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Gallery TPW

7PM-9PM

Registration required



**Gallery TPW**

170 St Helens Ave, Toronto, ON  
Wed-Sat: 11AM-5PM  
gallerytpw.ca

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Title wall smoke painted by N'we Jinan Curatorial Intern Emilia Nahdee

Print Services: Smokestack, Saman Designs Inc.

Equipment Support: Charles Street Video

Install Team: Meagan Christou, Nadine Maher, Jordan May, Craig Spence

### **Supported by:**



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