

June 17, 2020

June 21 is NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

Indigenous people urged for decades for a national solidarity day with Indigenous peoples. It is astonishing that it took until the 21st century to see this symbolic gesture. European settlers stole these territories through dishonesty and bad faith agreements. Ours is a society that, for generations, attempted to erase and assimilate these cultures, rather than recognize their contributions for a healthy and respectful society that honours all life. Every year we produce a poster developed by an Indigenous artist to honour this day and generations of Indigenous peoples sidelined by colonialism.

Innu Artist Anatole St-Onge created this year's work. He comes from a family of hunters, lumberjacks and musicians from Pessamit. He has been living in Maliotenam for almost 20 years. In 2008, a relative asked him for an easel. Unfortunately, that person passed away the next day. Overwhelmed by grief, Anatole wondered if perhaps the easel was for him. In 2010, Anatole swapped his guitar for a paintbrush. At 45 years old, he discovered a bond with canvas that would grow into his new occupation.

Anatole is a gifted portraitist whose paintings exude great serenity. He likes to marvel as he creates, and he aims to inspire a sense of wonder through his work. Always modest, he hopes that those who enjoy his paintings can experience the deep serenity he feels when he creates them.



The painting arises from a picture taken at the *Idle No More* rally in Montreal by Francis DiSalvio. Indigenous culture is one of stories and sharing. Anatole writes of the subject in his work: "his hair, his demeanor...reminded me of a deceased personal and family friend who lived in Montreal."

The Idle No More movement represents the rising of Indigenous peoples initiated by four women in December 2012. There is much to struggle for. We live in a colonized society that produces billionaires while others go hungry. Yet, arising from generations of despair and denial there is

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hope for all people. New generations of Indigenous youth inspire us reclaiming their history, purpose and preservation of the earth. We are silent no more!

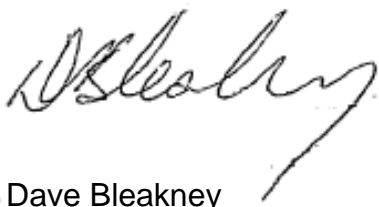
The scourge of colonialism and capitalism destroyed lands and impoverished people. Now, we face the reality of a climate disaster, a steadily boiling crisis that is changing the planet forever, which will cruelly punish our descendants. Indigenous contributions and knowledge are crucial to our understanding of respectful and sustainable relations with all life.

June 21 is a day the government designates for “recognizing the cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Indigenous peoples”. It is more.

It remains a day of solidarity that recognizes the struggle for freedom and liberation by Indigenous peoples. It is also a celebration stretching back eons, a time of renewal, and part of a great cycle that is connected and ongoing. These things continue every day. It is time for hope and rebirth.

We are thankful for the work of this artist and for the generations of those people whose names we do not know; those who struggled to survive colonialism, settler culture, and to remain in harmony with all their relations. As the planet heats through climate change, we are now all on that walk. On June 21, and every day, we can join that march for justice. We remain connected.

In Solidarity,



Dave Bleakney
2nd National Vice-President

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