

Landscapes of Injustice



Research News and Project Updates

Spring/Summer 2019

Message from Project Director

Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross



A New Perspective on the Internment Era

Four years of *Landscapes of Injustice* research culminated this April at the Spring Institute where we presented, in polished form, the four claims that have emerged from our research. These claims structure our project's latest book manuscript (now in review with McGill-Queens Press) and will give shape to the museum exhibit and the narrative website. In the coming issues of the newsletter and our social media posts, members of our collective and invited guests will explore the meaning of these claims to them.

1. The dispossession entailed the deliberate killing of home. Home—the place where we belong—continues to hold meaning, even (and perhaps especially) for displaced people. When the Canadian government destroyed the homes of Japanese Canadians and sold all of their belongings, it compounded the harms of the internment.

2. Dispossession is hard work. The dispossession required years of administrative work and the complicity of thousands of people. Hundreds of government officials laboured in the dispossession. Thousands of civilians stole and bought the belongings of their former neighbours. Japanese Canadians felt the burden of daily administration for an entire decade.

3. Perpetrators of the dispossession reasoned wrong. Dispossession was not the work of angry racists alone. Although racism permeated the corridors of power, notions of citizenship, good governance, and fair play were also twisted in service of injustice. Ideals that Canadians now repudiate folded together with ones we still cherish to deprive citizens of their rights.

4. Dispossession is permanent. The internment era was far too long—7 years, most of them after the Second World War had ended. But dispossession lasts forever. The lands, possessions, and opportunities lost can never be fully restored. The communities and neighbourhoods destroyed can never be fully rebuilt. Japanese Canadians and others live with legacies of shame, silence, regret, complicity, and loss. Even legacies of resilience and activism in the face of wrongdoing come with their own costs. We are heirs to landscapes of injustice.

Our project began with the conviction that this history was important. We're now also confident that, working together with the community, we've found new ways of telling it.

In this issue of the newsletter, we're very pleased to be able to launch this series highlighting these claims and exploring the core learnings of our research collective. Our first contributor, Community Council Chair Vivian Wakabayashi Rygnestad, discusses her "aha" moment, when she connected her own experience of the loss of home with related histories in Zimbabwe and the United States.

Touched by Dispossession

My “Aha” Moment

Vivian Rygnestad

Have you ever had an “aha” moment..the moment when you went from “knowing” to “understanding”?

About a month ago I was in Steveston’s Murakami House watching a film clip from Linda Ohama’s “Obachan’s Garden”. When it finished everyone left except for one couple and me. In silence we wandered around the house. The man asked me if I could tell them more about the internment. I began talking when suddenly the man blurted out that it was similar to their white families being driven out of Zimbabwe. Gradually they told about their families fleeing to South Africa and then to Australia. I asked if they had joined the other families who had also fled to Australia. Their answer was “no”. Whether it was shame, guilt, or just wanting to put everything behind them, there was silence. The bonds of shared histories was gone.

Later as I was talking with a museum clerk, a man nearby said he was Japanese American and was interested in learning Japanese-Canadian history. He was surprised to learn that JCs had also been interned. His father was born in Japan and was very proud of having become an American citizen. During and after incarceration his father had become increasingly angry and bitter about being placed in a concentration camp. His father never spoke about incarceration. His silence and bitterness deeply affected his children and family life.

During our latest Institute we talked about the legacies of internment: silence, shame, guilt, loss, anger, courage, resilience, hard work, changes. One word that resonated for me was “home”. Home is more than a building. Home is community. Home is the comfort of daily lives with those we love. Home is “where the heart is”.

The couple from Zimbabwe? They hugged me in tears and thanked me for listening and understanding how it felt to lose their home. The man from the US? Incarceration had destroyed the peace and happiness of home.

My “aha” moment was in knowing that our Japanese-Canadian experiences of the forced removals and dispossession were traumatic and life-changing for individuals, families, and our community as a whole. After the conversations on that sunny day, my brain and heart understood. The actual situations may differ, but the loss of “home” and all its implications and emotions are generational, overarching, and universal.


Through Lol we have begun the journey of learning the impacts of the loss of “home’. There are countless others throughout the world with whom we share these experiences. It continues today..

The Suitcase Project Exhibit

The Suitcase Project is a multimedia exhibition created by Kayla Isomura asking yonsei and gosei (fourth and fifth generation) Japanese Canadians and Japanese Americans what they would pack if uprooted from their homes in a moment's notice.

While these descendants of the internment and incarceration may never have to endure the same forced uprooting as their ancestors, Kayla's work examines how they and those descended from families who experienced other forms of discrimination, remain affected by this history today.

More than 80 subjects ranging in age and background share their stories from cities in British Columbia, Canada and Washington, US through a series of photographs, short films and interviews.



THE SUITCASE PROJECT

what would you pack
if forcibly removed
from your home
today?

July 5 to July 26
Opening reception
Tuesday, July 9
5pm - 8pm

Thurs. July 18th: "Global Displacement" public panel and discussion,
7 - 9 pm, Mesachie Room, Arbutus Gallery

Fri. July 26th: "Landscapes of Injustice"
presentation by members of the research collective, UVic.
10 - 12 noon, Mesachie Room

Arbutus Gallery, 2687 James Street, Duncan (in Island Savings Centre)
Monday - Friday, 11 am - 5pm, Saturday, noon - 3pm • 250 746-1633 • cvpublicartgallery.ca/exhibitions



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**IMMIGRANT WELCOME CENTRE
OF COWICHAN** where cultures connect

**Kayla's exhibit will be at the Arbutus Gallery,
2687 James Street Duncan, BC (in the Island Savings Centre)
July 5-26, 2019**

**Opening reception free and open to the public: Tuesday July 9th, 2019
5-8 pm.**

Landscapes of Injustice Update Presentation in Duncan

Friday, July 26th at 10am-12pm

Landscapes of Injustice will be in Duncan BC at the Island Savings Centre Mesachie Room, 2687 James St. holding a free presentation updating the public on how we are transitioning from the Research phase to the Knowledge Mobilization phase of the project.

Project Manager, Michael Abe, will give an overview of the project, outlining the research that has been undertaken and inform the audience of the plans to disseminate the results of the primary research to the Nikkei community and the general public.

Curatorial postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Yasmin Railton, will speak on the progress of the nationally travelling museum exhibit currently being created from LOI research. She will also share examples of recent community consultation initiatives designed to promote public engagement with this exhibit and this difficult history.

To complement The Suitcase Project by Kayla Isomura that is currently at the Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives, Research Coordinator, Kaitlin Findlay, will present reflections from Drs. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Heather Read, and herself on the Landscapes of Injustice Oral History Collection and how Japanese Canadians described belongings—whether lost or preserved—in their interviews. They found that stories of ‘things’ were more often stories about people and relationships than simply the ‘things’ themselves.

Discover how the project research can assist members of the Japanese-Canadian community research their own family history and learn how the internment and dispossession may have affected their own family. Talk to our Japanese-Canadian community research assistant, Natsuki Abe, about finding your family’s Custodian Case files and possibly a Bird Commission File.



Landscapes of Injustice Friday, July 26, 2019
10:00 am-12 pm

Research Project and Update

Island Savings Centre Mesachie Room
2687 James St. Duncan BC

How do people talk about belongings, whether lost or preserved. Stories of ‘things’ were more often stories about people and relationships than simply the ‘things’ themselves.

Translating research on loss and dispossession takes on different forms as Landscapes develops teacher resources, museum exhibits and digital archives.

We invite you to join us for a presentation on what this will look like.

Free and open to the public

Register with Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives 250-746-6612

For more information, please visit our
website landscapesofinjustice.com
or contact us at info@landscapesofinjustice.com

Landscapes of Injustice



CVMA
Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives
Cowichan Historical Society

**Register with Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives to attend
250-746-6612**

British Association for Canadian Studies Annual Conference

Eric Adams

In mid-April, Kaitlin Findlay, Yasmin Railton, and Eric M. Adams brought some of the current *Landscapes of Injustice* research to an international conference in the United Kingdom. Speaking on a panel dedicated to the *Landscapes* project at the British Association for Canadian Studies Annual Conference at the University of London, Kaitlin, Yasmin, and Eric presented their work to a room of engaged scholars and graduate students from across Europe and North America.

Kaitlin detailed her ground-breaking research on the Royal Commission on Japanese Claims (1947-1951), better known as the Bird Commission, drawn from her exceptional MA thesis. Kaitlin's close attention to the workings of the Commission and especially the voices of Japanese Canadians in advancing their claims demonstrates the complex cross-currents of a system designed to bring closure to a fight against injustice that could not be so easily constrained. Yasmin captured the attention of the room with her talk – and arresting visuals – of the museum cluster's process of translating the history of Japanese-Canadian dispossession into a public museum exhibit. Yasmin's work grapples with the ethics of conveying difficult histories while considering the potential for public history to combat future injustice. Eric spoke of his in-progress book with project director, Jordan Stanger-Ross, on the unsuccessful constitutional challenge to the exile of Japanese Canadians in 1946 – a case that ended in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council sitting in a room not far from where we were presenting.

We were pleased by the positive reaction to our on-going research and the widespread excitement for the *Landscapes* work still to come. We remain grateful to the entire *Landscapes* team for their contributions to the work we presented, and to Yasmin for her insider know-how which helped Kaitlin and Eric experience some of London.

Loss: A Symposium

Kaitlin Findlay

“What is loss? What causes loss? What remains? What is beyond loss?” These questions guided the conference Loss: A Symposium, which I had the privilege to attend in May. Dr. Laura Madokoro hosted the conference through McGill's department of History and Classical Studies. Personally, it was the first conference I have attended that followed a workshop format: Laura circulated the papers in advance and all conference participants attended the same, single panel. This meant that the group – comprising of scholars from Indigenous Studies, Critical Refugee Studies, Citizenship Studies and other related fields – was ready to engage closely with the material and see connections across the different histories. Rich and exciting discussions followed each panel. I presented reflections from Drs. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Heather Read, and myself on the Landscapes of Injustice Oral History Collection on how Japanese Canadians described belongings – whether lost or preserved – in their interviews. We found that stories of ‘things’ were more often stories about people and relationships than simply the ‘things’ themselves. Thank you to Laura for hosting such a fantastic conference – the reflections and conversations that began in May will undoubtedly inform and influence our work in the future.

Landscapes of Injustice Comes to Yukon for Asian Heritage Month!

Lillian Nakamura Maguire, Hidden Histories Society Yukon

For many Yukoners, cultural events and food provide the initial introduction to Asian culture. But of course, for many Nikkei, Asian Heritage goes deeper into the family stories. They are stories of people who were looking for new opportunities to make a living, who despite many hardships, managed to build up resources, to develop businesses, perhaps to rebuild their lives in new locations, and to provide a solid base for their children's future.



Lillian Nakamura Maguire and Michael Abe

Photo credit: Michael Abe

The Hidden Histories Society Yukon www.hhsy.org was pleased to have Michael Abe from Landscapes of Injustice as a special presenter and speaker for our events.

Michael outlined the purpose of the project and the public educational focus for the remaining years. He demonstrated the kinds of documentation available and how the Project staff use archival records to locate case files of local Japanese Canadians, records of their BC properties and people's forced removal from the B.C. coast. Michael was able to assist some Japanese Canadians attending the session to gather some information about their family.

Although we were not able to reach teachers and curriculum specialists in this trip, we are focusing our efforts in the coming year to build relationships. The Hidden Histories Society Yukon hopes to make inroads in order to offer a special workshop for educators before March 2020.

Check out a newly released publication by the Hidden Histories Society Yukon titled *Inventory of the History of Asian Yukoners*, which provides an amazing bibliography of archival documents available for family historians, researchers, teachers, and others. The majority of these materials are about people of Japanese descent who worked or lived in Yukon from the late 1800's to 2017. We'll soon have this available on our website or contact me at info@hhsy.org for a pdf copy.

Asian Heritage Month in Ottawa

Yasmin Railton

On May 14th, Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross, Kaitlin Findlay, and Dr. Yasmin Railton visited Parliament Hill to attend an Asian Heritage Month (AHM) event at the Senate. The evening was co-hosted by the Honourable Senators Lillian Eva Dyck, Yonah Martin, Victor Oh, Yuen Pau Woo, Marilou McPhedran; as well as the Honourable Jenny Kwan, MP; the Ottawa Japanese Community Association, Canada Japan Society of Ottawa, Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers, Asian Law Students Society, County of Carleton Law Association Diversity Committee, and Ottawa Asian Heritage Month Society. Senators and parliamentarians were invited to speak about the significance of AHM for Canada.

Justice Maryka Omatsu was honored as the first woman of East Asian heritage to be appointed to any Canadian court, and a key member of the Redress Movement. Senator McPhedran introduced her longtime friend and colleague, Justice Omatsu, who then spoke passionately about the legacy of the wartime treatment of Japanese Canadians and British Columbia's Redress Campaign for Japanese Canadians.

Justice Omatsu's film 'Swimming Upstream' was screened, bringing audience members to tears. Jordan Stanger-Ross then joined Justice Omatsu on stage in conversation with Melisa Kamibayashi. Their panel discussion highlighted the pertinence of *LOI* research today. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to share *LOI* research in Ottawa at the Senate of Canada.

Swimming Upstream is available to view on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjpgxOcdYzw>

Tofino Public Apology to Japanese-Canadian Community

Michael Abe

On a fine afternoon on May 28, 2019 in the small community of Tofino, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, over 70 people gathered in the Clayquot Sound Community Theatre to hear a public apology to Japanese Canadians and all others affected by the Village of Tofino's 1947 'Motion to Exclude Orientals'.

It was important to Tofino that this event was conducted as a matter of a regular council meeting so that it would be included in the official public record.

After acknowledging that the gathering was taking place on the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation Territory, Mayor Josie Osbourne introduced herself and current council. She then read a statement from an historical perspective provided by the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) that included the history of John Yoshio Madokoro's family move to the Tofino area in the 1920's and some of the discriminatory restrictions they faced. They built a home in the village of Tofino and lived there from 1938 until they were taken to Hastings Park in 1942. John and his brother Thomas would work on a road camp in Schreiber, Ontario. John returned to the west coast in 1951 but his family was not welcome in Tofino so they settled in Port Alberni.

View the [video of the apology](#) courtesy of Phil Hood Ucluelet & Area Historical Society

The Public Apology was read as follows by Mayor Osbourne.

"In January 1947, Commissioners of the Corporation of the Village of Tofino passed a resolution that all Orientals be excluded completely from the municipality and prevented from owning property or carrying on business directly or indirectly within the municipality.



Mayor Josie Osbourne and council members
Photo credits: Marlene Mortensen



Left to right front row: Janet Dick (nee Nakagawa), Frances Nakagawa (nee Madokoro), Mary Christmas (family friend), Mary Kimoto.
Left to right second row: Doug Kimoto (son of Mary), Masaru Kimoto (Mary's grandson), Ellen Crowe Swords, unidentified

In 1949, Commissioners gave direction to the Clerk to write a letter to the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs to ask if a Bylaw could be made to exclude Orientals from buying or owning property within the municipality.

In 1997, the District of Tofino Council formally rescinded the motion of January 1947 to exclude Orientals and recorded the rescinding in the official public record. A formal apology was not made at that time.

Today, we are here to declare that the District of Tofino Council takes full responsibility for its actions of 1947 and 1949, and we acknowledge that the words, actions and intentions of the past- both spoken and unspoken-caused harm and suffering.

We regret these actions, and today we offer a formal and sincere apology to Japanese-Canadians, to all persons of Asian descent, and to all others affected by our actions.

We reject any exclusionary policy based on racial or ethnic origin, and we make a solemn commitment that such injustices will never again be countenanced.

While today's apology may be interpreted as an act of closure, it is also a call to action.

We call upon the witnesses present to tell others about what you saw and heard today.

We call upon all present to embrace the shared responsibility to uphold the principles of human rights, justice and equality, today and into the future. Let this event be a catalyst to increase public understanding and dialogue about how and why injustices such as those of Tofino's past must never happen again."

The apology received a standing ovation from the crowd, which included multi-generations of families directly affected by the discriminatory actions in Tofino. Members of the Kimoto and Madokoro families came from near and far to attend, including 97 year-old Mary Kimoto from Ucluelet and 96 year-old Francis Nakagawa whom Ellen lovingly refers to as Aunt Kuni from Surrey and other children, grand-and great grandchildren. Such a wonderful event to bring them together.

Keiko Miki was also in attendance, representing the NAJC. When learning of the motion of 1947 the mayor reached out to Ellen Crowe-Swords (nee Kimoto) who then connected her with the NAJC and various local JC communities to seek advice and guidance on how to properly and respectfully offer an apology. In her NAJC president's message, Lorene Oikawa commended the mayor and councillors for showing the fortitude to set the record straight at a time when acts of hate and discrimination are on the rise in the world.

Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences - UBC

Yasmin Railton

In the first week of June, several members of the LOI research collective participated in the 2019 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The University of British Columbia's campus was a hive of activity with over 10,600 registered attendees from over 70 scholarly associations, each holding their annual conference during one lively week.

This year's theme, "Circles of Conversation," focused on the relationships between the university and the communities it serves, and encouraged dialogue through presentations, workshops, panels, public lectures, cultural events and receptions.

Landscapes of Injustice presented a panel to the Canadian Law and Society Association chaired by Professor Douglas C. Harris, of UBC's Allard School of Law. Nicholas Blomley, Eiji Okawa, Kaitlin Findlay, Sherri Kajiwarra, and Yasmin Railton spoke on concepts of loss and communication. Nicholas Blomley presented a paper co-written by him and Kaitlin Findlay, "(De)valuation: The State Management of Japanese Canadian Personal Property in the 1940s". This look into chattels is informed by new research included in the forthcoming *LOI* book. Eiji Okawa's "Landscapes of Meaning: Rethinking the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians" explored the intangible qualities of loss, and sought to make evident personal experiences through haiku. Kaitlin Findlay's paper "Testifying to Loss: Masue Tagashira and the Royal Commission on Japanese Claims, 1947-50", gave yet another dimension to the losses endured by Japanese Canadians, and the failure of the Bird Commission. Sherri Kajiwarra and Yasmin Railton concluded with their paper "Consult, Converse, Curate: Research and Development of the *Landscapes of Injustice* Exhibit)". Inspired by 'Circles of Discussion', the *LOI* team discussed how community consultation has informed every step of the exhibit making process.

Further contributions by LOI contributors included Mary Anne Vallianatos' "Managing Margins and Amending Borders: 'Race' and the Exemptions of the Chinese Immigration Act, 1885-1923", and Trevor Wideman's "Land Use Planning, Law and Waste: Making a Properly Properties Landscape in Vancouver".

Esquimalt Tea House Update from the VNCS

Tsugio Kurushima

The commemorative Japanese Tea House option is still in the running for funding under the McLoughlin Amenity Fund program. In the initial evaluation conducted last fall the Tea House came in a close third in the Park improvement category after multi-purpose facilities for Saxe Point Park and Gorge Park. The evaluation team is now doing high level costing on each option with a report due to the Esquimalt Council in June. This costing activity will be used to pare down the list of projects. So some time in June we will find out if the Tea House project will make the cut, or be dropped. We also learned at a meeting with Mayor Desjardins that a major challenge for the Tea House is that Esquimalt Park Policy does not allow for any restaurant facilities in their parks. So an actual Tea House is a non-starter. Instead what we are seeking is a multi-use facility that honours the original Japanese Tea House and Garden and can be used by the Japanese Canadian community for cultural activities.



Esquimalt Municipal Archives v986.18.14

This campaign seems to have a life of its own. It continues to garner public support and attention thanks to the ongoing efforts of the UVic *Landscapes of Injustice* project. On Saturday, March 9th, *LOI* participated in the UVic Ideafest with a 2 hour information session on the Takata Tea House and Garden including a stylized Tea house which gave people a sense of what the original Tea House was like. The VNCS also had a table at this event to provide information about the current campaign and we were swamped with inquires and supportive comments. Urasenke Tankokai participated as well providing information about the Japanese Tea Ceremony. In early April *LOI* issued an [editorial piece](#) about the Tea House that talked about the possibility of not only honouring the Japanese heritage of the Gorge Park but also the First Nations heritage of this location. This op-ed piece was printed in the Times Colonist, once again keeping the Tea House campaign in the public eye.

Recently the Takata family have been involved in the campaign. Dillon Takata, the great grandson of Kensuke Takata, one of the original founders of the Japanese Tea House and Garden, now lives in Victoria with wife Lisa and their young daughter Naya. Lisa, Dillon and other members of the Takata clan have written to Mayor Desjardins to describe their deep family roots with Esquimalt and their hopes for restitution for what happened to the Takata Tea House and Garden. It was because of Lisa and Dillon that we were able to meet with Mayor Desjardins to discuss what could be done to improve the chances of this project succeeding.

The addition of Lisa & Dillon Takata to our efforts has spawned another related project. Local filmmakers Bryan Smith and Chelsea Kanstrup heard about our Tea House campaign and would like to make a documentary film of our campaign and whatever conclusion it comes to. We believe that such a documentary will be helpful in a number of ways. It may help us secure McLoughlin Amenity funding and if we are not successful, it will help use in the ongoing campaign to secure some form of restitution for the Takata family. Bryan and Chelsea will apply for a grant from Telus to make this documentary.

Toronto art at the Royal Ontario Museum: Being Japanese Canadian: Reflections on a Broken World

Norm Masaji Ibuki

Originally published in "DiscoverNikkei.org, a project of the Japanese American National Museum", May 28, 2019.

Norm is also a member of the Landscapes of Injustice community council.



Emma Nishimura and Yvonne Wakabayashi's works displayed at the Royal Ontario Museum, on view through August 5, 2019. Photo by Brian Boyle, courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

What does being Japanese Canadian (JC) mean to you? And, how was the world of your own family broken by the experience of internment?

That answer differs with each one of us. Pondering upon my own answer, I would list factors like my family's lost histories in BC, internment, forced labour on a Manitoba sugar beet farm, the so-called dispersal 'east of the Rockies', settling into tumultuous new lives and careers in Ontario, young families, getting back into contact with old JC friends and establishing JC communities all over again like brand new immigrants. The Issei and Nisei didn't waste any time contemplating about the personal aftermaths of the internment, or how our BC communities were destroyed. For my young parents, 1960s Toronto presented new challenges. Raising a family of four kids in suburban Toronto, putting us all through university, and me going to live and teach in Japan before resettling back in Ontario, I am mindful that this identity business is an ongoing process that I don't expect to end any time soon. I arranged to meet my cousin Elm and Sansei artist Lillian Michiko Blakey, a retired teacher at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) entrance. Elm's mother, Dorothy, was Dad's eldest

sister. His own interest in our family history has recently been kindled by my own which has recently taken me to looking more closely at the Ibuki family farm in Strawberry Hill, BC that was stolen from my grandfather before they were exiled to work as forced labour on a Manitoba sugar beet farm.

Lillian, you may know, painted the iconic *Reiko, Alberta, 1945* of her young tanned mother standing smiling behind two jagged strands of barbed wire. Lillian kindly led the tour, following the signs to the *Being Japanese Canadian: Reflections on a Broken World* exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. I've been here many times throughout my life, usually to see special exhibitions featuring dinosaurs or ancient, forgotten civilizations.

As we wander through the huge cavernous spaces, stone pillars, and glass cases towards the exhibition, I was looking for large signs that might mark the exhibition space. Instead, much to my surprise, we in fact had to search for the work of the eight artists. My initial reaction was one of confusion, unease, and even panic triggered by what was an uncomfortable juxtaposition of JC works of art interspersed in and amongst displays of the furniture and finery of the European Colonialists who of course represented the forces that destroyed our communities. In an odd way, I had the feeling that the powerful white ruling classes were doing it to us again.



Photo credit: Lillian Blakey

Meandering through the exhibition then, a few particular highlights for me were Newfoundland artist David Hayashida's work *Low tea in '43 (BRITISH Columbia) still boils* (2017) mixed media. It was a brutally honest and bombastic comment about what it meant to be JC back in 1943. The raw power of his punked out creation possesses a mosh pit of racist images, words, and slogans that were used to dehumanize us. The no-holds-barred piece struck deep, painful chords.

There was also *Continuum: A Japanese-Canadian Cake History* by Marjene Matsunaga Turnbull (born 1947, Vernon, BC) that was a brilliant telling of JC history that uses the device of a simple cake recipe to tell the story of the ingredients that went into the making of the Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, and so on. It is an ironic and bitter sweet telling of where we come from and where we are going that also gets at some important truths about the complexity and conundrum of what we are today.

The inclusion of works created by internment camps was particularly moving. Included were a bowl made by Ichiro Matsushita, an inmate at Popoff internment camp, Slocan drawings by Kazuo Hamasaki and a parasol which was gifted to Seiji Onizuka (Greenwood camp), a reporter for the *New Canadian* newspaper, a remarkable creation made of cigarette paper and a broken chopstick, and a cedar chest made by the inmates of the New Denver camp for Aiko Murakami.

The exhibition was co-curated by Arlene Gehmacher, Heather Read, Bryce Kanbara, and Katherine Yamashita. I had a chance to interview Bryce Kanbara, Hamilton, Ontario artist and YouMe Gallery owner.

The ROM is quite the high profile venue for JC artists. Have they ever been featured at the ROM like this before?

No, but in the mid-1990s, Sansei architect, David Fujiwara, mounted the *Five Generations* exhibit at the ROM. It was a photo-based exposition that was resurrected by the JCCC around 10 years later and installed as the core exhibit of the Moriyama Nikkei Heritage Court. The ROM has also acquired JC art and artifacts lately – including paintings by Walter Sunahara and several items from this exhibit.

Can you take me back to the beginning? Who planted idea and how did it evolve?

The current ROM exhibition (we call it an installation) was proposed by Dr. Heather Read who was contracted by the ROM on a fellowship. As it turns out, her idea to intersperse artworks by Japanese Canadians to suggest a kind of parallel history within the large collection of colonial English and French art and artifacts in the Sigmund Samuel Gallery of Canada was unprecedented at the ROM. I appreciate the ROM's decision to take it on. These days, I think it's scary, but necessary, for large public institutions to step out of their usual ways of doing things and collaborate with diverse communities and tell their stories. I've read that this kind of working relationship requires "radical trust".



Photo courtesy of Bryce Kanbara.

Can you elaborate on what you mean by radical trust?

In my various capacities as curator at public galleries, I know how much of a stretch it would be to allow outsiders have an equal say in how a project is designed and unfolds. But I guess radical trust means entering a relationship with mutual respect for one another's ideas and ways of doing things. Institutions tend to formalize procedures and approaches, which is absolutely necessary for orderly operation. But from time to time, when they purport to want to collaborate with the diverse communities, it's important for them to break open their minds and methods to other possibilities, other results. In the end, it's a matter of what it takes to bring familiarity and understanding among people.

I recall that there were some JC community discussions... Can you summarize what some of those concerns were through the process?

Before Kathy Yamashita and I were brought aboard the project, it had been substantially developed, and the ROM decided, belatedly, to hold a couple of "community consultations" – at the ROM and the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto. I think the ROM was startled by the critical feed-back at those consultations. Participants raised concerns about the general tone of the exhibition conveyed by some of the wording and the selection of work.

I notice that the term of self identification "Nikkei" is absent. How intentional is this?

Strange, I didn't really notice until you mentioned it. But I know we were very conscious of minimizing words and explanations, and as much as possible, letting the artists and their works speak for themselves.

There seems to be a difference in how JCs living out west and those of us out east might see ourselves. Can you comment on any differences that are apparent to you?

Heather tried to cover the geographical waterfront with her selection of artists, and I think the exhibition reflects that. The artists in the show are not all easterners. By east and west, you may mean BC and Ontario, but there are distinct prairie, French-Canadian and Maritime sensibilities that are part of the JC community as well. The overarching issue of JC identity and heritage in this project yokes the work together and surmounts whatever social and political dynamics that may have sprung up to differentiate us in the post-war years. Being Japanese Canadian reflects how each of the artists, in whatever circumstances they found themselves, chose to come to terms with his/her Japanese Canadianness.

Can I get a few words about what being Japanese Canadian means to you as an artist and curator?

My focus has shifted along the way - from my own exploration of identity and community, to curating exhibitions of work by JCs that reflect those issues (or not), and then to seeing those issues as being of potential importance to many other JCs who may not have experienced or thought about them much. From the random encounters I've had with JCs visiting the ROM, I realize that projects such as *Being Japanese*

Canadian offer a touchstone for their personal and family experiences. I met a Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei / mother, daughter, and granddaughter, who talked about their family's internment, spent a long time looking at the works and then sat down together and watched all the videos. I'd like to think it was a memorable day for them.



Photo courtesy of Bryce Kanbara.

You are curating this show with another JC. Can you tell us about her?

Kathy Yamashita did her PhD dissertation in the form of a new media exhibition at the JCCC Gallery. It was comprised of a row of video monitors mounted along the walls running looped interviews with her female, Nikkei family members. They told their individual stories and the gallery was filled with a conversational buzz. Kathy defended her thesis in the gallery and had initially proposed to make it open to public access, as a kind of performance art piece – but it wasn't allowed. Kathy works tirelessly as an educator and has taught in high schools and at OISE. She's a member of the JCCC Art Committee.

Generationally speaking, can you speak to the narrative that is represented in this show? What are these pieces saying about our collective experience as JCs?

Although JC families endured different wartime experiences, they suffered the same historical injustice, the consequences of which were largely unspoken about, until Redress. It's not surprising that artists are expanding the conversation by addressing the lingering, emotional unrest, and posing questions. That's what artists do.

Are there any particular geographical differences of how these experiences are presented that might be worth pointing out?

The differences are generational, and at a glance, I'd say that the works of older Sansei, and Nisei are more directly personal and emotive – If their works don't convey this emotive force, then their statements surely do. The younger artists' works are leavened with formality, beauty, technical brilliance and even humour.

What pieces might speak most powerfully to you and your family's own personal story of internment and exile east of the Rockies?

Newfoundland artist David Hayashida's (born in Oakville, Ontario) set of English porcelain tea-cups, spilling ceramic "puddles" containing racist epithets ("Dirty Japs", "Once a Jap, always a Jap", etc.) and crude caricatures of Japanese men with buck teeth and big framed glasses, threw me back to the days when I was one of a handful of Asians at school. The images and words made me wince; they also reminded me that it was a hundred times worse for my grandparents, parents, uncles, and aunts.

When you were designing this exhibit, were there key messages that you wanted to make?

For me, the installation is an exploration of what it is to be Japanese Canadian. We chose *Being Japanese Canadian* as the title to cut to the chase.

As a community, what are some of the most pressing issues of this time? What are some of the barriers that stand in the way of our survival as a people?

It's ironic that you would ask a question about survival at an occasion where JCs are being accorded more/renewed attention. But I think you're right. There's an urgency to rally JCs around the project of community development. The barriers are in ourselves – within our personal successes and failures, our adoption of values, our expectations of others, our self-righteousness.

Can you speak to the support that you received from the ROM? What about the greater community?

The ROM has been a sometimes championing, sometimes reticent supporter of our ideas. This ambivalence – I would quickly add -- is unsurprising for a large public institution with an uneasy background of working with diverse communities, and that is dependent on funding from the Doug Ford Progressive Conservative provincial government. As a final exercise, Kathy and I sent a reach-out evite to senior staff, and to personnel in the departments we worked with, and invited them to meet individually or in small groups to review the show, and to talk in an informal setting. The response surpassed our expectations and many of our chats were at Café B at the Conservatory of Music building next door to the ROM.) The greatest sign of support is always the response from individuals who we meet in the gallery or after a presentation about the show. People are deeply interested in our JC story, in sharing their own stories, and in expressing their concerns about the past and future of this country. It's reassuring and quite moving, sometimes. When I visit the gallery, I read the written comments in the visitors book, and have wonderful conversations with people from all over. Ultimately, it's these one-on-ones that bring people closer together in understanding.