

# EMERGE



ART ON DEMAND 8.2

CHANTELLE  
TRAINOR-MATTIES

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Like many people in Canada today, Abbotsford-based artist Chantelle Trainor-Matties grew up largely disconnected from her Indigenous heritage. There are many historical reasons for this phenomenon of mass disconnection, including most heinously the separation of Indigenous children from their families through the Residential School system, and later the child welfare program. Even in cases where children did remain with their families and communities, individuals often felt pressure to disassociate from their Indigenous identity in order to avoid the racist treatment directed at First Nations individuals by non-Indigenous people and institutions.

Trainor-Matties' mother recalls her past experiences of feeling uncomfortable with claiming her Indigeneity. But recently, the family has come to embrace their Indigenous heritage, and are working to reclaim their culture. For Chantelle, her artistic practice has become a significant tool and expression of this journey, while also serving as a record of how her identity is growing and changing as she hones her knowledge of her cultural heritage.

The journey to reclaim her Nisga'a and Métis heritage began in 2018, when Trainor-Matties had the opportunity to collaborate on a mural through a class at the University of the Fraser Valley. Under the guidance of Indigenous artist Fred Jackson, Trainor-Matties designed and painted salmon artwork in an Indigenous style. Encouraged by Jackson, she pursued her practice and study of Indigenous art further, and eventually applied to be an artist at Nations Creations, a social enterprise that supports Indigenous creatives.

For Trainor-Matties it has been critical throughout this process to seek the guidance of reliable



Cover: *Ferret Whorl*, 2020, digital illustration, 14 x 18 in.

Above: *Ornicus Orca*, 2021, latex paint on panel, 4 x 6.5 ft.

sources. Studying books, conducting researching through seminars and videos, examining artifacts, and being in conversation with other Indigenous creatives have all been valuable means by which she has educated herself about her Indigenous culture and art. As she has not been traditionally trained, Trainor-Matties makes it clear that her work is not traditionally styled Nisga'a art. She instead considers her current style to be a form of contemporary Northwest Coast formline (to which she is connected through her Nisga'a heritage), but expressed with her own distinctive signature.

Contemporary Northwest Coast formline is based on the use of certain distinctive shapes such as the ovoid, U-form, and S-form. Trainor-Matties does make use of that visual vocabulary, but at times she also combines them with expressions of painterly realism. Visitors to the exhibition can see this perhaps most clearly in the large-scale mural painting *Ornicus Orca*, in which the form of a realistic killer whale is echoed by a formline design behind it.

Trainor-Matties also often incorporates Nisga'a language in the titles of her works. *Pdeek*, for example, is a Nisga'a word meaning "tribe" or "large family."

In her work of the same name, Trainor-Matties depicts four tribes each represented by a different animal: eagle, raven, orca, and wolf. Similarly, *Yuu-anuhl* is the title of the first drum that Trainor-Matties and her husband constructed in 2018 at an Indigenous Peoples Day workshop. The drum is decorated with an otter design that is particularly sentimental for the artist. Otters are closely related to ferrets, and both figure prominently in Trainor-Matties' work. She and her husband once had several beloved ferrets as pets, and the creation of several of her designs aided in the grieving of the loss of these beloved animal companions.

Trainor-Matties' journey to reclaim her Indigenous heritage has led her on a new pathway for creating art that both records her embrace of her culture, and her ongoing growth as she continues to learn the style and expand her identity. Although her journey is far from complete, she was greatly encouraged and validated by being able to obtain her Nisga'a citizenship card in 2020. As she continues on her path, her art practice will continue to support and aid her.

Emily Goodbrand  
Emerge Curator



## CHANTELLE TRAINOR-MATTIES

Chantelle Trainor-Matties is a visual artist with Nisga'a, Métis, and settler heritage who specializes in illustration, graphic design, and painting. Much of her work focuses on flora and fauna, pop culture, and the macabre, with styles ranging from bold contemporary formline to painterly realism.

She writes: “My Indigenous art has evolved over the years as I study, learn, and practice, and I’m proud of what I have accomplished thus far. I’ve had the opportunity to be a part of many amazing projects and fundraisers, and knowing that my artwork has had a positive impact in other peoples’ lives brings me a lot of joy. I hope to be able to continue sharing my creative endeavours.”

Above: *Pdeek*, 2021, digital illustration, 18 x 14 in.



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GRAPHIC DESIGN BY CELINA KOOPS