



Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize 2018  
Visual Arts Alberta Association  
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Edmonton, AB, T5K 1M7

RE: Nomination and written description of Terry McCue's *Demanding Justice*, from the exhibition *Ripples of Loss*

Dear Jury members,

Art Gallery of St. Albert was honored to present the exhibition *Ripples of Loss* by Ojibwa artist Terry McCue from November 2 to December 2, 2017.

The *Ripples of Loss* works are a vivid visual departure from McCue's previous practice. They stand as a powerful tribute to the missing and murdered Indigenous Women of Canada and as an homage to other works created by visual artists in this subject field. McCue enthusiastically acknowledges the work that has been done in this area by other artists. He states that his sole objective with these works is to keep a spotlight on this issue. We live in a time where our attention is easily diverted to the next news story on our computer or phone screen, McCue hopes that those who experience these works either through the exhibition, online imagery or the digital catalogue created by AGSA, are reminded to keep their attention on this topic.

The number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada is disproportionately high, this tragedy is the subject of a national inquiry and an important reckoning for those living in contemporary Canada.

McCue's sombre and striking works emit the ghostly forms of the women dressed in red in an ever-changing landscape. McCue reveals the women in traditional aboriginal ceremonial attire: Ojibwa Jingle Dance dresses, Plains Cree tunics and cloaks, as well as in contemporary nonindigenous clothing. A strong sense of narrative permeates the works. As we view the collection we relate to the women and witness that they were mothers, sisters, daughters, all taken too soon and vanished to violence.

McCue explains that the title *Ripples of Loss*, references the ripple effect of this ongoing tragedy being like ripples in a pool of water multiplying out from a point where a raindrop has met the surface: "The death of an individual is not just their loss. It also affects the lives of their family members and the community they are from. For many of the murdered and missing women there is no end to the pain of wondering."

Prior to the creation of the *Ripples of Loss* paintings, McCue's work had been mostly devoted to figurative and wildlife subjects, with wildlife becoming the primary focus. McCue strongly believes that "someone must be the voice of those who cannot speak." This belief springs from traditional Ojibway teachings which address the human responsibility regarding the natural world.

In regard to McCue's motivation in creating these new works, he states:

"This new work is a complete departure from what I normally do. I can't say why this work is so important to me, only that I am compelled to produce it. I have been lucky enough in my life to have had the opportunity to follow my dreams. The missing and murdered Aboriginal women, who are

the subject of these paintings, were not allowed this opportunity. And not only that, but they have also been denied justice in their deaths. I simply feel the need to stand up and speak for those who have no voice, because I can.”

It is the artist’s objective to add to the growing spotlight being shone on this tragedy with the creation of these paintings. McCue felt so strongly about his need to create the works that, although his representation at Canada House Gallery in Banff rejected them early on, he dedicated a year to their creation regardless. Given that McCue’s occupation is solely as a professional artist, this choice cost him the income he would have earned in that year had he continued to produce the wildlife paintings he usually shows and sells. While it can be easy for many artists to fall into a comfortable routine following significant commercial success, we commend McCue for taking this risk with his work and staying true to the message that he felt compelled to share.

*Demanding Justice* is one painting in the *Ripples of Loss* series that was exhibited at the Art Gallery of St. Albert in November 2017. At 40 inches by 60 inches in size, *Demanding Justice* is one of the larger paintings in this series. While on display at AGSA, *Demanding Justice* was displayed as the first painting that visitors saw when they entered the exhibition space.

The painting depicts a still, dark, winter landscape scene with a solid, stark, black field as the sky. Each spatial plane and snowy hill is also depicted as a solid field of colour. One central, haunting and skeletal figure stands in the foreground of the image among leafless poplar tree trunks. This figure, its skull draped with dark brown braids and hollow eye sockets fixed hauntingly on the viewer, is clothed in the scarlet robes of a Supreme Court judge. A dense, shadowy trail of footprints in the snow runs beside this figure, diagonally across the image, guiding one’s eye to a doe in the mid-ground, near the centre of the painting. Like the skeleton figure in the foreground, the doe’s gaze is directed outward at the viewer. In the distance, behind the doe, other haunting, skeletal figures clad in red attire each trudge with haste and determination toward Canada’s Supreme Court building atop a hill, level with the main figure’s height. The building is painted without lights in the windows. It sits dark and seemingly empty atop the snowy hill.

As with McCue’s other works in the *Ripples of Loss* series, these ghostly figures in red attire are intended to represent the spirit of an Indigenous woman or girl whose life was taken too soon. In *Demanding Justice*, the spirits of innocent indigenous women appear to be moving toward another realm, each on a solitary journey to the Supreme Court of Canada to claim the justice that they have yet to receive. The judge in the foreground serves as a reminder that these victims occupied all walks of life, each serving an integral role in their family, community, and country.

The Art Gallery of St. Albert has chosen to nominate *Demanding Justice*, above all other works, because of its striking imagery and powerful message. We believe that it is the strongest representation of the entire *Ripples of Loss* series as an embodiment of this tragedy and the important issues behind the public inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls of Canada, as well as a respectful tribute to these women and girls, their families, and their communities. This painting serves as a strong reminder of the work that has yet to be done in finding justice for them and all who have been affected by their loss.

The *Ripples of Loss* exhibition provided reference to an incredibly pertinent, powerful message for Canada that AGSA guests were especially receptive to while visiting the *Ripples of Loss* exhibition. One visitor wrote about the works as follows:

“It is such a significant show at this time when the Canadian public is waking up to truths about Indigenous history in our country... Your exhibit is a form of reconciliation, a wake-up to the Canadian public. The piece demonstrating the distance between the judges on the horizon and the indigenous women is a fine visual metaphor. The others repetitively demand attention to this heartbreakingly distanced treatment of Indigenous women... We must admit that the exhibit is difficult to experience. But it reflects highly important truths about Canada...”

Overall, the works in this series have deeply affected those who experienced the exhibition and had the opportunity to hear the artist speak. It is the hope of both the Art Gallery of St. Albert and the artist, that these works continue to be shared.

We hope that you will consider Terry McCue's *Demanding Justice* for the Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize 2018. AGSA eagerly awaits your decision. Please note that I am available should you have any questions or require any further information regarding this nomination.

Jenny Willson-McGrath

Director/ Curator

Art Gallery of St. Albert